

IMPROVISING OTHERWISE

SOUND, NATURE, AND COLONIALITY

IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

by

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DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Music Degree Committee.

Improvising Otherwise: Sound, Nature, and Coloniality in Early Modern England

Fatima Lahham

ABSTRACT

Improvisation can be a mode of imagining otherwise: a practice that allows us to re-consider and question ways of writing, sounding, and being in the world. In this thesis I use improvisation as a lens through which we can listen to alternative stories of early modern English music history, situating my musical research within histories of the body, sounds of nature, Anglo-Ottoman relations, and the coloniality of the travelogue. Through reading theological texts, travelogues, literature about the natural world, plays, poetry, and music theory treatises, I develop deeply contextual understandings of historical improvisation practices that have the potential to transform historical performance practice today.

My work unfolds over four main areas. First, I focus on improvisation and the body in contexts of ‘extemporary’ prayer, listening to ways in which improvised prayer practice was described as an embodied (and sometimes transgressive) practice. I demonstrate that extemporary practices were premised on notions of classical memory arts, and the idea that sensory experiences left imprints on the body. These imprints could then be ‘read’ in the process of improvisation. Critiques of improvisations that were considered transgressive thus often created boundaries around the body and its improvisations, implicating notions of otherness.

Second, I turn to two English travelogues and one work of speculative fiction, reading them as performative and improvisatory scripts of reciprocal encounter. I consider depictions of improvising Ottoman subjects in the Levant, as well as reconceptualising the travelogue itself as a series of scripted improvisations enacted by the travellers. I suggest that these texts also became a means for readers back home to enact ‘vicarious’ travel and participate in processes of world-making.

Third, I explore sounds of the natural world that were theorised as improvised/extemporary and heard in ways that draw on boundaries of ‘the human’ and religious/racial ‘other’. I focus on

texts about the nightingale and the bee, exploring how the bee's genders and the nightingale's tongues affected the ways in which they were constructed as improvising queens. I examine how histories of natural sound add to historical associations of improvisation with 'otherness', and how these associations are intimately entwined with histories of gender and coloniality.

Finally, I explore how my contextual research into improvisation can allow us to rethink our relationships to early modern musical texts and the role of historical imagination in music-making today. Through readings of early modern music theory treatises and discussions of my own practice as heard on the accompanying album, I argue that historical improvisation could become a space for historical re-conceptualisation and political reimagination, enabling the 'historically-informed' musician/music historian to experiment with practices of improvising 'otherwise'.

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ALBUM

Alongside my thesis, I present my debut solo album, *bulbul*. At the time of submission, this album is scheduled be released on FS Records in September 2022. Five of the tracks are directly related to thesis chapters, while the other tracks demonstrate the potential and application of ‘historical improvisation’, drawing on various different musical and textual inspirations. In my epilogue, I present the album liner notes.

To the reader: you are invited to listen to this album in any order and fashion that appeals – as a soundtrack while you read the thesis, away from the thesis, at home, in the company of nightingales and bees...

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INTRODUCTION

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The Jamaican writer and theorist Sylvia Wynter said that she wanted to sound in theory what Aretha Franklin sounded in song. That she would like to feel that everything she said had the liberating and emancipatory dimension that Aretha's songs contained.¹ Over the last three years of working on this thesis, I have wondered how the two worlds of sound and theory might find meeting points in my own work. Not (as I had first imagined) how I might improvise my writing or write about improvisation, but how I might find the intimate moments of meeting between the two. The way that writing can feel like a creative act of music-making, the way that discovering a sound can transform an idea, the way that both words and sound might approach different kinds of freedom through improvisation.

My project is about historical acts of improvisation, as I have traced them in early modern English texts that bring together themes of sound, nature, Anglo-Ottoman relationships, and embodiment. In weaving together some of these historical narratives, I propose various ways in which musicians and music historians today might mobilise practices of improvisation and their study. I am interested in historical research that inspires creativity, and pursue this specifically in relation to practices of historical performance, which I define for the purposes of this thesis as performances of historical repertoires and/or practices of music-making that are explicitly informed by historical sources.

The relationships between sound and theory in my work are constantly shifting; as I will explore in the pages to come, improvisation's insistence on present moments of liveness enters into moments of both relation and alienation with historical pastness. Yet it is in this temporal space of contradiction that I have come to thrive, trying to read and hear beyond pastness and trying to sound beyond presence.

I use the verb *to listen* when I talk about my sources, which comes from the Old English *hýlsnan* and tends to imply a mode of active engagement with the aural world that goes beyond a passive

¹Greg Thomas, 'PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter', *Proud Flesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics & Consciousness*, No. 4 (2006)
<<https://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/proudflesh/article/view/202%C2%A0>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

sense of ‘hearing’ without intent or understanding. This is because I believe that an important role for the musicologist/musician/sound artist is one of listening, of ear-witnessing.² In these years as a PhD student, I have tried to grapple with something that ethnomusicologist Rachel Harris encapsulated so beautifully last year, that ‘the task of the scholar is to listen through the layers, to perceive not only the dominant and immediately audible present of the soundscape but also the things that have been submerged and over-written but never erased.’³

Listening through the layers as a methodology chimes with Sara Ahmed’s notion of a feminist ear: *how you hear what is not being heard*.⁴ Ahmed uses the verb ‘to hear’, and I wonder whether one way we might mobilise feminist ears (to hear what is not being heard) is through listening. And while both Harris and Ahmed theorise in and from contemporary society, my project adopts and transforms these concepts in relation to early modern texts, listening between the lines and through the layers, to all those sounds that are not being heard, the voices that are concealed, the narratives that are not considered.

In my thesis I read a variety of early modern English texts, both musical and non-musical. I have tried to engage these texts ‘contrapuntally’, to borrow from the Palestinian academic and theorist Edward Saïd, who wrote: ‘we must...read the great canonical texts with an effort to draw out, extend, give emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present or ideologically represented in such works. The contrapuntal reading must take account of both processes – that of imperialism and that of resistance to it, which can be done by extending our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded.’⁵

Transferring Saïd’s approach to musical historiography of the early modern period is not a new phenomenon, as David Irving explores so thoughtfully in his study on music in Manila. Irving writes that he is inspired by Saïd to mobilise the term ‘counterpoint’ as a social analogy of how colonial society combined several voices according to ‘a strict, uncompromising set of rules wielded by a manipulating power’, as well as a way to understand ‘cultural relationships between parent states and their overseas colonies’.⁶

² For an example of the responsibilities of listening, see self-described ‘artist and private ear’ Lawrence Abu Hamdan’s work on ear-witnessing for several examples of using the ear as a political mechanism for exploring and making explicit relationships between sound and surveillance <<http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

³ Rachel A. Harris, *Soundscapes of Uyghur Islam* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2020), pp.216-217.

⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p.203.

⁵ Edward Saïd, *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage: Random House, 1994), pp.78-9.

⁶ D.R.M. Irving, *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.3-4.

In the context of my project, I draw loosely on the concept of contrapuntal analysis to situate England and English people in constant dialogue with Islam, Muslims, and countries falling under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman empire, giving ‘emphasis and voice to what is silent or marginally present’, and attempting to weave a narrative that is alert to processes of imperialism and resistance to them – both in the early modern period and in historical processes of understanding today.

This latter approach of considering present contexts in historical research is also informed by my engagement with pre-modern critical race studies, in particular exemplified by much recent public scholarship on early modern literature by a collective of scholars and activists mainly concentrated in North America, who cultivate anti-racist perspectives and pedagogies to Shakespeare and other early modern English playwrights. This movement often considers how the reading and study of Shakespeare is important for the present socio-political moment, as well as reflecting on how scholars who study race can avoid replicating the racism in the texts and contexts they address, and instead mobilise the space of early modern studies as a liberatory and anti-oppressive movement.⁷

Finally, my thesis approaches questions of different creativities and how they can draw on and be inspired by different histories. The album recording that accompanies this thesis offers an example of how my own creativities as a musician have been informed and shaped by historical research and texts, as well as how they collide simultaneously with my own contexts, backgrounds, and locations. As I argue through various modes in my thesis, I believe that improvisation can facilitate and offer a space for these historical processes of creativity that are still grounded in contemporary concerns.

My project draws on several different disciplines, bringing together various concepts and methodologies. In the following section I outline my engagement with some key disciplines my thesis draws on, highlighting the main authors and voices that have inspired me or shaped my work, and enjoying dancer and scholar Tara Aisha Willis’s idea of citation itself as a form of improvisation and a constant dialogue of gathering:

⁷ See Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Gender and Race in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995) for the book that arguably launched the field, as well as the Twitter hashtag #ShakeRace.

Citation is not unlike dance improvisation, and dance improvisation is always citational: they have in common a multi-directional time–space organization. We spin something old–new (nothing new under the sun or in our bodies; nothing that once was can ever be again). They have in common a process of *gathering* experience (Goldman 2010; Coan *et al.* 2018) – in real-time/space – and evidencing it in the world, sometimes even on one’s own terms, not needing to be proved to be believed. Improvisational/citational practices push us to work with what we have: to gather experience into and beyond the present moment; to gather others and our relations to their work into ourselves and out again anew.⁸

Between the Critical and the Historical: On Improvisation Studies

In 2017 Massimiliano Guido edited a collection of essays intended to establish the existence of ‘historical improvisation’ as a discipline in itself, building on cumulative work at universities and institutions across Europe and North America over the past five years.⁹ Guido describes this discipline as a concerted attempt by musicologists and theorists to enable the ‘reconstruction of improvisational practices of the past, through the study of primary and secondary sources.’¹⁰ However, Guido notes that the exploration of historical improvisation is not simply a reconstruction of an old-fashioned practice but rather, ‘it is...adding some fresh spring water to the river. This closes the circle: from improvisation to theory, and from theory back to improvisation. And the water goes...into the ocean.’¹¹ Alongside the possibility of bringing historical sources into conversation with present-day experience and improvisation as a current practice, there is also a hint of the danger and excitement of being aware of the bigger picture – the metaphorical ocean beyond musicology’s reach.

⁸ Tara Aisha Willis, ‘A Litany on An/notations’, *Performance Research*, 23:4-5 (2018), 85

<<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13528165.2018.1524675>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

⁹ Massimiliano Guido, ‘Introduction, Studies in historical improvisation: a new path for performance, theory and pedagogy of music’, in *Studies in Historical Improvisation: From Cantare super Librum to Partimenti*, ed. by Massimiliano Guido (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), p.1.

¹⁰ Guido (ed.), p.1.

¹¹ Guido (ed.), p.2.

Guido's collection is not unprecedented. Musicologists such as Rob Wegman¹², Jessie Ann Owens¹³, Peter Schubert¹⁴, and Julie E Cumming¹⁵ among others have contributed studies that pave the way to the new discipline that Guido describes, crucially by problematising modern notions of 'composer' and compositional process, and expanding our understanding of musical pedagogies. Alongside Guido's volume, the edited volume by Rebecca Herissone and Alan Howard on creativities in early modern England offers further frameworks within which we can understand ideas of imagination, composition, rhetoric, and memory in this period, problematising the anachronistic idea of 'improvisation' understood in opposition to composition.¹⁶ Additionally, Rebecca Herissone's work on notions of communal authorship and music-making productively destabilises the fixity of later concepts of 'composer' and 'text', refocussing our attention on oral improvisatory processes.¹⁷

Improvisation practices have also been considered within studies of the early music and historical performance movements. Bruce Haynes considers improvisation to be central to historical performance practice, writing in 2007 that 'the separation between composing and performing hasn't always existed. Before the rise of Romanticism, improvisation and composition were normal activities for any musician. In a time when new pieces were in constant demand, being a composer was nothing special, just part of the process of producing music. But even if a musician didn't always write their improvisations down, they had to know how to make up music on the spot. Without that ability, they couldn't play the music of the time.'¹⁸ Nick Wilson also considers improvisation to be central to 'early music', not only as a practice but even as an ethos or aesthetic: "“Playing” early music with its distinctive approach to authentic historical performance looks like such a case in point [that of play as identity]. Under the “imaginary” rhetoric of play we find an interest with improvisation, imagination and “creativity” of the animal and human play worlds."¹⁹

¹² Rob C. Wegman, 'From Maker to Composer: Improvisation and Musical Authorship in the Low Countries, 1450–1500', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 49 (1996), 409–79.

¹³ Jessie Ann Owens, *Composers at Work: The Craft of Musical Composition, 1450–1600*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Peter Schubert, 'Counterpoint Pedagogy in the Renaissance' in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*, ed. by Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.503–533.

¹⁵ Julie E. Cumming, 'Renaissance Improvisation and Musicology', *Journal of the Society for Music Theory*, Volume 19: 2 (2013) <<https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.2/mto.13.19.2.cumming.php>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

¹⁶ Rebecca Herissone and Alan Howard (eds.), *Concepts of creativity in seventeenth-century England*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013).

¹⁷ Rebecca Herissone, *Musical Creativity in Restoration England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹⁸ Bruce Haynes, *The End of Early Music: A Period Performer's History of Music for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p.4.

¹⁹ Nick Wilson, *The Art of Re-enchantment: Making Early Music in The Modern Age* (New York: OUP, 2013), p.170.

While much of this scholarship paves the way for work on historical improvisation practices, the focus has tended to be primarily musical and historical, with the ostensible aim of reconstruction. Yet the phrase ‘historical improvisation’ is itself an oxymoron; simply put, one word is in the past and the other can only exist in the present. How can such a study ever be truly historical, and how does historical work address the present nature of improvisation? Motivated by this question, my work brings research into historical improvisation into conversation with critical improvisation studies to dwell on these uncomfortable interstices between ‘historical’ and ‘improvisation’.

As a discipline, critical improvisation studies grew around a few pivotal conferences, and led to an important two-volume handbook published in 2016.²⁰ In their introduction to this handbook, George Lewis and Benjamin Piekut describe critical improvisation studies as creating an agenda where ‘the arts become part of a larger network tracing the entire human condition of improvisation.’²¹ In another recent work in this field, Daniel Fischlin and Eric Porter define their work as falling into a trajectory of critical improvisation studies that ‘...is committed to understanding the possibilities, and limitations, of musical improvisation as a model for cultural, and ethical dialogue in action – for imaging and creating alternative ways of knowing and being known in the world even as it interrogates the ways in which aesthetic practices impact other forms of social practice.’²² In other words, critical improvisation studies aims to examine ‘how improvisation mediates cross-cultural, transnational, and cyberspatial (inter) artistic exchanges that produce new conceptions of identity, history, and the body.’²³

These descriptions of critical improvisation studies suggest a potential framework for studying historical improvisation in a contextual manner that reaches beyond the purely musical to create a dialogue between present and past human practices more broadly. By integrating the model of critical improvisation studies into existing paradigms of historical improvisation studies, I propose that we can offer not only better historical insights by considering wider (and non-musical) contexts, but also productively relate this work back to present-day improvisations and improvisers in the historical performance movement, and to wider contexts of music-making today.

²⁰ George Lewis and Benjamin Piekut (eds.), *Oxford Handbook to Critical Improvisation Studies*, Vols. 1-2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²¹ Lewis and Piekut (eds.), p.2.

²² Daniel Fischlin and Eric Porter (eds.), *Playing for Keeps: Improvisation in the Aftermath*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), p.3.

²³ Lewis and Piekut (eds.), p.1.

As a result, my approach integrates musical and non-musical forms of historical improvisation, as well as allowing the methods and processes of improvisation themselves to inform my historical approach, and interrogating the practice's present ramifications. For example, in Chapter 1 I argue that studying extemporary prayer practices can tell us about issues of temporality and authority in the improvisation of music, and in Chapter 2 I propose that ways of reading and performing travelogues are not fully separate from the actual instances of musical improvisation found in the pages of these books.

However, in contrast to a central tenet of critical improvisation studies, I do not claim that the examples of improvisation I examine were necessarily always a resistive or even liberatory practice. As I explore throughout my thesis, the historical materials point to improvisation as a mode of expression that could be mobilised for many different ends, rather than a practice that carried any inherent quality of liberation. Still, in my concluding explorations of the potential impact of my work on historical performance practices today, I do turn to improvisation as a way to seek creative and hermeneutic freedoms, and this endeavour links back to some of the central motivations of critical improvisation studies.

Finally, while my work does not primarily engage Ottoman musics, it is important to acknowledge scholarship on improvisatory practices in the Middle East and North Africa. Prime amongst these has been work by the musicologist and performer Ali Jihad Racy, who has shown how musical improvisation in the East-Mediterranean Arab world is both symbolic as well as affective, thus rendering the practice of *taqsim* (improvisation) both an aesthetic practice and a way of evoking 'social and artistic values of Arab listeners and performers.'²⁴ In her book on learning to play the ney in Turkey, anthropologist Banu Senay also engages *taqsim* as an area of social, cultural, and ethical exploration, contextualising the tradition of learning ney improvisation within historical Arabic music-making practices as well as jazz improvisation traditions.²⁵ Senay has also explored improvisation in other, non-musical dimensions such as Arabic calligraphy of the Qur'an, prompting questions of improvised performance and orality across different socio-political contexts.²⁶

²⁴ Ali Jihad Racy, 'The many faces of improvisation: The Arab taqasim as a musical symbol', *Ethnomusicology*, Vol.44, Issue 2 (Spring 2000), 302.

²⁵ Banu Senay, *Musical Ethics and Islam: The Art of Playing the Ney* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2020), p.78.

²⁶ Banu Senay, 'Textual Ecologies in Islam: improvising the perfect Qur'an in Calligraphy', *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, Vol.3 (2017), 46-56.

In the context of Iranian classical music and *maqam* practice, Laudan Nooshin's article on composition/improvisation also sheds light on how the composition/improvisation divide polarises 'Western' and 'non-Western' musics, allowing us to note some of the similarities between historical Western improvisation practices and contemporary improvisation practices in Iranian classical musics.²⁷ Historical musicologists working on early modern Ottoman history have also contributed important work on improvisation, allowing us to note some of the continuities and discontinuities with contemporary practice. Walter Feldman's study of music in the Ottoman court from around 1600 to 1750 remains a comprehensive examination of historical Turkish musics, linking historical materials on *maqam* to current *maqam* music practice.²⁸ Musicologist Owen Wright has also contributed several studies on Islamicate musics of the early modern period, including his volume on Safavid music theory and musical improvisation in early modern Persian culture.²⁹ Wright's chapter 'Turning a deaf ear' (2013) is also important to mention as a central study of European and Ottoman musical communication, offering a consideration of different musical 'codes' (often involving improvisatory practice) that resulted in mis-communication/understanding.³⁰

Tell me a Story: On Decoloniality and Historical Narrative

The way we tell stories, and the stories we tell, are inherently political. And of course in some ways, they reflect and reveal more about ourselves and our histories than about the events we try to narrate. In my thesis, I therefore actively question the kinds of events and figures who become historical anchor points to my project. The main contexts I draw on in this study of historical practices of (musical) improvisation are print culture/orality and English relations with the Ottoman empire, two areas which intersect and whose politics tangle with iterations of coloniality. However, the issue of coloniality in this context is one fraught with complications and subtleties.

As a historian approaching seventeenth-century Anglo-Ottoman relations, I must take into account the expansion of the Ottoman empire from Turkey to the so-called 'Ottoman Arab

²⁷ Laudan Nooshin, 'Improvisation as "Other": Creativity, Knowledge and Power – The Case of Iranian Classical Music', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol.128, Issue 2 (2003), 242-296.

²⁸ Walter Feldman, *Music of the Ottoman Court: Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire* (Berlin: Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 1996).

²⁹ Owen Wright, *Music theory in the Safavid age: The taqsim al-nagamat* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019).

³⁰ Owen Wright, 'Turning a deaf ear', in Anna Contadini and Claire Norton (eds.), *The Renaissance and the Ottoman World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 143-165.

lands' (or *bilad as-sham* – present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine) and the proto-colonial attitudes of English travellers in these lands, as well as our knowledge of the later English colonisation and occupation of so many West Asian and North African countries. Nabil Matar has observed that in the case of Palestine for example, European renaissance mapping foreshadowed later colonial ideologies by presenting it as a land without inhabitants, without a political or social identity.³¹ Throughout my thesis I show that even though England had not yet formally colonised any West Asian and North African countries, there is still evidence of colonial ideology in the way that the subjects and lands of the Ottoman empire were discussed. In fact, the existence of Ottoman imperialism may have served to fuel England's imperial envy.

In response to the coloniality – a decolonial concept in itself³² – that I have encountered in many of my sources, my approach draws on decolonial theory as a frame for my analysis and critique. In adopting this frame, I draw a crucial distinction between decoloniality and decolonisation, as defined by Walter Mignolo. Mignolo explains that decolonisation originally meant 'freeing a colony to allow it to become self-governing or independent; to build the former-colonized own nation-state.'³³ And in the infamous words of Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'decolonisation is not a metaphor' – it is the material processes of land-back movements, restoration and reparations made to indigenous peoples.³⁴ However, Mignolo shows that many such liberation movements for decolonisation left coloniality (defined as a complex structure of domination and control) intact, at which point decoloniality emerges 'from the shortcomings of decolonization.'³⁵ For Mignolo then, decoloniality is the process of delinking from the 'colonial matrix of power', in order to imagine and engage in being decolonial subjects.³⁶ He builds on the work of Peruvian decolonial theorist Anibal Quijano to encourage a critique of the European model of rationality/modernity that emerged in the early modern period, and argues that an epistemic mode of disengaging from coloniality must be paired with material decolonisation, to which it is central.³⁷

³¹ Nabil I. Matar, 'Renaissance Cartography and the Question of Palestine', in *The Landscape of Palestine: Equivocal Poetry*, ed. by Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Roger Heacock, and Khaled Nashef (Birzeit, Palestine: Birzeit University Publications, 1999), p.139.

³² Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), p.112.

³³ Mignolo and Walsh, 121.

³⁴ Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a Metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2012), 1-40.

³⁵ Mignolo and Walsh, p.124.

³⁶ Mignolo and Walsh, p.125.

³⁷ Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, 21:2-3 (2007), 168-178.

While I draw on Walter Mignolo's work at several crucial moments in my thesis – including my title, which takes the 'otherwise' from his idea of 'thinking and doing otherwise' as a counter to paradigms of coloniality³⁸ – I would like to take note of the dangers of decolonial theory's possible proximity to narratives of nationalism and purity, especially when applied outside specific geographical and historical contexts. Furthermore, I believe the decentring of actual decolonisation, and reification of decolonial theory within the academy, is often seen to do the 'job' of decolonisation. In response to these potential pitfalls, and acknowledging the diminishing nature of decolonial thinking as a trend or buzzword, I do not describe my methodology as fundamentally 'decolonial', but instead draw some useful tools from decolonial theory to be applied in specific contexts in my work. I am mindful of Audre Lorde's powerful statement that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house'. As such, I am not claiming to dismantle the house with this project so much as proposing how we might fashion tools that will de-stabilise it.³⁹

With all these considerations in mind, my work draws on some of the potential of decolonial scholarship to locate paradigms of modernity and coloniality in the early modern period, to show how coloniality lies at the heart of so much of our historical and present endeavours, and to offer some alternative ways of hearing the world that may disturb the nascent coloniality in my primary sources and their ongoing manifestations today.⁴⁰ In Chapter 1, I focus on how coloniality produced certain constructions of the body and of the 'human', often in opposition to the alterity of non-Western/Christian people. In Chapters 2 and 3, I also address the role of coloniality in travel narratives, and on conceptions of the natural world. Finally, in my final chapter, I ask what the role of decoloniality is when making music that has colonial subtexts, and propose the use of improvisation as a mode of disturbing that coloniality. While it is important to acknowledge these influences of decolonial scholarship on my work, I also have tried to adopt Sara Ahmed's concept of 'bringing theory home' – attempting to absorb and embody theory so that it can be applied organically throughout my text.⁴¹

Throughout my work I strive to imagine how - as musicologists in general and historical musicologists in particular - we can produce work that is socially responsible and politically engaged, fundamentally challenging the value systems that uphold certain knowledges over

³⁸ Mignolo and Walsh, p.113.

³⁹ Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House', *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*, (London: Silver Press, 2017), p.89.

⁴⁰ Mignolo and Walsh, p.3.

⁴¹ Sara Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke University Press, 2017), pp.1-18.

others, and certain ways of knowing over others. As such, acts of improvisation seem a particularly potent starting point, posing a foundational challenge to the dominant method of conducting historical research through the study of printed sources, as well as complicating the idea of a purely historical/historicised study, given that the act of improvisation is one that happens in the present moment.

In defining the historical and methodological anchor points for my project, I have been indebted to Nabil Matar's extensive scholarship on cross-cultural historiographies between (broadly speaking) Europe and the Arabic-speaking world, and his proposal of alternative centres and peripheries in the making of these histories. My project has been particularly inspired by the approaches in *Europe Through Arab Eyes* (2008)⁴² and *Britain and the Islamic World* (2011).⁴³ In the former, Matar discusses the multiplicity of narratives available in this period, writing that 'in the early modern period...and in the Arab-Islamic West, there was less of a monolithic construction of otherness and more of a diversity of perspectives.' He continues, 'the study of the early modern period is important because it redirects today's East-West and colonized-colonizer discourse to the specificity of historical antecedents.'⁴⁴ My research builds on Matar's meticulous studies of relationships between early modern Britain and the Islamic(ate) world, seeking alternative stories of Anglo-Ottoman engagement that challenge the mono-cultural/lithic construction of 'British' history, and propose instead several ways of making history *otherwise*.

In light of my above discussion of modes of writing history, I present this timeline of nineteen dates as an amalgam of some specific points of reference in my thesis combined with more 'canonic' moments in early modern English and Ottoman histories. Running from the Ottoman capture of Palestine and Syria in 1516 to the publication of Henry Maundrell's *Journey to Jerusalem* in 1697, this collection of dates is meant to highlight certain temporal anchor points for the reader, rather than to orient them within a linear time-sphere. I intend to demonstrate in my thesis that while events such as Elizabeth I's excommunication by the Catholic Church is undeniably a significant moment in early modern English history, so is the moment when she sent an organ to Topkapi Palace.

⁴² Nabil Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes, 1578-1727* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁴³ Nabil Matar and Gerald MacLean, *Britain and the Islamic World, 1558-1713* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴⁴ Nabil Matar, *Europe Through Arab Eyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p.5.

Timeline

1516 Selim I captures Palestine and Syria

1517 Selim I captures Cairo

1534 Henry VIII establishes Anglican Church, with him as its head

1570 Elizabeth I is excommunicated by the Catholic Church

1581 Turkey Company established (renamed Levant company in 1592)

1594 Elizabeth I receives a letter from the Ottoman empress Safiye

1599 Elizabeth I sends an automated organ via Thomas Dallam to Sultan Mehmed III (Safiye's son)

1603 End of Elizabeth's reign

1609 The first edition of Charles Butler's bee-keeping manual *The Feminine Monarchie* is published, the first English text to gender the Queen bee as female

1636 Henry Blount's *Voyage into the Levant* is published

1638 Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* is published, believed to be the first work of science fiction in English

1644 Jacob van Eyck's *Der Fluyten Lusthof* is published in Amsterdam

1659 Publication of first edition of Christopher Simpson's *The Division-Viol or The Art of Playing Extempore upon a Ground*

1661 Ireneus Freeman's *Non-conformity to common prayer* is published

1665-1666 Great Plague of London

2-6 Sept 1666 Fire of London

1668 Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is published

1676 Thomas Mace's *Musick's Monument* is published

1697 Henry Maundrell's *Journey to Jerusalem* is published

In the conclusion to their study of Islam in Britain from 1558 to 1685, Nabil Matar and Gerald MacLean reflect on the contradictory relationships between England and Islam/Muslims, writing that 'throughout the seventeenth century, England experienced simultaneously a centripetal and a centrifugal relationship with Islam, either embracing elements in the civilization of the Arabs and the Ottomans or vilifying that civilization.'⁴⁵

In response to this, they claim that:

⁴⁵ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558-1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.188.

...studies of early modern Britain have uniformly focused on its internal history and its links with Christian Europe – both Protestant and Catholic. The confrontation with Spain in the 1580s and 90s and with Catholicism throughout the Elizabethan and Stuart periods; the parliamentary and financial transformations that gave rise to the Civil Wars; the ascendancy of the gentry and the emigration to the New World; the alliance and/ or confrontation with Scotland and Ireland; the regicide and the expansion of the navy; the Interregnum and the diffusion of sects; the Restoration of Charles II and the persecution of Nonconformity; the Dutch wars, the Popish plot, the rivalry with France and the Glorious Revolution –all these are factors that transformed England and the rest of the British Isles. But...there was, parallel and sometimes intertwined with these factors, the cultural legacy of Arabic Islam and the military might of the Turkish Empire which made the "Renaissance" for England not only an inter-Britannic and inter-European experience, but an inter-Mediterranean and inter-religious one too.⁴⁶

It is in this in-between moment of relation between England/English people and the Islamicate world that I situate this musical study of improvisation. Not only is this moment of relation inter-Britannic, inter-European, inter-Mediterranean, and inter-religious, but also inter-colonial. As Matar and MacLean note, 'the period under study witnessed the beginnings of British colonial ideology, in which the key to domination lay in the religious conversion and the cultural subordination of the "natives" –as occurred in North America and West Africa. This colonial ideology was not possible in the Muslim Levant. From the eighteenth century on, however, Britain's relationship with the domains of Islam, both in the Levant and in the Far East, was transformed into a relationship of power and empire.'⁴⁷

Poised at these junctures, my project challenges the historiographical conventions of what is deemed central and what is deemed peripheral in early modern histories, asking why battles in the English civil war are considered an essential backdrop to histories of prayer in early modern Britain but not ideas about memory palaces; what happens to histories of nature when we pay attention to the moment when the queen bee's gender is identified correctly; why the first English story about moon travel is not generally deemed as significant as other 'real' travelogues to distant lands? In this thesis I aim to decentre these 'canonic' histories as I locate improvisatory

⁴⁶ Matar, *Islam in Britain*, pp.184-185.

⁴⁷ Matar, *Islam in Britain*, pp.190-191.

processes through embodied prayer practices, travelogues, depictions of nature, and musical texts, drawing together these different threads and themes to tell a different kind of story.

Themes & Overview

Chapter 1 of my thesis opens by introducing ‘the extemporary’ as a category of improvisatory activity in early modern England, identifying it as an important space for the development of discourses around embodiment, print, social and religious authority, and ‘otherness’. I start with Christopher Simpson’s *Division Viol* (1659) and explore some of the connections between print and the human body.

I contextualise ‘extemporary music’ within readings of texts on extemporary prayer, and demonstrate how praying ‘without book’ was often theorised by its detractors as a deviant practice of reading prints from one’s own brain, rather than from the pages of the *Book of Common Prayer*. The negative consequences of such a practice were often described in terms of racial and/or religious otherness, showing the extemporary to be a space in which the bounds of human nature and its expression were hotly contested. The legal and authoritative implications of the extemporary are also of great importance at this moment, involving debates around natural law and written/unwritten legislation, which offers yet another context to the practice of musical improvisation. I argue that by listening to these non-musical extemporary contexts, we can start to theorise this space of the ‘extemporary’ as a vital historical location for making and remaking the early modern body. By situating the musical extemporary within this context, improvisation can be understood as an embodied practice of transformation, playing with the boundaries between body, text, and human nature, and risking the potential transgression of those boundaries.

Building on these processes of embodiment in extemporary prayer and their connections to forms of ‘otherness’, I offer a reading of English travelogues as performative and improvisatory scripts of encounter in Chapter 2. In particular, I explore improvisation and improvisatory encounters in travelogues by Henry Blount (1602-1682) and Henry Maundrell (1665-1701), using historical notions of musical improvisation as a way to understand extemporary styles of non-musical encounter, and arguing that an approach grounded in understandings of musical improvisation adds to our perception of improvisatory behaviours more widely.

This chapter draws on recent scholarship that rethinks sonic encounter as a space in which binaries are broken down, and suggests that improvisation presents an even more heightened example of such a space.⁴⁸ I focus on examples of the travelogue itself as an improvisatory document of encounter, as well as examples of Ottoman subjects improvising music, and cases where the geographies and environments encountered are themselves portrayed as improvisatory. I then consider the reader's role as an improvising body living through – and even becoming themselves imprinted by – the staged encounters and sensory experiences of the travellers in the pages.

As I situate the travelogue as a genre of speculative fiction, I then offer a reading of *The Blazing World* (1668) by Margaret Cavendish (1623-73). I argue that the travelogue could create an analogue imaginal space in which the reader could create and imagine new worlds. Through this reading, I identify the power of 'fancy' to create new worlds, and suggest that identifying iterations of improvisation in the early modern travelogue can help us form new approaches to early modern imperialism, imagination, and the extemporary.

Chapter 3 builds on my previous discussions of human nature and 'otherness'. I explore how sounds of the natural world and its creatures were often theorised as improvised/extemporary, and heard in ways that draw both on constructions/boundaries of 'the human' and of the religious/racial 'Other'. I focus on two creatures who claimed early modern musical attention: the bee and the nightingale. In my chapter I ask how their sounds were theorised in relation to language and music, and how they often mobilised improvisation within the geographical and imagined spaces between England and the Ottoman empire. I argue that at this moment we can see the bee's improvisations change from that of 'free' natural extemporisation to the stylised improvisation of musical composition, and that similarly, the nightingale's divisions were frequently imagined as being replaced by the improvisations of musical instruments, overpowering her wild and uncontrollable voice.

In addition to these narratives of free versus fettered improvisation, I explore depictions of both bee and nightingale as ethnic/racial others through texts that portray them as queens of foreign empires. I listen to how the nightingale's improvising status often allowed her to occupy a 'transposable' place in cross-cultural dialogue, and ask how we can use the nightingale to

⁴⁸ Jennifer Linhart Wood, *Sounding Otherness in Early Modern Drama and Travel: Uncanny Vibrations in the English Archive* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

understand the complex relationships between England and Ottoman Turkey, locating her as a site of gendered power negotiation often expressed sonically through improvisation.

Finally, I consider musical scores that feature the bee and nightingale within these historical contexts, proposing that the unfixed and reciprocal nature of improvisation can allow us to move towards a more flexible dialogue between nature, music, and the improvisatory spaces between them in early modern England.

In my last chapter, I ask how my previous investigations into the extemporary body, improvised encounters, and improvising nature might inform our relationships to early modern English musical texts today, and propose ways in which historical research into improvisation practices could transform how we read historical texts and how we approach ‘historically informed performance’.

I argue that improvised text and textualized improvisation co-existed in different configurations within most performances, and that research into some of these relationships between improvised practice and text can allow the ‘historically-informed’ musician/music historian to explore some of the extemporary histories that I have mapped in my thesis.

I explore different genres of extemporary music and their relationships to text, memory, and embodiment through readings from Thomas Mace’s *Musick’s Monument* (1676) and John Walsh’s *The Division Flute* (1706). I theorise extemporary practice and early modern print culture as existing in constant relation to one another, in each case resulting from some combination of the parameters of environment, humour, sensory experience, and fancy (amongst others) that generate multiple types of improvisation with text or texted improvisation – playing with what Shakespeare’s Polonius called ‘the writ’ and ‘the liberty’. Building on my analyses of these texts on improvisation, I consider how such extemporary approaches could be applied to a composed score/text, taking Henry Purcell’s *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) as an example of how improvisatory practices can be used to find the moments of ‘unfixing’ in a printed text. I listen to Dido’s Lament from this perspective, considering how its ground bass structure might allow for extemporary possibilities, and what this might mean for the status and meanings of Queen Dido of Carthage in early modern England.

By reading Dido in this way, I posit that historical research into extemporary practices and cultures is inextricable from the use of an extemporary imagination which can challenge the status of printed historical sources and allow us to listen to the world around us and mobilise its sounds to reimagine these texts. I argue that the practice of historical improvisation is always necessarily emmeshed with contemporary concerns, rendering it a site for reconceptualising histories and relistening to present moments.

CHAPTER 1

IMPROVISING THE HUMAN

EXTEMPORARY PRACTICE AND THE BODY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Towards the ‘Extemporary’

What language should we use when writing about historical *improvisation* practices? As English-speaking musicians in the twenty-first century, we are accustomed to and familiar with the word ‘improvisation’. However, the first use of this term in English is not recorded until 1777 by the OED, although John Florio included the Italian ‘improvisare’ in his *World of Words, or, Most copious, and exact dictionarie in Italian and English* (1598) and translated it there as ‘to sing or speak extempore’.¹ While the word may have been known in seventeenth-century England, it was not used in the vernacular to describe improvisatory practice; instead, we see and hear the word ‘extempore’, a term whose historical usages I will trace here before delving into some of its histories, and how they may apply to extemporary music making in early modern England.

The term ‘ex tempore’ is used by the English musician Christopher Simpson, who wrote a treatise on how to play and improvise divisions on a ground on the viola da gamba that was printed in London in 1659 by William Godbid and sold by John Playford. Simpson’s book *The Division-Viol or The Art of Playing Extempore upon a Ground*, is one of the most comprehensive texts on this practice, appearing a year after the death of Oliver Cromwell and a year before the accession to the throne of Charles II. The second revised edition (with the addition of a Latin translation) was planned to come out in 1665 but most copies exist in a later state from 1667, due to delays caused by the Plague and the Fire of London. A third edition appeared in 1712, a testament to the huge success the volume enjoyed - Sir Roger L’Estrange, who licensed the second edition, dubbed it ‘one of the best Tutors in the world’ and ‘a work of exceeding use in all sorts of Musick whatsoever’.²

¹ John Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes, or Dictionarie of the Italian and English tongues* (London, 1598), p.17 <<https://www.resolutejohnflorio.com/2019/09/19/a-world-of-words/>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

² Christopher D.S. Field, ‘Christopher Simpson [Sypmson]’, *Grove Music Online* (2001) <<https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000025844>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

In this treatise, Simpson uses the phrase ‘extemporary musick’ to describe two viols playing together ‘on a ground’ (or repeating bass line), and comments:

I have known this kind of *Extemporary Musick*, sometimes (when it was performed by *Hands* accustomed to Play together) pass off, with greater *Applause*, than those *Divisions*, which had been the most Studiously Composed.³

The word ‘extemporary’ comes from the Latin phrase *ex tempore*, which literally translates as ‘out of (the/this) time’. There are several different interpretations one could make of this phrase; does it mean *timeless*? Arising from *this particular moment in time*? Existing *outside the bounds of time*? The *Oxford English Dictionary* shows a variety of spellings and forms also exist for this word in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including: extempore (adv. adj. c.1556), extemporal (adj. 1570), extemporate (adj. 1590), extemporanean (adj. 1621), extempory (adv. 1623), extemporean (adj. 1624), extemporize (v.1644), extemporality (n. 1656), extemporaneous (adj. 1656), extemporany (adj. 1673). This plurality in terms is also reflected in the different ways each term could be used.

The OED definitions for ‘extempore’, for example, are numerous:

A. *adv*

1. At the moment, without premeditation or preparation; at first sight; off-hand. Now usually with reference to speech, composition, or musical performance. **to speak extempore** in present use often merely means to speak without notes, or without reading from manuscript. **to pray extempore** is opposed to using a set form of prayer.
2. On the instant; at once; immediately.
3. **To live extempore**: to live ‘from hand to mouth’

B. *adj*

1. Arising out of the moment; casual, occasional; sudden, unprepared for. Now only of personal actions

³ *The Division-Viol, or The Art of Playing Ex Tempore Upon A Ground* by Christopher Simpson, A Lithographic Facsimile of the Second Edition, 1677 (Faber Music: Curwen Edition, 1965), p.59.

- a. Of a discourse, etc.: Composed, spoken, performed, or acted at the moment, without premeditation or preparation. Now usually understood to mean: Without the assistance of notes, or without reading.
- b. Of speakers, performers.
2. Contrived for the occasion, makeshift
- C. *n.* Extempore composition, speech, or performance; an impromptu, improvisation

Notably, the term is not restricted to music-making, but also found when discussing improvised poetry, theatre, prayer. The earliest recorded example (dating from c.1556) is by the schoolmaster and playwright Nicholas Udall, who used the word to describe how ‘ditties’ were improvised – ‘*extempore* will he ditties [sic] compose.’⁴

Praying or preaching *extempore* was also a common use of the word, with G. Babington noting in 1588 ‘afterward..he..began to preach *ex tempore*’, G. Wither declaring in 1665 ‘there is in many, an excellent gift of extempore vocal Prayer’, and John Bunyan writing in 1688 ‘it is at this day wonderful common, for men to pray Ex-tempore...To pray by a Book...is now out of fashion’. Extempore could also be used of killing – ‘I don't like a Man that can hate at first Sight, and kill *Extempore*’ (Jeremy Collier, 1694), as well as living – ‘... a man lives not *ex tempore*, but premeditates’ (J. Goodman, 1679).

In referring to different types of improvised behaviour, the term was rarely evoked solely in opposition to writing, but rather to *premeditation*. For example, on his trip to Italy in 1673, John Ray noted ‘academies or societies of Virtuosi’ who met to discourse on various topics in a manner ‘sometimes extemporany [sic], sometimes premeditated.’⁵ Likewise, *unpremeditated* became directly synonymous with the extemporary, and the two adjectives were paired together to describe (and cast aspersion on) extemporary praying practices in numerous texts, including works by the rector Richard Lewthwat,⁶ Lancashire preacher Zachary Taylor,⁷ and Somerset

⁴ OED Online, ‘Extempore, adv., adj., and n.’ <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/66917>> [accessed 23 May 2020].

⁵ John Ray, *Travels Through the Low Countries: Germany, Italy and France, with Curious Observations* (London, 1673), p.341.

⁶ R. Lewthwat, *A justification of set forms of prayer and in special of the liturgy of the church of england; in answer to, and confutation of varasor powel's fourteen considerations, against all composed and imposed forms of prayer. by richard lewthwat, M.A. and rector of wethersdale in Suffolk* (Printed by A. Godbid and J. Playford, for Robert Clavel, at the Peacock in St. Pauls Church-Yard, London, 1679) p.31. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University Library <<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2240875148/99829295>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

⁷ Z. Taylor, *A dissuasive from contention being a sermon preached and designed for the last itineration of the king's preachers in the county palatine of lancaster / by zachary taylor ...*, Printed by John Gain for William Cadman (London, 1683), p.3. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University Library <<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2248538896/12073922?accountid=9851>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

vicar Matthew Hole.⁸ Thus the extemporary was not defined only by a lack of writing or text, but rather through a departure from temporal bounds, and a sense of revelling in the chance and unpremeditated nature of that activity.

Returning to Christopher Simpson's use of the word, we find a different context; this 'extemporary music' leaves little to chance, since the improvisation of such divisions is covered carefully in his book, offering detailed instructions and examples to anyone wishing to try their hand. His treatise offers examples of the kind of diminutions or divisions a musician could make on particular intervals, as shown below in Figure 1:



Figure 1: Christopher Simpson, *The Division Viol*, London: Printed by Mr Godbid, and sold by John Playford, 1659, p.22.

Simpson's book also includes fully written out 'divisions' on a ground, a genre also represented by *The Division Violin* (1684) and *The Division Flute* (1706). These prints are, in a sense, the closest we can get to hearing someone improvise in seventeenth-century England, but they also highlight print's intermediary role between orality and literacy. The solo divisions I recorded (track 2, *bulbul*) illustrates this on a more practical level (see Figure 2): printed in *The Division Flute* (1706), the score maps out a set of divisions that lies somewhere in between Simpson's examples and a fully-composed piece of music.

⁸ M. Hole, *The expediency of a publick liturgy, to preserve the reverence of publick worship a sermon preach'd at bridgewater, for the satisfaction of an eminent dissenter / by matthew hole ..* Printed for Matt. Wotton (London 1697), p.10. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University Library
<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2240863265/11702024?accountid=98> [accessed 12 March 2022].



Figure 2: The Division Flute, Walsh 1706, Part 2, p.11.

However, solo divisions also somewhat destabilise the premise of ‘divisions on a ground’. The ground bass’s notable absence makes us question what it is that we are making divisions ‘over’ (or ‘of’). It suggests some freedom and fluidity around what divisions were, and how they should sound.

In fact, in the third part of his book, Simpson identified three types of division. He wrote:

In playing to a Ground we exercise the whole compass of the Viol, acting therein sometimes the part of a Bass, sometimes a Treble or some other Part. From hence proceed Two kinds of Division, viz. a Breaking of the Ground, and a Descanting upon it: Out of which two, is generated a Third sort of Division; to wit a Mixture of Those, one with the other; which Third or last sort, is expressed in a two fold Manner; that is, either in Single or in Double notes. These several sorts of Division are used upon the Bass-Viol, very promiscuously, according to the Fancy of the Player or Composer...⁹

Simpson's model seems clear enough: there are two main modes of improvising, one where the musician makes divisions *out of* the bass line and the other where they make divisions *over* it, and a third mode which consists of a combination of the former two. Strikingly, however, in popular understanding and discussion today by both performers and musicologists (largely promoted by the modern publishing of treble divisions over a static repeated bass), this second type of division is taken to represent the whole practice and genre.

'Breaking the Ground', as Simpson calls it, is 'the dividing [of] its Notes into more diminute Notes.'¹⁰ He writes that this practice 'admits divers ways of expression, according to the divers ordering and disposing the Minute parts thereof' and offers five ways of 'breaking a note'. The first is a simple rhythmical alteration of the same pitch, the second consists of decoration around the note being 'broken', the third uses passing notes to connect the bass note in question to the next note in the ground bass, the fourth 'breaks' the bass notes into other 'concorde' or notes that are consonant with those notes being broken, and the fifth consists of running notes around the main bass notes.¹¹

According to Simpson, the third main mode of improvising is 'more excellent' than the other two. He writes:

I call that Mixt Division which mixeth Descant and Breaking the Ground, one with the other; under which name I comprehend all Division which presents to our Ears the Sounds of Two or more Parts moving together: And, this is expressed either in single Notes, by hitting first upon One String and then upon an Other; or in double Notes, by touching two or more Strings at once with the Bow. This, as it is more excellent than the

⁹ *The Division-Viol*, p.28.

¹⁰ *The Division-Viol*, p.28.

¹¹ *The Division-Viol*, pp.28-31.

single ways of Breaking the Ground, or Descanting upon it, so it is more intricate, and requires more of judgement and skill in Composition; by reason of the Bindings and intermixtures of Discords, which are as frequent in This as in any other Figurate Musick. and requires also a greater level of skill both due to the playing of chords (only possible on some instruments) and to the addition of suspensions and discords.¹²

Figure 3 shows an example of a ground bass being improvised upon in all three of these modes: first the bass itself is ‘broken’, then Simpson gives us a descant voice that improvises over the bass, and finally we get a mixture of the broken bass and descant diminution. The intention of this print is not only to provide the musician with music to perform from, but primarily as a tool to initiate the musician into the extemporary practice of making divisions on a ground.



Figure 3: Christopher Simpson, *The Division Viol*, p.32.

¹² *The Division-Viol*, p.29.

The music theorist Roger North explains more about this common practice of learning to improvise through sample passages showing different ways to improvise a particular interval or bass line (in the tradition of Italian *passaggi*, for example). North describes the practice of improvising a voluntary as something that is located in the different parts of the body, likening the process to preparing to give a speech through the ‘gathering’ of ‘materialls’ in one’s memory. Not only should the orator’s mind be ‘filled with the materiall’ but ‘the proper formes’ should also be at their ‘tongue’s end, always ready on occasion’.¹³ North describes how the musician’s body should be ‘filled’ with different passages and parts of music that they hear:

Even so a musitian, to become a good voluntier, must know the art of musick and have the knack of composition and full comand of his instruments (which here I have presumed to be the organ). And as for ayre of all sorts, he must be filled with it by a constant exercise, as well in the performing part, as in the imploy of perusing, wrighting, comparing, and transposing from key to key the best musick (of many parts in score and with as much variety as) he can procure; and all this so continuall that (as in the institution of an orator formerly used to be required) it may be accounted to have bin the great buisness of his life.¹⁴

Through the process of collecting these musical extracts, North asserts, the musician’s memory will be filled with:

...numberless passages of approved ayre, and have...all the cursory graces of cadences and semi-cadences, and comon descants and break-ings, as well as the ordinary ornaments of accord, or touch. And all these in a manner as may be termed memoriter, in like manner as persons that deal in tunes and lessons have them by heart and can performe without thinking, and even as sometimes camon fiddlers will play when fast asleep; which I mention to shew what exactness and perfection of memoriall habit a master ought to be armed with, to enable him to be a perfect voluntier.¹⁵

The cultivation of so-called artificial memory was present across many different sectors of society across Europe up into the early eighteenth century, revived from a set of techniques employed

¹³ John Wilson (ed.), *Roger North on music; being a selection from his essays written during the years c. 1695-1728* (London: Novello, 1959), pp.140.

¹⁴ Wilson (ed.), pp.140-141.

¹⁵ Wilson (ed.), p.141.

primarily in classical oration. Orators in ancient Greece and Rome were trained to imagine ‘memory houses’ in order to memorise speeches, placing key pieces of information in specific rooms or *loci* that could then be accessed by conjuring up a visual image of the ‘house’ and visiting various rooms to recall parts of the speech. The practice was used across many different activities and disciplines including music, as scholars such as Gregory Butler,¹⁶ Leo Treitler,¹⁷ and Massimiliano Guido have shown.¹⁸ The art of memory was often called upon in the composition or improvisation of certain genres, with musicians memorising certain melodic formulae, contrapuntal modules, or harmonic paradigms that would act as aural *loci* or rooms that could be visited in order to facilitate the creation of a particular genre of music.

The notion of creating a ‘memory house’ in the imagination comes from the Aristotelian principle that we are ‘imprinted’ by the things we perceive through our senses. This idea was adopted in early modern England by several figures including the physician Helkiah Crooke (1576-1648), who proposed a reading of the Aristotelian model where sensing was an active way of engaging with and being imprinted by the sensory environment (*Mikroksomographia*, 1615).¹⁹ The memory house was thus filled with both purposely placed/memorised things, and those environmental sounds, sights, tastes, and touches that the individual had encountered more passively.

Classical sources on this topic were continuously revived and adopted in early modern England. For example, in 1634, English politician and author Miles Sandys (1601-1636) wrote a tract on ‘Prudence’, the sixth chapter of which treats memory as the first of three parts of prudence (the others being understanding and providence). Sandys describes this type of sensory encounter filling the memory storehouse:

Memory keeps and hides, sayeth Aristotle, as it were a thing deposited, all sensible species judged, and thought one; that she may use them, when need requires. [...] As light and all colours and shapes of bodies are discerned by the eyes; by the ears all kinds

¹⁶ Gregory G. Butler, ‘The Fantasia as Musical Image’, *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol.60, No.4 (October 1974), 602-615.

¹⁷ Leo Treitler, ‘Speaking of the I-Word’, *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Improvisation Studies*, Vol.2, ed. by Benjamin Piekut and George E. Lewis (Oxford Handbooks Online, 2014) <<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199892921.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199892921-e-19>> [accessed 12 March 2022].

¹⁸ Massimiliano Guido, ‘Climbing the Stairs of the Memory Palace: Gestures at the keyboard for a flexible mind’, *Studies in Historical Improvisation: From Cantare super Librum to Partimenti*, ed. by Massimiliano Guido (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁹ Elizabeth L. Swann, ‘Anatomizing Taste: Practice, Subjectivity, and Sense in Mikroksomographia’, *Taste and Knowledge in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), p.93.

of sounds; all odours by the passage of the nose; all tastes by that of the mouth, and by the sense of the whole body, what is hard, what soft, what warm or cold, gentle or sharp, heavy or light, either extrinsically or intrinsically: so all these things doth that grand receptacle of the memory receive; yea she restores and calls them back to mind at pleasure.²⁰

Across the various sources on extemporary practice consulted for this chapter, this basic concept of memory as a bodily storehouse of past sensory experiences that are ‘printed’ on the body or brain remains constant. Rather than relying on a printed text, improvised activity was thus understood as a practice by which these ‘prints’ on the body might be read and performed – in some sense, the body becomes a text. This theory of memory and improvisation centres not only the physical bodies of historical personages and musicians, but also their personal experiences and identities. According to this theory, it seems logical to conclude that an English man who had travelled to Syria in the seventeenth century would produce different improvisations to a woman who stayed her whole life in rural Hampshire. The sounds, sights, and smells that they each imbibed during their lifetimes would be present in their improvisations, which become a bodily script of their personal histories.

The notion of memorisation being a sort of commitment of musical material *into* the body, which would then be able to improvise with this material almost of its own accord is a transhistorical phenomenon to some extent. For example, in a study of improvisation processes in jazz, Martin Norgaard relates a violinist telling him: ‘the hand is gonna crawl around and the brain is gonna like try to pick out something that the hand is doing.’²¹ Norgaard elaborates on this: ‘in all cases, it appears that the process the improvisers described is separate from the conscious control of physical movements. When the violinist describes the hand as “crawling around” and “the brain” as picking out material, he gives the impression that the brain is monitoring what the hand is doing and the hand is not under conscious control.’²²

In fact, in early modern music texts, the hand is often used to stand metonymically for the musician. Thomas Mace, for example, offers this brief description of a ground:

²⁰ William Engel, Rory Loughnane, and Grant Williams (eds.), *The Memory Arts in Renaissance England: A Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p.133.

²¹ Martin Norgaard, ‘Descriptions of Improvisational Thinking by Artist-Level Jazz Musicians’, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, Vol.59. No.2 (July 2011), 117.

²² Norgaard, 117.

The Ground is a set Number of Slow Notes, very Grave, and Stately; which, (after It is expres'd Once, or Twice, very Plainly) then He that hath Good Brains, and a Good Hand, undertakes to Play several Divisions upon It, 'Time after 'Time, till he has shew'd his Bravery, both of Invention and Hand.²³

Simpson also uses the same language when describing how to make divisions: '...in this manner of Play, which is the perfection of the Viol, or any other Instrument, if it be exactly performed, a man may shew the Excellency both of his Hand and Invention, to the delight and admiration of those that hear him.'²⁴

He continues:

But this you will say is a perfection which some excellent Hands have not attained unto... True that is, that Invention is a gift of Nature, but much improved by Exercise and Practice. He that hath it not in so high a measure as to play *ex tempore* to a Ground, may, notwithstanding give both himself and hearers sufficient satisfaction in playing such Divisions as himself or others have made for that purpose; in the performance whereof he may deserve the Name of an excellent Artist; for here the excellency of the Hand may be shewed as well as in the Other...²⁵

In other words, having an excellent 'Hand' or technical/physical skill does not equate to excellence in 'invention' or improvisational ability, which while it can be improved through application, is fundamentally 'a gift of Nature' that nevertheless must be exercised and improved upon. For these people who have not been blessed by nature with the gift of invention, they should play written divisions pre-composed either by themselves or someone else, which they might still be able to play with excellence since it is the hand not the invention that is responsible for this.

Unsurprisingly, another part of the body that appears in discussions of extemporary music-making is the ear. In a passage that echoes Simpson's notion of invention as a 'natural' gift, Roger North names the ear as an essential attribute for the improviser, writing that a 'good voluntiere' (or improviser) must be: 'a genius capable of musick, or what they call an ear, for divers persons have not that; and tho' application and industry will conquer some ineptitudes, yet

²³ Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument*, Reproduction en fac-similé (Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique: Paris, 1958), p.129.

²⁴ *The Division-Viol*, p.27.

²⁵ *The Division-Viol*, p.27.

others that proceed from naturall defect, of which musicall incapacity is one, are never to be remedied.²⁶ According to North then, the ear could be trained to a certain extent yet ultimately was largely dependent on nature for its success.

The ear is also discussed as an autonomous entity by the Italian violinist Nicola Matteis, who came to London in the 1670s. In book 2 of his collection of *Ayrs* for example, he presents a *Corrente da Orecchia* (Corrente for the ears) and *Corrente da piedi* (Corrente for the feet) alongside one another, where one is for ‘listening’ and one for ‘dancing’.²⁷ Instead of denoting the activities for which they are intended, he names instead the body parts that they engage. In the two versions of this piece, shown in Figure 4, a very similar melody is presented differently to accommodate the ear and the feet respectively: the ear’s version contains violin stopping for its delectation and running quavers to display the violinist’s virtuosity (and no doubt, their ornamentation on the repeats); the version for the feet, on the other hand, starts with the same motif an octave higher (perhaps to be heard better by dancers), and presents a much simpler melodic contour to highlight the Corrente’s rhythms.



Figure 4: Nicola Matteis, *Ayrs* Book 2, p.24.

Like Simpson, Matteis also discusses the hand, notating some pieces in the same collection as ‘per far la mano’ – to ‘make the hand’.²⁸ As Figure 5 displays, the passage over which this phrase

²⁶ Wilson (ed.), p.136.

²⁷ *Other Ayrs Preludes Allmands Sarabands with full stops for the Violin By Nicola Matteis, The Second Part*, (Unidentified publisher, not dated), pp.24-25 <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/5/5e/IMSLP99060-PMILP203526-Matteis_Nicola_2._Other_ayrs_preludes_allmands_sarabands.pdf> [accessed 13 March 2022].

²⁸ *Ayres For the Violin To Wit...The Third and Fourth Parts Composed By Nicola Matteis* (Unidentified publisher, not dated), p.2 <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/7/75/IMSLP99061-PMILP203526-Matteis_Nicola_3._Ayres_for_the_violin.pdf> [accessed 13 March 2022].

is written shows a very simple falling sequence, quite different to the preceding material. Matteis does not elaborate on what he means by the phrase or why it is related to this musical passage, yet its scalar and sequential nature suggests it may have been a way to train the violinist in the performance of similar falling sequences, perhaps similarly to Simpson's exemplar passages on how to make divisions over particular intervals.



Figure 5: Nicola Matteis, Ayrs Book 3, p.2.

Matteis's well-known reputation as an improviser adds a further dimension to his embodied markings. A diary entry by John Evelyn on November 19 1674 describes the extraordinary powers of the violin in Matteis's hand, using the word 'spiritato', in seventeenth-century English most commonly used to refer to a religious enthusiast, to describe his 'ravishing' improvisations on a ground bass:

I heard that stupendious Violin Signor Nicholao (with other rare Musitians) whom certainly never mortal man exceeded on that instrument: he had a stroak so sweete, & made it speake like the Voice of a man; & when he pleased, like a Consort of severall Instruments: he did wonders upon a note: was an excellent Composer also: here was also that rare Lutinist Dr. Wallgrave: but nothing approch'd the Violin in Nicholas hand: he seem'd to be spiritato'd & plaid such ravishing things on a ground as astonish'd us all.²⁹

Evelyn's use of religious vocabulary to describe Matteis's 'spiritato'd' state and almost mystical abilities is particularly striking given my later discussion of practices of extemporary prayer and their resonances with extemporary music-making. In fact, they also exist side-by-side in Evelyn's

²⁹ E.S. de Beer (ed.), *Diary of John Evelyn, Volume IV: Kalendarium, 1673-1689* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p.48.

diary. An entry just four days earlier on November 15 had described his visit to hear Gilbert Burnet (1643-1715), ‘the most celebrated extempore preacher of his day’.³⁰

Of this occasion, Eveyln writes:

The Anniversary of my Baptisme I first heard that famous and Excellent Preacher Dr. Burnet...explicating the nature and Dignity of the human Soule, & new-man: how to be made conformable to the Image of God; with such a floud of Eloquence, & fullnesse of matter as shew’d him to be a person of extraordinary parts.³¹

Whether in music or prayer, successful improvisation could be achieved by training different parts of the body and mind. Simpson and Matteis’s texts show the hand and ear being ‘cultivated’ from their natural state, becoming useful tools for extemporisation. However, this ‘making’ of the ear and hand occurs here through the musical entrainment of bodies via print, somewhat complicating the relationship between improvisation and a printed text.

While printed music and improvised music are frequently imagined as polar opposites, Simpson’s text in particular challenges this binary understanding of the two: at which point does an improviser stop following Simpson’s printed examples and trust their own storehouse of material, and is it ever possible to make a clear distinction between them? The position of print between orality and literacy was perhaps symptomatic of the role of popular print in English society at this moment more broadly. The history of printing in England had started two centuries earlier in 1473/4, when William Caxton famously printed *The recuyell of the historyes of Troye*, closely followed in 1477 by the publication of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, and in 1495, the first music print - eight notes in Chester monk Ranulf Higden’s *Policronicon*, printed by Wynkyn de Worde in Westminster. However, it was not until the century following the Reformation that print became widely accessible and an important part of the dissemination and performance of early modern English culture, as epitomised by genres such as the broadside ballad, the woodcut picture, and the chapbook.³² After Ottaviano Petrucci produced his first musical print in Venice in 1501 (a collection of ninety-six secular pieces in three/four parts), the course of music printing everywhere (including England) was to change, and in 1530 the first known print of English secular music appeared, a collection titled *XX Songes*.

³⁰ de Beer (ed.), pp.47-48; see footnote 5.

³¹ de Beer (ed.), pp.47-48.

³² See Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Between the 1530s and the mid-seventeenth century, the printing and dissemination of secular and ‘popular’ music went from being a rarity to becoming an established practice in England, and had become a standard way for music to be written down and shared across different contexts and by different musicians. However, the way that print (both musical and non-musical) was used, and the way it functioned within the entrenched, pre-existing oral culture of seventeenth-century England, mean that the popular printing of these texts did not immediately herald the end of an oral society and the start of a literate one. Rather, they shaped a society in which print became part of oral culture, and oral culture became part of print.

Within this wider context, Simpson’s treatise functions as a key example of how print and improvisation were not considered as opposites, but became blurred in calling upon print to train the improvising body. However, Simpson’s text goes beyond merely training the body to improvise; his understanding of music in/and the world suggests that such a practice is connected to a wider conception of the harmony of body, soul, and universe. In the earlier part of his text where he discusses how to play the viol, Simpson elaborates on his theory of cosmic harmony, explaining how the seven notes of a scale and their potential consonances lead him to reflect on ‘the Mysterious Number of Seven’ and encourage a ‘Contemplation of the Universe’.³³ He continues:

When with these I compare my Seven Graduall Sounds, I cannot but also admire the Resemblance of Their Harmonies: the Concords of the One so exactly answering the Aspects of the other; as a Unison, to a Conjunction; an Octave, to an Opposition; the Middle Consonant in a Diapason, to the Middle Aspects in an Orb; as a Third, Fifth, Sixth in Musick, to a Trine, Quartile, Sextile in the Zodiack. And as These by moving into Such and Such Concords, Transmit into the Eare an Influence of Sound, which doth not only strike the Sense, but even affects the very Soule, stirring it up to a devout Contemplation of the Divine Principle, from whence all Harmony proceeds; and therefore very fitly applied to Sing and Sound forth his Glory and Praise.³⁴

This conception of musical harmony as a way for the musician to reach ‘devout Contemplation of the Divine Principle, from whence all Harmony proceeds’, is configured as a process that

³³ *The Division-Viol*, p.23.

³⁴ *The Division-Viol*, pp.23-24.

progressed from the ear to the striking of the senses and the stirring of the soul. In fact, musical harmony and the making of such harmonies by the musician, becomes an analogue for the perfection of the universe and God's creation:

...when I further consider, that taking any One Sound, if you joyn thereto Another, a Third above it; and then place Another, a Third above that also; these Three thus conjoined and Sounding together, do Constitute One entire Harmony, which Governs and Comprises all the Sounds, which by Art, or Imagination, can at once be joined together in Muscull Concordance: This I cannot but think a Significant Embleme of that Supreme, and Incomprehensible Three in One, Governing, Comprising, and Disposing the whole Machine of the World, with all its included Parts in a Perfect Harmony.'

Since Simpson heard the Holy Trinity and its ordinance over the 'whole machine of the world' reflected in the harmony of the musical triad, his concept of the seven notes of a scale as comprised of three superimposed triads place the musician in a role of great responsibility, where their treatment of the triad should mirror divine perfection and harmony. Playing a 'wrong' note or disharmonious chord in this context is not just jarring to the ear, but could be detrimental to the musician's soul and to the world's order. In this light, the stakes of musical improvisation are high: who would be willing to risk causing such disharmony through unskilful improvisation?

Simpson concludes, 'what I have already mentioned, is enough to persuade me, that in the Harmony of Sounds, there is some great and hidden Mystery above what I find delivered.'³⁵ This tone of mysticism frames the study of harmony and of making divisions as an arcane practice. Later in the book, Simpson refers explicitly to the 'chief Myserie of Division to a Ground', splitting this mystery into three parts: firstly that the division be harmonious to the holding note, secondly that the division leads to the next note of the bass line in a 'smooth and natural passage' and thirdly that if the division passes into discords, that 'they should be such as are aptly used in Composition.'³⁶

In light of Simpson's theory of cosmic harmony, which reflects widely-held beliefs at the time, the importance of improvising correctly, and ironically of *not* leaving anything to chance,

³⁵ *The Division-Viol*, p.24.

³⁶ *The Division-Viol*, p.30.

becomes more apparent.³⁷ But what, then, was the relationship between improvisation, the musician's body, and print, and what possible dangers did improvisation entail, given its deeply embodied location? In the following section, I propose that reading texts on extemporary prayer can offer some answers to this question, and result in a fuller understanding of the 'extemporary' in early modern England. I argue that by reconfiguring the relationship between the improvising body and printed text, the extemporary emerges as a site for making and remaking the early modern body and for reflecting on wider issues of religious, racial, sexual, and socio-political identity at this moment.

Extemporary Prayer

'Extemporary' or 'unpremeditated' prayer became a site of significant and heated debate throughout seventeenth-century England, a time of great tumult in liturgical practice following first the Reformation in 1517, Elizabeth I's excommunication from the Catholic Church in 1570, and the Civil War and so-called 'Glorious Revolution' through the 1640s-80s. The English historian Judith Maltby situates liturgical practice in revolutionary England between two main events: the collection of laws governing religious practice introduced between 1558-1563 by Elizabeth I (known as the Elizabethan Religious Settlement), and the rise of a seventeenth-century reform movement within the Church of England started by the Archbishop William Laud (known as 'Laudianism').³⁸

One of the central debates within the church in this period of upheaval concerned the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559). While many preachers urged worshippers to follow its set forms, others rejected both the notion of having 'stage directions' for worship, and the idea of repeating the same text day after day and month. These preachers claimed both that the text of the liturgy needed reform, and that the 'creative workings' of the Holy Spirit were being stifled by the Book of Common Prayer's repetitive nature. On this latter point, for example, the Ipswich town preacher Samuel Ward wrote in 1635: '...there was not that life to quicken either hearer or speaker in the reading of an homily or prayer, though penned never so elegantly, as there was by prayer and preaching by the Spirit, and that a Parrett might be taught to repeate forms without affection.'³⁹

³⁷ It is worth noting that this cosmic connection between musical notes, celestial bodies, and human souls and bodies was a philosophy shared entirely with the Eurasian Islamic world.

³⁸ Judith Maltby, 'Extravagancies and Impertinencies': Set Forms, Conceived and Extempore Prayer in Revolutionary England', in *Worship and the Parish Church in Early Modern Britain*, ed. by Alec Ryrie and Natalie Mears (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp.221-243.

³⁹ Maltby, p.181.

Since ‘all the [Protestant] reformers agreed that true prayer was created by the workings of the Holy Spirit – in other words, true prayer could never be a “work”’, this created some major issues around the use of the Book of Common Prayer and in 1645 a new worship book was approved by an ordinance of Parliament to replace the Book of Common Prayer. This new manual was titled: a ‘Directory for the Public Worship of God.’⁴⁰ As Maltby observes, ‘the Directory was a revolutionary solution to the Prayer Book “problem”’. To those more familiar with the latter, the Directory reads like a set of stage directions without the speaking parts – or very few speaking parts. The noted mid-twentieth century liturgist, E.C. Ratcliff put it succinctly by remarking that the Directory was “not so much a prayer book as a rubric book”.⁴¹ The unique relationship between orality and written text in the Directory framed the book as a set of structures for extemporisation, operating as a kind of halfway house between the set forms of the Book of Common Prayer and the complete freedom of extemporary prayer, in a similar fashion to how Simpson’s text mediated between printed music and free improvisation.

While Simpson concedes that consecutive fifths and eights created when playing divisions to a ground may ‘...scandalize a young Composer, and perhaps give offence to some old Critick’, he does not describe forms of transgressive extemporary music-making in too much further detail.⁴² In the domain of extemporary prayer however, we find a number of written refutations against the practice, in the form of printed books and pamphlets explaining how harmful it could be.

In the preface to his English translation of bishop Lancelot Andrews’s Greek prayer book in 1648, parish priest and Laudian ceremonialist Richard Drake writes that readers should learn of ‘...His [Andrews’s] Judgement concerning Extempore Conceptions, and undigested Praiers.’⁴³ It is worth noting the bodily language used even here, with the womb-like associations of ‘conception’ and connotations of the gut evoked by ‘undigested’. Drake continues:

I am confident He had as great abilities of expressing himself to purpose *without premeditation*, as anie Rabbie that pretends to the highest pitch of Inspiration. But his Devotion had not taught Him to cast off his *Humilitie*; nor was He so little acquainted with

⁴⁰ Maltby, p.222.

⁴¹ Maltby, p.225.

⁴² *The Division Viol*, p.42.

⁴³ John Walter, ‘Affronts and Insolencies: The Voices of Radwinter and Popular Opposition to Laudianism’, *English Historical Review*, Vol. 122, No. 495 (2007), pp.35-60.

His God and *Him* | *self*, as not to know His distance and to keep it. It had been a sin to Him to appear before *His God* emptie, or with that which cost Him no | thing.⁴⁴

In other words, Drake sees extemporary prayer almost as disrespectful, arguing that even in the case of Andrews, who had ‘great abilities of expressing himself to purpose *without pre* | *meditation*’, to improvise prayer would be to overstep boundaries of divine intimacy and represent a cheap or ‘emptie’ manner in which to address God. Drake goes on:

There is too much of a Pharisee in him that dares to trust to his Mem | orie, his Phancie, or Invention before the Majestie of Heaven; when even his most premeditated and weigh | ed thoughts, though clothed in the best at | tire of language, would be esteemed by himself too unworthie to be offered to his Prince. And yet such is the ir | religion of this Age, the most High God must take up and be content with that homelie en | tertainment, which my Lord or Ladie, forsooth, would not receive from their most faithfull ser | vant without great scorn and indignation.⁴⁵

Drake reaches his fever pitch of indignation as his text continues, and actually invokes music: ‘But it is the highest pitch of sacrilege to make the Scripture pa | tronize Impietie. They abuse the Text and the Apostle, that urge His, *I will praie with the spirit*, to justifie En | thusiasm in Praijng, unless they will, what never anie brainsick Novelist attempted, in | terpret to us, *I will sing with the spirit*, with their *extempora* | *rie Music*.⁴⁶ Here Drake is referring to a passage in *Corinthians* which discusses modes of prayer and the importance of praying both with ‘the spirit’ and with ‘the understanding’: ‘What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.’⁴⁷

Thus he seems to be suggesting that extemporary prayer – and by extension extemporary music – uses the idea of praying/singing with the spirit as a way to justify the lack of understanding inherent in improvised acts. Finally, lest the reader should be left in any doubt as to the salvific nature of the written word and its superior status to the extemporary in not permitting ‘fruitless

⁴⁴ *A manual of the private devotions and meditations of The Right Reverend Father in God Lancelot Andrews, late Lord Bishop of Winchester translated out of a fair Greek M.S. Of his amanuensis by R.D., B.D.* (London: Printed for W.D. by Humphrey Moseley, 1648), unnumbered page. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University <<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240867083/C459844B906F433APQ/1?accountid=985>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

⁴⁵ *Meditations and Devotions*, unnumbered page.

⁴⁶ *Meditations and Devotions*, unnumbered page.

⁴⁷ Corinthians 14:15, King James Bible (1611) <https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611_1-Corinthians-14-15/> [accessed 13 March 2022].

matter' or 'idle words', he explains that Andrews did not use this passage in Corinthians to draw such 'wild conclusions' about the permissibility of extemporary prayer and song:

His Reading had not taught this learned Father to make such wild conclusions; Nor would his *Pietie* per|mit Him to licence them to others, or Him|self. Hence it is that, in His addresses to His God, His *Heart* was kindled, first, with *ho|lie fire*; nor would He then present His *Thoughts* upon the *Altar*, til He had weigh'd them in the balance of the Sanc|tuarie, and by commit|ting them to *Faithful writing* left no room for fruitless *matter* or idle *words*.⁴⁸

Drake's characterisation of the extemporary is as a wild, disrespectful mode of expression that ignores the rational 'understanding' in favour of 'spirit' – an unbalanced reflection of the 'holie fire' that kindled the speaker's heart. Its unpremeditated nature represents goes against any notion of planning ahead, and against the ultimate pre-planned nature of text. In this characterisation, the extemporary is othered in opposition to the *Book of Common Prayer* – the author's extreme position on how a person is to communicate with God precludes any kind of spontaneity in expression.

The construction of the extemporary as a space of alterity also extended to religious and racial othering. As a result, Islam and Muslims were often evoked in these texts. An embedded and complex example of this occurs in a polemical work of 1661, in which Ireneus Freeman (potentially an alias for the clergyman John Sedgwick) responded to the nonconformist Henry Daubney's earlier defence of extempore prayer over prescribed forms of public worship.⁴⁹

Freeman argues that even if extemporary prayer is what seems naturally right to us, it is still wrong if we are commanded to pray by the book. He uses illustrative examples to explicate his point that are not directly relevant to the topic at hand yet deeply telling of some of the unspoken connections between extemporary prayer, authority, and notions of otherness. Freeman claims that to strengthen his point, he will 'prove' that 'lawful Authority' in the church

⁴⁸ *Meditations and Devotions*, unnumbered page.

⁴⁹ Ireneus Freeman, *Logike latreia the reasonableness of divine service : Or non-conformity to common-prayer, proved not conformable to common reason : In answer to the contrary pretensions of H. D. in a late discourse concerning the interest of words in prayer and liturgies/ by ireneus freeman* (London: Printed and sold by Tho. Basset, 1661). Early English Books Online, Cambridge University
<<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240849505/13436790/48D60D71EDEF4BA6PQ/1?accountid=9851>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

has the power to impose ‘significant Ceremonies’ – in other words, ceremonies or practices that show reverence through what they signify rather than what they inherently mean.⁵⁰

By way of example, he describes how a Magistrate has the power to command that people should uncover their heads when they pray to God, not because it is indecent in itself to uncover one’s head, but because the command entails a level of respect and reverence. Freeman continues ‘...we are not to understand by it, the absolute nature of man universally, but the conditional nature and Idiopathy of such Countrey-men...many times signifying Birth and Breeding. Otherwise nature would teach the Turks the same manners, who yet signify their respects by keeping on their Turbans’.⁵¹

This passing reference reveals a fascinating logic by which discussions of the extemporary might actually shape understandings of what human nature is. Here, ‘Turks’ (a term that stood for racial and religious otherness, denoting both Muslims and Turkish/Arab people) are somewhat distanced from conceptions of nature by reason of their ‘birth and breeding’, and are thus not to be included within English Christian assumptions of what is natural. Furthermore, a mistrust of human nature as a guide to correct behaviour means that we must look to authority (whether religious or political) to tell us what to do. By evoking the example of the ‘Turk’, Freeman implicitly sets up a scale of ‘human nature’ that some measure up to and others fall short of through his enunciation of human-ness.

The Scottish Protestant minister George Gillespie also implicated Muslims in his writing on extemporary prayers, although this time in support of the practice. In a pamphlet entitled *Reasons for which the Service Booke, urged upon Scotland ought to be Refused* (1638), he argues that prayers should be spontaneous, rather than pre-planned, so that the Holy Spirit may influence the speaker. He lists many reasons supporting extemporary prayer, arguing that ‘it is not lawfull for a man to tie himselfe, or bee tyed by others, to a prescript forme of vvords in prayer and exhortation.’⁵² He lists ten reasons why this is the case, including: ‘Eygthly, It may all be done by a Boy of 7 yeares olde, and so every private man that can read, yea, a Turcke if he can read, may be such a Minister.’ By Gillespie’s argument, since the text does not require spontaneous engagement, anyone could

⁵⁰ Freeman, *Logikē latreia*, p.3.

⁵¹ *Logikē latreia*, p.4.

⁵² George Gillespie, *Reasons for which the Service Booke, urged upon Scotland ought to bee Refused*, (Printed by G. Anderson: Edinburgh, 1638), unnumbered page. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University <https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/reasons-which-service-booke-urged-upon-scotland/docview/2240884769/se-2?accountid=9851> [accessed 13 March 2022].

be a minister, even someone who is a heretic or who is clearly (to him and his reader) not suited for this role. A fixed liturgy cannot discover whether the person reading it and praying has a suitable nature.

In both Freeman and Gillespie's texts, the figure of the Turk functions as an undefined figure of alterity, serving to re-affirm each author's position on extemporary prayer. By situating arguments for or against extemporary prayer in relation to this undefined figure, both writers actually write Muslims into a spectrum of humanity and nature. The extemporary either illuminates how far away 'English nature' is from that of the Turks, or shows that under the cover of the printed word, that nature can be disguised. Either way, it is often in relation to the Turk that the extemporary is discussed, constructing ideas of both Christian and Muslim humanity in the process.

Reading the Body's Prints

In other anti-extempore texts, the process of extemporising prayer was intimately connected to transgressions of the body, notions of self-love and a concomitant dangerous, individualistic passion for freedom. Elsewhere in his tract, Freeman explains that when a schoolboy uses his 'invention' to make up his own poetic verses, he will experience a certain 'intention and heat' (perhaps similar to Drake's 'holie fire' – in fact the language of heat is pervasive in many of these texts) which 'reading an Author' will simply not yield, since 'invention takes up the soul, be it in what subject it will.'⁵³

This 'invention' that supposedly lay at the heart of extemporising one's own words derived its 'heat' from love of the self: 'men are naturally more affected with their own inventions, then with those of others; and therefore extempore Prayers may more affect them then prescribed forms, upon no better an ac|count then [sic] that of self-love.'⁵⁴ The heat of this exertion is represented as a dangerous and intensely bodily practice: 'when a man doth strongly bend his wit in study (most of all in *invention*) he feels a sensible heat in his body, insomuch that I have known some to put a napkin dipped in cold water on their heads.'⁵⁵ English literature scholar Joseph Pappa describes further the early modern belief that bodily heat could be caused by an extreme passion

⁵³ *Logikē latreia*, p.27.

⁵⁴ *Logikē latreia*, p.27.

⁵⁵ *Logikē latreia*, p.28-29.

that stimulated the imagination, and explains how such passions could also imprint the memory/brain.⁵⁶

In addition to this heat, the invention associated with extemporary prayer affects the breath too: ‘Any man (I think) may experience, that in such an employment he doth not breath so freely and frequently as ordinarily he doth; which will be most apparent to such as take Tobacco; even as a man holds his breath when he is about with all his might to strike a blow. And this obstruction of the breath alone is sufficient to effect an extraordinary fervency in the blood and spirits.’⁵⁷ Moreover, Freeman seems to suggest that the unpremeditated nature of the extemporary and its need for quick invention could exhaust and strain the body: ‘Besides, when a man is not only to invent, but to invent as fast as the Auditors expect he should utter: in case matter comes not fast enough, he will be apt to draw out his last words to the great straining of his body, and to make up the defect of matter with more then ordinary earnestnesse in the delivery.’⁵⁸

To overcome this extemporary passion and its negative effects on the body, it is necessary to be restrained by ‘forms’. Freeman quotes the Bishop of Norwich who likens these composed forms to physical ropes and bondage (echoing Gillespie, who used such language negatively): ‘Now men using their own liberty in extempore Prayers, but being limited and tyed up by Forms, they may be more intent and fervent in the former then in the latter, upon no better principle then that which is most predominant in the most corrupt men, which are the most independent, and say, Let us break their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us.’⁵⁹ This image of ‘breaking bonds asunder’ is striking; the claim is that people who extemporise prayer are ‘corrupt’ and ‘independent’, breaking free of printed text that becomes a *cord* to prevent freedom and a person’s own inventions.⁶⁰ In this context, the practice of reading prayers takes on a controlling and oppressive role, restraining not only the person’s freedom but also their invention.

According to Freeman, the advantage of reading ‘prints and characters in a book’ lies in the ‘easie bringing of the Idea’s into the head’.⁶¹ He argues that: ‘every man that is an expert reader (especially in reading that, which he hath read often, in a fair print) doth probably find, that he

⁵⁶ Joseph Pappa, *Carnal Reading: Early Modern Language and Bodies* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), p.16. ProQuest Ebook Central, Cambridge University <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cam/detail.action?docID=1365260>> [accessed: March 15 2022].

⁵⁷ *Logikē latreia*, p.29.

⁵⁸ *Logikē latreia*, p.29.

⁵⁹ *Logikē latreia*, p.28.

⁶⁰ *Logikē latreia*, p.28.

⁶¹ *Logikē latreia*, p.30.

heeds the characters little, or not at all, but minds the sense, or something else. Nor is the Soul necessarily more abstracted from all created objects in extempore Prayers, then it may be in reading a Prayer out of a Book. The created objects, which are met with in a Book, are the Prints and Characters in the Book: But he that prayes without book (especially with vocal prayer) must needs look upon the like prints and stamps made in the Brain: or whatsoever things the species are, without which a man can neither speak nor think, they must needs be created objects...'⁶²

This passage starts as a direct rebuttal of Henry Daubney's suggestion that the worshipper's soul is 'abstracted' during extemporary prayer since it is focussed solely on the action of praying and not on the material object of the book. On the contrary, Freeman argues, if the worshipper's attention is not on the printed text in a book, it will be redirected to the 'prints and stamps made in the Brain', recalling my earlier discussion of early modern beliefs around the brain-printing capacities of sensory impressions. Freeman's argument is that it is better to read from a book of scripture than your own brain, since prayer must depend on reading one or the other. This assertion goes back to a belief that the human mind is the product of a bodily text, written through a person's sensory engagements with the world. Following this model, the practice of improvisation is thus a process of reading and reanimating the stamps and imprints formed on the brain through these sensations.

Freeman's arguments against extemporary prayer are based on an assumption that the practice physically affects the body negatively and results in overheating and exhaustion, as well as the conviction that reading from a book is necessarily better than reading the 'brain's prints.' In this context, then, there is less of an opposition between body and text than a convergence, where the body becomes a type of text that can be read, perhaps as a memory book of that person's histories. The separation between body and text results in a type of bondage, restraining that person's imagination and inventions, and curtailing their body and its memories to a certain extent. As we shall see, this view of the extemporary affecting the body and leading the person to damage themselves in some way could take even more striking forms, with text positioned almost as a means to self-preservation.

One extreme example of the belief that improvisation could negatively imprint itself on the body is found in sectarian literature. George Spinola's text of 1646 falls into this category, a book in

⁶² *Logikē latreia*, p.30.

which the author proposes ways in which those separatists from the Church of England who participate in the un-orthodoxies of extemporary prayer might engage in ‘face-mending’ to correct the physical deformities that their practices had caused.⁶³ The text not only tells us of the extreme effects of extemporising on the body, but also intimates how the practices of these people (including those of extemporary prayer) were heard as acts of non-conformity and transgression that (here at least) could be countered by a type of eugenicist bodily ‘correction’.⁶⁴

Spinola writes: ‘I confesse in all my observations of the Phisnomies of Men, I have noe found such strange, exotick, forrain, ridiculous deformities, and non-conformities of parts in the Faces and Limbs of any kinde of Men, as in those which at this day are familiarly called the Sectaries and Seperatists, and therefore I direct this discourse of Face-mending to those invisible Christians of Knock-verjuice-lane, and other obscure places.’⁶⁵ Spinola rationalises the dedication of this ‘face-mending’ manual to these people not only because ‘the mistakes of Nature are not so preposterous, ridiculous, and enormous in the Faces of any kind or order of Men as in theirs and their Childrens’, but also since ‘some of the best Rules of Facemending here proposed, doe worke primarily by the strength and force of Imagination, in which kind of Imagination, they are known to have a greater share, than of Reason, and a cleare intellectual minde.’⁶⁶ The possession of reason and a clear intellectual mind are thus set in opposition to the lack of rationality and imagination of the ‘exotick’, ‘forrain’, and ‘deformed’, ascribing a racialised otherness to the extemporary actions of these people.

This extraordinary method for bodily ‘improvement’ and ‘face-mending’ thus posits that imaginative transgression and the process of extemporary practice begets physical transgression. The lack of order in the extemporisers’ imaginations is expressed outwardly in their physical appearance and that of their children: ‘...it is no wonder that they and their barnes are of such ridiculous Phisnomies, since by their profession they abhor all decency and harmoniousnesse,

⁶³ *Rules to get children by vvith handsome-faces: Or, precepts for the paptists, that get children by booke and for the extemporary sectaries, that get children without booke, to consider what they have to doe, and look well before they leape. that so the children of the papists may not have such prodigious ill-boding faces as their fathers, who became so ill physiognomied, not only being crossed over the face in baptisme, nor the children of the sectaries, by outfacing men that they had any originall sinne at all, but also by their ignorance in these precepts, for the begetting of children with handsome ingenious features, and symmetrical limbes. composed by george spinola. published according to order* (London, printed for T.S., 1646)

<<https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240879117/BAD11DFF426E46ECPQ/1?accountid=9851&imgSeq=1>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

⁶⁴ While it is beyond the scope of my chapter to explore this further, it is worth noting that sects that embraced extemporary prayer were often not in favour of musical expression in devotional practice, while those sects that embraced music as part of worship frequently reviled extemporary prayer practices.

⁶⁵ *Rules*, pp.1-2.

⁶⁶ *Rules*, p.2.

and lye with their Wives in that opinion. Impressions of slovennesse, disorder and disproportion must needs affect the Spirits of such as habitually averse from decencie, order and proportion...but this is not all; besides their resolute abjuring of Order, from variety of other Objects of their like or dislike, varieties of strange Impressions arise in their Spirits.⁶⁷

The key to changing their monstrous physiognomies lies in reading corrective texts – sometimes as much for their visual characteristics as for what they actually say. Spinola states in his first ‘rule’, that ‘one serious look of a Brownist [a name for a dissenter or separatist who followed Robert Browne (c.1550-1633)] upon the red Capitall Letters in the Canon of the Masse, would enable him to beget a Boy or Girle with Cherry-cheeks and Lips. But I must praemonish thee (Good Brownist) that thou look not upon all the pictures in the Masse-book and Legend with equal ardency; take heed at staring too wide upon S. Dunstan holding the Devill by the Nose with a payre of tongs, left immediately upon it thou chance to get a Babe which may have more of the Devill, the Nose, and the Tongues in it, than of S. Dunstan.’⁶⁸

A text’s purported effects on the reader’s children and their faces is startlingly literal: a Brownist could literally conceive a child with a complexion akin to the colours seen in the printed text of the Mass, or conversely, by staring too long at a picture of S. Dunstan holding the devil by the nose with a pair of tongs, could end up with offspring that has ‘more of the Devill, the Nose, and the Tongues in it, than of S. Dunstan’. By this reading, print physically effected changes on people’s physiognomies, rendering it an extremely dangerous yet also potentially salvific repository of power.

Spinola’s second rule concerns the Brownist’s lack of planetary learning, and consequently not picking a good time to beget a child, since his ‘extemporary Cock-sparrow devotion towards his doxie will not let him take time to Catechise a Planet, and say, *is it peace Jesu...*’⁶⁹ Spinola’s third rule is drawn from ‘a relation of Aeliana a Greek Historian and Philosopher’, and makes explicit the underlying sense of the ‘exotic’ and ‘forrain’ that he referenced as a key indicator of difference:

In Africa...where it is very hot, and Waters are scarce, wilde Beasts of all kinds and shapes meet together at the Water in very great Companies, and there, when their spirits

⁶⁷ *Rules*, p.4.

⁶⁸ *Rules*, p.5.

⁶⁹ *Rules*, p.6.

are cheered by the Water in very great Companies, they engender with one another at randome, and so by a continual coalition of promiscuous blood, Africk is continually full of strange and monstrous shapes.

It is not hard to draw a faire parallelisme betwixt these African Beasts, and the practice of the invisible brethren; your heats-(brethren) are known to be as great and malignant as those which the surly Dogstar breathes; your companies are full, and of shapes, strange and exotick... if you chance to mingle your loves promiscuously...as you interweave opinions, and beget monsters, in reason, your church may well vie with Africk for monstrous shapes...⁷⁰

In this passage, the continent of 'Africa' is imagined as a place of heat that lacks natural order, where the interbreeding of beasts results in a motley array of 'strange and monstrous' shapes due to the 'continual coalition of promiscuous blood'. In their extemporary transgressions against the book of common prayer, the separatists are portrayed as transgressive through racist comparisons to 'Africans', and processes of vicarious racialisation – their church 'may well vie with Africk for monstrous shapes'. In Spinola's argument, Africa becomes a locus of sexual promiscuity,⁷¹ where even the nature of animals is subject to an order-less randomness. In other words, the otherness of the extemporary becomes racialised and sexualised; it is a way to compromise 'human nature', which is constructed in the process.⁷²

The association of the extemporary with a deviant sexuality recall Freeman's notion of the extemporary as a type of transgressive self-love – a self-reflexive category that destabilises the normative separation between self and text, as though the extemporiser has transgressed the boundaries of divine authority and textual authorship by taking themselves as that authority and *becoming* their own text. The entanglement with temporality (signalled by *ex tempore*) thus seems to reach beyond the 'unpremeditated' and become associated with an 'unnatural' reflexivity of self, one in which the extemporiser subverts the proper separation between reader and text by inscribing themselves with the improvisations they imagine.

⁷⁰ *Rules*, p.6.

⁷¹ Note Christopher Simpson's use of the same word in *The Division Viol*, p.28: 'These several sorts of Division are used upon the Bass-Viol, very promiscuously, according to the Fancy of the Player or Composer...'

⁷² Walter Mignolo's 'local and self-promoted emergence of *the model/human* in the European Renaissance' comes to mind - what he describes as a 'fictional' reconceptualization and reinvention of the human, achieved through 'the (epistemic) invention of imperial and colonial differences.' See Mignolo and Walsh, p.153.

These writings about extemporary prayer show that, whatever the writer's stance, they often became a space to discuss and construct ideas of human nature. By problematising a clear-cut distinction between print and extemporary practice, improvisation can become a space of making and remaking the human body through mediating between the body's prints and printed texts. And in the spaces between these two, perhaps we can start to sense something of the 'mystery' of improvisation that Simpson evokes. The extreme beliefs about extemporary prayer leading to physical disfigurements or racialised otherness also serve to inscribe and put limits on 'human-ness', a limitation that is more easily conveyed and fixed through text than through the fluidity and flux of improvisation. In this light, Simpson's instructions for improvisation, and the status of his printed text, transcend the purely musical and may take on a role of social and spiritual regulation.

Law and Order: Policing the Extemporary Body

The extemporary's reach extended not only to bodies in prayer, but also to the early modern state and its laws. Freeman theorises extemporary prayer as a break with law and (natural) order, arguing rather obtusely that while it is unlawful to impose the Common Prayer over other forms (including extempore ones), this does not mean that it is unlawful to use the Common Prayer in itself, and furthermore that it should be used when commanded. The idea that the Common Prayer is not to be used, he argues, is 'absurd', 'since I could instance in hundreds of things, which ought not to be commanded; and yet ought to be done, when commanded.'⁷³ Yet despite the unlawfulness of the imposition, Freeman argues that the upholding of these 'commands', regardless of whether they are reasonable or should be made, is essential to maintenance of personal and public 'order': 'Suppose the Magistrate command me to go three miles to Church, when there is as good a Minister in every respect within a mile: This command hinders the exercise of my devotion not a little, and therefore it ought not to have been imposed: Yet for all that, it must be obeyed.'⁷⁴

He continues: 'If it be replied, that every man is bound to take the course which tends most to his edification in it self, though it be forbidden by Authority: and consequently that in such a case I should go to the nearest Church, and make use of extempore prayers, rather than prescribed ones: I answer, that by this Rule every household-servant should leave all attendance

⁷³ *Logikē latreia*, p.2.

⁷⁴ *Logikē latreia*, p.2.

on his Master on Sun|days, and go into his Closet; that way tending most directly in it self to his edification.⁷⁵

In other words, extemporary practice can call obedience and authority into question, since it offers the possibility of following one's own will rather than that of an external authority – here, for example, it might stop the hypothetical Servant doing as the Master says, in order to further their own 'edification'. Freeman counters this with an argument of expediency: 'the servant should wisely con|sider, If I disobey my Master, that I may have a better opportu|nity and help for my devotion now; I shall be outed of his famil|ly, and put into a condition attended with far more distractions at other times. And the wise Christian subject will argue in like manner. If I disobey the Magistrate in going to the next Church, or not using the Common Prayer; and many others do as I do: the Laws being exposed to contempt, wars and confusions will arise in the Kingdom: or, if the Laws are vindicated, I who break them must be under restraint: and both these wayes I shall have worse advantages of edification afterward, for using those which I thought absolutely best; against the will of my Rulers.'⁷⁶

Extemporary prayer is thus not only portrayed as 'better' for the person of non-ruling class, but also so dangerous that if acted upon it could result either in 'laws being exposed to contempt, wars and confusions' or in the person breaking them necessarily being put 'under restraint'. In order to preserve the authority of the Church and the ruling classes and avoid anything resembling anarchy, the Servant must obey the will of their Rulers regardless of what they command. The importance of obeying order is thus crucial to personal and public safety, but also a way of reflecting the macrocosm of universal order and perfection through the microcosm of social behaviours and interactions.

The relationship of writing and extemporisation to law and legal practice was further commented on some thirty years later by the English philosopher and physician John Locke (1632-1704), who wrote in a political tract of 1690:

The legislative, or supreme authority, cannot assume to its self a power to rule by extemporary arbitrary decrees, but is bound to dispense justice, and decide the rights of the subject by promulgated standing laws, and known authorized judges: for the law of

⁷⁵ *Logikē latreia*, p.2.

⁷⁶ *Logikē latreia*, p.2.

nature being unwritten, and so no where to be found but in the minds of men, they who through passion or interest shall miscite, or misapply it, cannot so easily be convinced of their mistake where there is no established judge...⁷⁷

Locke argues here that laws must be written and not extemporised, since natural law is unwritten and any person can misrepresent and misapply its true nature through an extemporary approach that is not fixed through writing. Through this process of writing and relinquishing extemporary freedom, he argues, society may escape the 'state of nature': 'to this end it is that men give up all their natural power to the society which they enter into, and the community put the legislative power into such hands as they think fit, with this trust, that they shall be governed by declared laws, or else their peace, quiet, and property will still be at the same uncertainty, as it was in the state of nature.'⁷⁸

In a subsequent passage, Locke goes on to assert that by following extemporary laws, society will actually be in a worse state than its 'natural' one, since people will abuse the power it necessarily gives to their improvisatory choices:

...whatever form the common-wealth is under, the ruling power ought to govern by declared and received laws, and not by extemporary dictates and undetermined resolutions: for then mankind will be in a far worse condition than in the state of nature, if they shall have armed one, or a few men with the joint power of a multitude, to force them to obey at pleasure the exorbitant and unlimited decrees of their sudden thoughts, or unrestrained, and till that moment unknown wills, without having any measures set down which may guide and justify their actions: for all the power the government has, being only for the good of the society, as it ought not to be arbitrary and at pleasure, so it ought to be exercised by established and promulgated laws; that both the people may know their duty, and be safe and secure within the limits of the law; and the rulers too kept within their bounds, and not be tempted, by the power they have in their hands, to employ it to such purposes, and by such measures, as they would not have known, and own not willingly.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. by Mark Goldie (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2016), p.69.

⁷⁸ Locke, p.65.

⁷⁹ Locke, p.70.

These passages are particularly significant given that Britain's constitution remained 'unwritten' despite the Civil War and Revolution, and the fact that one of the most significant documents that make up this uncoded constitution was the Bill of Rights in 1689, which established the supremacy of Parliament over the Crown. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss English constitutional change in any detail, Locke's association of 'extemporary' activity with a state of nature, as well as his proposal that writing should codify this true extemporary natural law, adds another element to the nexus of improvisation, freedom, and nature. Further, it shows that beliefs around the extemporary included not only music-making and prayer, but extended to broader questions of governance and statehood.

'Held by the Ears': Conclusion

What, then, did it mean to play extemporary music in seventeenth-century England? Was it a dubious practice of freedom? A source of transgression and danger? Was it to follow your nature, perhaps to read the prints on your brain and body? In the latter case, would extemporary forms thus constitute a way of revealing one's nature, and conversely, did texts that placed conditions and bounds on the extemporary seek to define and limit certain types of human nature?

Against this backdrop of extemporary prayer practices and what they entailed, we can now gain a better understanding of Simpson's project. The potential negative impact of extemporary prayer on the body suggests that perhaps Simpson's careful instructions on how to make extemporary music were a way to avoid such transgressions; and, also, that perhaps extemporary music was the closest one could get to the kind of divine or cosmic 'mystery' he describes. The power of improvisation derived from the autonomy of following one's own authority instead of that of a text, which could be seen as a freedom, or as a dangerous mis-configuration of both somatic and world orders. And yet Simpson's text restricts the authority of the self to the textual in ways that complicate more binary debates around extemporary prayer. By following his instructions for making extemporary prayer, the early modern improviser existed in a liminal state between following text completely and relying exclusively on their own fancy.

Descriptions of contemporaneous improvisation, however, suggest that in practice musicians have overstepped such boundaries between text and body. In a well-known account of the violinist Nicola Matteis improvising, Roger North recalls: 'I have knowne him hold a roomfull of

gentlemen and ladys by the ears for hours, and not a whisper scarce to be perceived among them...'⁸⁰ A silent audience was largely not characteristic of early modern English audiences, evidenced by North hyperbolically declaring he had never experienced this before nor since. Also striking is this metaphor of 'holding the audience by the ears'. The phrase recalls a Latin proverb of 'holding a wolf by the ears', with which classically-educated readers of North would most probably have been familiar.

The proverb is exemplified through the character Antipho who, in the words of Roman playwright Terentius, says: *Auribus teneo lupum, nam neque quomodo a me amittam invenio neque uti retineam scio*⁸¹ – 'I hold a wolf by the ears, for I can't find either a way of getting rid of her nor do I know how to keep her'. According to Suetonius this proverb was also used by the emperor Tiberius to describe his precarious and unstable position, exemplified by the dangers of the she-wolf.⁸²

This linguistic background hints at a real sense of *mutual* danger between improviser and audience – Matteis might have seized control by holding them by the ears, but will he get bitten if he lets go? Here improvisation is framed as wild and dangerous, perhaps travelling from the invention of Matteis's ear and hands to the ears and bodies of the audience members. If extemporary practices trade in performances of human nature and revelations of each person's 'brain prints', perhaps what we are witnessing here is Matteis improvising *himself*. With no separation between body and text, the extemporary could become a space where human nature could be made and remade, heard and reheard, and where the potential for its expression was limitless.

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In my next chapter, I focus on improvisation and encounter, building on the questions I have posed in this chapter about the relationship between body, print, and improvisation. I locate extemporary practice within musical and non-musical improvisatory narratives in travelogues of the Levant region in this period, and ask how historical understandings of improvisation can offer new ways to understand these texts and their contexts.

⁸⁰ John Alexander Stinson, 'Roger North's Essay of Musick Ayre: an edition from the autograph with Introduction and Commentary' (Masters thesis, The Australian National University, 1977), p.331 <<https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/133223>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

⁸¹ Terence, *Phormio*, ed. by Robert Maltby (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2012), pp.171-172.

⁸² C. Suetonius Tranquillus, *Tiberius*, ed. by Alexander Thomson, 25. Perseus Digital Library <<http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:latinLit:phi1348.abo013.perseus-eng1:25>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

CHAPTER 2

IMPROVISING ENCOUNTER

TRAVELOGUE READING AS WORLD-MAKING

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Improvising ‘Otherness’

In the years following the Protestant Reformations, England expanded its travel networks outside Europe. Elizabeth I had been officially excommunicated by Pope Pius V in 1570, which freed her of papal edicts that forbade Christian trade with Muslims. As a result, she started to send diplomats and merchants into the lands of the Ottoman empire. In this period, we therefore find reports of Christians ‘turning Turk’ (converting to Islam), as well as examples of Muslims who embraced Christianity, records of Muslims settling in England, and several visits from Ottoman and Moroccan diplomats. In literature and on the stage, Muslim characters cast as ‘Turks’ and ‘Moors’ entered the popular imagination, while countless travel accounts started to be published by English travellers in Turkey and the Ottoman Arab provinces, Morocco, and Iran. The role of print was crucial in disseminating these accounts, creating an English identity forged both in opposition to and alongside some of these cultural and geographical ‘others’, which renders the early modern English travelogue a significant genre for understanding this historical moment.

It is important to note that England’s first colony was not in the Ottoman world, but on the land of the Powhatan people (Jamestown, Virginia) in 1607. Thus when I refer to England as ‘pre/proto-colonial/imperialist’ in the context of this chapter, I am referring strictly to its relationship with the Ottoman empire. Similarly, it is crucial to recognise that the seventeenth century is when the East India Company did indeed create colonies in India, and also the century of Royal prerogative in the African-Atlantic slave trade. While it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to explore their ramifications here, these histories of colonialism and violence cannot be set apart from England’s contemporaneous relationships with the Ottomans.

By the time Elizabeth I’s reign came to an end in 1603, several major trade companies had been established, including the Turkey Company in 1581, renamed the Levant Company in 1592. The seventeenth century would continue to see and hear major changes in England’s relations to

Istanbul and the so-called Ottoman Arab lands, moving from what historian Gerald Maclean calls ‘imperial envy’ to the formation of England’s own ‘Eastern empire.’¹ Moreover, as Maclean observes, despite England’s lack of political power at this ‘pre-Orientalist’ moment, English depictions of the Ottoman East ‘developed certain representational themes that would feed directly into the Orientalist mind set: these include such notions as backwardness, licentious eroticism, “different sexualities”, barbaric cruelty, despotic absolutism.’² These discourses grew from and around the trade companies that maintained a double function as both economic and diplomatic bodies.

At the same time, as part of this culture of ‘imperial envy’, Elizabeth’s renown and power as monarch were reinforced by her knowledge of and proximity to Ottoman/Islamic(ate) cultures and languages. In a poem of 1612 by the musician Robert Johnson (c.1583-1633) for example, her purported skill in speaking Turkish and Arabic resounds alongside her ‘wonderfull’ music-making, showing the elevated status of these languages alongside other skilled arts in early modern England, as well as her sonic excellence conveyed both through the sound of music and of these foreign tongues.³

None like *Elizabeth* was found,/in learning so deuine:
 She had the perfect skilfull arts,/of all the muses nine.
 In Latten Gréeke and Hebrew shée,
 most excellent was knowne:
 To forraine Kings Ambassadors,
 the same was daily showne,

The Itallian French and Spannish tongue,
 she well could speake and read.
 The Turkish and Arabian spéech,
 grew perfect at her need.
 Her musicke made her wonderfull,
 so cunning therein found:

¹ Gerald Maclean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire Before 1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.20.

² Maclean, p.19.

³ While I am not aware of any clear evidence that Queen Elizabeth I did indeed speak Arabic and Turkish, here the significance is more around the perceived importance and value of her fluency in these languages.

The fame whereof about the world,
in Princes eares did sound.⁴

These contexts all form an important backdrop to my explorations of Anglo-Ottoman relations and constructions of identity through improvisatory practices in contemporary travelogues, as I go on to explore. As a metaphor for encounter and travel, I propose that musical improvisation is an important lens through which to understand the complicated relationship between England and the Ottoman empire at this moment of imperial envy, colonial aspirations, and developing orientalist discourse.⁵

Sensory Encounter in Henry Blount's *Voyage into the Levant* (1636)

In this chapter, I examine several different types of improvisation in/around early modern travelogues, including written depictions of 'improvising' Ottoman subjects by English travellers and the scripted improvisations of the English travellers themselves, as recorded in these travelogues.⁶ I discuss how the role of imperialism manifests in these texts, and explore how the travelogue became a location for extemporary processes of imagination and invention.⁷

One such travelogue is that of Henry Blount (1602-1682), an English landowner, traveller, and author. Blount is known for publishing an account of his travels to Turkey and the Ottoman Arab lands in 1636, and for being a keen advocate of coffee, which he had encountered in Turkey and which he helped bring to England.⁸ It is possible that Blount was on an official

⁴ R. Johnson, *A most royall song of the life and death of our late renowned princesse queene Elizabeth* (London, 1612), unnumbered page. Early English Book Online, Cambridge University
<<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2147751927/Z200405300/B4F88199BF6B4CF3PQ/2?accountid=9851>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

⁵ For a discussion of how eighteenth-century travel and travelogues were often treated as a space to explore wider socio-political issues, see Vanessa Agnew, *Enlightenment Orpheus: The Power of Music in Other Worlds* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp.12-70.

⁶ This sense of improvisation as a self-interested imperial tool of simulation wielded by English travellers is discussed by Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp.222-254. Greenblatt frames improvisation as 'a central Renaissance mode of behaviour' defined by an ability to 'empathise' in a disinterested and manipulative manner.

⁷ See also Katherine Brown's article on representations of Indian music in seventeenth-century travel writing, which analyses topoi used to describe and understand 'Eastern' music in India: 'Reading Indian Music: The Interpretation of Seventeenth-Century European Travel-Writing in the (Re)construction of Indian Music History', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, Vol.9, Issue 2 (January 2000), 1-34.

⁸ *A Voyage into the Levant: A Breife Relation of a Journey, lately performed by Master H.B. Gentleman, from England by the way of Venice, into Dalmatia, Sclavonia, Bosnab, Hungary, Macedonia, Thessaly, Thrace, Rhodes and Egypt, unto Gran Cairo: with particular observations concerning the moderne condition of the Turkes, and other people under that Empire* (The second Edition. London, printed by I.L. for Andrew Croke, and are to be sold at the signe of the Beare in Pauls Church-yard, 1636)
<<https://archive.org/details/avoyageintoлева00blougoog>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

journey financed by Charles I (who knighted him in 1639); but regardless, as Sabine Schülting argues, the text holds great value in showing England's political, military and economic interests in the 'East'.⁹

Blount opens his journal with a consideration of sensory perception and cultural difference in the travelogue, framed by what might be described as 'imperial envy.' He writes of his desire to visit this part of the world, since the Turks are 'the only moderne people, great in action, and whose Empire hath so suddenly invaded the World, and fixt it selfe such firme foundations as no other ever did'.¹⁰ Blount explains the cultural differences between England and 'Turkey' by appealing to climate: 'seeing the customes of men are much swayed by their natural dispositions, which are originally inspired and composed by the Climate whose ayre, and influence, they receive, it seems naturall, that to our North-West parts of the World, no people should be more averse, and strange of behaviour, than those of the South-East'.¹¹ This notion that people were affected by the 'ayres' of their country (a term that could be used both of the gaseous substance called 'air' and of a piece of music) is grounded in the ideas explored in my previous chapter, where I showed how sensory perception was thought to imprint the body in a particular way, which would affect that person's 'nature' and thus how they would draw on their bodily memories in order to improvise.

Climate or natural environment was considered a significant factor in the formation of the early modern memory storehouse. In his memory treatise of 1661, John Willis (d. 1625) names a long list of 'things that debilitate memory', citing different kinds of air such as 'unwholesome air that is infected with vapor of standing-waters, Marshes, Woods, Prisons, Dunghills, Common Sewers, & co.', 'Windie aire, that is agitated with violent winds', and 'aire infected with smoke of strong sented combustible things'.¹² Since memory was central to the improvisatory process, and air was perceived to affect memory, this theory is particularly significant in considering travellers and improvisers in the Ottoman lands. Moreover, according to these contemporary beliefs,

⁹ Sabine Schülting, 'Strategic Improvisation: Henry Blount and the Ottoman Empire', in *Early Modern Encounters with the Islamic East: Performing Cultures*, ed. by Sabine Schülting, Sabine Lucia Müller, and Ralf Hertel (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), p.67.

¹⁰ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.2.

¹¹ *A Voyage into the Levant*, pp.1-2.

¹² *Mnemonica, or, the art of memory drained out of the pure fountains of art & nature, digested into three books : Also a physical treatise of cherishing natural memory, diligently collected out of divers learned mens writings / by john willis* (Printed and are to be sold by Leonard Sowersby, London, 1661), p.137

<<https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/mnemonica-art-memory-drained-out-pure-fountains/docview/2264209113/se-2?accountid=9851>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

surely Blount's own memory and creativity would have been affected by his travels in these 'ayres and influences'.

Blount continues that 'above all other senses, the eye having the most immediate, and quicker commerce with the soule, gives it a more smart touch than the rest, leaving in the fancy somewhat unutterable; so that an eye witnesse of things conceives them with an imagination more compleat, strong, and intuitive, then he can either apprehend, or deliver by way of relation...' ¹³ Positioned at the start of his narrative, this passage explains the eye's closer relationship to the soul but ascribes to it the sense of touch too, noting that it has a 'quicker touch' than the other senses. This superior ability of the eye to 'touch' what it perceives means that an eyewitness is able to 'conceive' the people and places they have witnessed for themselves 'with an imagination more compleat, strong, and intuitive' than had someone related these details to them second-hand. Further on, Blount acknowledges the ear when stating that 'the reader is like one feasted with dishes fitter for another mans stomacke, than his owne: but a traveller takes with his eye, and eare, only such occurencies into observation, as his owne apprehension affects, and through that sympathy, can digest them into an experience more naturall for himself, than he could have done the notes' ¹⁴ of another... ¹⁵

In this context, Blount is explaining the merits of visiting a place oneself rather than simply reading about it (hence justifying the publication of his own travelogue); yet the intersensory language he uses tells us more. The reader who feasts on travel accounts will become gorged on food that was intended for 'another mans stomacke', since they are not travelling themselves and thus only able to take in only so much as they can withstand and 'digest'. The metaphor of reading as eating was a common one in the early modern period, and perhaps most famously used by the philosopher and essayist Francis Bacon (1561-1626), who claimed that 'some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested.' ¹⁶ In the context of Blount's book, the metaphor positions eye and ear as organs that quite literally imbibe the sounds and sights of abroad into the body and digest them. The sensory experiences of travel and new environments were thus taken *into* and *worked on/were worked on by* the body, and

¹³ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.3.

¹⁴ It is interesting to reflect on this word choice – 'the notes of another' might in another context refer to notated music, bringing to mind debates about the authenticity of improvised or self-dictated prayers, or about musical divisions that were printed versus those that were entirely extemporised.

¹⁵ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.3.

¹⁶ Francis Bacon, 'Of Studies', *Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral*, 1627, p.2

<<http://fountainheadpress.com/expandingthearc/assets/francisbaconstudies.pdf>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

transformed into something new.¹⁷ These discussions of reading as digestion also evoke Richard Drake's description of extemporary prayer as 'undigested' in Chapter 1, placing reading as digestion, reading as travel, reading/travel as digestion, and improvisation as indigestion, into a series of complex and shifting relationships.

While Blount seems to accord the ear a somewhat secondary role here, I wonder whether the eye's and ear's shared mode of imbibing material into the body and digesting it, renders the exact organ unimportant; eye and ear are simply two entry points. In this light, I ask how we could hear Blount's text as a collection of sensory experiences imbibed by the ear as well as the eye (and perhaps the stomach), relating to the same organs in the reader 'gorging' themselves back home. Perhaps Blount's resulting memory house could be filled not just with aural but also visual and gastronomic experiences, to be performed in an extemporary fashion that made use of the body's storehouse of memories, experiences, and airs.

In addition to describing his own sensory experiences and nature (and thereby shaping those of the reader), Blount's volume recounts several encounters that include several instances of improvisatory behaviour, which to him reveal the 'nature' of Ottoman subjects improvising. One of these encounters is described in an anecdote on his way to Constantinople, which the literary historian Sabine Schülting has analysed as an instance of 'strategic' improvisation.¹⁸ Blount has met some Ottoman soldiers en route, and relates how on seeing him, the soldiers recognised him as a Christian and called to him. Blount did not understand their words, so he stood still until 'they menacing their weapons, rose, and came to me, with looks very ugly.'¹⁹

He continues:

I smiling met them, and taking him who seemed of most port, by the hand, layed it to my forehead, which with them is the greatest signe of *love*, and *honour*, then often calling him *Sultanum*, spoke *English*, which though none of the kindest, yet gave I it such a sound, as

¹⁷ Perhaps unsurprisingly, since early modern meanings of the word 'travel' are inextricably connected to the word 'travail', indicating the 'work' of travelling. See Dyani Johns Taff, 'Precarious Travail, Gender and Narration in Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* and Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*', in *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama and the Wider World* ed. by Patricia Akhimie and Bernadette Andrea (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), p.273.

¹⁸ Schülting, p.69.

¹⁹ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.98.

to them who understood no further, might seeme affectionate, humble, and hearty;
which so appeased them, as they made me sit, and eate together, and parted loving...²⁰

Through this combination of speech and bodily acts, Blount's 'improvisation' of friendliness is 'successful' – the soldiers invite him to share a meal with them. According to Schülting, this kind of simulated behaviour is born out of inadequacy and the inability to communicate with the Turks whom he meets, thus falling back on this type of 'play-acting' to convince both himself and the reader that he is somehow able to get the better of them despite his lack of understanding and knowledge. Here, improvisation is a type of trickery, it is Iago's "I am not what I am", relayed by Stephen Greenblatt as 'the motto of the improviser, the manipulator of signs that bear no resemblance to what they profess to signify.'²¹

The continuation of the passage reveals that an Italian merchant passed through just after Blount, also on his way to Constantinople. In contrast to Blount, however, this traveller was not able to perform correctly – 'he not yet considering, how the place had changed his condition, stood upon his termes, till they with their Axes, and iron Maces (the weapons of that Country,) broke two of his ribs, in which case, we left him behind, halfe dead, either to get backe as he could, or be devoured of beasts.'²² Blount's callous abandonment of this man to his likely death is matter-of-fact; he was not able to survive because he had not considered how his new surroundings had 'changed his condition', and thus 'stood upon his termes' inflexibly, rather than responding to the change and to his new environment by taking in all its stimuli and acting accordingly.

Blount's success in befriending those Turks who intended violence towards him on the road is 'daily', and he boasts: 'I grew so confident of the Turkish nature, as when Lances, or Knives, were often set against me, I doubted not my selfe, unlesse it were by a Drunkard...for drinke makes the fancy of the one uncertaine...'²³ Blount's purportedly skilled imitations of the 'nature' of the Turks is achieved through these on-the-spot encounters, suggesting that his behaviour is somewhat improvisatory. And in similar fashion, the 'nature' of the Turks whom he has grown so adept in imitating is presumably revealed (if we follow contemporaneous theories of memory and the extemporary) through improvisatory behaviours too. After all, the reason Blount is still

²⁰ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.98.

²¹ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), p.238.

²² *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.98.

²³ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.99.

wary of a drunkard is that alcohol makes for an ‘uncertain’ fancy; in other words, he cannot trust that the person will act in accordance with their nature, of which he has grown so confident.

Blount is thus in a constant state of flux, observing the nature and behaviours of the Turks in order to imitate them, while also experiencing some change in his condition through his travels in new countries, climates, and sensory stimuli. When viewed through such a lens, these scenes of encounter in his travelogue show improvisation to be a complex and shared activity: behaviours overlap, scripts and improvisations collide, climates and cultures act on and are acted upon by the people engaging with them. Furthermore, improvisation is mobilised here to cast the travelogue as a stage for such encounters, a space in which the reader could almost enter the scene vicariously and imagine themselves acting out Blount’s part. While the reader back home had not been saturated in the same sensory experiences that Blount describes in his introduction (and which perhaps played a role in influencing his improvisatory behaviours as he gained familiarity in his new surroundings), the travelogue might become a way to experience them secondhand.

This sense of improvisation that I have hinted at grow sharper as I now move to listen to the musical ‘airs’ that Blount experienced and made during his travels through the atmospheric airs abroad. In doing so, I suggest that musical performance can present a complicated and nuanced picture of reciprocal improvisation. A striking example in Blount’s text occurs in his disparaging description of Ottoman music, itself containing yet another example of his own experimental ‘improvisation’. He introduces the topic of music in ‘Turkey’ (used often by travellers in this period to denote any Ottoman land), in the context of a discussion of coffee and the proliferation of coffee houses: ‘there upon scaffolds, halfe a yard high, and covered with Mats...[the Turks] sit crosse-legged after the Turkish manner, many times two or three hundred together, talking, and likely with some poore Musicke passing up and downe.’²⁴

The association of music with coffee houses in the Ottoman world was extremely common in this period, with the French traveller Monsieur de Thévenot even likening the sound of sipping coffee to a kind of music: ‘They all drink it sipping, for fear of scalding themselves; so that being in a *Coffee-hane* (so they call the place where they sell it ready made) one hears a pretty pleasant kind of sippling musick.’²⁵ (‘on le boit tout à petits traits de peur de se brusler, de sorte qu’estant

²⁴ *A Voyage into the Levant*, pp.105-106.

²⁵ *The Travels of Monsieur de Thevenot into the Levant in three parts, viz: into I. Turkey, II. Persia, III. the East-Indies / newly done out of French* (Printed by H. Clark, for H. Faithorne, J. Adamson, C. Skegnes, and T. Newborough, London, 1687), p.33. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University

dans un cafehane, (ainsi nomment les lieux où on le vend tout prepare,) on entend une affez plaisante musique de humerie...²⁶) The OED gives ‘sipping’ as a derivative of the verb ‘sipple’,²⁷ while Cotgrave’s French-English dictionary of 1611 gives the original French word used, ‘humerie’, as ‘a supping, sipping; sucking up’.²⁸ Once again, we encounter an entanglement of imbibing food/drink with hearing/making music, perhaps prompting us to wonder whether the music played in the coffee-hane itself mimicked the physical motions of sipping a cup of coffee that in itself created this additional soundscape.

On the ‘poore Musicke’ that passes ‘up and down’ in these coffee houses (presumably this refers to the communal nature of the music-making, although it could also refer to an ensemble of strolling musicians), Blount comments:

The Musicke of Turkey is worth consideration; through all those vaste Dominions, there runnes one tune, and for ought I heard, no more, nor can every man play that; yet scarce any but hath a fiddle, with two strings, and at Feasts, and other meetings, will confidently play upon it, but hee knows not to what tune, nor can play the same twice over...²⁹

This dense passage contains a wealth of observation and insight into his listening experiences. Firstly, we note the bold claim that ‘through all those vaste Dominions, there runnes one tune, and for ought I heard, no more.’ While this may refer to a melody that Blount heard across all the Ottoman countries he visited, it seems more likely an indication of his lack of experience with this music and its *maqamat* (modes), leading his ear to collapse all the melodies he heard into one and the same homogenous ‘tune’. Secondly, he comments that although scarcely anyone he came across was able to play this tune, anyone who has a fiddle with two strings (presumably an instrument similar to the *rebab* – a small bowed instrument of 1-3 strings found since the eighth

<<https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/travels-monsieur-de-thevenot-into-levant-three/docview/2248529090/se-2?accountid=9851>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

²⁶ Jean Thévenot, *Relation d'un voyage fait au Levant: dans laquelle il est curieusement traité des estats sujets au Grand Seigneur... et des singularitez particulières de l'Archipel, Constantinople, Terre-Sainte, Égypte, pyramides, mumies ["sic"], déserts d'Arabie, la Meque, et de plusieurs autres lieux de l'Asie et de l'Afrique... outre les choses mémorables arrivées au dernier siège de Bagdat, les cérémonies faites aux réceptions des ambassadeurs du Mogol et l'entretien de l'auteur avec celui du Pretejan, où il est parlé des sources du Nil / par Monsieur Thevenot* (Paris, 1664), p.63. BnF Gallica

<<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k106525z/f83.item>> [accessed 7 July 2022].

²⁷ OED Online, ‘Sipple, v.’ <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180351?redirectedFrom=sipping#eid22617279>> [accessed 7 July 2022].

²⁸ Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Printed by Adam Islip, 1611) <<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/534small.html>> [accessed 7 July 2022].

²⁹ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.106.

century in the Ottoman lands), will confidently play at ‘feasts’ and ‘other meetings’. However, Blount comments that such a musician ‘knows not to what tune, nor can play the same twice over’ – the tunes are unpremeditated, in other words, almost arising unconsciously from the musician, and cannot be replicated since they are unfixed and presumably improvised. The noted confidence with which these musicians play this ‘tune’ contrasts with Blount’s inability to pin down or grasp what he is hearing – in fact, we might rephrase his statement and say that *he* is unable to hear the same thing twice.

The idea of not being able to play the same tune twice is common in European descriptions of Arab and Turkish music, and functions as a signifier of improvisation. A particularly clear example of this appears a little later in Guillaume-André Villoteau’s description of Egyptian music in 1799, following Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt. Villoteau is also disparaging about the level of musical skill he encounters in the Egyptian musicians, and describes how he would ask them to sing/play while he attempted a transcription. However, he narrates that his attempts to notate their music was thwarted by their ornamentation and improvisation: ‘in the beginning, that which vexed us the most upon hearing the Egyptian musicians sing...was that we were unable to discern the modulations of the melodies from the numerous and bizarre ornaments with which they overload their singing...’³⁰

Despite the discomfort caused by the improvisations of the musicians around him, Blount himself improvises in response to the improvisations he observes. To give his account more credence, he tells his readers of an ‘experiment’ he conducted to test the musicians:

...this I’m sure of; for to make experiment, I have ventured to play at divers meetings, pretending the ayers of my country, to note whether they had skill or no, and took so well as they have often made me play againe; then I found their skill and mine alike, for I never understood the least touch of any instrument...³¹

In other words, Blount himself made music at several ‘meetings’, falsely telling the ‘Turks’ that he was playing English airs. Since they received his playing well and even asked him to play again, he decided that their level of musical skill/education is the same as his, i.e. one of ignorance – ‘I never understood the least touch of any instrument’. The resonance of the word ‘ayer’ here, as an almost

³⁰ Ruth Rosenberg, *Music, Travel and Imperial Encounter in 19th-century France* (London: Routledge, 2015), p.38.

³¹ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.106.

improvisatory variant of the ‘ayre’ of the climate, is striking. Blount is trying to ‘pretend’ the airs of his country in a Turkish coffee house as a point of cultural difference, but he ends up noting his similarities to the musicians there – ‘I found their skill and mine alike’. On the surface, this is an improvisation of simulation and ‘strategy’, to quote Sabine Schülting. Yet is it possible within an early modern framework to improvise without changing yourself? It is striking, and important to highlight that the music is never explicitly marked as ‘improvised’ or ‘extemporary’ – the clues that point to the improvised nature of the music-making are all in its descriptions, or lurking between the lines of his text.

The questions that this scene provokes of a reader today are seemingly endless, since we can only imagine how the story would have unfolded – is Blount in a coffee house, or a dedicated ‘meeting’ of musicians? And once there, what instrument did he play upon? Was he invited to play alone, or did he join in with the musicians around him, improvising the ‘false airs’ to such acclaim? If we conceive more practically of Blount improvising alongside these musicians, it is hard to think of him as untouched by the sounds around him, and much more likely to think of him responding to the scales, harmonies, and phrases that entered his ear. Sound literally would have worked upon him, as the vibrations moved his body, bringing him and his fellow musicians into a type of proximate intimacy and reciprocity in that moment.

We should also take contemporaneous theories of extemporary practice as a reading of sensory prints into account – surely Blount would have been imprinted (quite literally) by the airs (both atmospheric and musical), sounds, smells, sights, touches, and meals he had imbibed while travelling, and how could these have not shaped and contributed to his improvisations? In fact, we might wonder whether Blount was so changed by the airs of Turkey that he could no longer sustain a plausible performance of English-ness. Perhaps, then, we need to question or listen between the lines of his cold and strategic account of calculated improvisation intended to fool those around him, an account that denies the sense of reciprocity that surely shaped this musical encounter.

It is difficult to know whether Blount and his contemporaries believed that those living in different ‘climates’ actually had distinctly different natures, or whether their natures were simply susceptible to the conditions under which they lived.³² If the latter were true, then one might ask how Blount

³² It is also worth noting Charles de Secondat Montesquieu’s *L’Esprit des Loix* (1752), which evidences similar beliefs about how climate affected cultural behaviours. See Michael R. Dove, ‘Chapter 1, Historic Decentering of the Modern Discourse of Climate Change: The Long View from the Vedic Sages to Montesquieu’, in Jessica Barnes and

(as a traveller living for some time in these countries) conceived of himself as different from the inhabitants of that place. Other descriptions of Ottoman subjects improvising music in early modern travelogues seem to corroborate the notion that these people simply had different natures, and this difference (usually negative) came out in moments of improvisation that revealed their true natures.

A particularly striking example of this occurs in the travelogue of Jean Dumont, a French publisher who was named official historiographer to Charles VI of France. The book was originally written and published in French in 1694.³³ In the English translation of 1696, Dumont writes that the music of the ‘Turks’ is ‘...rather a hideous Dinn than a regular Harmony, and resembles exactly the howling Shrieks of a tortur’d Wretch.’³⁴ (‘...la musique Turquesque, c’est une chose horrible; ce sont des cris si desagreables qu’il semble qu’on les écorche...’³⁵) Dumont continues:

The first time I heard a *Turk* sing, I cou’d not forbear stopping to look upon him, concluding that he was certainly Mad: For I cou’d not imagine that a Man who had the use of his Reason, wou’d take pleasure in distorting his Body, and rolling his Eyes in so odd and extravagant a manner; tho’ they pretend that all those unusual Motions are only the Marks and Effects of a tender and violent Passion.³⁶

(La premiere fois que je vis chanter un Turc, je m’arêtai à le considerer, croyant qu’il fut fou, car ils accomapagent ce chant de contorsions & de roulemens d’yeux, qui ne permetent pas d’en juger autrement, ils disent que ces mouvements là ne proviennent que de la passion, & de l’atendrissement, dont ils se sentent touches.³⁷)

Michael R. Dove (eds.), *Climate Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives on Climate Change* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), pp.29-30.

³³ Jean Dumont, *Nouveau Voyage du Levant* (La Haye: chez Etienne Foulque, Marchand Libraire, 1694).

³⁴ *A new voyage to the Levant containing an account of the most remarkable curiosities in Germany, France, Italy, Malta, and Turkey: with historical observations relating to the present and ancient state of those countries / by the Sieur du Mont ; done into English, and adorn'd with figures* (London, 1696), p.275

<<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=5kVoAAAAcAAJ&pg=PP13#v=onepage&q&f=false>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

³⁵ *Nouveau Voyage du Levant*, p.324.

³⁶ *A new voyage to the Levant*, p.275

<<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=5kVoAAAAcAAJ&pg=PP13#v=onepage&q&f=false>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

³⁷ *Nouveau Voyage du Levant*, p.324.

This visceral analysis ascribes madness to the grotesque passion that Dumont observes, the 'howling shrieks of a tortur'd Wretch' adding to the idea of a tortured body emitting these haunted and horrible sounds. In fact, the original French word used is 'écorche', literally meaning 'flayed' or 'skinned', which adds even more to the grotesque image of bodily suffering. His claim that the Turks excuse the singer's 'unusual motions' are 'only the Marks and Effects of a tender and violent Passion' seems to regard these motions as 'marks' or visible touches, as it were, from such a passion.

The embodied narrative of horror bleeds into his description of the instruments too, some of which are described with reference to the human body:

Their *Musical Instruments* are extremely suitable to the Nature of their Harmony: For they have a kind of *Violin* with three Strings, a Neck as long as a Man's Arm, and a great Belly like the Block of a Hat; some ill-contriv'd *Flutes*; little *Timbrels* about the bigness of one's Fist, a *Drum*, some paultry *Hautbois*, and several little Brazen *Targets*, which they hold in their Hands, and knock against one another. Judge, Sir, what a mad Consort they make with the confus'd jangling of so many inharmonious Instruments.³⁸

(Les instrumens dont ils se servent ordinairement, respondent parfaitement bien à la nature de cette musique, ce sont un espece de violon à trois cordes, dont le manche est long comme le bras, & le corps gros, comme la forme d'un chapeau, des mechantes flûtes douces, des petites timbales, grosses chacune comme le poing, un Tambour de Basque, plusieurs petites Rondaches d'airain, qu'ils frappent l'une contre l'autre avec les deux mains, & quelque mechant haut bois. Jugés Monsieur, lors que tout cela est ensemble qu'elle musique enrage il doit faire; c'est une vray charivary...³⁹)

Here the musical disharmony of the instruments is mirrored by the disharmony in the human forms that the instruments mimic; the result is 'confused', just like the singer who has lost all 'reason'. In fact, the only instrument about which Dumont has a good word to say is the psaltery, which according to him owes its pleasurable nature to its Classical Greek origins, thus confirming that the horrific music described so far owes its character to the people from whom it emanates:

³⁸ *A new voyage to the Levant*, p.275.

³⁹ *Nouveau Voyage du Levant*, p.324.

The only tolerable Instrument they have is the *Psalterion*, which is cover'd with Latten Strings, stretcht as upon a *Harpsical*; and they strike upon 'em with little Sticks, which they hold betwixt their two Fingers. All the Women play admirably well on this Instrument, for 'tis their usual Diversion in their Chambers, especially the *Greeks*, whose Musick may be heard with Pleasure, since 'tis a great deal more agreeable than that of the *Turks*.⁴⁰

(Le seul instrument qu'ils ayent qui soit supportable, est ce qu'ils apellent un Psalterion, il est couvert des cordes de Laton, tendues comme sur un Clavessin, & l'on frape dessus avec de petit baguettes qu'on tient entre les deux doigts, toutes les femmes en sçavent jouer en perfection, & c'est à cela qu'elles se divertissent dans leurs chambres, les Grecques particulièrement, qu'il y a du Plaisir d'entendre, parceque leur musique est beaucoup plus agreable que celle des Turcs.⁴¹)

Dumont concludes: 'I shall only add on this Subject, that neither of 'em sing the Notes without the Words; and our way of singing Tunes seems so ridiculous to 'em, that they usually laugh at the *Franks*, and ask 'em what their *Tartara lera* signifies.'⁴² ('Au reste ni les uns, ni les autres ne chantant jamais qu'en recitant, & se moquent des Francs qui disent *Tartara lera* leur demandant ce que cela signifie.'⁴³) What Dumont seems to be alluding to here is the fact the *Turks* do not vocalise using syllables like *tartara lera* (which perhaps is referring to rhythmic/articulation syllables – see for example Jacques Hotteterre's discussion of *tu* and *ru*).⁴⁴ As a sign of learning, perhaps the absence of these types of syllables contributes yet further to the picture of wild and unsophisticated music making that Dumont paints. If the music is in fact improvised, then to Dumont it is not a practised or skilled improvisation, more an uncouth bodily expression that he can take little pleasure in. Such a locating of bodily horror in the process of improvisation chimes with my readings of extemporary prayer in the previous chapter, suggesting once again that these musicians may have been performing *themselves* – their horrific performances being heard as expressions of their nature.

⁴⁰ *A new voyage to the Levant*, p.275.

⁴¹ *Nouveau Voyage du Levant*, p.324-325.

⁴² *A new voyage to the Levant*, p.276.

⁴³ *Nouveau Voyage du Levant*, p.325.

⁴⁴ Jacques Hotteterre le Romain, *Principes de la flute traversiere, de la Flute a bec, et du Haut-bois*, Op. 1 (Amsterdam: Estienne Roger, undated), pp.21-29

<[https://imslp.org/wiki/Principes_de_la_flute_traversiere,_de_la_Flute_a_Bec,_et_du_Haut-bois,_Op.1_\(Hotteterre,_Jacques\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Principes_de_la_flute_traversiere,_de_la_Flute_a_Bec,_et_du_Haut-bois,_Op.1_(Hotteterre,_Jacques))> [accessed 13 March 2022].

Another account of musical improvisation that evokes this inextricable connection between improvisation and expressions of nature is found when Blount visits Egypt. He describes some music that he hears in Cairo, played on a cittern by a Frenchman who enthralls a nest of snakes with his improvised tunes:

...many rarities of living creatures I saw in Gran Cairo: but the most ingenious was a nest of foure-legg'd Serpents, of two foot long, blacke and ugly, kept by a Frenchman, who when he came to handle them, they would not endure him, but ranne, and hid in their hole; then would hee take his Citterne, and play upon it; they hearing the Musique, came all crawling to his feet, and began to climb up him, till he gave over playing, then away they ran...⁴⁵

Blount concludes: 'nor is this stranger in Nature, to see such creatures delight in sounds delightfull to us, then to see them relish such meats, as relish with us: the one argues a conformitie to our composition in one of our senses; the other in another.'⁴⁶

While the image of snake-charming was to become a rather tired orientalist trope in both India and Ottoman countries, here it functions as a way through which Blount improvises the soundscape and its actors – and to some extent also himself as a listening subject, and us as the readers of his text – through a written description of the improvised music. For Blount, the role of man-made music here is to control creatures and make them obedient; the otherwise dangerous and intractable snakes may be handled safely only through making them hear certain sounds. There are also implicit gendered resonances of a temptress serpent, who can somehow be silenced and made docile through 'sounds delightfull to us' that civilise her, perhaps even as Egyptian people themselves might be 'civilised' according to this gendered colonial logic.

The language of improvisation was not only contained within musical descriptions, but also shaped English perceptions of the Ottoman lands themselves, which were often characterised as a site of improvised lives and activities. While still in Cairo, Blount relates that a family friend with whom he stayed – 'his Excellence the Lord Ambassador of Holland at Constantinople, Sir Corenelius Haga' – passed on some 'insider knowledge' to his guest, describing the Cairene

⁴⁵ Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.45.

⁴⁶ Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.45.

streets as follows: ‘then the noted streets, foure, and twentie thousand, besides petty turnings, and divisions.’⁴⁷ Of particular note here is the use of ‘divisions’, and its potential musical connections – much like ‘ground’, the term has many lives, all of them spatially-inflected. But in this context, even the improvisatory turnings of the streets are ‘petty’ – perhaps even unnecessary.

There are also signs of the land itself being improvisatory in the account of English traveller Henry Maundrell (1665-1701). While still in Lebanon, he writes of a garden: ‘it may perhaps be wonder’d, how this Emir should be able to contrive any thing so elegant and regular as this Garden; seeing the Turkish Gardens are usually nothing else but a confus’d miscellany of Trees, jumbled together without either knots, walks, arbours, or any thing of art or design, so that they seem like thickets rather than Gardens. But Faccardine had been in Italy, where he had seen things of another nature, and knew well how to copy them in his own Country. For indeed it appears by these remains of him, that he must needs have been a man much above the ordinary level of a Turkish Genius.’⁴⁸

This comment on Turkish gardens as usually being so confused and haphazard, betrays his feeling that nature in Lebanon is not *cultivated* enough – in fact, it is so uncultivated that it seems like a thicket rather than a garden; part of the natural world rather than part of what he considers to be the ‘human’ world. The lack of order is ‘confused’, ‘jumbled’, and hazardous, typical in fact of a ‘Turkish Genius’ which in Maundrell’s view could not achieve a garden that is ‘elegant and regular’ except through European contact.⁴⁹

Throughout these examples, the depictions of improvisation are complex and varied. At first glance, we see Henry Blount styling himself through improvisatory processes (both musical and non-musical) and a performative text. Yet on closer reading, it seems difficult to detach him from his environment as a key shaping factor in his improvisations. Further, the sense of reciprocity that comes across in his descriptions of music-making make it difficult to separate his acts from those of the Ottoman musicians he sits amongst. However, descriptions of improvised Ottoman musics in Blount’s text and other contemporaneous travelogues are rarely complimentary, instead following orientalist tropes and hearing the supposedly ‘deviant’ nature

⁴⁷ *A Voyage into the Levant*, p.38.

⁴⁸ Henry Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter, A.D. 1697* (Oxford: Printed at the Theatre, 1703), p.40. <https://archive.org/details/gri_journeyfroma00maun> [accessed March 13 2022].

⁴⁹ Despite these descriptions, it is worth noting that Ottoman gardens were actually frequently modelled on Roman and Byzantine styles.

of the musicians in their music – and even sometimes in the layout of the countries and spaces in which they lived.

This negative connotation of improvisation as something unplanned and ‘wild’ contrasts with the kind of performative improvisations of the English traveller, recalling once more my discussion in Chapter 1 of improvisation as an activity should only be undertaken by some people under certain conditions. What remains consistent across these examples of improvisation, however, is the key notions that the act of improvising reflects one’s ‘natural disposition’, and is affected by the sensory experiences and climates one had experienced.

Silence and Absence in Henry Maundrell’s *Journey to Jerusalem* (1697)

As popular printed texts, many early modern travelogues allowed readers not only to passively read the words on the page, but to engage vicariously through the traveller’s performative narrations. So far, I have primarily considered the authors of these travelogues and the subjects they depict. But what of the readers of these texts? I now turn to another function of improvisation and embodiment in the travelogue, and ask how the genre became a location for developing modes of vicarious travel by the reader, and a space in which to enact imperial – as well as other – modes of world-making. This is perhaps particularly relevant in the context of considering improvisation as encounter in the travelogue; in Blount’s text, for example, the improvisations of the Turks are largely absent, yet we know they must be there, and this knowledge requires readers to elaborate somewhat on the printed text, perhaps even extemporising on the scenes they read. After all, any sonic phenomenon is not actually present in the text, and needs to be imagined by the reader.

In pursuing this notion of an ‘improvisatory’ reading of the early modern English travelogue, I move from instances of explicit musical improvisation to considering how the travelogue as a genre of printed text could become a vehicle of vicarious travel, imprinting and filling its readers with second-hand experiences of the countries and peoples of which they read. English chaplain Henry Maundrell’s travelogue of 1697 stands out as a particularly influential example of the early modern English travelogue, becoming one of the most popular books written by a European about the ‘East’ throughout the next few centuries.⁵⁰ By 1749 there were seven editions in

⁵⁰ Issam Nassar, ‘Review: Maundrell in Jerusalem: Reflections on the Writing of an Early European Tourist’, *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Issue 9 (Summer 2000) <<https://www.palestine-studies.org/en/node/78133>> [accessed 17 March 2022].

different European languages and sections of the book started to appear in travel writing anthologies in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As late as 1844, John Kitto described the book as ‘...an account so intelligent and perspicuous, that his still remains the standard description in the English language, and is scarcely rivalled in any other’.⁵¹

While the book was extremely popular, it actually contributes very few facts about the countries visited. In contrast to Blount’s empirical approach, Maundrell’s relies instead on Biblical knowledge of the Holy Land and surrounding lands. How, then, would an early modern reader engage with such a text? While the book may well have been received as confirmation that Biblical histories were more significant than the current stories of the contemporary inhabitants, I attempt here an ‘improvisatory’ reading that could point to the silences/absences in a text, or even fill in some of the missing sounds. This is by no means a new historical method – the Haitian anthropologist and historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1949-2012) suggests that identifying the moments where silences enter the process of historical construction can become ‘conceptual tools’ that help us understand the differences between silences, and how they should be approached: ‘any historical narrative is a bundle of silences, the result of a unique process, and the operation required to deconstruct these silences will vary accordingly.’⁵² In the context of the early modern travelogue, I ask how the (sometimes extemporary) performativity embedded in these texts can result in a type of improvisation enacted by the reader, allowing them to participate in the process of reconstructing and reimagining the experiences of travel.

I begin with the moment when Maundrell is in Tripoli, Lebanon. He describes how he and his companions encounter, explore, and map out a tower under which they find a network of rooms for burial. Through narrating his entry and exploration of the tomb, he also imagines and reconstructs his own living body in the space alongside the corpses of the inhabitants, mediated through his readers’ bodies as participants in his account.

Maundrell starts the day on Monday 8th March 1697:

Having passed over a restless night, in a marshy and unwholesome ground, we got up very early; in order to take a nearer veiw [sic] of the two Towers last mention’d. We found them to be Sepulchral Monuments, erected over two ancient Burying places. They

⁵¹ John Kitto, *The Pictorial History of Palestine and the Holy Land* (London: Charles Knight and Co., 1844), p.xv.

⁵² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power & the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), p.27.

stood at about ten yards distance from each other... Each of these barbarous Monuments had under it several Sepulchers: the entrances into which were on the South side. It cost us some time and pains to get into them: the Avenues being obstructed, first with Briars, and Weeds, and then with Dirt.⁵³

From the outset, the natural world is pitted against the travellers – the ground is ‘marshy and unwholesome’ and entry to the monuments is obstructed by ‘Briars, and Weeds, and then...Dirt’, which act as the ground’s natural doorkeepers in the absence of human inhabitants. The designation of ‘marshy and unwholesome’ to describe the ground brings to mind John Willis’s description of the conditions that impair the fully-functioning memory, while the reference to the ‘ground’ (clearly here referring to the actual ground upon which they tread), resonates with the notion of a ground bass. Just as ‘air’ was used interchangeably to discuss both atmosphere and a musical piece, perhaps ‘ground’ also could fuse the marsh underfoot with a soggy bass-line in the mind.

Crucially, the briars and weeds resist the travellers, who must force their entry into the ‘ancient Burying places’ by ‘time and pains’, according them a rapacious role of domination as they break through the privacy and sanctity of the tomb. Maundrell goes on to say that they ‘removed’ these obstacles, ‘encouraging ourselves with the hopes, or rather making ourselves merry with the fancy of hidden treasure.’⁵⁴ The fantasy of forced domination in order to gain a ‘hidden treasure’ is a common trope of coloniality in travel literature, and also positions the expedition in general as an opportunity for gain, and the travelogue as a way of theorising and materialising that gain.

Despite these promises of gain, disappointment comes next:

...as soon as we were enter’d into the Vaults, we found that our golden Imaginations ended (as all worldly hopes and projects do at last) in dust, and putrefaction.⁵⁵

The phrase ‘golden Imaginations’ is telling of the type of proto-coloniality at work here, powered by the ambitions of imagination and fixed in texts of golden promise. The entrance taken by way of the briars and weeds promised conquest and a fulfilled fantasy of gaining hidden treasure, yet it ends in ‘dust and putrefaction’. Maundrell’s comment that this is the way of all worldly hopes

⁵³ Maundrell, p.21.

⁵⁴ Maundrell, p.22.

⁵⁵ Maundrell, p.22.

and projects sounds a tone of regret or recognition that their pursuit was vain and inglorious, yet he seems determined that the trouble of forcing his way in should be met with ‘some reward for our pains’. Tellingly, the reward comes in the form of ‘an exact survey’ of ‘these Chambers of darkness’ – in the absence of striking gold, he finds another way to take ownership of the space and make their toils worthwhile. In this context, the table that follows in Figure 6 can be read as a visual representation of ownership and domination – a revelation of the hidden treasure within, a cartography of capture shared with the reader.

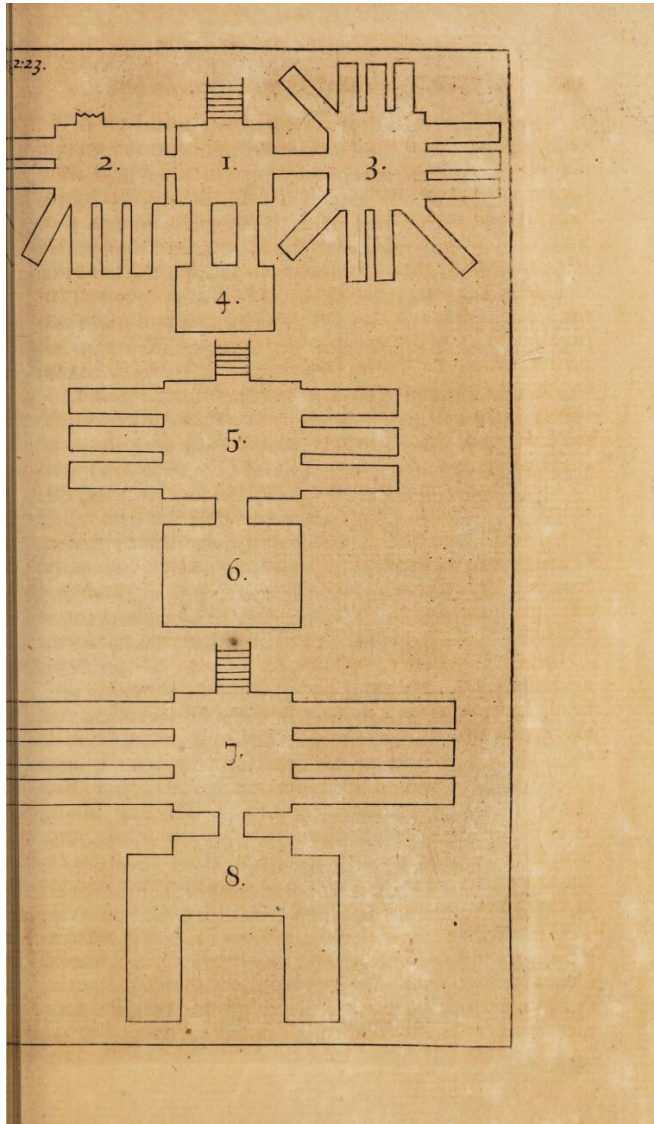


Figure 6: Henry Maundrell, *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem at Easter*, AD 1697, p.23.

The drawing comes accompanied with a text that explains its navigation:

The Chambers under the Tower lay as is represented in the first figure. Going down seven or eight steps, you come to the mouth of the Sepulcher; where crawling in you

arrive in the Chamber (1) which is nine foot two inches broad and eleven foot long. Turning to the right hand, and going through a narrow passage, you come to the Room (2) which is eight foot broad and ten long: in this chamber are seven cells for Corpses, *viz.* two over against the entrance, four on the left hand and one unfinished on the right. These cells were hewn directly into the firm Rock. We measured several of them, and found them eight foot and a half in length, and three foot three inches square. I would not infer from hence that the Corpses deposited here, were of such a Gigantick size, as to fill up such large Coffins: tho' at the same time, why should any men be so prodigal of their labour, as to cut these Caverns into so hard a Rock as this was, much farther than necessity requir'd?⁵⁶

The bodily dimension of this description, and the nature of the diagram and directions, make this seem like a staging of a performance. The informal tone of 'going down seven or eight steps, you come to the mouth of the Sepulcher; where crawling in you arrive in the Chamber' coalesces the author's body with that of the reader. Maundrell invites his readers to live vicariously through his texted experience through a particular way of reading the text. The act of crawling also makes the body prone, and thus closer to the seven corpses for which there are carved cells of immense proportions, causing Maundrell to speculate on why such huge coffins would be made, and what sort of dead bodies they would house. Although the coffins should house corpses and thus already be occupied, his account makes no recognition of them either in life or death, replacing their bodies with the somatic silence and absence of death that makes the space open for occupation by his own body.

The possibilities of this reading of silence as presence of absence, or as a sound that has evaporated, also encourages us to examine the way in which the sepulchre is centred as an object of exploration.⁵⁷ As a house of silence, it affords a space for ownership and performativity quite literally because its occupants are dead. The lack of fear or trepidation at being contained in a narrow space with these foreign corpses also signals Maundrell's erasure of the occupants – they are both silent and invisible in death, unable to resist the advances of the travellers. In fact, in this whole account, the only resistance offered to the sepulchre's invasion is from the weeds and

⁵⁶ Maundrell, p.22.

⁵⁷ The notion of silence as 'evaporated sound' is elaborated on by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, see Mahmoud Darwish, *A River Dies of Thirst: Journals*, translated by Catherine Cobham (Brooklyn, New York: Archipelago Books, 2009), p.33.

briars. The stage is empty, ready for an imperial fantasy of conquest to be enacted in part by the reader.

The lack of engagement with the local inhabitants comes across not only in Maundrell's account of entering the sepulchre, but more generally in his strategy of detaching Arab antiquity from the contemporary people of these lands and seeing it instead as the root of Western civilisation.⁵⁸

Edward Saïd names this phenomenon as a common orientalist trope:

The orient existed for the West, or so it seemed to countless Orientalists, whose attitude to what they worked on was either paternalistic or candidly condescending – unless, of course, they were antiquarians, in which case the “classical” Orient was a credit to *them* and not to the lamentable modern Orient.⁵⁹

Of Beirut, for example, Maundrell comments: ‘... at present, it retains nothing of its Ancient felicity, except the situation...’, mobilising the notion of past antiquity as the golden age of the so-called Middle East that English people can relate to, access, and even own through the study and appropriation of classical civilisation.⁶⁰ Returning to the scene of the sepulchre in Tripoli, he comments on the rest of the day: ‘...we saw many Sepulchers, old foundations and other remains of Antiquity. From all which it may be assuredly concluded, that here must needs have been some famous Habitation in ancient times: but whether this might be the Ximyra, laid down by Strabo hereabouts...the same possibly which the Country of the Zemarites...I leave others to discuss.’⁶¹ Strikingly, all his reference points in the area are to the classical authors and biblical study that formed his education in England, rather than to the contemporary experience of being in Lebanon, or to interaction with present inhabitants.

On his map of the sepulchre and in the accompanying description, too, the most striking absence is in fact of these present inhabitants. The map is empty, peopled only by numbers and the measurements given in feet. Again, one way to read this is through the lens of pre-colonial erasure and proto-orientalism, which clearly play a role in Maundrell's text. Moreover, the emptiness of the text and its potential as performative script presented the possibility of entraining the early modern English reader into modes of coloniality.

⁵⁸ As we saw earlier, with Dumont's praise for the Greek psalter.

⁵⁹ Saïd, *Orientalism*, p.204.

⁶⁰ Maundrell, p.38.

⁶¹ Maundrell, pp.23-24.

Despite this invitation to an interactive and improvisatory relationship with the text, in many respects Maundrell's travelogue seems almost anti-improvisatory. Replacing people with measurements is a strategy employed throughout the book, with a meticulous approach to calculating every hour of travel and how it is spent, resulting in an unfalteringly accurate set of hours for each day. Nothing is left to chance, in other words; Maundrell needs to account for every moment. This urge is also present in his desire to create a quantifiable 'account' of the city of Jerusalem from his own footsteps, as a way to capture or encapsulate something previously uncaptured and uncharted.

On Wednesday April 14 1697, he writes:

I was willing before our departure to measure the Circuit of the City; so taking one of the Fryars with me, I went out in the afternoon, in order to pace the Walls round. We went out at Bethlehem Gate, and proceeding on the right hand came about to the same Gate again. I found the whole City 4630 paces in Circumference, which I computed thus.⁶²

	Paces
From <i>Bethlehem</i> Gate to the corner on the right hand	400
From that corner to <i>Damascus</i> Gate	680
From <i>Damascus</i> Gate to <i>Herod's</i>	380
From <i>Herod's</i> Gate to <i>Jeremiah's</i> Prison	150
From <i>Jeremiah's</i> Prison to the corner next the Valley of <i>Jehosaphat</i>	225
From that corner to St <i>Stephen's</i> Gate	385
From St <i>Stephen's</i> Gate to the <i>Golden</i> Gate	240
From the <i>Golden</i> Gate to the corner of the Wall	380
From that corner to the <i>Dung</i> Gate	470
From the <i>Dung</i> Gate to <i>Sion</i> Gate	605
From <i>Sion</i> Gate to the corner of the Wall	215
From that corner to <i>Bethlehem</i> Gate	500
In all, Paces	4630

The reduction of my paces to yards, is, by casting away a tenth part; ten of my paces making nine yards: by which reckoning, the 4630 paces amount to 4167 yards, which make just two milés and a half.

Figure 7: Henry Maundrell, *Journey to Jerusalem*, p.110.

⁶² Maundrell, pp.109-110.

As a cartographic source or score, this example of ‘measurement’ shown in Figure 7 seems to be intended to provide little more than arithmetic. The Biblical reference points erase the Palestinian names for those places; in a sense Maundrell creates a ‘new Jerusalem’ as he paces, dissolving the more recent history of the city into indisputable numbers that are also silent. This strategy of recreation is also evident in the accompanying pictures of his travels, which portray a completely empty landscape, devoid of any signs of habitation or life. These silences in the book thus represent the absence of certain people, and the possibility for the reader’s ‘golden imagination’ to take flight, through the interactive and vicarious nature of the text. Yet when we consider the nature of the text in light of theories of improvisation and the histories of print at this moment, perhaps we can start to think of another mode of improvisation in the travelogue: as a way for the reader to almost go on a guided tour of ‘the East’, via a text that needed interaction and involved the reader in its performativity. In this way, print culture’s investment in the travelogue played an important role in disseminating early iterations of coloniality to literate members of the English public who would never leave the British Isles.

What I have been trying to grasp at in my analysis of Maundrell’s text, then, is that through thinking with silence/absence, we might start conceiving forms of ‘improvisatory’ readings that add to our understanding of how the travelogue as a printed text may have functioned in early modern England. By engaging beyond the text in this way, I argue that readers might involve themselves and their bodies quite literally in the traveller’s accounts, vicariously experiencing some of the sensory stimuli encountered by original authors. Returning to Blount’s introductory statement about readers becoming gorged on the accounts of travels they had not personally experienced, I circle back to ask whether this means a reader could actually imbibe and be inscribed by the sensory experiences of which they read. Travelogues were not simply an account of someone else’s travels to be read at home, but in a sense, a way to travel for oneself, or to transform oneself into a traveller, with all the concomitant dangers and pleasures of being bodily imprinted.

Imagining Otherwise in Margaret Cavendish’s ‘The Blazing World’ (1668)

The popularity of the travelogue at a historical moment steeped in extemporary practice of different kinds shows us how print became a way for readers to experience travel. It also heralds an age in which authors could imagine and share new fictional worlds and other-worldly universes that could only be accessed through text. What is thought to be the first work of

science fiction in English, *The Man in the Moone* by Francis Godwin, was published in this time (1638), followed by Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1668) and Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687). The imagination of utopian new worlds in parallel to and sometimes even instead of colonial 'discovery' in the material world is a phenomenon that shows us how powerful memory and the imagination could be, as well as the strength of desire to imagine alternatives – an imaginative act that closely linked to a concept of fancy and improvisation.

Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is one such example of world-building through imagination, captured forever in the printed book of 1668. Cavendish (1623-73) was the youngest daughter of a wealthy Essex family, and the Duchess of Newcastle. The print's opening words are from William Newcastle, who sets the book up in the vein of a colonial expedition of discovery, writing in verse addressed 'To the Duchess of Newcastle, on her Blazing new World.' He writes: '...Columbus then for Navigation fam'd,/Found a new World,/America 'tis named:/Now this new World was found, it was not made,/Only discovered, lying in Time's shade./Then what are You, having no Chaos found/To make a World, or any such least ground?/but your creating Fancy, thought it fit/To make your World of Nothing, but pure Wit./Your Blazing-world, beyond the Stars mounts higher,/Enlightens all with a Celestial Fire.'⁶³ Here he posits the writing of speculative fiction almost as an alternative (and perhaps even a preferable one) to colonisation: while Columbus simply found a continent already known to its inhabitants, Cavendish and her 'creating Fancy' has 'made' her own world out of 'pure Wit'.

In her preface addressed to the reader, Cavendish also discusses the role of 'fictions' and 'fancy' in her work, writing that 'fancy creates of its own accord whatsoever it pleases, and delights in its own work', and clarifying that she means 'by fancy a voluntary creation or production of the mind.'⁶⁴ She explains that she sees fancy and reason or philosophy as 'two worlds at the ends of their poles', complementing each other and offering the reader variety.⁶⁵ Finally, she explains that her motivation to create this new world stems from her ambitions that cannot be realised in the world she currently lives in:

I am not covetous, but as ambitious as ever any of my sex was, is, or can be; which makes, that though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavour to be Margaret the First; and although I have neither power, time, nor occasion to

⁶³ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing world and Other Writings*, ed. by Kate Lilley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p.121.

⁶⁴ Cavendish, p.123.

⁶⁵ Cavendish, p.124.

conquer the world as Alexander and Caesar did, rather than not be mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates gave me none, I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like.⁶⁶

In other words, Cavendish has created a world in which being a woman will not prevent her from achieving certain ambitions; her travelogue-like account of this new world becomes a powerful exercise in imagining otherwise, and crucially, as she points out, encouraging the reader to do so too – 'it is in every one's power to do the like.' This use of the imagination to escape the restrictions of being a well-to-do woman in seventeenth-century England come with a distinct imperialist world-view of desiring new lands to conquer and create anew, although, as I will argue, this use of the imagination could also be put to the building of alternative non-imperialist worlds. In this dimension, Cavendish's text contextualises some of my readings of imagination in the travelogue. Perhaps her writing should make us ask, where is fancy in our readings of such texts, and how does it relate to concepts of musical fancy and imagination?

In *The Blazing World*, Cavendish locates herself both in the 'Empress' protagonist and also, with a touch of wry humour, in the Empress's friend and 'platonic lover', the Duchess of Newcastle.⁶⁷ The Duchess expresses a desire to 'conquer a world', and is told by the spirits called up by the Empress that they wonder why she desires to be Empress of a terrestrial world when 'you can create your self a celestial world if you please.'⁶⁸ Here, in fact, the imperialist desire to conquer and rule over a pre-existent 'new' world is countered by the power of the fancy and imagination to do the same; the same tools as those employed for improvisation could in fact become modes of imagining and living otherwise, and a way to escape the oppressions of one's personal circumstances.

The spirits go on, 'every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures, and populous of immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or scull...'⁶⁹ The bodily location of this world is in a person's skull, the repository of the brain and of human memory, which brings the practice in close proximity to processes of memory and extemporisation. Furthermore, while the Duchess wishes to rule over

⁶⁶ Cavendish, p.124.

⁶⁷ Cavendish, p.183.

⁶⁸ Cavendish, p.185.

⁶⁹ Cavendish, p.185.

others (and Margaret Cavendish herself was a monarchist), this process of creation can be practised by ‘every human creature’, giving it a sense of equal access.

If we follow my earlier readings of the travelogue as a way for readers to vicariously travel through performative scripts that left space for the ‘traveller’ back home, then Cavendish’s book takes that practice to a new level of imagination as world-building. While the motivations behind such a practice were often of an imperialist nature, presumably one’s memory and sensory experience would dictate the type of world created, and this leaves space for us to re-imagine the plethora of early modern worlds that may have been constructed ‘in the mind’. However, how does this relate to extemporary *musical* practice? Was the same freedom accorded to extemporary modes of musical world building? And what would they have looked or sounded like?

In another passage in Cavendish’s text, the Empress and the Duchess go to the theatre. The Empress asks if the comedies and tragedies are real, and the Duchess replies in the negative and says ‘they are feigned.’⁷⁰ After they have seen a play, the Duchess asks if the Empress enjoyed it, to which the Empress says she did, but admits that ‘the actors make a better show than the spectators, and the scenes a better than the actors, and the music and dancing is more acceptable than the play itself; for I see, the scenes stand for wit, the dancing for humour, and the music is the chorus.’⁷¹ Expanding on this, she continues that she prefers ‘a natural face before a sign-post...a natural humour before an artificial dance...music before a true and profitable relation...’⁷² Her argument is that theatre, and by extension the music performed there as part of a play, is artificial, and does not involve the spectators and their stories ‘in real life’, rather focussing on those actors feigning reality onstage. By way of reply, the Duchess rebuts that poets would relegate ‘relation’ – or dialogue, conversation, narration of a ‘realistic’ nature – to ‘a chimney-corner, fitter for old wives tales rather than theatres’, and goes on to admit that while these same poets take ‘old stories’ for their subject matter, they yet have ‘new actions’.⁷³ This obtusely-phrased debate is the only clue we have as to the kind of music Cavendish would dream up in her blazing world. It leaves us asking what kind of music might be equivalent to ‘true and profitable relation’, rather than something resembling an ‘old’, pre-told story.

⁷⁰ Cavendish, p.191.

⁷¹ Cavendish, p.191.

⁷² Cavendish, p.192.

⁷³ Cavendish, p.192.

William Godwin (1756-1836), the English radical political philosopher and novelist who was married to Mary Wollstonecraft, wrote somewhat similarly on music in his two-volume work of 1793 titled 'An Enquiry concerning Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness'. While Godwin's ideas were published over a century later, they resonate deeply with Cavendish's ideas, and may shed light on the kind of music she was intimating.

In the section 'Of Cooperation, Cohabitation and Marriage', Godwin classes musical interactions as social institutions or engagements (perhaps even 'relations'):

...shall we have concerts of music? The miserable state of mechanism of the majority of the performers, is so conspicuous, as to be, even at this day, a topic of mortification and ridicule. Will it not be practicable hereafter for one man to perform the whole? Shall we have theatrical exhibitions? This seems to include an absurd and vicious cooperation. It may be doubted, whether men will hereafter come forward in any mode, formally to repeat words and ideas that are not their own? It may be doubted, whether any musical performer will habitually execute the compositions of others? We yield supinely to the superior merit of our predecessors, because we are accustomed to indulge the inactivity of our faculties. All formal repetition of other men's ideas, seems to be a scheme for imprisoning, for so long a time, the operations of our own mind. It borders perhaps, in this respect, upon a breach of sincerity, which requires that we should give immediate utterance to every useful and valuable idea that occurs.⁷⁴

In other words, Godwin condemns the 'repetition of words and ideas' that are not the actors' own, or the performance of musical compositions written by others. It is in fact a 'breach of sincerity' to take up the ideas and expressions of others, rather than giving utterance to our own thoughts. This may again relate to Cavendish's idea of 'artificial' performance, and her ideas about 'true' musical expression, which should be 'natural'. These ideas about artificial versus natural performances and the 'liberating' practice of performing one's own ideas rather than the pre-composed ones of others would continue to resonate long after the early modern period. For example, Godwin's belief that 'habitually executing the composition of others' is not only an 'imprisoning' practice but in fact is socially regressive and perpetuates forms of socio-political oppression, is echoed in Brazilian theatre practitioner and theorist Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the*

⁷⁴ William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (Batoche Books, 2000), p.572. ProQuest Ebook Central, Cambridge University <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cam/detail.action?docID=3117779>> [17 March 2022].

Oppressed (1974).⁷⁵ Boal names improvisation as a liberating form of expression – ‘improvisation is life’⁷⁶ – while Godwin and Cavendish are less explicit. However, what all three accounts share is a belief that authentic or ‘true’ music-making should reflect a person’s natural self and their own ideas – one of the characteristics of extemporary processes of creation.

If we read Cavendish’s book as a fictional travelogue, in the same genre as Blount and Maundrell, the power of ‘fancy’ to create new worlds offers a way of thinking about the influence of early modern imperialism that involves imagination, memory, and the extemporary at its core. In this genre, the performative nature of the texts not only allowed and encouraged readers to enter into the pages and imbibe the new airs, but also modelled a mode of reading that was inextricable from invention and processes of improvisation. Finally, I believe that the inclusion of my analysis of Cavendish’s text could encourage us to see the proto-colonial and orientalist styles of thought and behaviour in the other two travelogues as choices that could have gone otherwise. Her book also opens up the possibility of other imagined worlds and the role of imagination (and potentially improvisation) to create new universes, alternatives to the worlds that their authors lived in.

Conclusion: Divisions in Aleppo

By reading two very different travelogues of the Ottoman world and a fictional travelogue of a ‘blazing world’ in this chapter, I hope to have shown that there is not one way or two ways to engage with these texts (either historically, imaginatively, or in the present moment), and that by taking theories of improvisation and embodiment into consideration, we can recognise the genre of travelogue as both an ‘unfixed’ performative script and a way for the reader back home to travel vicariously (as well as for the author to ‘imagine’ a new world). This positioning of travel as yet another mode of sensory engagement that could imprint and ‘gorge’ the body with experience has important ramifications for both the possibilities contained within the reading of travel texts and the improvisations (musical and otherwise) of travellers – as well as opening the possibility of travels that were not modelled on an imperialist project.

⁷⁵ Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, translated from Spanish by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia McBride and Emily Fryer (London: Pluto Press, 2008).

⁷⁶ Boal, p.xiv.

These manifold possibilities are crystallised in a final travel story: that of Rowland Sherman, a factor for the Levant Company.⁷⁷ Sherman set sail from London to Aleppo in the summer of 1688, and stayed there until his death in 1747/8. The National Archives at Kew contain his letters to friends and family back home, and also hold an inventory of his possessions, including his extensive music collection. As Figure 8 shows, in this inventory, Sherman is recorded as having in his music library a collection of ‘Divisions for Violin’ – a seemingly trivial entry that, I would argue, represents several untold (and largely untraceable) histories of improvisatory thought and practice.

What does the presence of these divisions in Sherman’s library indicate about early modern English extemporary practices in Aleppo, and what would it mean for Sherman to improvise his own divisions in this environment where he had spent so much time? As musicians and music historians today, should we take this entry simply as evidence for a material object in the archive, or as a sign that Sherman invented, created, and imagined around this text?

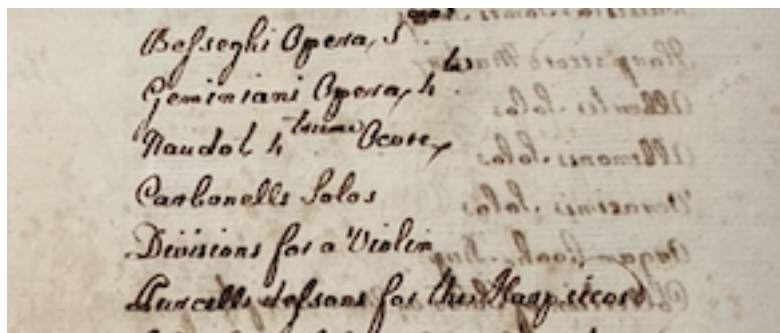


Figure 8: SP 10/73, part 2, folio 73v, National Archives, Kew.

While we will never be able to answer these questions, I have shown in this chapter that bringing theories of memory and improvisation to bear on travelogues and travel texts opens up a spectrum of different creative readings and ways of conceiving of these texts that implicate the creativities of both the historical and contemporary readers’ experiences and imaginations. In many ways, and as I explore more fully in Chapter 4, the historical project to understand early modern improvisation practices becomes a concern of the present, and the historical texts that tell us of such practices must be located within such imaginary worlds

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⁷⁷ Bryan White, ‘Brothers of the String’: Henry Purcell and the Letter Books of Rowland Sherman, *Music & Letters* Vol. 92, No. 4 (November 2011), p.521.

In my next chapter I build on the work I have done here that demonstrates how extemporary processes and the role of printed text are linked to imperialist relationships with the Ottoman world. I explore the extemporary via improvised sounds in the natural world, focussing on the nightingale and the bee.

CHAPTER 3

IMPROVISING NATURE

PIPING OF THE BEE, DIVISIONS OF THE NIGHTINGALE

.....

The Extemporary Languages of Nature: On Bees and Birds

...Beasts and Birds their Stories tell
To One another Certainly,
And yet no Words they speak Plainly;
But by That Language which is giv'n
In Nature, (by Decree from Heav'n)
They Understand undoubtably
Each others Speech...¹
Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument* (1676)

The speech of 'beasts and birds' preoccupied many philosophers, naturalists, and musicians in early modern England. The unintelligible nature of this speech is referenced above by the music theorist Thomas Mace, who joined many contemporary writers in the belief that animals and the natural world lacked rational language and rhetoric. As the musicologist Linda Phyllis Austern puts it, "The world of nature, in which nightingales sang sweetly and bees produced their own form of esoteric discourse, lacked humanly comprehensible words. Bestial rhetoric often remained inaccessible to human ears."²

While this inaccessibility often fell in line with notions of nature as irrational, passionate, illiterate, and unreasoned, it could also point towards divine mystery. Mace continues, 'if you'll regard with stedfast Eyes,/And dive into such Mysteries,/you'll find that Nothing's Plainer then/That BRUTES have Speech as well as MEN.'³ These 'mysteries' concerning the speech of creatures and the natural world were often entwined with matters of print and orality; the

¹ Mace, p.37.

² Linda Phyllis Austern, Nature, 'Culture, Myth, and the Musician in Early Modern England', *JAMS* Vol. 51, no. 1 (Spring 1998), p.5.

³ Mace, p.37.

languages and sounds of nature emanated directly from their sources without recourse to a text or script, functioning as a set of extemporary behaviours, speeches, and sounds that were created directly by and from the bodies of those who enacted them.

These early modern discourses on the language of animals often focussed on investigations into bees and their sounds, as well as the study of birdsong. As I explore in this chapter, improvisation was often located in the speech and sounds of animals as a ‘natural’ means of expression – one that presented a display of uncurbed nature and that could be improved upon through musical practice.

My discussion of nature here builds on themes explored in Chapter 1, where I argued that extemporary practice was a process by which those imprints that are left on us by our sensory experiences are read and performed, and that the success or failure by which we expressed these ‘prints’ through our extemporary performances were dependent on our nature. This belief prompted anxieties around extemporary prayer, resulting in numerous publications discouraging this practice. At the same time, musical manuals on how to improvise correctly also circulated, explaining how best to make extemporary music, and offering pre-printed improvisations for those lacking the requisite natural skill to make their own. In the bestial world however, animals had no need of such artifice; despite attempts to ‘train’ birds to sing in accordance with musical practice, as we shall see later, their sounds were always improvised and thus always a direct revelation and expression of their nature. In the words of English ballad-writer Martin Parker, ‘birds seldome use any untruths to tell.’⁴

Moreover, the early modern encounters that I discussed in Chapter 2 locate improvisation as a way to understand some behaviours of English travellers as well as their perceptions of Ottoman subjects. As I discussed, this analysis considered that the travelogue could become a performative text mobilised by the reader as a form of vicarious travel or world-building, often forming colonial discourses in the process. These texts of travel and science fiction formulated the cultural, geographical, racial, and religious Other in a very similar fashion to how writers formulated the natural world and its creatures, and in this chapter I explore how the thread of improvisation continues into these depictions. I build on both narratives of embodied

⁴ *The nightingale vvarbling forth her owne disaster; or the rape of philomela. newly written in english verse, by martin parker* (Printed by George] Purslowe] for William Cooke, and to be sold at his shop neere Furneals Inne gate in Holbourne, London, 1632), p.72. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University <<https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/nightingale-vvarbling-forth-her-owne-disaster/docview/2248522286/se-2?accountid=9851>> [accessed March 13 2022].

improvisation and improvisation as encounter, reading cross-cultural encounters through the bodies of birds and bees who improvise, and identifying discourses of gender and coloniality and their intersections in these texts on the extemporary natural world.

Colonial Pipes: A Song of Extemporary Queens

The early modern period in England was a significant time for the study and understanding of bees, reflecting contemporaneous issues of gender, coloniality, and language. The first book in the English language to acknowledge that drone bees are male and that the queen bee is female was published in 1609, thus branding bee colonies as a system of ‘feminine monarchie’. This bee-keeping manual by Charles Butler became the most popular text of its kind in seventeenth-century England, with revised editions appearing in 1623 and 1634.

As a child, Butler was a chorister at Magdalen College in Oxford, and he would later write a music treatise, *The Principles of Musike* (London, 1636). His musical knowledge spilled into his perception of bees, whom he cast as musicians in this book, providing notations of their songs that ranged from transcriptions of their sounds in the 1609 edition (shown in Figure 9) to a madrigal composition in the editions of 1623 and 1634. The original piping sound is presented as a transcription of improvisatory sounds that are originally performed as a ‘begging song’ from the princess to Queen bee, ‘with more or fewer notes, as she [the princess bee] pleaseth’ in her petition for the hive to swarm.

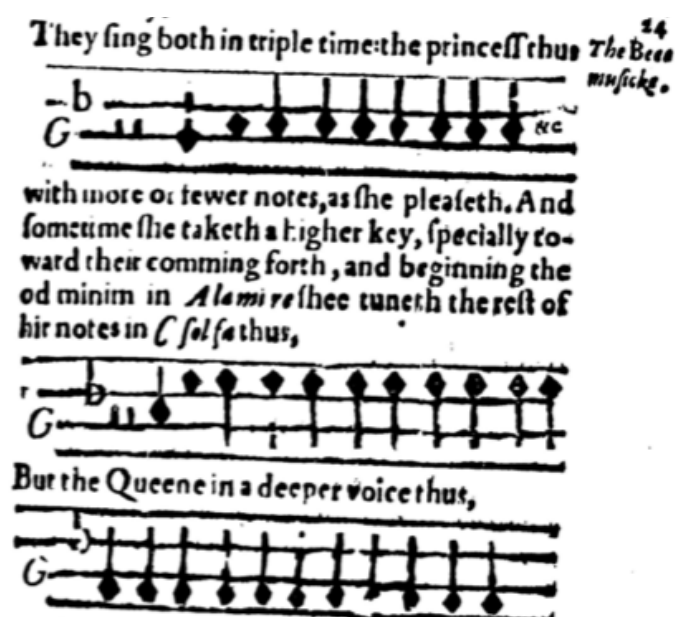


Figure 9: Charles Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 1609, p.53.

This piping sound is notated as a tone rising a second and pulsing eight times on that note, ‘&c’; or, in other words, repeating this pattern in like-fashion, and/or embellishing that second note at the will of the bee. Butler also notes that sometimes the bee will take a ‘higher key’, starting a note higher than in his previous notation and then sounding repeatedly a third higher. The Queen, however, sounds the bass, piping a third below the repeated sound of the princess bee’s first example, and a fifth below the repeated sound of the princess’s second example. Thus, as Butler notes, ‘when they sing together, sometimes they agree on a perfect third, sometimes on a diapente, & (if you respect the terminology of the base), sometimes in a Diapase, With these tunes answering one another, and some pauses’.⁵

In Butler’s transcription, the princess bee and queen bee naturally make harmony when they pipe together, instinctively sounding the notes in a triad. However, within this harmonic structure, the rest is improvised: the bees choose whether to pipe in thirds, in fifths, or in unison; whether there are any passing notes; what rests or pauses they leave; what ‘tunes’ they sing that ‘answer one another’, and so on. More fancifully, we might hear the Queen’s ‘bass’ as a ground, with the other bees making divisions over it. In any case, these notations exists as some kind of transcription of an extemporised performance, and perhaps as it appears in Butler’s book, as some kind of structure for extemporisation in itself.

Later editions of this book departed from the simplicity of these transcriptions to present a fully-fledged four part madrigal by Butler, along with expanded sections on the bee’s music.⁶ In the 1623 edition, Butler included a section titled ‘In the Bees Song are the grounds of Musicke’, commenting of the madrigals that were to follow, ‘...in this Melissomelos, or Bees Madrigall, Musicians may see the grounds of their Art’.⁷ Presumably he was suggesting that the origins of

⁵ *The feminine monarchie or a treatise concerning bees, and the due ordering of them wherein the truth, found out by experience and diligent observation, discovereth the idle and fond concepts, which many have written anent this subject. by char: Butler magd.* (Printed by Ioseph Barnes, Oxford, 1609), p.53. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University <<https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2240864630?accountid=9851>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

⁶ See Gerald Hayes, ‘Charles Butler and the Music of Bees’, *The Musical Times*, Vol. 66, No. 988 (Jun. 1, 1925), pp. 512-515.

⁷ *The feminine monarchie: Or the historie of bees shewing their admirable nature, and properties, their generation, and colonies, their government, loyaltie, art, industrie, enemies, warres, magnanimitie, &c. together with the right ordering of them from time to time: And the sweet profit arising thereof. written out of experience by charles butler. magd.* (Printed by Iohn Hauiland for Roger Iackson, and are to be sold at his shop in Fleetstreet, ouer against the Conduit, London, 1623), p.45. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University <<https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/feminine-monarchie-historie-bees-shewing-their/docview/2240894735/se-2?accountid=9851>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

music-making lie in the music of nature, but his language also might hint at the ‘ground’ basses of improvisatory processes that the bees could teach any musician.

Taken more literally, how might an early modern musician have understood such a statement, that the bee’s songs were the fundamentals, perhaps even the ground bass of music? My accompanying recording (track 6 on *from the bounds of the sky*) offers a response to such a question from the perspective of a contemporary musician trained in ‘historical performance’. I experimented with imitating the bee’s piping alongside a repeated sample of this sound, before continuing alone into an extended improvisation premised (or grounded) on this sound. My intention was to provoke exploration into the (historical and contemporary) boundaries drawn between ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ sound, as well as the boundaries of historical performance. How might we use historical texts such as Butler’s as a way to creatively challenge these binaries, mobilising improvisation in response?

Butler’s own response to the challenge of imagining musical responses to the bees’ piping comes in this later edition of his text. The piping transcriptions that were included in the earlier versions of the book appear within a composed four-part madrigal in the 1623 edition. The text of the madrigal likens the bees’ feminine monarchie to that of the ‘famous Amazons’, and praises them for their aspirations: ‘To seeke new Cities, for new habitation,/They send abroad their num’rous Colonies...’ As Butler developed the bees’ social model into a proto-colonial one that perhaps mirrored England’s socio-political position and served (like the Ottoman empire) as an object of imperial envy, so their musical status rose from that of transcribed triadic improvisation to the sophistication of four-part harmony and the setting of a long text.⁸

However, the extemporary ‘piping’ is still there in the Meane voice part, representing a rupture from text and notation. In terms of early modern physiology, Bruce R. Smith discusses the space between animal sounds and human sounds as a continuum, referencing Helkiah Crooke writing in 1616 that ‘even in the tongue of man, sometimes it expresseth onelie those things that fall under the Sense, as when wee crie for paine, or for Foode and succour.’⁹

The sound of the bee piping may fall into this category of ‘sense’ as in something that is ‘sensed’ and may only be felt rather than apprehended logically or through language, therefore also

⁸ *The feminine monarchie* (1623), pp.46-47.

⁹ Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p.45.

placing these sounds into a similar category to that of women, perceptions of foreigners/foreign languages, and of the natural world as non-verbal and overly ‘sensual’. The piping also emphasises the lack of musical ordering in comparison to the carefully crafted madrigals that had come before. The cultivated harmony and ensemble of the four-part writing suddenly falls apart as the solo ‘bee’ abandons language, harmony, and tonal melodic sense, instead vocalising on four pitches.

The second time the madrigal features piping, the text disappears again but the sound is no longer monophonic, instead involving all four voices but representing a much simpler and more repetitive type of four-voice interaction than the preceding polyphony. In fact, the notation itself is unfixed by Butler’s earlier remark that ‘they sing both in triple time the princess thus...with more or fewer notes, as she pleaseth. And sometime she taketh a higher key...’. Thus the notation here operates as a kind of record of a live instance of ‘performance’, subject to change every time it is performed or heard.



Figure 10: Charles Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 1623, p.47.

The musical text in Figure 10 taken from the *Meane* part, thus takes on the character of a transcription, with Butler’s role as transcriber rather than composer.

The musicologist Linda Austern describes the shift from the transcriptions in Butler’s earlier editions of his book to the madrigal setting as follows: ‘...the entomologist-composer has transformed the simple sounds of his tiny winged females from the practical but barely comprehensible signals he had first notated into domestic decoration and witty wonder for human entertainment. No longer the natural philosopher observing the public customs of a manly state in miniature, he functions instead as the imperial explorer refashioning a simple effeminate product for consumption by his own culture.’¹⁰ This re-imagining of Butler as an

¹⁰ Austern, p.11.

‘imperial explorer’ who captures and ‘refashions’ the sounds of the female bees in print for the consumption of English people back home is striking, and shows how ways of interacting with the natural world can often mirror colonial ways of interacting with people from other cultures.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, early modern travelogues were not restricted to factual travels, and sometimes spilled into imaginary accounts of other-worldly voyages where sound and music were recreated in accordance with the authors’ worldview, for example in Margaret Cavendish’s *Blazing World* (1668). Austern’s words similarly recall the notion of the travelogue as a text in which the traveller ‘refashions’ themselves and the places and peoples they encounter, in a way that allows readers to do the same back home. The transcription of languages and musics in travelogues was quite common, along with taxonomies of instruments played, and here Butler transposes some of these aspects of the travelogue genre into his beekeeping manual.

Although by the first edition in 1609 Elizabeth I had been dead for six years and been succeeded by James I (VI of Scotland), the madrigal text is clearly inspired by her ‘feminine monarchie’, sitting in the hive that is England and sending her worker bees – or diplomats and traders – abroad to create new colonies. Butler’s revised text presented the ‘feminine’ rule of the bee as an impressive and well-ordered organisation, but contemporary views of the ‘apiarchy’ were not as tolerant or complimentary. In an article on John Milton’s beehive, Nicole A. Jacobs traces the image of the hive in Milton’s corpus, relating it to the English tradition of the bee as ‘a divine symbol of monarchical and ecclesiastical power structures’, and arguing that, for Milton, this imagery was used ‘to register harsh critiques of earthly monarchy, feminine influence, and Catholic superstition.’¹¹ Jacobs offers an important re-reading of a passage in Milton’s *Eikonoklastes* of October 1649, a parliamentary response to the *Eikon Basilike* promoted by royalists, in which they presented Charles I’s final prayers and meditations before his January 1649 execution. In this passage Milton refers to the executed king as the ‘Aegyptian Apis’, a phrase that commentators had previously ascribed as referring to the sacred bull Apis who was the incarnation of the Egyptian god Osiris, ignoring the translation of the Latin *apis* or bee.

Images of the ‘royalist bee and republican ant’ became popular in mid-seventeenth century English political literature, linking the bee to the threat of female power and the need to

¹¹ Nicole A. Jacobs, ‘John Milton’s Beehive, from Polemic to Epic’, *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 112, No. 4 (Fall, 2015), p.798.

dominate the natural world, as well as to the dangers of foreign Catholic popery.¹² Earlier, Frederick R. Prete had argued that the tradition of using bees as a way to discuss utopian visions of seventeenth-century English society came into conflict with beliefs around gender roles in this period. He writes: ‘as the century wore on, an increasing number of seemingly anomalous discoveries about honey bees forced authors of beekeeping texts to deny or distort findings in order to continue to use the honey bee as a metaphor for the ideal English society.’¹³ In this context, Butler’s royalist agenda in writing his text is perhaps complicated by the radical nature of presenting an ideal image of a society run by female authority, producing the first text to admit that bee organisation was predicated on the supremacy of a queen bee, and gendering ‘Princes’ as female in this new model where female was the default mode of being.¹⁴

In making his case for the ‘feminine monarchie’, Butler moves sonically from rustic improvised sounds to composed and more refined ones, taming the raw and natural piping into polished singing. The sanitisation of the original piping that he transcribed could have happened for many reasons: to impose order on the irrational sounds of nature, to add a selling point to his book, or to mollify the alien qualities of the bee – its proximity to Catholic popery, Charles’s ‘Egyptian bee’, and queenship as a model of rule.

Improvised sound as a default mode of language for creatures in the natural world was not unusual, as we will see later on with the nightingale’s ‘divisions’. However, more than that, improvised sound referred to a wider mode of describing the ‘other’ sounds of uncharted lands – and even planets. Early writings on the moon and its imagined exploration can illustrate this point, as well as indicating ideas about musical language. In 1641, the polymath John Wilkins described how a language could consist ‘only of Tunes and Muscicall Notes, without any articulate sound’, since ‘a man may frame a Language, consisting only of Tunes and such inarticulate sounds, as no Letters can expresse. Which kind of speech is fancied to bee usuall a |mongst the

¹² Here it is worth noting the spread of Catholicism in seventeenth-century Palestine, connecting foreign notions of Catholicism to the lands of the ‘Turks’ in the early modern British anxieties around these two threats. See Felicità Tramontana, ‘The Spread of Catholicism in Seventeenth-Century Palestinian Villages’, in *Space and Conversion in Global Perspective*, ed. by Giuseppe Marcocci, Aliocha Maldavsky, Wietse de Boer, and Ilaria Pavan (Brill, 2014).

¹³ Frederick R. Prete, ‘Can Females Rule the Hive? The Controversy over Honey Bee Gender Roles in British Beekeeping Texts of the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries’, *Journal of the History of Biology* 24 (1991), 117; on the history of gendering bees, see Cyrus Abivardi, ‘Honeybee Sexuality: An Historical Perspective’, *Encyclopedia of Historical Entomology* (Springer: Dordrecht, 2005 edition) <https://doi.org/10.1007/0-306-48380-7_2057> [accessed 13 March 2022].

¹⁴ Butler’s interest in sound goes beyond bees; in 1633 he published a book on grammar in which he argued that words should be spelled how they sounded, and in his subsequent writings he trialled a new system of phonetic spelling.

Lunary Inhabitants.’¹⁵ The language that he describes is ‘irrational’, comprised of only musical sounds without verbal expression, and spoken by ‘lunary inhabitants.’

Musical language is also present in the first piece of science fiction written in English, Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone* (1638), in which a man travels to the moon as part of a quasi-colonialist mission, and finds that the ‘lunary inhabitants’ all speak in musical tunes. In a very similar manner to Charles Butler’s notations, Godwin makes some musical transcriptions of some of these phrases, shown in Figure 11:¹⁶



<p>94 <i>The Man in the Moone.</i></p> <p>in the utterance of them, yea many wordes there are consisting of tunes onely, so as if they list they will utter their mindes by tunes without wordes: for Example, they have an ordinary salutation amongst them, signifying (<i>Verbatim</i>) Glorie be to God alone, which they expresse (as I take it, for I am no perfect Musitian) by this tune without any words at all.</p>  <p>Yea the very names of Men they will expresse in the same sort.</p> <p>When they were disposed to talke of mee before my face,</p> <p style="text-align: right;">fo</p>	<p><i>The Man in the Moone.</i> 95</p> <p>so as I should not perceiue it ; this was <i>Gonsales</i>.</p>  <p>By occasion hereof, I discerne meanes of framing a Language (and that ealie soone to bee learned) as copious as any other in the world, consisting of tunes onely, whereof my friends may know more at leisure if it please them.</p> <p>This is a great Mystery and worthier the searching after then at first sight you would imagine.</p> <p>Now notwithstanding the difficulty of this language, within two months space I had attained unto such knowledge of the same, as I could understand most questions to be demanded of mee, and what with signes, what with words, make reasonable shift</p> <p style="text-align: right;">shift</p>
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Figure 11: Francis Godwin, *The Man in the Moone*, 1638, pp.94-95.

¹⁵ John Wilkins, *Mercvry, or, the secret and swift messenger shewing, how a man may with privacy and speed communicate his thoughts to a friend at any distance* London (Printed by I. Norton, for Iohn Maynard and Timothy Wilkins, London 1641), p.141. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University

<<https://www.proquest.com/docview/2240859501/13436899/4?accountid=9851>> [accessed March 13 2022].

¹⁶ Francis Godwin, *The man in the moone: or, A discourse of a voyage thither by domingo gonsales the speedy messenger* (Printed by John Norton, and are to be sold by Ioshua Kurton, and Thomas Warren, London, 1638), pp.94-95. Early English Books Online, Cambridge University

<<https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2240905526?accountid=9851>> [16 March 2022].

As illustrated, Godwin imagines a world where phrases such as ‘Glorie be to God’ may be expressed by a melody ‘without any words at all’, or where the name ‘Gonzales’ may be communicated in a phrase of eight notes. As the protagonist of his story notes, ‘by occasion hereof, I discern meanes of framing a Language (and that easie soone to bee learned) as copious as any other in the world, consisting of tunes only, whereof my friends may know more at leisure if it pleases them. This is a great Mystery and worthier the searching after then at first sight you might imagine. Now notwithstanding the difficulty of this language, within two months space I had attained unto such knowledge of the same, as I could understand most questions to be demanded of mee...’

The description of this musical language poses several questions about the role of invention and improvisation. John Wilkins continues:

By this you may easily discern how two Musicians may discourse with one another, by playing upon their Instru | ments of *Musique*, as well as by talking with their instruments of *speech*. And (which is a singular curiosity) how the words of a Song may be contrived in the tune of it. I suppose that these letters and notes might be disposed to answer one ano | ther, with better advantage then here they are expressed. And this perhaps, would bee easie enough for those that are thoroughly versed in the grounds of *Musique*, unto whose further en | quiry, I doe here only propose this in | vention.¹⁷

For Wilkins, musicians already possess this ability to communicate without language through instrumental sounds. However, ‘discourse’ or conversation between people are by default improvised or made up in the moment without text to dictate how the sounds of letters and notes ‘might be disposed to answer one another’. Wilkins goes on to say that such an exchange would be easy for one ‘versed in the grounds of *Musique*’ – which, according to Butler, could be learned from the bees –, once again bringing us back to the domain of the extemporary as located in the natural world, which presented a spectrum of improvised and non-verbal sounds that ‘explorers’ could only grapple with through transcriptions.

Butler’s bee-keeping treatise thus represents an important source for musicians and improvisers, as well as presenting a challenge to historians. How do we listen to such a text within the contexts I have explored here? In fact, I argue that ways of listening to this text are varied and

¹⁷ *Mercury*, pp.142-143.

fluid, but that they benefit from being underpinned by contemporaneous research into musical improvisation, which highlights ways in which to read this text contextually and to listen to what is not being heard. Furthermore, these texts offer musicians and improvisers a plethora of ways to engage creatively with different historical contexts and to mobilise a musical imagination that is grounded in historical spaces of imagining – for example, the imagination of sounds made by bees and lunar inhabitants. Improvisation here offers a space in which subjects may sound ‘otherwise’ – and where the notations of any such sounds in texts were always subject to change and took on an unfixed nature that the contemporary musician/music historian may engage creatively today.

Sweet Divisions: Paradoxes of the Nightingale

Discourses of improvisation surround the early modern nightingale too. In their 2014 dictionary of Shakespeare and music, Michela Calore and Christopher R. Wilson note the idea that ‘Elizabethan birds were accomplished in the art of division’, citing Robert Nichol’s description of the preparations made by the Nightingale for her singing contest with the Cuckoo, in *The Cuckow*, London (1607):

The little Philomel with curious care,
Sitting alone her ditties did prepare,
And many tunes...
Dividing sweetly in division
Now some sweet straine to mind she doth restore.¹⁸

This trope of the improvising nightingale was common in early modern poetry and depictions of the bird, which usually extolled her ‘sweet strains’. In contrast to this sweetness, the origin of the nightingale’s story in many popular English accounts lies in Ovid’s tragic tale of Philomela and her rape by Tereus – the husband of her sister Procne – as related in Book 6 of the *Metamorphoses*, and, from the fifteenth century, through numerous English translations and retellings of Ovid’s text. With some variations in content and narrative, the story relates not only that Tereus rapes Philomela, but also that he cuts out her tongue so that she is not able to tell anyone of his crime. Despite her lack of speech, Philomela reveals her fate to her sister through

¹⁸ Christopher R. Wilson and Michela Calore, *Music in Shakespeare: A Dictionary* (Continuum Shakespeare Dictionaries, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p.143.

an embroidered tapestry, and the sisters take revenge by serving up a stew to Tereus that contains his son. When Tereus finds out what Philomela and Procne have done, he pursues them. The gods turn him into a hoopoe (in some versions the bird species varies), and Procne and Philomela become a swallow and a nightingale.

As a nightingale, Philomela gets a 'second' voice: despite Tereus cutting her tongue out when she was a woman, as a bird she is able to sing. However, her original voice is forever gone, as is her ability to verbalise the story of what happened to her. Instead, she sings sweetly – in the words of the English ballad-writer Martin Parker, who wrote in the first person to imagine her feelings:

I *Philomel* (turn'd to a Nightingale)
Fled to the woods, and 'gainst a bryer or thorne,
I sit and warble out my mournfull tale:
To sleepe I alwaies have with heed forborne,
But sweetly sing at euening, noone, and morne.
No time yeelds rest unto my dulcide throat,
But still I ply my lachrimable note.¹⁹

The story of Philomela in this tradition is one of replaced voices, shifted identities, and transposable tongues. The identity of the Common Nightingale (*Luscinia megarhynchos*) in England (both in the early modern period and now) is further complicated by the fact these are migrating birds, breeding in Europe, Northwest Africa and Southwest Asia, but spending the winter south of the Sahara from West Africa to Uganda, and coming to the UK from May onwards to spend the summer.

The absence of the nightingale for the remaining 9 months of the year rendered her a travelling bird, perhaps going away to collect materials for the divisions she would come back to England to sing. Furthermore, her sojourn in those parts of the world that English travellers were starting to explore expands her songs to cross geographical and cultural borders that she easily flew over, further complicating the stories told about her, and causing her to feature in travelogues of the Ottoman empire as a consistently musical creature. In his travels into 'the Levant', for example, the French traveller Jean de Thévenot charted his journey at the River of Jordan, and noted that 'It is very full of Fish, and on both sides beset with little thick and pleasant Woods, among

¹⁹ *The nightingale warbling forth her owne disaster*, p.57.

which, thousands of Nightingales warbling all together, make a most pleasant delightful and charming Consort.²⁰

The story of the nightingale that English travellers may have encountered in the traditions of countries in North Africa and the Mediterranean was quite different to the Philomela myth. In the Islamic Sufi tradition, the love story between nightingale and rose is a tale of divine love, where bird and flower are a metaphor for the lover and the beloved. Here, the nightingale falls in love with a white rose. He sings his sweet song to woo her, and she answers by opening her petals. Yet whenever the nightingale flies in to embrace her, thorns pierce his chest and stain the flower red with his blood.²¹ The nightingale and the rose appeared frequently in varying formulations on this theme, across Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Urdu texts.

While the English/Ottoman origin stories for the nightingale diverge, it is important to note the presence of the thorn in both traditions: in the passage I quoted above by Martin Parker, he describes how the bird warbles her sad song “gainst a bryer or thorne”, and in Shakespeare’s narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), Lucrece also describes the nightingale as singing ‘against a thorn’.²² The reason for the bird’s sorrow can thus be traced in both accounts to the pain caused by the thorn, perhaps resulting in a convergence of tragedy, both caused by different types of injury that the world can inflict.

Despite this cultural/geographical ambiguity, the nightingale was an important sonic symbol of early modern English culture. Perhaps most famously, Shakespeare uses her in *Romeo and Juliet* as a temporal indication of how much time the lovers still have together. In the exchange, Juliet tries to convince Romeo not to leave by telling him she can hear the sound of the nightingale, while he refutes her hearing and claims that the song they can hear is that of the lark (thus indicating dawn rather than night):

JULIET

Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.

It was the nightingale, and not the lark,

That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.

²⁰ *The travels of monsieur de thevenot*, p.193.

²¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp.178-180.

²² Wilson and Calore, p.56.

Nightly she sings on yon pomegranate tree.

Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.

ROMEO

It was the lark, the herald of the morn,

No nightingale.²³

While it is the nightingale's song that pierces the 'fearful hollow' of Romeo's ear, the pomegranate tree here is also significant since it represents an 'exotic' fruit only recently brought to England from the Ottoman world. It is difficult to decide if the nightingale here is simply a familiar melancholy figure on the sonic English landscape, or in fact a further symbol of (Ottoman) danger, deception, and otherness.

The paradoxes of the nightingale seem many – caught as she is between migrations, genders, and cultural associations. Yet it is just this slippery quality that that make her such a promising point of focus for tracing the convergences of gender, animality, coloniality and otherness, forming in tandem the nightingale's 'transposable tongue', and perhaps aided and abetted by her extemporary skill.

The nightingale occupied a unique position between early modern English and Ottoman cultures. Since her stories, like her songs, were numerous, intricate, and varying, I will now consider two case studies of the nightingale at moments of early modern Anglo-Ottoman encounter. In 1594, the Ottoman Empress Safiye (wife of Sultan Murad III who reigned from 1574 to 1595) wrote a letter to Queen Elizabeth I. This was not an isolated moment of contact, since Elizabeth corresponded with both Safiye and her husband. The two queens also exchanged gifts: Safiye received a golden coach from Elizabeth, and in return sent her the clothes of an Ottoman noblewoman. Her letters to Elizabeth were written in five colours of ink and sprinkled in gold dust. The 1594 letter is dated 'the first day of the Moone of Rabie Liuoll in the yere of the Prophet', and opens with an address eulogising Elizabeth. Safiye continues:

I send you Majesty so honorable and sweet a salution of peace, that all the flocke o
Nightingales with their melody cannot attaine to the like, much lesse this simple letter of
mine. The singular loue which we haue conceiued one toward the other is like to a

²³ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (The Folger Shakespeare), III.5, l.1-7, pp.156-157 <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/downloads/pdf/romeo-and-juliet_PDF_FolgerShakespeare.pdf> [accessed 17 March 2022].

garden of pleasant birds: and the Lord God vouchsafe to saue and keepe you, and send your Maiesty an hap end both in this world and in the world to come...”²⁴

It is striking that Safiye heightens her ‘honorable and sweet salutation of peace’ by declaring that it excels not only her ‘simple letter’ but even the melody of a whole ‘flocke’ of nightingales. She goes on to describe the love and accord between her and Elizabeth as ‘a garden of pleasant birds’, extending the nightingale metaphor. Perhaps her reference point for the nightingale is that of a yearning lover singing to his rose, thus positioning her as an ardent admirer of the English queen. Yet the love between them is reciprocal – or at least, so Safiye would have us believe, and in this metaphor the two queens are likened to a garden of birds in their mutual affection. The aural image created is one of birdsong, with Safiye and Elizabeth warbling sweet divisions in imitation of the other.

But what is it about the nightingale that encourages Safiye to select her song for this gesture towards Elizabeth? The Persian mystic poet Farid ud-Din Attar’s poem *The Conference of the Birds* (*Manteq at-Tair*, c.1177) is also of great importance to this discussion, since it was certainly known to Safiye and formed an important cultural touchstone for the nightingale’s imagery in Sufi and Islamicate contexts. The poem narrates a story in which the birds of the world gather together, led by the hoopoe, to find their king, the Simorgh. In the course of the journey, each of the birds gives an excuse for why their quest is impossible – the nightingale cannot leave his beloved, the finch is too scared to set off, and so on. The allegorical nature of the text allows the reader to see different facets of themselves and their failings on the spiritual path through the birds and their character traits.

The nightingale takes the character of the lover, yearning over the rose until he is sick. He claims to be unable to leave her side: ‘My love is for the rose; I bow to her;/From her dear presence I could never stir./If she should disappear the nightingale/Would lose his reason and his song would fail,/And though my grief is one that no bird knows,/One being understands my heart – the rose.’²⁵ The bird continues with his excuses for why he cannot undertake the journey:

²⁴ Cited in Lamiya Mohamad Almas, ‘The Women of the Early Modern Turk and Moor Plays’ (A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, August 2009), p.3.

²⁵ Farid Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, translated by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984), pp.41-42.

I am so drowned in love that I can find
 No thought of my existence in my mind.
 Her worship is sufficient life for me;
 The quest for her is my reality
 (And nightingales are not robust or strong;
 The path to find the Simorgh is too long).
 My love is here; the journey you propose
 Cannot beguile me from my life – the rose.
 It is for me she flowers; what greater bliss
 Could life provide me – anywhere – than this?
 Her buds are mine; she blossoms in my sight –
 How could I leave her for a single night?²⁶

The hoopoe responds to these excuses sharply, accusing the nightingale of a superficial love that must be overtaken by a less transient one:

...Dear nightingale,
 This superficial love which makes you quail
 Is only for the outward show of things.
 Renounce delusion and prepare your wings
 For our great quest; sharp thorns defend the rose
 And beauty such as hers too quickly goes.
 True love will see such empty transience
 For what it is – a fleeting turbulence
 That fills your sleepless nights with grief and blame –
 Forget the rose's blush and blush for shame!²⁷

The nightingale emerges here as a symbol of utmost devotion and love, although that love may also be in need of tempering and sublimating from a superficial passion to a more elevated love – in Somayeh Baeten's words, the nightingale here is 'a symbol of men interested in earthly

²⁶ Farid Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, translated by Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984), p.42.

²⁷ *The Conference of the Birds*, p.42.

unstable pleasures'.²⁸ Thus, in Safiye's evocation of the bird, perhaps the nightingale's paradoxical status that I outlined above leaves the exact nature of her devotion to Elizabeth in some ambiguity – is she simply stating her utmost adoration, or suggesting that this love should be curbed in some way?

Five years after Safiye sent her letter, in 1599, Elizabeth I sent an automated organ to Sultan Mehmed III (Safiye's son). It was the first organ sent to the Ottoman Empire by an English trading company (although it is worth noting that in the Islamicate world organs had been gifted to Europe as early as the Abbasids, with the caliph Harun al-Rashid presenting one to Charlemagne),²⁹ and was built by Thomas Dallam, who accompanied the organ to repair it after damages on the sea voyage, and then to install it in the Topkapi place in Istanbul. Dallam kept a journal documenting his travels, in which he recorded his experiences installing and performing on this instrument, making it a well-documented journey.³⁰ In the words of Jennifer Linhart Wood, this organ was a 'necessary element in a complex set of diplomatic protocols that enabled the English Levant Company to maintain a commercial relationship with the Ottoman Empire'³¹; according to Ian Woodfield, the organ was 'the most magnificent musical gift sent by any English company'.³²

Dallam's mechanical organ was 'self-playing' and also featured a chiming clock and mechanical puppets including trumpet players and a nest of mechanical birds who sang and flapped their wings. His diary entry for September 24th 1599 reads as follows:

The presente began to salute the grand sinyor; for when I lefte it I did alow a quarter of an houre for his cominge thether. Firste the clocke strouke 22; than The chime of 16 bells went of, & played a songe of 4 partes. That beinge done, tow personagis which stood upon to cornders of the seconde storie houldinge tow silver trumpetes in there hands did lifte them to theire heads, & sounded a tantarra. Than the mvsicke went of, and the

²⁸ Somayeh Baeten, *Birds, Birds, Birds: A Comparative Study of Medieval Persian and English Poetry, especially Attar's 'Conference of Birds', 'The Owl and the Nightingale', Chaucer's 'The Parliament of Fowls', and the Canterbury Tales* (München: Utzverlag, 2020), p.40.

²⁹ See Mika Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism: Artistic Encounters between Europe and Asia at the Courts of India, 1580-1630* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), p.139 and pp.142-148 for a history of organs as gifts between Europe and the Mughal court.

³⁰ Thomas Dallam, *A brefe Relation of my Travell from the Royall Cittie of London towards The Straite of mariemediterranum and what happened by the waye*. This manuscript account is in the British Library – BL Add MS 17480 and all references to it in my chapter are drawn from Jennifer Linhart Wood (2019).

³¹ Jennifer Linhart Wood, *Sounding Otherness in Early Modern Drama and Travel: Uncanny Vibrations in the English Archive* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan 2019), p.168.

³² Ian Woodfield, *English Musicians in the Age of Exploration* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1995), p.191.

orgon played a song of 5 partes twyse over. In the tope of the orgon, being 16 foute hie did stande a holly bushe full of blacke birds & thrushis, which at the end of the mvsick did singe & shake theire wynges. Divers other motions thare was which the grand sinyor wondered at. (55v)³³

The song of the ‘black birds and thrushis’ (blackbirds and thrushes) was created through a special sound-effect stop called the ‘Nightingale’ in which the ends of the pipes were placed in a bowl of water or oil, producing a sound imitating the warbling of birds.³⁴ This technique dates from at least 1450, and is commonly referred to as a ‘nightingale’ stop, evoking Philomela’s replaced tongue; her voice supplanted by that of the blackbird and thrush. Since Dallam’s holly bush was full of birds that were native to England and other parts of Europe, he probably included many Nightingale stops to sonically represent multiple birds.³⁵ Thus the mechanical birds that conclude the organ’s concert were ostensibly sounds indicative of an English soundscape replicated for the Sultan: the nightingale was a sonic representative of England, sent to Istanbul.³⁶

While the organ was sent as an English gift that brought these English sounds to the Turkish court, the organ’s materiality complicates the matter, and the instrument itself was ‘transformed by its travels,’ as Wood argues compellingly.³⁷ Not only did the organ undergo repairs on site using Turkish materials, but the water, oil, and air that went through the pipes to create this nightingale stop were indeed Turkish. The nightingale’s identity is even more compromised by the fact that it is not actually her voice that is heard – she merely stands as a representative body for both blackbird and thrush. These two case studies show that the nightingale’s

³³ Wood, p.184.

³⁴ *The Organ: An Encyclopedia*, ed. by Douglas E. Bush and Richard Kassel (London: Routledge, 2006), p.371.

³⁵ It is important to note that the nightingale stop was not a phenomenon restricted to England or Europe, see Wood pp.189-190. There is also a striking mention of this feature in the Palestine travelogue (1693) of Damascene mystic and writer Abdel Ghani el Nabulusi. Nabulusi records that he heard the monks of Bethlehem making music with an organ, composing a poem in which he likened the organ’s sounds to that of the blackbird (*shabrur*) and nightingale (*hizār, bulbul*). In ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī, *Al-Haḡiqa wa-l-majāz fī al-ribla ila Bilad al-Shām wa Miṣr wa-l-Hijāz*, ed. by Ahmad ‘Abd al-Majīd Harīdī (Cairo: Al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya), p.125 <<https://archive.org/details/hakika-majaz>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

³⁶ It should be noted that the nightingale’s ‘sweet notes’ would later be used as an English-sympathising counter to the sound of the Quran, which was likened to the sound of the cuckoo in the ‘caveat’ to the first English translation of the text made by Alexander Ross in 1649. See *The alcoran of mahomet, translated out of arabick into french, by the sieur du ryer, lord of malezair, and resident for the french king, at alexandria. and newly englished, for the satisfaction of all that desire to look into the turkish vanities. to which is prefixed, the life of mahomet, the prophet of the turks, and author of the alcoran. with A needful caveat, or admonition, for them who desire to know what use may be made of, or if there be danger in reading the alcoran* (Printed and are to be sold by Randal Taylor, near Stationers Hall, London 1688), unnumbered page <<https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/alcoran-mahomet-translated-out-arabick-into/docview/2264187402/se-2?accountid=9851>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

³⁷ Wood, p.170.

accomplishment in the art of division was entangled with her cross-cultural transposability. From the divergences of her origin stories and the common thorn they share, to her slippage between women and bird/male and female/English and Ottoman, her improvising voice was perhaps a symbol of her unfixed identity and the flexibility she enjoyed in appearing in different contexts with different voices.

The nightingale also existed within another duality in early modern England, between the natural world and the musical one, and it is this opposition that I now turn to explore. As I noted above, the nightingale was frequently invoked in early modern English sources as an improvising bird who sang musical ‘divisions’, warbling her way through poems with a sweetness that belied her tragic origin story. One poet amongst many who found inspiration in the improvising nightingale was Joshua Sylvester (1563-1618). In a poetic transcription of the nightingale’s songs, Sylvester describes a dialogue between nightingales, the first warbling ‘sweetly, cleer’, the second repeating her strains, to which ‘the first replies, and descants there-upon;/With divine warbles of Division,/Redoubling Quavers; And so (turn by turn)/Alternately they sing away the Morn...’³⁸ The harmony of these songs, according to Sylvester, ‘excels/Our Voyce, our Violls, and all Musick els.’, and the improvisations of each nightingale on the other’s melodies fill the morning’s soundscapes.

The nightingale’s divisions arise naturally from her surroundings; Sylvester recognises them as ‘divine warbles of division’, and ‘descants’, but she is of course entirely unschooled in the art of making division. In the context of both the recognised dangers of improvising freely, and the status of the nightingale as a gendered female songster, these improvisations were simultaneously acclaimed (as in Sylvester’s poem) and potentially life-threatening, resulting in other poems that instead depict the nightingale’s death. One such example of the latter story appears in retellings of the *Musical Duel* by Jesuit poet Famiano Strada (1572-1649), originally written in Latin in imitation of the Roman poet Claudian’s tale, which stages a musical contest between a harpist and a nightingale. Strada’s version was expanded upon in English by several writers, including an anonymous author who printed his version in London in 1671 by ‘J.W.’ for a ‘William Gilbert, at the Half Moon in St. Paul’s Churchyard.’

³⁸ George MacBeth (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Animal Verse*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), pp.218-219.

The story of the ‘duel’ was frequently retold throughout the seventeenth century, and, as the preface to this print notes, was ‘first imitated in English by Mr. Crashaw, then by Mr. Hinton; and now by a third Hand so enlarg’d, and that the whole Frame of the Poem so alter’d, that little of Strada is preserv’d, save onely the Scene, and Issue of the Duel: All in a more familiar Style than that of Claudian imitated by Strada.’³⁹ From this preface then, we may surmise not only that the tale had been retold at least twice before in English print, but also that this version of the story is both a corruption of Claudian’s original poem and also of Strada’s. Rather than offering a comparison of the original Latin text and its subsequent retellings and translations, here I focus on the expanded and rewritten version as it was published in London in 1671 by this ‘third hand’.

The story starts under a cool oak tree’s shadow, where sits ‘the Owner, and (what’s more) the Master too/Of a sweet Harp; a Harp that might well go/ For Mistress of all Harps; his skilful Hand, As well as that his Thoughts, could understand;/And, what she understood, as well expound/In the sweet language of all Artful Sound.’⁴⁰ The harpist and harp are clearly depicted as ‘Master and Mistress’ from the start, and this union is given a telepathic quality: the harp is not merely a passive instrument, but a sentient being that is able to understand the harpist’s thoughts and translate them into sound.

As we learn that the harpist has chosen ‘This Instrument, This Time, This Place’ so that he may ‘give troubled thoughts some short repose’, the nightingale is heard – described as a ‘Wood-bred Syren’, who is as harmless as the ‘sea-breed’ is harmful. The bird’s comparison to a siren, a woman who lured sailors to their death by singing, is striking. But the author reassures us that while sirens are able to entrap a ‘whole man’ by simply singing into his ear, the nightingale herself can be captured by a man who takes *her* by the ear: ‘A Man but by the Ear takes, those trapan,/And by the Ear alone take the Whole Man.’⁴¹ Despite her reality as a small bird, the nightingale here is already set up as a threat, with the danger directly linked to a sense of deviant womanhood; she is either a siren, luring men by the ear, or the less harmful ‘wood siren’, being *taken* by the ear.

³⁹ *Strada's musical duel in latine / much enlarg'd in english by the addition of several traverses between the harper and the nightengale ; together with a more particular account of the issue of the contest* (Printed by J.W. for William Gilbert, London 1671), unnumbered

<<https://ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2240946414?accountid=9851>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

⁴⁰ *Strada's musical duel*, unnumbered page.

⁴¹ *Strada's musical duel*, unnumbered page.

When the nightingale is finally introduced directly, it is as an imperial monarch:

A Nightingale, the Queen of a Sweet Quire,
Her Empire deems invaded by the Lyre.
Upon the Frontiers therefore bent to try
Her now, he'er till now, doubtful Destinie;
The same Oak chose, her Ambush and her Cage;
And so of this fam'd War the honor'd Stage.⁴²

The duel that is about to ensue between bird and harpist is thus framed as a battle over territory; the nightingale is queen of an 'empire', which the harpist has 'invaded', and whose frontiers he threatens. The 'war' waged is not only one of man and nature, but also a gendered one against the nightingale's queenship and iteration of female power. The term 'empire' also invites analysis, ambiguously evoking both the domain of the natural world as opposed to the urban man-made one, as well as pointing to an extraneous empire in opposition to early modern England – in this historical and cultural context, likely the Ottoman empire.

When the duel between harp and nightingale starts, improvisation is quickly weaponised and the nightingale's 'natural' ability is pitted against the harpist's laboured efforts. The 'lessons' that the harpist has learned 'with much Pains' are instantly sung back to him by the nightingale 'True, Clean, Sweet', and 'Without Book'. In this manner (i.e. playing 'by ear') she is able to sing back his 'Pavin-Grand Pas', 'Almain-Trot', 'Coronto-Amble', 'Saraband', and 'Jigg'. Her ability at playing back whatever she hears from the harpist echoes Sylvester's description of nightingales embellishing upon each others' songs; it is natural to her to match 'without book' anything that she hears. Accordingly, the harpist decides that 'ready-prest close Composition' does not 'advance his war', and decides to try to overpower his rival through 'free loose Voluntaries'. The contrast between descriptors of 'ready-pressed' for pre-printed compositions and 'free, loose' for improvised voluntaries highlights the shift that is about to take place, from the realm of composition to that of 'extemporary wits':

The *Lessons* he, oft seen, with much Pains learn'd,
She, at first hearing, *True, Clean, Sweet* return'd.
Vwithout Book *Pavin-Grand Pas, Almain-Trot,*

⁴² *Strada's musical duel*, unnumbered page.

And the *Coronto-Amble* so soon got.
 Knew the False-Gallop of the *Saraband*:
 And could the Full-Speed of the *Jigg* command.
 Vwhat *Lessons* e're he play'd, *sung* to the *Life*.
 Wisely then stints he this vain Part of Strife.
 When ready-prest close *Composition*
 No whit advanc'd his *War*; he thought upon
 (His sweet *Bird-Rival* so to over-pow'r;
 And sink her in as *smart*, as *sweet* a Show'r)
 His free loose *Voluntaries*; in which kind
 He play'd as soft as A'er, as swift as Wind.
 As 'tis with some Extemporary Wits;
 His sodain better were than studied Hits.⁴³

However, the author is quick to note that despite being improvised, the harpist's 'judgment' is 'quick as Phansie' and even 'gives Laws', dispelling anxieties around improvisation as a law-breaking practice, as expressed in debates around extemporaneous prayer discussed in Chapter 1. While the harpist turns to the genre of voluntary to make his improvisations, the nightingale turns to improvised divisions on a ground, showing that the harpist has mistaken his 'Weapon, and his Foe', who 'hath him now at her wish'd Lock' – the 'looser freedom' of improvisation is her true domain and she is able to show him that both 'invention' and 'memorie' are in her nature: 'She's born the Poet, and Muse of the Wood/Other inspir'd ones Rapture wait from far;/ And sometimes long; her Inspirations are/Her Nature'.

This natural ability in improvisation results in the most skilled divisions on a ground, better than the 'boldest hand' could effect:

The first was *Nature's Plain-Song*, and her *Grounds*;
 The next her *Descant*, last *Divisions*.
 Yea, all these she so *blends*, as her small Breast
 Had been of all siz'd *Viols* a full *Chest*:
 And all *together* sounding in the Hands
 Of (for all *Parts*) best skill'd *Musicians*.

⁴³ *Strada's musical duel*, unnumbered page.

For she as well as they, due *Time*, and *Place*
 Knew for sweet *Relish*, and all other *Grace*.
 In *Dropping* Notes her *Voice* would swifter glide,
 Than boldest *Hand* on *Strings* could Posting Ride.⁴⁴

This reference to ‘nature’s grounds’ echoes both Charles Butler’s use of the phrase in reference to bees, and John Wilkins’s allusion to it as essential knowledge to partake in the kind of musical language he outlines. Its application here to a situation of musical improvisation – the extemporisation of divisions *upon a ground* – draws the use of the word ‘ground’ as a repeating bass line ever closer to the earth and associations of the natural world with improvisation, as well as to the ‘grounds’ or essentials of music-making. Nature, in the form of the harmonious cosmos evoked by Christopher Simpson, is the seat of primordial musical knowledge, the domain of the earth out of which the ground bass line originates, the underlying structure to all improvisation.

The origins of improvisation in the natural world give the nightingale an advantage in this mode that the harpist will never match, and he retreats to consider his options and devise a new plan of attack:

The herein baffl’d *Harper* sounds *Retreat*.
 But such *Retreat* he made, as Men devise
 For longer *Leaps* to take a better *Rise*.
 Such, as for *Flight* in other Wars they feign,
 With more Advantage to *fall on* again.
 So acts our *Harper*; whose *Retirements* be
 But from loose *Phansie*, to fast *Memorie*.⁴⁵

This move from ‘loose Phansie’ to ‘fast Memorie’ suggests that he moves from free and ‘loose’ improvisation to a faster, more controlled form of extemporisation that relies on his memory, perhaps following the rules for divisions and voluntaries set out by Christopher Simpson and Roger North. It also suggests that the nightingale’s realm is that of free and loose improvised divisions, rather than this more artful and stylised mode of music-making. The harpist’s new approach is presented in sounds of almost shocking violence:

⁴⁴ *Strada's musical duel*, unnumbered page.

⁴⁵ *Strada's musical duel*, unnumbered page.

Trebles alone then skilfully he moulds
 To the right Accents of mere Women-Scolds:
 Their Tunings, far from Unisons, designs
 For imbred Discords in the Female Minds.
 When touch't, their jarring Accents aptly meant
 The Quarrels of She-Tongues to represent.
 Upon a softer touch submitter Jarrings,
 Before they bark't, the Dogged Womens Snarlings.
 When harder Strokes yet harsher Jars out-hammer;
 This spake the Scolding womens lowder Clamor.
 Many such Strings together when he'd strike;
 Confus'd Brawls of more Scolds at once 'twas like.
 Ill names when try'd, the Strings knowing him mean
 Vwould say, ye filthy Jade! Ye dirty Quean!
 Yea, Pinching of such jarring Strings he'd shew
 Scratchings, as well as Scoldings, of that Crew.
 Streight rudelyer handled put 'em to such Squeeks,
 As would exactly render Female Shrieks.
 Some short Pause made, to work agen he'd go:
 Just as such Scolds, when out of breath, will do.⁴⁶

The 'brawl' created by the harpist presents gendered sounds with jarring and discordant tuning, imitating 'women-scols' that represent the discord of 'female minds', along with 'quarells of she-tongues', 'dogged womens snarlings', and 'female shrieks'. The strings of the harp themselves speak for the harpist with insults, saying to the nightingale 'ye filthy Jade! Ye dirty Quean!' The mobilisation of such sounds against the nightingale – herself gendered as a female queen, seem puzzling. They recall the poet's earlier comment about the dangers of sirens to men's ears – perhaps the harpist enacts a fantasy in which he brings down the 'queen' using the very tools that he is anxious the queen will mobilise against him. Furthermore, this passage highlights an anxiety around improvisation as queenly weapon; the nightingale's superior extemporary facility must be quelled, and quelled with some force. In response, she is unable to compete –

⁴⁶ *Strada's musical duel*, unnumbered page.

She fills her *Bag*; and *blows*, and *blows*; but brings
 Forth Nothing, beyond softer *Murmurings*.
 Sweet little *Soul*! She had accustom'd long
 To pleasant *Air*, and well-tun'd peaceful *Song*.
 But could not tune her prettie *Pipe* at all
 To the *Cross-Capers* of such *Jarring Brawl*.⁴⁷

The poem ends with the nightingale singing one final 'funeral note', before succumbing to death whereupon her soul retires into the harp – the instrument absorbs her and her song. This popular story of the nightingale's defeat presents a clear example of improvisation as intrinsic to the natural world, associating her natural skill in making free divisions upon a ground with her rule as 'Queen of a Sweet Quire', the frontiers of whose Empire is invaded by the Lyre (or harp) and its sounds. Matching the power of her queenship over sound and nature, this poem casts improvisation as a site for gendered violence, showing that the queen can only be overwhelmed by a different type of improvisation that moves away from 'phansie' to 'memorie' and its rules. In this domain, the lyre can evoke dangerous 'female' sounds while still maintaining its status as a cultivated musical instrument.

As with the bee, the nightingale's voice and her status as a creature embodying female rule and the power of natural improvisation render her a threat. While Butler figuratively took the sting out of the bee's tail by concealing her improvised piping in the intricacies of a madrigal, in this poem the nightingale's improvisations are 'silence'd in eternal Pause, and Rest', as her dead corpse 'on the Harp drops breathless down'. As her body enters the instrument, the harp 'needs no more Fill of other Vocal Tone:/It self is Voice and Instrument in One./And so at Once both Rings the Fun'eral Peal,/And Sings the Requi'em of sweet Philomel.' The nightingale's voice is taken into the harp, and in a strange parallel to Ovid's metamorphosis, is changed into an instrument that will improvise in accordance with the rules of musical extemporisation rather than according to her nature. From this perspective, both Butler and Strada's texts tell the same story of curtailing an improvising queen's songs of nature, presenting a more orderly, rational, and humanised version of their extemporisations.

⁴⁷ *Strada's musical duel*, unnumbered page.

The lyre's consumption of the nightingale is thus a triumph of nurture over nature, and perhaps also of male dominance over the independence and reign of the queen. Yet her positioning as a *foreign* queen of an empire separate from that of the lyre complicates the story by once again associating the 'otherness' of the natural world with that of a cultural/geographical other. Once again, the nightingale's improvisations are connected to an inherent otherness in her positionality. In this case, this tension between the natural, free improvisations that she sings and the harpist's studied divisions is resolved through her death, not simply to be silenced forever, but to be heard in a muted form through the instrument's body. As an origin story for instrumental music, this narrative reflects the idea that human music-making imitates and improves upon nature, as well as the idea that improvisation found in the natural world was simultaneously more 'naturally' skilful than instrumental improvisation, and yet more in need of silencing.

Reflecting on Richard Crashaw's retelling of Strada's duel, Linda Austern writes that 'the same fatal musical contest is recounted in a young gentlewoman's mid-century manuscript lute-tutor as an illustration of "the Enthusiasmes and Ravishments of the Lute" and the concomitant superiority of the divinely assisted "Art of man" over "the woonders of nature"', noting that 'her lutenist is assigned no gender, and her nightingale is a cocky male.'⁴⁸ In this way, the female instrumentalist depicted in the *Mary Burwell Lute Tutor* is subtly invited to share in a form of musical power that overcomes the innate shortcomings of her body and her traditional connection to the natural world.⁴⁹ This 'connection' to the natural world is heard in the young woman's superior improvisations, suggesting that the gendered nature of extemporaneous accomplishment extended from birdsong to musicking on an instrument.

A Musical Archive of Nightingales and Bees

In this final section of my chapter, I explore some depictions of nightingales and bees in early modern English music. Both creatures often featured in masques, songs, and sets of variations at the time, either inviting extemporisation by the musician(s), or including improvisatory musical material in the score.

⁴⁸ For an edition of this tutor book, see Thurston Dart, 'Miss Mary Burwell's Instruction Book for the Lute', *The Galpin Society Journal* Vol. 11 (May, 1958), 3-62. See also a discussion of the text's possible colonial overtones in Olivia Bloechl, *Native American Song at the Frontiers of Early Modern Music* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 15-18.

⁴⁹ Austern, p.26.

Perhaps one of the most famous pieces of music about the nightingale in early modern England is a piece called the ‘English nightingale’, or *Engels Nachtegaeltje* as it was known in a collection of variations titled *Der Fluyten Lusthof* (Volume 1: Amsterdam 1644) transcribed from the blind Dutch recorder player and carillonneur Jacob van Eyck’s improvisations on popular contemporary songs and melodies.⁵⁰ As was my intention to illustrate on my accompanying recording, the melody in this piece is clearly imitative of a bird’s song, with the repetitions and improvisatory leaps in van Eyck’s variations reflecting the spontaneity and extemporary nature of the nightingale’s famous songs (see Figures 12a and 12b).



Figure 12a: Jacob van Eyck, *Engels Nachtegael*, *Der Fluyten Lusthof*, Second Edition, Amsterdam: Paulus Matthysz, 1649, p.33.

⁵⁰ See Thiemo Wind, *Jacob van Eyck and the Others: Dutch Solo Repertoire for Recorder in the Golden Age* (Muziekhistorische Monografieën 21, Utrecht: Koninklijke Vereniging voor Nederlandse Muziekgeschiedenis, 2011).

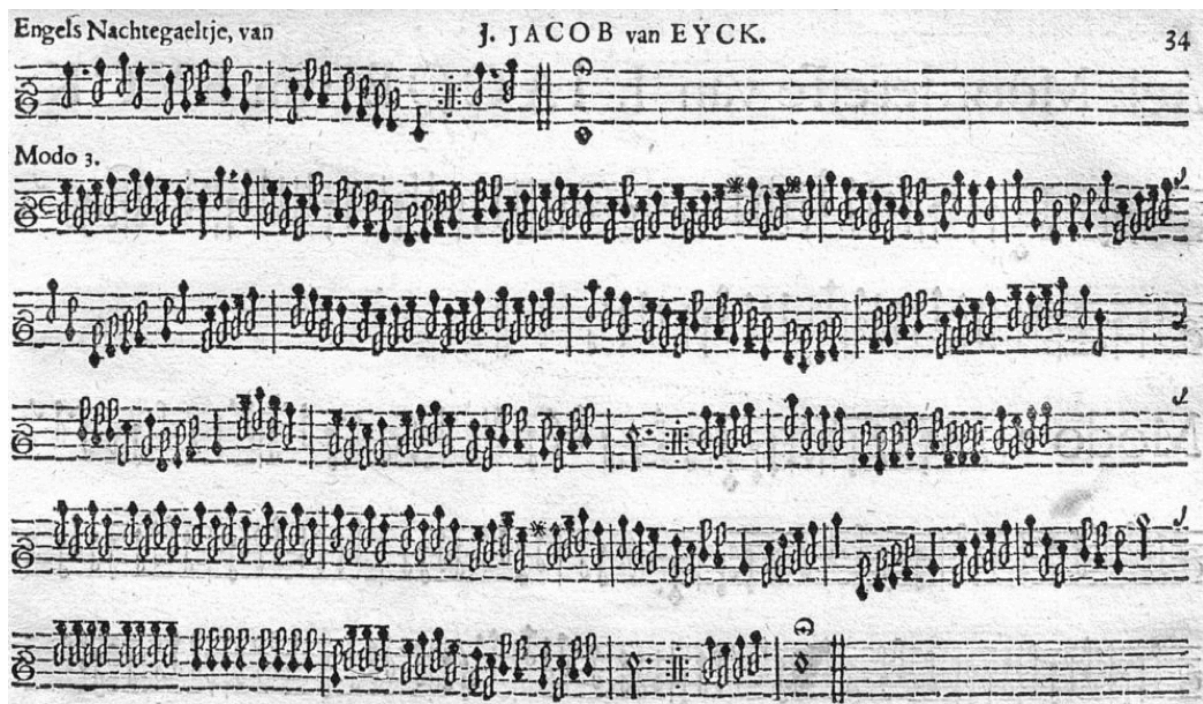


Figure 12b: Jacob van Eyck, Engels Nachtegael (cont.), p.34.

About thirty years earlier in England, *The Lord's Masque* (1613) by Thomas Campion (1567-1620) had included this melody in a work that was performed alongside *The Tempest* to celebrate the marriage of James I's daughter to Frederick the Elector Palatine. In this masque, 'The Nightingale's Response' imagines the song of Orpheus's silver nightingale responding to his master's harp playing.⁵¹ The classical story of Orpheus as the 'tamer' of wild beasts and creatures through his music was well known in early modern English literature, and the melody's appearance in this masque was perhaps the source for van Eyck's later improvisations on the same melody, which also featured in settings for keyboard, cittern, and lute, and appears in Thomas Mace's *Musick's Monument* (1676).⁵² Its association with Orpheus suggest that perhaps this melody represents a transcription of the 'tamed' nightingale's improvisations, made 'safe' in a similar fashion to Strada's nightingale.

In fact, to a certain extent, these settings of the nightingale's song for instruments can be heard as depicting the ending of Strada's popular poem: we can now hear the lute 'playing' the nightingale, her voice trapped inside its body. With this in mind, what did the act of playing the nightingale's song on an instrument signify? Was it heard as a way of 'taming' the nightingale's

⁵¹ Thomas Campion, *A Score for The Lords' Masque by Thomas Campion: Performed on 14 February, 1613*, ed. by Andrew J. Sabol (Hanover, N.H. : London: Brown UP ; UP of New England, 1993), pp.61, 335.

⁵² Mace, p.201.

divisions, of controlling and bounding the sounds of nature through more nurtured and foreseen musical means?

The recorder is a particularly interesting case study for this connection between birdsong and musical instrument, since it derives its name from the Latin verb *recordari* (to remember) associating its sound with recollection or remembrance, as well as with the physical operations of memory involved in making music (and particularly, improvising).⁵³ Numerous sources show, moreover, that the English verb ‘to record’ was used of birds in the early modern period, for example by the poet and musician Thomas Watson, who writes in his *Entertainment...at Elvetham* (1591): ‘Now birds record new harmony,/And trees do whistle melody...’⁵⁴

In Watson’s poem the verb is used of the birds themselves, miraculously ‘recording’ or remembering ‘new harmonie.’ However, it was also used by Shakespeare in relation to the nightingale to refer to one of the two gentlemen of Verona’s ‘tuning’ and ‘recording’ of his woes alongside her song; in Valentine’s words, as he yearns in the forest for his lover, Silvia: ‘Here can I sit alone, unseen of any,/And to the nightingale’s complaining notes/Tune my distresses and record my woes.’⁵⁵ In this passage, Valentine may be remembering his woes alongside the nightingale’s song of tragedy, but there is also a musical process to his recollection; he ‘tunes’ his distresses to the nightingale’s ‘complaining notes’, and perhaps recalls and sounds his own sorrows simultaneously – presumably enacting the same process that the bird is going through.

The recorder’s role in ‘recording’ is ambiguously open, then; through its name, it can recollect melodies, but is also associated with birdsong. In the context of the nightingale’s duel, the instrument might also take the role of replacing the bird, swallowing her whole and providing a wooden body through which her voice might echo. This preoccupation with ‘taming’ birdsong through the recorder, and thus also taming the free and natural improvisations of these birds, is epitomised in a book published a little later, in *The Bird Fancier’s Delight* (c.1715).⁵⁶ This collection

⁵³ Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell (eds.), *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Historical Performance in Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p.526.

⁵⁴ Wilson and Calore, p.359.

⁵⁵ William Shakespeare, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (The Folger Shakespeare), V.4, 1.4-7, p.175 < https://shakespeare.folger.edu/downloads/pdf/the-two-gentlemen-of-verona_PDF_FolgerShakespeare.pdf > [accessed 13 March 2022].

⁵⁶ *The Bird Fancier’s Delight, or Choice Observations And Directions Concerning the Teaching of all sorts of Singing Birds after the Flagelet and Flute [recorder] when rightly made as to Size and tone, with Lessons properly Compos’d within the Compass and faculty of each Bird, viz. for the Canary-Bird, Linnet, Bull-Finch, Wood-Lark, Black-Bird, Throustill [thrush], Nightingale and Starling. The whole fairly Engraven and Carefully Corrected* (Printed for J. Walsh, London, c.1715) <[https://imslp.org/wiki/The_Bird_Fancier's_Delight_\(Walsh,_John\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/The_Bird_Fancier's_Delight_(Walsh,_John))> [accessed 13 March 2022].

of tunes was intended to serve as a compendium of musical material with which the flageolet or recorder player could ‘train’ birds how to sing, and features particular songs for the canary, linnet, bullfinch, woodlark, blackbird, thrush, nightingale and starling. The nightingale’s song in the book is stilted and formal, a complete reversal of the spontaneous divisions and mournful songs that we read about in contemporaneous plays and poetry.⁵⁷ Whether or not early modern ‘bird fanciers’ believed they could actually train their caged nightingales in this way, the very fact that this was a plausible aim deserves notice in the history of early modern improvisatory practices and their complicated place between musical rules and the natural world.

Alongside attempts to train or ‘record’ voices of creatures in the natural world, many sources also contain musical depictions of several kinds of animals. For example, Thomas Campion’s reconstructed masque included music for several creatures, such as the camel, goat, ape, and bee, alongside music for ‘Turks’ and ‘Amazonians’. The othering and orientalist depiction of non-European ethnic and racial groups in English masques was common in this period, and their juxtaposition with the songs of the birds and beasts clearly demonstrates their objectification and essentialisation, as well as their perceived proximity to sounds of nature through their own distance from an ‘English’ human nature.

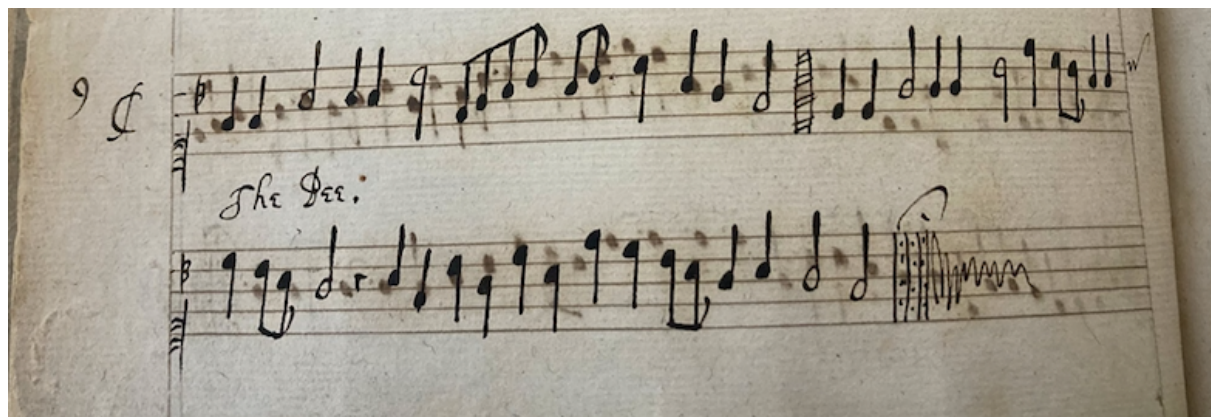


Figure 13: British Library Add. MS 10444 “The Bee” anon., treble, f.4v.

⁵⁷ *The Bird Fancier's Delight*, p.11.

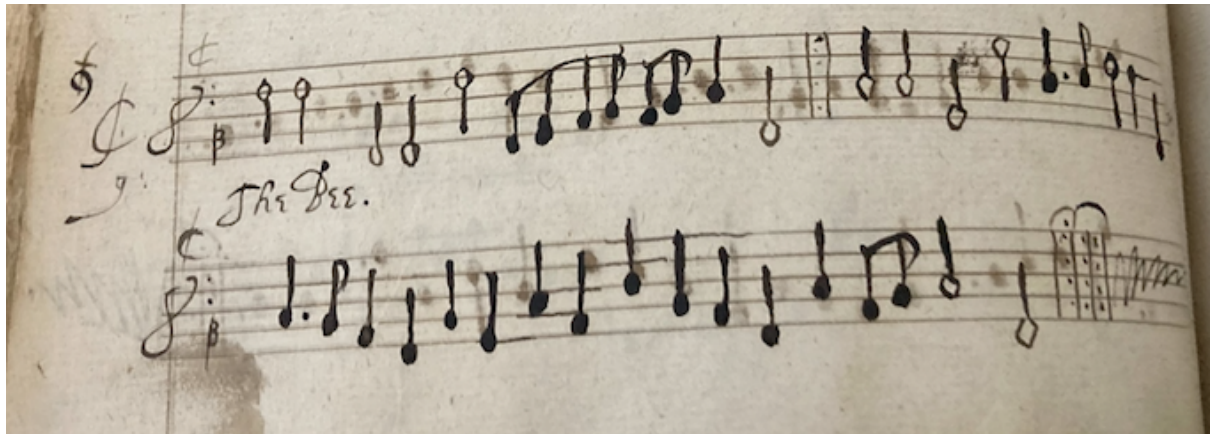


Figure 14: British Library Add. MS 10444 “The Bee” anon., bassus, f.59v.

The manuscript that contains the original (anonymous) bee’s song in the masque presents an extremely simple melody and bass line, as shown in Figures 13 and 14.⁵⁸ Musicologist Andrew J. Sabol’s edition adds three inner parts to this basic skeleton and also suggests divisions over the treble part on the repeat, a practice that is both historically informed and recalls the bee’s improvisations in Charles Butler’s text.⁵⁹ By contrast, the ‘Turke’s dance’ shown in Figures 15-17 is much more stylised, presenting a dance in cut common time that modulates into triple time.⁶⁰

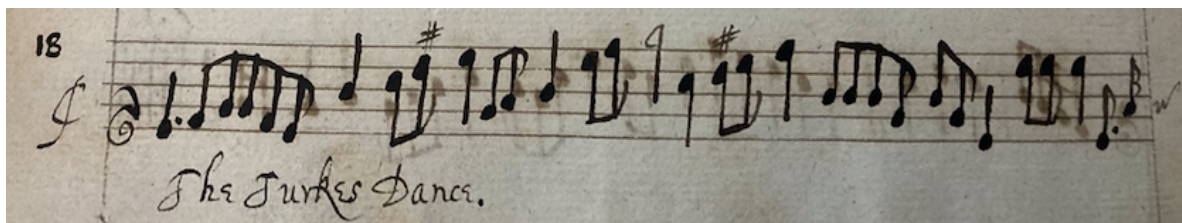


Figure 15: British Library Add. MS 10444 “The Turke’s Dance”, anon., treble, f.18v.

⁵⁸ London, British Library Add. MS 10444, f.4v, f.59v.

⁵⁹ Campion, p.79.

⁶⁰ London, British Library Add. MS 10444, f.19r, f.73r.

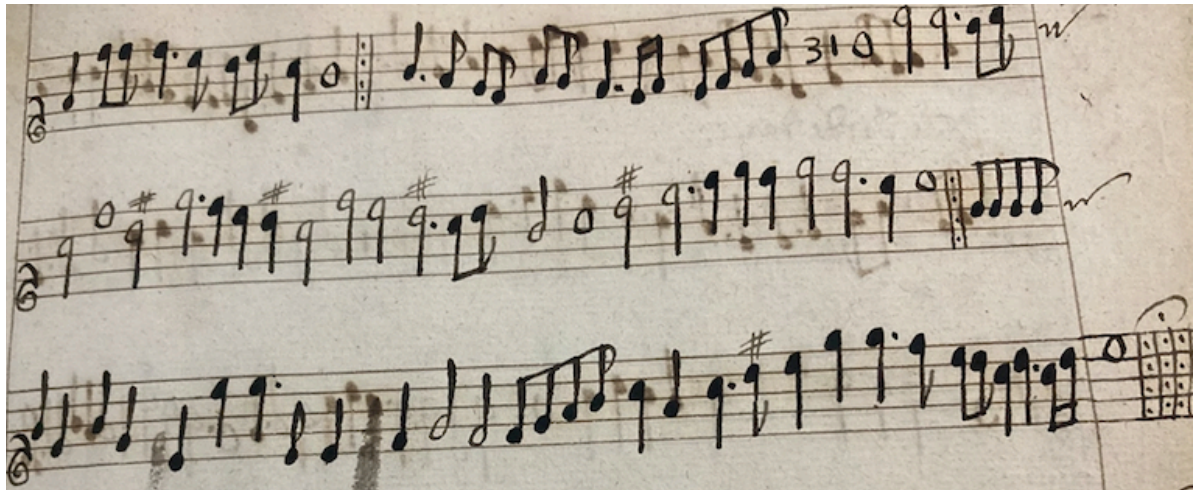


Figure 16: British Library Add. MS 10444 “The Turke’s Dance”, anon., treble, f.19r.

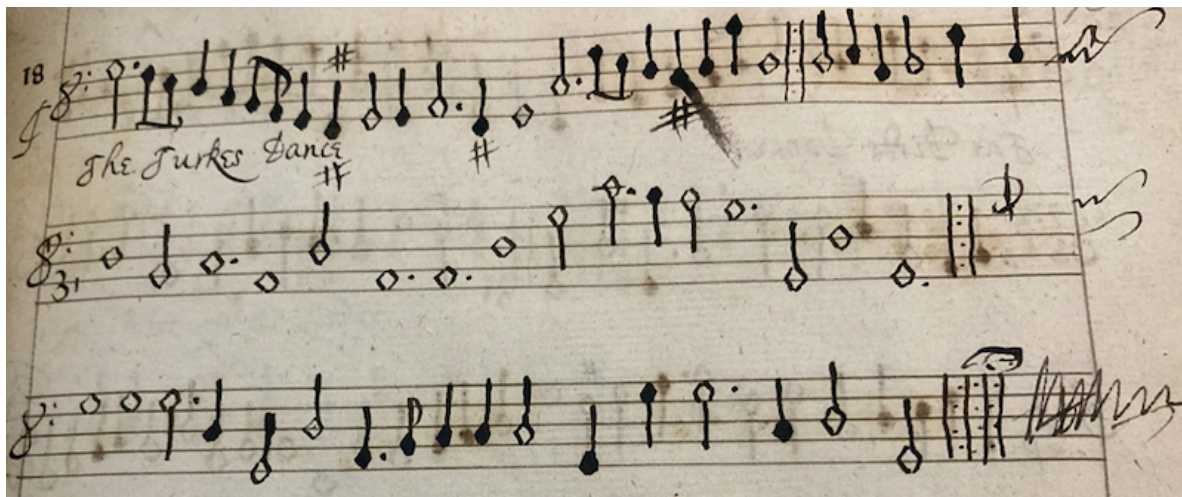


Figure 17: British Library Add. MS 10444 “The Turke’s Dance”, anon., bassus, f.73r.

While this manuscript offers an example of the bee’s piping being considered comparable to the ‘Turk’s dance’ simply by its inclusion in the collection, my final example shows a musical collaboration of sorts between English clergyman and physician John Covel (1638-1722) and Polish dragoman and musician at the Ottoman court ‘Alī Ufukī (c.1610-1675). John Covel toured the Levant between 1670-1679, and wrote extensively about his travels in his diaries during these years.

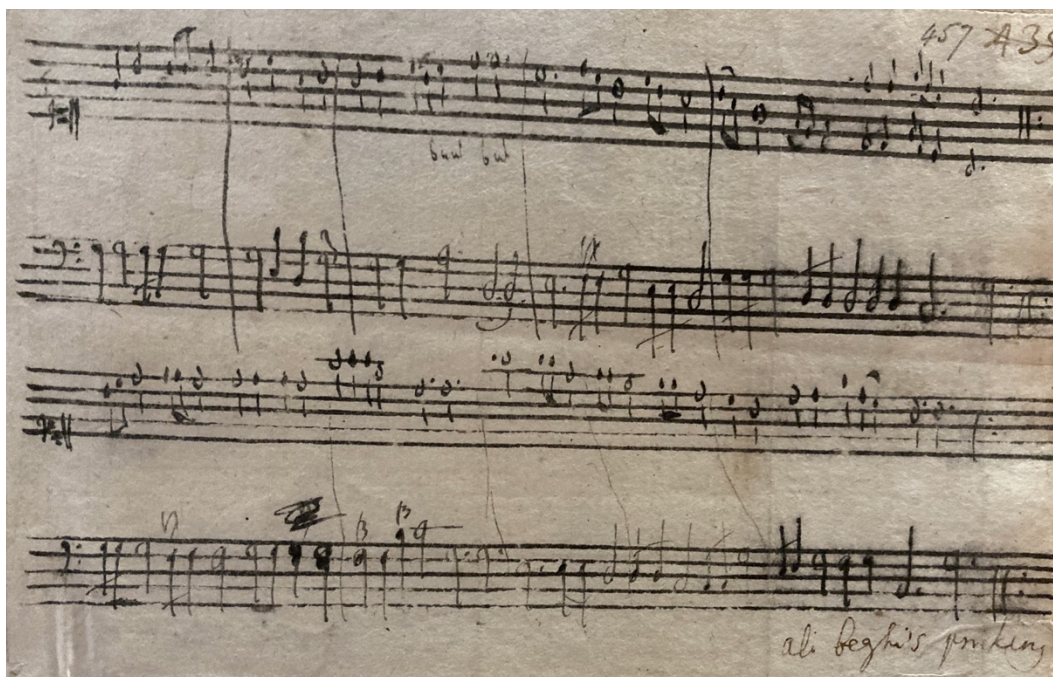


Figure 18: British Library, London, MS Add MS 22911.

The fragment shown in Figure 18 is found in his collected papers in the British Library, and shows a melody from ‘Alī Ufukī’s compendium, the *Mecmûâ-i Sâz u Söğ*, to which John Covel added a bassline.⁶¹ The melody belongs to the song *Semâ’î-yı Evc-‘Irak Reng-i ruhî gülîzar tebah eyledi bülbül*, and, as we see above, John Covel has added a note – ‘ali beghi’s pricking’ – presumably to indicate that the musician had notated (‘pricked’) the melody for him at some point on his travels in Ottoman Turkey.⁶²

The original song’s text follows a common theme for Ottoman poetry of this time; it tells of a nightingale and his unrequited love for the rose, which, as mentioned earlier, was often evoked as an analogue for the soul’s unrequited yearning for its Creator.

SEMAI

- [1] Renghi rui ghiulizar tebah [eiledi] Bulbul Dost ieleli ieleli Lella Lelli [eiledi] Bulbul
- [2] Bakti ghiul ruhsarina ebah [eiledi] bulbul Dost etc.
- [3] Bir ahi gigher soz chekiub iadi [ruinle] Dost etc.
- [4] Ghiul gon’gei hurszidi siah eiledi bulbul Dost etc.⁶³

⁶¹ London, British Library, MS Add MS 22911.

⁶² Judith I. Haug, *Ottoman and European Music in ‘Alī Ufukī’s Compendium, MS Turc 292: Analysis, Interpretation, Cultural Context*, Volume 2: Critical Report (Wissenschaftliche Schriften der WWU Münster, Reihe XXVI, 2020), p.390.

⁶³ Judith I. Haug, *Ottoman and European Music in ‘Alī Ufukī’s Compendium, MS Turc 292: Analysis, Interpretation, Cultural Context*, Volume 1: Edition (Wissenschaftliche Schriften der WWU Münster, Reihe XXVI, 2020), p.467.

(Translation: The nightingale spoiled the colour of the face of the rose-cheeked one
The nightingale looked at the rose's cheeks and sighed 'ah'
With the memory of your face, it let out a heart-piercing [lit. 'liver-burning'] sigh
The nightingale made the rosebud mouth of the sun black.⁶⁴)

However, in John Covel's version of the song, the only word of the text that remains is *bülbül* (nightingale) faintly sketched across the third bar. This tiny fragment points not only to the nightingale as cultural ambassador between English and Ottoman cultures but also highlights some of the bird's transposable tongues/identities: in England the nightingale is Philomela, making mournful divisions on her tragic story, in Turkey he is an anguished lover gazing on the unattainable rose.

The presence of this fragment in my archive of nightingales complicates both these versions of the bird, suggesting an improvisatory nightingale who hovers in between. Moreover, when we consider how this piece would have been performed according to Covel's copy, again improvisation is surely called for – in adding such an impromptu sounding and incongruous bass to this melody, perhaps Covel himself was simply scribbling down his extemporised bass line, to be changed and improved upon in performance. The dissonant ninth interval on the ninth note of the piece, along with the clunky tracking of the melody's rhythm with the bass line, all suggest a work-in-progress, a sketch or a starting point. An early modern performance of the piece might have also called for divisions on the simple melody, which tips us over into the realm of the imagination – perhaps the only space in which historical materials that touch on improvisation can be assimilated in order to reach a version of 'historically informed improvisation', as I explore in my final chapter.

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter has been to continue the story of the previous two, connecting the embodied nature of early modern improvisation with its complex relationships to 'others' in seventeenth-century English society, both mediated and alienated by contemporary print cultures. I do so here through the voices of the nightingale and bee, demonstrating that it is often through sonic iterations of the natural world that we can hear how the extemporary became a category for 'birds and beasts', a category that passed from creature to instrument as a way to control and regulate such improvisations. Furthermore, as we see from depictions of the

⁶⁴ Many thanks to Dr. Jacob Olley for his help with my translation of the Ottoman Turkish text of this poem.

‘colonising’ bee and imperial ‘queen’ nightingale, it was often through the animal world that issues of gender and imperialism were addressed, patterning human modes of behaviour through anthropomorphism.⁶⁵ By locating pieces of music about nightingales and bees within these rich (and often contradictory) contexts, my aim has been to show how musical improvisation in these pieces refers back to contemporaneous assumptions about these creatures and their sounds, and the subsequent stylisation of such sounds within a piece of printed music.

Finally, I would like to suggest that my historical explorations in this chapter may be productively enriched by considering them while listening to bee-song and bird-song today, and reflecting on changes to modes of listening, perceptions of improvisation, and the songs of the birds and bees themselves. While my explorations in this chapter have taken on a human-centric approach to sounds of the natural world, it is worth bearing in mind that there is scientific evidence to suggest both that nightingales might be ‘imprinted’ by the sensory aspects of their environments to sing differently in different contexts and times,⁶⁶ and also that bees can modify the frequency and amplitude of their buzzes, ‘improvising’ to manipulate specific plants to release pollen.⁶⁷

As musicians today studying these contexts for historical improvisation in the early modern natural world, it is important to understand that the environmental factors that caused nightingales to modify their divisions and bees to altering their buzzing affected what early modern improvisers heard around them, and thus the music they subsequently made in imitation. In turn, these factors affect our own improvisations and understandings of historical improvisation today – how could they not, when, as I noted in chapter 2, the very ‘air’ around one could affect extemporary processes. With this in mind, to what extent might such environmental considerations affect our own engagements with material objects, instruments, and texts from the early modern period, and how might we mediate between our own improvising bodies, our imaginations fuelled by historical research, and the desire to practice ‘historically informed improvisation’?

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⁶⁵ See Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

⁶⁶ See Helen Briggs, ‘How lockdown birds sang to a different tune’, *Science & Environment, BBC News* (24 September 2020) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-54285627>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

⁶⁷ T. Morgan, P. Whitehorn, G.C. Lye *et al.*, ‘Floral Sonication is an Innate Behaviour in Bumblebees that can be Fine-Tuned with Experience in Manipulating Flowers’, *J Insect Behaviour* 29, 233–241 (2016) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10905-016-9553-5>> [accessed 13 March 2022].

In my next and final chapter, I ask how the historical contexts of improvisation function as a site of negotiation for what it meant to be human, to encounter ‘others’, and to listen to nature affects our improvisations today as historically-informed musicians. I explore these questions through the figure of Dido of Carthage, theorising the ‘extemporary imagination’ as a space that seeks alternative ways of creatively engaging early modern texts.

CHAPTER 4

IMPROVISING TEXT

HISTORICAL PERFORMANCE AND THE EXTEMPORARY IMAGINATION

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Between ‘the law of writ and the liberty’

In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Polonius introduces the Players in Elsinore with an impressive recommendation. He casts them as ‘the best actors in the world’, able to perform any genre imaginable as well as capable of ‘the law of writ and the liberty’. By this last phrase, Polonius seems to be referring to scripted plays (‘the writ’) and improvisatory acting traditions (‘the liberty’). He makes an important statement on improvisation and/as freedom, and on the relationship between following a script and improvising:

Introducing the players:

The best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy,
history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral,
tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral; scene
individable, or poem unlimited. Seneca cannot be too
heavy, nor Plautus too light. For the law of writ and the liberty,
these are the only men.¹

The Shakespeare scholar Louise George Clubb explains Polonius’s distinction between the ‘writ’ and the ‘liberty’ as ‘the contrast...between scripted five-act plays observing the rules (the ‘writ’) and improvised three-act performances from a canevascio or scenario (the ‘liberty’), also obeying some of the rules, sometimes.’² The ‘scenarios’ she mentions refer to the tradition of improvised theatre, the *commedia dell’arte*, popular in Renaissance Italy. In this genre, plays would be semi-improvised by players based on pre-written scenes.

¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine (The Folger Shakespeare), II.2, l.420-426, p.107 <https://shakespeare.folger.edu/downloads/pdf/hamlet_PDF_FolgerShakespeare.pdf> [accessed 13 March 2022].

² Louise George Clubb, ‘Pastoral Jazz from the Writ to the Liberty’, in *Italian Culture in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries: Rewriting, Remaking, Refashioning*, ed. by Michele Marrapodi (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p.15.

As in early modern music-making, the flexible and inextricable relationship between improvisation and text is also evident in theatre practices, with the distinction between ‘writ’ and ‘liberty’ proving difficult to pin down. In fact, Clubb goes so far as to liken the difference between scripted and improvised plays as ‘not unlike the difference between classical music and jazz, distinct in several ways but most obviously in that one is performed from a full score and the other is improvised on the chord progressions of a tune’ – or, to find a more appropriate early modern analogue, a ground bass line. Clubb continues, ‘in undertaking to produce pastoral plays in the form Polonius calls the ‘writ’, dramatists were in effect performing a jazz operation, improvising a theatrical structure from a canon of non-theatrical Arcadian literature...’³

Looking to extemporary early modern theatre practices can be helpful in terms of thinking through the multiple relationships between ‘the writ’ and ‘the liberty’ in contemporaneous musical practice. As I noted in my first chapter, the study of historical improvisation is rife with paradoxes and contradictions. One such issue is that of demarcating the boundaries between the improvised and the texted; if an improvisation is notated, it loses some of its ‘improvised-ness’, yet if it is not, we can never know it after the moment of performance. However, I want to suggest here that we can open up a new way of approaching text by thinking about it in the same way as a bass line, suggesting a series of chord progressions and motives for improvisation rather than a fixed order of events. In the world of early modern drama, this approach has been convincingly argued by scholars such as Richard Andrews, who proposed that Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* is based on scenarios for improvisation that existed and were in use in Italy well before the play’s first performance in 1611.⁴ Thus Shakespeare’s text is merely a written-out ‘version’ of the theatregrams or paradigms for a set of pre-existing scenes.

Such a communal or distributed account of creativity echoes the processes of memory I explored in my first chapter, whereby a musician might memorise modules of music heard elsewhere, and assemble them together in the process of improvisation. It also presents a way of thinking about contemporaneous musical texts as ‘versions’ of that piece made from an underlying structure for improvisation (such as the ground bass line). A binary distinction between the ‘purely improvised’ and the ‘purely texted’ is thus ultimately a false one, since neither of the two categories can be found without the other. Instead, I argue that they exist in a

³ Clubb, p.19.

⁴ Richard Andrews, ‘The Tempest and Italian Improvised Theatre’, in *Revisiting the Tempest: The Capacity to Signify*, ed. by Silvia Bigliuzzi and Lisanna Calvi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Shakespeare Studies, 2014), pp.45-62.

series of combinations, depending on the other parameters informing the moment of improvisation.

Here it is interesting to note the similarities with improvisation/composition in Iranian classical music, and the ways in which a clear-cut binary between improvisation and composition has often been used to other non-Western musics, as Laudan Nooshin has explored.⁵ Nooshin cites Bruno Nettl's 1974 *Musical Quarterly* article in which he challenges 'the idea of improvisation and composition as oppositional categories', and suggests instead 'a continuum of creative practice between music which is primarily "compositional" and that which is primarily "improvisatory", whether musicians are using notation or creating in performance.'⁶ She problematises the distinction between the two and the association of composition with notation even further, pointing out that in the first five sections of her article she discusses compositional practices in a range of performance traditions, without even discussing the role of notation until later.⁷ This problematisation of such discrete categories and connections like improvisation/composition, or composition *as* notation persists throughout her examination of classical Persian performance practices. For example, Nooshin cites an instance of the musician H. Gholi (d.1915) being asked why he did not compose fixed pieces like his students, to which he replied "What I compose is what I play".⁸ This attitude is perhaps surprisingly at home in early modern English music-making, rich with ambiguities between the murky spaces of composition, improvisation, print, writing, and a score's 'fixity'.⁹

In my thesis so far, I have explored many instances of these combinations, enjoying the multiplicity of improvisational wealth to be found in early modern texts, musical and otherwise, while trying to understand some of the differences between these instances of improvisation. Within this multiplicity, we can hear distinctions between improvisations that are made by following clear rules to conform to a particular genre (eg. divisions on a ground), and 'free' improvisations, heard for example in the songs of nature, or in descriptions of more 'loose' music-making such as the Prelude (which I explore later on in this chapter). Additionally, within all the early modern printed texts I have read/listened to in my thesis, we can see evidence of an

⁵ Laudan Nooshin, 'Improvisation as "Other": Creativity, Knowledge and Power – The Case of Iranian Classical Music', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol.128, Issue 2 (2003), 242-296.

⁶ Nooshin, 254.

⁷ Nooshin, 256.

⁸ Nooshin, 261.

⁹ For an account of encounters between Western 'early music' practice with indigenous music practices, see Dylan Robinson, 'Chapter Three, Contemporary Encounters between Indigenous and Early Music', *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), pp.113-147.

improvisatory approach to text – from the copying of passages from travelogues to the translated variations on Strada's nightingale poem by several authors.

The type of improvisation seen in extemporary prayer is clearly different from that of Nicola Matteis's violin playing; the improvisations heard by English travellers in Turkish coffeehouses are not the same as those presented in Christopher Simpson's divisions upon a ground; the divisions in poems about the nightingale are not the same as those of the bee in stylised madrigals. Improvisation takes on different guises and characters, different balances of extemporary practice to texted practice, depending on the social, historical, personal, political, and geographical contexts.

I argue, then, that the two spheres of 'the writ' and 'the liberty' do not exist separately in any meaningful way, but that the way they interact depends on how different parameters relate in each instance of improvisation. Thus in my thesis I have sought out historical texts that may be read in an improvisatory fashion, whether that has been travelogues that call for performative readings, or notated examples of improvisations that musicians could either follow strictly, mix in with their own improvisations, or use as an inspiration for entirely improvised performances.

To 'historically-informed' performers, these parameters that create the relationships between text and extemporary practice may seem to form yet another paradox – how can a musician be strictly 'informed by history' while also being responsive to issues of environment and the need to delve into their own imaginations when engaging in 'historically-informed improvisation'? As I have argued earlier and will continue to explore in this chapter, early modern extemporary practices are processes through which musicians build 'memory stores' to be drawn on in moments of improvisation, and thus improvisation is always a contemporary concern. These storehouses are filled not only with musical experiences and passages that can be book-learned, but are also made up of sensory experiences: the sounds of nature that surround us, people we remember, smells of different environments, the memory of certain feelings, travels we may have experienced, and perhaps even our historical researches into these extemporary contexts. Historical improvisation is thus an intensely present matter, while also requiring a rich and nuanced understanding of early modern texts and ways to use them.

Thomas Mace and Roger North: On *Hab-nab* and the Extemporary Imagination

While there are plenty of early modern writings denouncing certain types of extemporary behaviours there is no clear consensus as to what constituted ‘good’ improvisation amongst early modern music theorists, who wrote variously about different modes of creative production and their relationships to text and transmission. Rebecca Herissone has written insightfully about the connection between the improvisatory practices of making voluntaries as described by Roger North, and processes of aural transmission and the notation of existing pieces from memory.¹⁰ While I do not engage with questions of transmission and arrangement in my thesis, it is important to note that these practices were inescapably caught up in extemporary culture, so that in some sense it is impossible to conceive of any contemporaneous musical practice that does not somehow pertain to some aspect of improvisation and memory.

I open this chapter by comparing and contrasting Roger North’s description of making voluntaries with Thomas Mace’s transcriptions and stories of his own improvisations, investigating the role of memory, embodiment and imagination in their writing. I show that these texts constantly refer to an integrated understanding of extemporary practice and printed text, and argue that this integration should prompt us to ask questions about the ways in which we read and perform early modern texts, and the role of improvisation in this process.

In his treatise *Musick’s Monument* (1676), Thomas Mace lists some common types of ‘lessons’ that he is about to present for learning the lute, paying attention to their intersections with written and improvised forms. Of the prelude and voluntary he writes:

The *Praelude* is commonly a *Piece of Confused-wild-shapeless-kind of Intricate-Play* (as most use It) in which no perfect *Form, Shape, or Uniformity* can be perceived; but a *Random-Business, Pottering, and Grooping*, up and down, from one *Stop, or Key*, to another; And generally, so performed, to make *Tryal*, whether the *Instrument* be *well in Tune*, or not; by which doing, after they have *Compleated Their Tuning*, They will (if They be *Masters*) fall into some kind of *Voluntary*, or *Fansical Play*, more *Intelligible*; which (if He be a *Master, Able*) is a way, whereby He may more *Fully, and Plainly*, shew *His Excellency, and Ability*, than by any

¹⁰ Rebecca Herissone, *Musical Creativity in Restoration England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.372.

other kind of undertaking; and has an *unlimited*, and *unbounded Liberty*; In which, he may make use of the *Forms*, and *Shapes of all the rest*.¹¹

The hierarchy of genres is not hard to detect here; the prelude is ‘confused’ and ‘wild’, has no ‘form’ or ‘shape’, and is employed simply to make sure the instrument is in tune. However, the voluntary, or ‘Fancical Play’, will progress from the prelude in the hands of an experienced musician, affording them ‘unlimited and unbounded liberty’ and allowing them to make use of all the forms and shapes of the other genres listed. The final clearly improvised form that Mace lists is the Ground, which, as noted in Chapter 1, he describes as a location for the musician to show the ‘bravery’ of both invention and hand.¹²

Perhaps surprisingly, then, according to Mace’s description of the voluntary, the musician can only find ‘liberty’ through following the shapes of the other genres, and knowing their way around the instrument and musical forms. The freedom he describes is not defined through distance from form, but rather through a facility with genre and knowledge of how to make extemporary music in a way that mediates between the body, the imagination, and pre-existing pieces. Figure 19 offers an example of a voluntary in his book that comes in Chapter 42 on how to play the theorbo, titled “A Fancy-Praelude, or Voluntary; Sufficient Alone to make a Good Hand, Fit for All manner of Play, or Use.”¹³ As I noted in Chapter 1, extemporary practice could be thought of as a way of *making* the body – here, this happens through the use of a text: the piece is seen as a way to make a ‘good hand’, or one that is ‘good’ for improvising.

¹¹ Mace, pp.128-129.

¹² Mace, p.129.

¹³ Mace, p.210.



Figure 19: Thomas Mace, 'A Fancy-Prelude', Musick's Monument, 1676, p.210.

Mace introduces the piece as an example for how a musician may learn to improvise once their hand is fully made:

'Here is That One Only Lesson for your Hand; which although It seem long, may be Divided (as it were) into 13 Several Strains; which you may perceive by the Pauses, and Double Barrs, I have made; and also let Figures at the Beginning of every Place: So that you may (if you please) leave off at any of Those Places; But I set it Thus, to show you the way and manner of Playing Voluntary, which you may well Imitate. This Lesson alone will make your Hand Sufficiently for the whole Business of the Theorboe, be It what It will.'¹⁴

He continues, "Therefore Practice It well; for I intend to set no more to That Purpose; for I Aim at Short Work: Therefore I'll proceed to the Directions of Playing a Part; your Hand being first made,

¹⁴ Mace, p.209.

there will be *much Less Difficulty* in *That*.¹⁵ In other words, the printed voluntary is there to train the musician and their hand so that they may make their own voluntaries, thereby attaining their own ‘unlimited, and unbounded Liberty’.

By contrast, Roger North’s conception of the voluntary is one of simply knitting together pre-composed passages that the musician had found in musical scores and committed to memory and ‘into’ the body, as I discussed in Chapter 1. While this process somewhat counter-intuitively centres text in acts of extemporisation, it bears many parallels to the extemporary theatre practices I have discussed above, and can involve a similar destabilisation of printed text. Moreover, it recalls Thomas Mace’s notion that through the voluntary the musician may make use of the ‘forms and shapes’ of all the other genres.

Of the voluntary, North writes that ‘...there must be so much practise of the art that it shall become habituall. And not onely his mind be filled with the material, but the proper forms also to be at his tongue’s end, always ready on occasion – this makes a good orator, or as they now terme it a good extemporary speaker...’¹⁶ The analogy with the art of an orator and the classical art of rhetoric evokes the memory arts I discuss in Chapter 1, and describes a method of ‘filling one’s mind with the material’ and then practising ways to dispose and deliver this material in an improvised manner at a moment’s notice.¹⁷ North explains, ‘by this he will know the fluency and emphases of musick, and his memory will be filled with numberless passages of approved ayre, and have *ad unguem* all the cursory graces of cadences and semi-cadences, and common descants and breakings, as well as the ordinary ornaments of accord, or touch...’¹⁸

North’s insistence on the importance of using the material that the improviser has assimilated offers another example of how improvisation did not necessarily preclude text, but rather engaged with it in a variety of ways. Here, North explains that the performer must choose, apply, and connect these memorised passages:

It is not to be expected that a master invents all that he plays in that manner. No, he doth but play over those passages that are in his memory and habituall to him. But the choice,

¹⁵ Mace, p.209.

¹⁶ Wilson (ed.), p.141.

¹⁷ See also Thomas Mace on music and oratory in Mace, p.152.

¹⁸ Wilson (ed.), p.141.

application, and connexion are his, and so is the measure, either grave, buisy, or precipitate; as also the several keys to use as he pleaseth.¹⁹

In this context, the extemporary parameters are clearly stated, including the measure or mood, and the keys used. Additionally, we might add to these parameters issues of the performer's spirit and invention, the space in which the performance takes place, and (remembering Chapter 2) the climate or 'ayre' of the country where they find themselves as they play their musical airs.

North continues:

And among the rest, in the spirit of zeal when he is warme and engaged, he will fulfill of his owne present invention a musick which, joined with the rest, shall be new and wonderfull. I say'd application, which refers to what was sayd before of imitation, as the lying downe after labour is sweet repose is admirably express't in the semicadence of a flat key, adagio; and so of other like conjectures not to be repeated. Then for connection, these passages which a voluntiere serves himself of are (by transitions of his own) so interwoven as to make one style, and will appear as a new work of a good composer, of whom the best (as I will venture to say here) useth the methods of a volunteire, and more or less borrows ayre from those that went before him, and such as he hath bin most conversant with. (This is exemplified in the game of chess, of which they say he that hath most gambetts hath the advantage, which gambetts are pre-contrived stratagems, which are put forward as occasion is given by the walk of the adversary. So he that hath most muscall passages drawne off from the musick of others and in most variety to be put together with extemporary connection, is the best furnished for voluntary.)²⁰

Despite the pre-composed nature of these passages, North ventures that these 'improvisations' will be 'new and wonderfull', and goes on to suggest even that good composers will use the same method of 'borrowing' ayres that went before. He offers an analogy with chess and the preconceived nature of 'gambits' or calculated opening moves that are combined with the chess player's reactions in the moment to succeed.

¹⁹ Wilson (ed.), p.141.

²⁰ Wilson (ed.), pp.141-142.

This comparison to a game, and the quite formulaic notion of simply ‘sticking’ together musical passages composed by others might seem to render improvisation an achievable goal for an amateur musician such as North. Yet the ‘extemporary connection’ to which he refers proposes a way in which any musician could enter into a series of extemporary relationships with text, and textual relationships with improvisation.

North concludes:

But as I sayd, the connexion, handling, and setting forth is his owne; for no one man is an absolute inventor of art, but comonly takes up and adds to the inventions of predecessors.

....For in musick nothing is left to accident; all must be done either with designe or by inveterate habit, in a course duely establisht; and the chief industry lyes in procuring variety, and *ne quid nimis*, for the long uniformity of air and manner, tho’ at first very good, will grow fastidious.²¹

North’s preoccupation with not leaving anything ‘to accident’ is striking in the context of a practice that was ostensibly defined by a lack of ‘pre-meditation’; it also evokes the ‘accidents’ and lack of artificial planning in the songs of the natural world, and can perhaps point to some of the reasons for discourses around curbing the divisions of the nightingale as explored in the previous chapter. In contrast to this lack of accident, Mace’s descriptions of his own improvisations (transcribed as lessons in his book), are full of chance.

In the two examples that follow, I explore Mace’s depiction of improvisation as a practice of artlessly ‘finding’ pieces of music, in this case, inspired by two women. The processes described are intensely visceral and built on embodied memory. In the case of the second example, the process is framed in a derogatory fashion as a messy stitching together of different passages – seemingly presenting a very different opinion about such a practice to Roger North. As early modern transcriptions of improvisations, Mace’s pieces provide us with important clues about the relationship between instrument, musician, body, and text, with the written narrative

²¹ Wilson (ed.), p.142.

accompanying each musical piece perhaps as important as the scores themselves.

The First Lesson of the First Set, called the Authors Mistress.

The musical score is written on three systems of staves. The first system begins with a treble clef and a common time signature. It features several measures of music with notes and rests, accompanied by dynamic markings such as 'Loud', 'Soft', and 'a'. The second system continues the piece with similar notation. The third system concludes the piece. The handwriting is in an old style, typical of 17th-century manuscripts.

Figure 20: Thomas Mace, *Musick's Monument*, 1676, p.121.

Early in the book, Mace introduces us to a lesson that transcribes one of his own improvisations – one inspired by (and named after) his ‘mistress’, as shown in Figure 20. He writes that the piece came to him when he was ‘past being a suitor’ to his now-wife, but not yet married:

That very Night, in which I was Thus Agitated in my Mind, concerning Her, (My Living Mistress;) She being in Yorkshire and My Self in Cambridge,) Close Shut up in my Chamber, Still, and Quiet, about 10, or 11 a Clock at Night, Musing, and Writing Letters to Her; Her Mother, and Some other Friends, in Summing up, and Determining the whole Matter, concerning Our Marriage: (You may conceive, I might have very Intent Thoughts, all that Time, and might meet with some Difficulties. (For as yet, I had not gain'd her Mother's consent.) So that I my Writings, I was sometimes put to my Studyings.

The detail with which he sets the scene is surely not an accident; the particulars of the circumstances are just as important to the resulting improvisation as the musician and instrument are. He continues:

At which Times, (My Lute lying upon My Table) I sometimes took It up, and Walk'd about My Chamber; Letting my Fancy Drive, which way It would (for I studied nothing at the time, as to Musick) yet my secret Genius or Fancy, prompted my Fingers, (do what I could) into This very Humour; So that every Time I walk'd, and took up my Lute (in the interim, betwixt Writing, and Studying) This Ayre would needs offer It Self unto Me, Continually; In so much that at the last, (liking it Well), (and lest it should be Lost,) I took Paper, and Set it down, taking no further Notice of It, at that Time; But afterwards, It pass'd abroad, for a very Pleasant, and Delightful Ayre, amongst All; yet I gave It no Name, til a long Time after, no taking any more Notice of It, (in any particular kind) than any other My Composures, of That Nature.

According to this description, the driving factor behind the improvisation is 'fancy', since Mace claims to have been unschooled in music at this time. He also refers to this faculty of creative imagination as 'secret genius', and credits it entirely with moving his fingers into the piece's 'humour' or mood; once placed in this situation, the ayre 'offers itself' to him 'continually', until Mace finally commits it to paper. The process is mysterious, intuitive, and generated by his experience of separation from his fiancée. Despite his lack of musical training, he is still able to create a piece of music worthy of transcription.

In fact, Mace even claims that the piece was performed 'abroad' where it passed 'for a very Pleasant, and Delightful Ayre', which, whether or not it is true, recalls the idea of improvisation as simulation and Henry Blount's attempts to pass off his untrained improvisations as 'ayers of my country' when travelling in Turkey (see Chapter 2 of this thesis). In contrast to the care with which North recommends that voluntaries should be made, and the detailed instructions for making divisions passed down by Christopher Simpson, here the process is one of inspiration through a set of direct sensory experiences.

Mace continues with his narrative, revealing to us the after-history of his improvisation:

But after I was Married, and had brought my wife home, to Cambridge; It so fell out, that one Rainy Morning I stay'd within; and in my Chamber, My Wife and I, were all alone; She Intent upon Her

Needle-Works, and I Playing upon my Lute, at the Table by her; She sat very Still, and Quiet, Listening to All I Play'd, without a Word a Long Time till at last, I hapned to Play This Lesson; which, so soon as I had once Play'd, She Earnestly desired Me to Play It again; For, said She, That shall be Called, My Lesson.

Once again, Mace's attention to detail is painstaking – we need to know that this occasion took place on a rainy day when he was confined indoors with his now wife, intent on her needle-work while he played his lute by her. These facts are all an integral part of the extemporary process. His wife's recognition of the piece also happens in and through this setting, where they are both somehow connected through a shared environment and sonic experience. When his wife speaks these words of recognition, Mace remembers the occasion of the piece's creation:

*From which Words, so spoken, with Emphasis, and Accent, It presently came into my Remembrance, the Time when, and the Occasion of Its being produced, and returned to Her This Answer, viz. That it may properly be call'd Your Lesson; For when I Compos'd It, You were wholly in my Fancy, and the Chief Object, and Ruler of My Thoughts; telling Her how, and when It was made: And therefore, ever after, I Thus call It, My Mistress; (And most of My Scholars since, call it, Mrs. Mace, to This Day.)*²²

Mrs. Mace's presence is key to the improvisation; she originally inspired it due to 'ruling' her then fiancée's thoughts, and now evokes it again as they sit in Cambridge. Furthermore, her inexplicable connection to the piece causes her husband to recall the original performance.

By relating that his wife recognised herself in the piece, Mace suggests that something about it captured something of her true essence, spirit, humour, or intrinsic nature. He explains that the purpose of telling this story is so that the reader may know that 'there are *Times, and particular Seasons, in which the Ablest Master, in his Art*, shall not be able to *Command his Invention*, or produce things, so to his *Content*, or *Liking*, as he shall at other Times; but he shall be (as it were) *Stupid, Dull, and Shut up*, as to any *Neat, Spruce, or Curious Invention*. But again at other *Times*, he will have *Inventions come flowing in upon him, with so much Ease, and Freedom*, that his greatest Trouble will be, to *Retain, Remember, or Set Them down, in Good Order*.'

²² Mace, pp.122-123.

Presumably, then, on the original occasion of finding the piece, Mace's feelings for his wife resulting in an 'overflowing' of inventions, somehow transforming his thoughts of her into musical figures, shapes, and forms.

Accordingly, he continues:

Yet more particularly, as to the *Occasion of This Lesson*; I would have you take notice, that as it was at such a Time, when I was *Wholly*, and *Intimately possessed, with the True, and Perfect Idea of my Living Mistress*, who was at That time *Lovely, Fair, Comely, Sweet, Debonair, Uniformly-Neat*, and every way *Compleat*. How could (possibly) my *Fancy* Run upon any Thing, at that Time, but upon the very *Simile, Form, or Likeness*, of the *same Substantial Thing*.²³

This story corroborates my earlier readings of certain texts, in which I claimed that the extemporary process was one deeply affected by the people, places, sights and sounds that one experienced. Here Mace is so preoccupied with thoughts of his wife that she overtakes not only his fancy but also his fingers – his body is literally overwhelmed and the piece comes out as a result.

Moreover, the printed score is transformed through this story from a text whose notations must be replicated through an instrument, to a transcription of an improvisatory moment that encrypts within in it the entire story, Mace's creative process, the environmental factors that went into making the piece, and the interactions between him and his wife. The text is mired in improvisation, so that the performer's interaction with it is troubled. How should a present-day performer proceed? Should we take the score and story as inspiration for our own improvisations? How many of Mace's other pieces are similarly modelled on improvisation, and how many pieces of his contemporaries?

My next example occurs in the fifth lesson of the third set, titled 'Hab-Nab'. While the origin of this piece is also due to Mace's overwhelming thoughts about a woman, this time the process and resulting piece are not cast in a favourable light. As before, Mace includes 'A Story of the Manner, and Occasion of Hab-Nab's Production' along with the notation of the piece. The story starts:

²³ Mace, p.123.

Now comes a *Lesson*, which has neither *Fugue*, nor very Good *Forme*, yet a *Humour*, although none of the *Best*, which I call *Hab-Nab*. This last lesson (quite *Differing* from all the *whole Number* going before) I have set you here on *Purpose*; because by It, you may the more *Plainly Perceive*, what is meant by *Fugue*. Therefore view every *Barr* in it, and you will find not any one *Barr* like another, nor any *Affinity* in the least kind betwixt *Strain*, and *Strain*; yet the *Ayre* pleaseth some sort of People well enough: But for my own Part, I never was pleased with it; yet because some liked it, I retained It. Nor can I tell, how it came to pass, that I thus made It, only I very well remember, the *Time, Manner, and Occasion of its Production*; (which was on a sudden) without the least *Praemeditation*, or *Study*, and meerly *Accidentally*; and as we use to say, *Ex tempore*, in the *Tuning of a Lute*.²⁴

Despite including it in his book, Mace clearly seeks to somewhat distance himself from this piece, pointing out its faults and inconsistencies and scathingly remarking that the ayre will be pleasing enough to ‘some sort of people’ – but clearly, not to him. He goes on to explain that the way he made this piece was ‘without the least Praemeditation, or Study and meerly Accidentally; and as we use to say, *Ex tempore*, in the tuning of a lute’ – thus according with his earlier description of the prelude.

Mace continues to fill us in with the details of the ‘occasion’ of this improvisation, which he claims came to him as he contemplated one of his students, ‘a Person of an Ununiform and Inharmonical Disposition, (as to Musick)’:

And the Occasion, I conceive, might possibly contribute something towards It, which was *This. I had, at that very Instant (when I made It) an Agitation in Hand (viz. The Stringing up, and Tuning of a Lute, for a Person of an Ununiform and Inharmonical Disposition, (as to Musick;) yet in Her self well Proportion’d, Comely, and Handsome enough; and Ingenious for other Things; but for Musick very Unapt; and Learned It, only to please Her Friends, who had a great Desire she should be brought to It, if possible; but never could, to the least Good purpose; so that at the last we both grew weary; (For there is no striving against such a Stream.)*²⁵

²⁴ Mace, p.150.

²⁵ Mace, pp.150-151.

In light of my research in Chapter 1 into the body and the potential to affect its appearance through reading/performing certain texts or improvisations, it is notable that Mace describes this woman's physique as almost deceptive – her appearance is 'proportion'd, comely, and handsome', but her disposition when it comes to music is 'ununiform and inharmonical'. Perhaps the improvisation that Mace transcribes is thus a musical depiction of the woman's true nature; through the extemporary, Mace is able to make heard what her appearance belies.

He continues:

I say, *This Occasion*, possibly might be the *Cause* of this so *Inartificial a Piece*, in regard that *That Person, at that Time, was the Chief Object of my Mind, and Thoughts. I call it Inartificial; because the Chief Observation, (as to a good Performance) is wholly wanting: Yet it is True Musick, and has such a Form, and Humour, as may pass, and give Content to Many; Yet I shall never advise any to make Things Thus by Hab-Nab, without any Design, as was This: And therefore I give It That Name.*²⁶

Mace's use of 'inartificial' here is derogatory – to him, music must have artifice in order to be worthy and pleasant. His description of how 'hab-nab' came to be is thus a story of preoccupation with the student spilling into his mind and thoughts and spilling out again in his improvisation. And yet, he concedes that it is 'true musick', and that its form and humour may content many, while making it clear that he does not endorse making anything 'without design', or, 'hab-nab'.²⁷

The story concludes with a thought about the difference between composition and improvisation. Mace notes that there are many musicians who pass as composers when in fact they are merely assembling passages here and there from other people's compositions:

There are *Abundance of such Things* to be met with, and from the *Hands of some*, who fain would pass for Good Composers; yet most of them may be *Trac'd*, and upon *Examination, their Things found, only to be Snaps, and Catches*; which they (having been *long Conversant in Musick*), and can command an *Instrument*, (through *great, and long Practice*,

²⁶ Mace, p.151.

²⁷ See the OED entry for meanings of 'hab-nab', which include 'however it may turn out', 'anyhow', 'at a venture', 'at random', in *OED Online*, 'Hab, adv. (and n.)' <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/82947?redirectedFrom=hab+nab>> [accessed 6 July 2022].

some of *Them very well*) have taken here and there (Hab-Nab) from several Ayres, and Things of other Mens Works, and put them Handsomely together, which then pass for their Own Compositions.²⁸

Thus ‘hab-nab’ refers to an assemblage of musical passages put together and resulting in something ‘unpremeditated’ that falls accidentally from Mace’s lute as he is tuning. With this in mind, the piece itself, as shown in Figure 21, is perhaps less offensive than a modern reader may have imagined – with its wandering phrases, basic harmonic structure (I-V-I), and gentle atmosphere, we might be forgiven for hearing it as a ubiquitous prelude of its time.



Figure 21: Thomas Mace, *Music's Monument*, 1676, p.150.

²⁸ Mace, p.151.

Crucially, the piece challenges our ideas of the ‘wild’, ‘confused’, and ‘shapeless’ – what may seem benign and unremarkable to us was heard differently by Mace. Furthermore, if we treat this musical text as a transcription of Mace’s improvisation, we can imagine that the piece would sound quite different when brought to life and subjected to improvised timing, ornaments, and even ‘wrong’ notes and chords.

Through reading Mace’s transcriptions and narratives alongside North’s ideas about the voluntary, I propose that while my central claim – of extemporary practice and printed text existing as a series of possible relationships informed by certain key performance parameters – still holds, the exact way in which this unfolded was by no means uniform or agreed upon. For example, the practice of stitching together passages from other works was a contested one; in this case perhaps Mace’s low opinion of the practice and North’s account of its efficacy reflect their respective skills and disposition in inventing their own passages. Furthermore, even in cases where one did engage in such a practice, it may not have happened consciously – in Mace’s case of *hab-nab*, he simply made music *ex tempore* as he was tuning his lute, and ‘accidentally’ happened upon this assemblage, directly contradicting North’s statement that there is nothing accidental about improvising. In fact, according to Mace’s earlier example of his wife’s piece, everything about his extemporary process seems accidental: the improvisation reflects all the accidents of time, place, and affect that he experienced.

However, rather than pitting North and Mace against one another, I propose instead that there was no one way of demarcating and thinking of improvisation in this context. In light of my opening exploration of ‘the writ’ and ‘the liberty’, I would argue that there are many types of writ and many types of liberty at work here, in constant engagement with one another. While I will go on to explore ways in which musicians may approach Mace’s concept of ‘fancy’ in the last part of this chapter, I move now to thinking about creative ways in which we might actually mobilise ‘hab-nab’ today, by thinking of texts themselves as assemblages of passages heard elsewhere.²⁹ Such an improvisatory approach to early modern text can offer exciting possibilities of how to re-read/create texts designed to show ways of improvising (in this case, divisions on a ground), but can also be called upon when approaching musical scores more widely and contextualising them within contemporaneous extemporary practices.

²⁹ On this ‘building-block’ approach to musical improvisation, it is important to consider the similarities with musical ‘schema’, used by improvisers and story-tellers across different genres and cultures to facilitate their improvisations. On schemas in the Indian classical tradition, see Richard Widdess, ‘Schemas and improvisation in Indian music’, in Ruth Kempson, Christine Howes, and Martin Orwin (eds.), *Language, Music and Interaction* (London: College Publications, 2013), 197-209.

Text and Act: Dido, Improvising Queen

The ‘division books’ published in early modern London represent collections of printed improvisations, to be used by the musician as scores to be followed, as inspiration for their own truly ‘improvised’ divisions, or a mixture of both. John Walsh’s *Division Flute* (1706)³⁰ was published twenty-three years after John Playford’s first edition of his *Division Violin* (1684),³¹ and features many of the same pieces, transposed up a third for the recorder.

Playford himself is unclear about where he got these divisions from, writing in the preface to his second edition: ‘Having for some Years stored my self with a Collection of several Choice Divisions for the Violin upon a Ground, A Consort of Musick which do not require many hands to perform; knowing how acceptable and useful this would be to Practitioners in Musick, I have now with no small Pains and Charge made the same publick.’³² The pieces are simple in form: the repeated bass line that runs through is overlaid with a melody part (for violin, or, in the case of the *Division Flute*, for recorder) which is varied each time it repeats, usually (but not always) increasing in complexity.

Readings Ground, reproduced in Figure 22 from Walsh’s print, illustrates the genre well: the ‘Ground Bass’ at the bottom of the page is played repeatedly while the recorder ‘improvises’ the printed divisions over the top. We can see that the set of divisions ends with four rounds of a new topic (the last sixteen bars of the melody part), marked in Playford’s version as a ‘Jigg’, and that before that there are sixteen four-bar sections.

³⁰ *The First and Second Part of the Division Flute, Containing The Newest Divisions upon the Choisest Grounds for the Flute as also Several Excellent Preludes Chacon’s and Cibells*, London printed for Walsh, 1706 <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/5/58/IMSLP79264-PMLP160577-versao_final.pdf> [accessed 13 March 2022].

³¹ *The Division-Violin: containing A Collection of Divisions upon several Grounds for the Treble-Violin, Being the first Musick of this kind made Publick. The Second Edition, much enlarged* London, Printed on Copper-Plates, and sold By John Playford near the Temple Church, 1685 <https://s9.imslp.org/files/imglnks/usimg/4/42/IMSLP96722-PMLP198850-Playford_John-division_violin.pdf> [13 March 2022].

³² *The Division Violin*, p.1.

Readings Ground 1

Ground Bass

Figure 22: 'Readings Ground', The Division Flute, Playford: London 1706, p.1.

Following the descriptions of Mace and North, we might imagine that each four-bar module could be used interchangeably. The nature and intended uses of the piece challenges the narrative fixity of its presentation in a printed score. Going a little further, we may also imagine that the modules could be interchanged and/or exchanged with the performer's own improvised divisions, either for one or more rounds of the bass. With this approach, we can start to use printed divisions as a bank of musical ideas on which the improviser could draw, considering the score merely as an example of one route that could be taken by a performer in a single performance.

Such an analytic method takes an approach similar to creating a 'choose your adventure' book out of a through-written novel, and recalls Laurence Dreyfus's model of 'paradigmatic' analysis developed with regard to the music of J.S. Bach. Dreyfus proposes that we imagine pieces of music not as 'static objects' but 'as a residue of human thoughts and actions', taking the historical notion of 'invention' as a tool with which to unpack the actions of the composer (in his case, J.S. Bach) and to build a picture of some of the possible actions they could have taken – and thus consider what they did *not* do as well as what they did. Taking an approach grounded in rhetoric, Dreyfus explores not only the musical transformations that are available to the composer, but also considers how they arranged these transformations to form the final narrative of the piece, hearing it in rhetorical terms as an act of *dispositio*.³³

Rather than tracing compositional actions and the notion of compositional disposition in this way, I propose to try and go back to the moment just before improvisation, when a performer had some textual tools available to them and was about to make their own 'version' of the piece. Such a process would consider how notation may represent rhetorical devices at the point of performance, rather than seeking to unravel the minutiae of 'composed' melodic figuration, which I suggest is incidental to the underlying paradigms that guide the improviser. This approach is grounded in a historical understanding of how early modern English writers such as Thomas Mace and Roger North theorised improvised practices such as 'hab-nab', or a knitting together of pre-contrived materials that the musician may choose to perform in a different order, with a different measure, and in a different key.

This model of reading and performing a text recalls my earlier explorations of extemporary theatre practices. As I noted above, scholars such as Richard Andrews have analysed

³³ Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Patterns of Invention* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

Shakespeare's *Tempest* as a 'version' of some pre-existent scenes for improvisation, or 'theatergrams', as Andrews calls them. We can perhaps imagine that the relationship between Shakespeare's text and the corresponding scenes or paradigms that appear in the 1611 collection of actor-manager Flaminio Scala, are similar to that of printed divisions and the original bass line and opening theme that they elaborate. Excitingly considering such a practice in the context of such a canonic work as Shakespeare's *Tempest* can have broader implications for our approach to musical scores more generally; it draws attention to moments in early modern musical texts that are now generally considered to be 'fixed', and instead of simply asserting that they may represent an improvisatory process, calls for moments of contemporary improvisation.

As a case study, I take Purcell's opera *Dido and Aeneas* Z.626, and focus on Dido's famous lament (see Figure 23) as a place to experiment with an extemporary approach to text, as well as a place to listen to some of the connections between gender, coloniality and improvisation that I explored in Chapters 2 and 3.³⁴ Purcell's opera tells the ancient tale of Queen Dido of Carthage who falls in love with the Roman traveller Aeneas, and takes her own life after he abandons both her and their affair in favour of continuing his empire-building mission. In the famous scene of Dido's lament (Act 3), the queen sings over eleven repetitions of the well-known ostinato bass that consists of a chromatic falling fourth 'lament' bass followed by a cadence.

While there is no shortage of modern-day analyses of Dido's lament, here I consider to what extent it is significant that her aria is written as a ground, and to what extent she *is* the ground, as an analogue for the natural world. In light of some of my earlier explorations, it is perhaps not of little consequence that the Queen of a 'foreign' empire represented onstage in seventeenth-century London would express the height of her passion through the ground bass, so close to the earth in which she would soon be laid. Notwithstanding Purcell's role in composing a work in a traditionally improvised genre, the work's popular associations as 'Dido's lament' almost position her as composer/improviser rather than performer of his music – even though the notes are dictated in the score, we might reimagine a completely different set of divisions over the same repeating bass line.

³⁴ The opera was written no later than July 1688, according to Bryan White's reading of a letter by Rowland Sherman from Aleppo, Syria, that mentions Purcell's work. See Bryan White, 'Letter from Aleppo: dating the Chelsea School performance of *Dido and Aeneas*', *Early Music*, Vol. xxxvii, No. 3 (2009), 417-428.



Figure 23: Henry Purcell, 'Dido's lament', Dido & Aeneas. Copyist's MS, 1778. Juilliard Manuscript Collection.³⁵

Early modern depictions of Dido (or Elissa, as she was known interchangeably) in England do not start or end with Henry Purcell – Christopher Marlowe's had reimagined her in his play *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (c.1593), Shakespeare evokes her in *The Tempest*,³⁶ and twentieth-century singers such as London-born 'Dido' (Florian Cloud de Bouneville O'Malley Armstrong) and the Lebanese singer Elissa would all take inspiration from her in different ways.

I propose that Dido's ground can be rethought within the extemporary contexts of early modern England that I have explored in my thesis. As the expression of her despair at this moment, the environment, her feelings and sensory experiences are all evoked through her performance, rendering her body the 'text' that she reads to her death. In Chapter 2, I explored the effects of travel on improvisation, and descriptions of people improvising abroad; here Dido's improvisations are inextricable from her status as a Carthaginian queen, and the song she sings is surely reflective of the 'air' and environmental factors her body has imbibed through living there.

This brings us to the question of nature and its othering, often through colonial means. I have mentioned already the coincidences between a musical 'ground' and the ground on which we walk, the earth in which Dido's body would be laid. And there are so many symbolic references to other contemporaneous depictions of improvising creatures in the natural world; to take Strada's nightingale in Chapter 3 as an example, we see a striking parallel between the

³⁵ *Dido and Aeneas, a Masque by Henry Purcell, 1677*

<https://juilliardmanuscriptcollection.org/ajaxzoom/single.php?zoomDir=/pic/juilliard/PURC_DIDO&zoomFile=> [accessed 13 March 2022].

³⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 2, II.1, 1.75-99, pp.131-132.

nightingale's body being absorbed by the lute, and Dido's body being absorbed by the ground. Only it is perhaps unclear which ground it is that has subsumed her; is it the earth, or is it the musical form? In some senses, it may be that Purcell's ground bass marshals her into a correct and orderly form of musical improvisation, much as the lutenist hoped to curtail the nightingale's wild and free divisions. Ultimately, we are once again asked to reckon with the contradictory freedoms and bounds of musical improvisation in early modern England; between the writ, and the liberty.

To the 'historically-informed' performer encountering Dido's lament, I therefore suggest that the various intersecting histories of the extemporary I have explored have a bearing on the way in which improvisation might be mobilised here. The options for a performer might, in fact, be endless. My recording of the piece (track 13 on *from the bounds of the sky*) is just one example. We might follow Purcell's text to the letter; we might adopt the method of 'hab-nab' and cobble together some alternative divisions heard from other sources; we may become overtaken by thoughts of Dido and let our fancy take over, as Thomas Mace describes; we may improvise freely and wildly as we heard the nightingale did; we may even somehow attain Mace's 'unlimited and unbounded Liberty' in the process. As I suggested earlier, the relationship between early modern text and extemporary practice can be said to have existed in constant shifting relations to one another, the result of combining the various parameters that make up an improvised performance, changing on each occasion.

The examples and case studies of improvised performances that have arisen throughout my thesis have all existed in separate and various relationships to different parameters of environment/humour/sensory experience/fancy, as have my own performances on the accompanying recordings. When I suggest ways to reimagine Dido, it is thus impossible to prescribe any one way to do so in writing or notation, since the reimagination will be largely dependent on the particular factors at play in the moment of performance. My recording thus exists as one version of the possible interactions between parameters, brought together through my performance and the tools available to me in that moment: my body, instrument, texts, space, and imagination. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that recordings still 'fix' a version, or even sonically print a particular narrative of events (and imprint those on a listener). In this regard, perhaps we could think of 'printing' as a much broader category, encompassing not only ways of affixing ink to paper but including all attempts to notate the same thing in the same way

multiple times. It is in fact not merely a mechanical process but a way to reconceive relationships between the body and the world, externalising and determining processes of embodied memory.

Thus, as I explore further in the creative reflection at the end of my thesis, when I offer my own ‘versions’ of the bee’s improvisation, of Jacob van Eyck’s English nightingale, or Dido’s lament, it is important to recognise that they are precisely that: versions. The nature of a thesis is that it is written, recorded, and fixed, and for this reason I ask the reader to mobilise their own improvisatory powers, when reading – or listening – to my work.

My example above of Dido’s improvisation requires a certain use of creative imagination, or perhaps what Thomas Mace would call ‘fancy’. Any reimagination of Dido’s lament might lead to telling a different story about her; an alternative narrative about her death and its causes. This mobilisation of the historical imagination has been present in various forms throughout my thesis, and in fact I suggest that it is necessary for the study of improvisation practices, as we reimagine extemporary practices and the alternative narratives and stories they may uncover. In identifying these processes of reimagination throughout my thesis, I have proposed an ‘extemporary imagination’, that might offer new ways of imagining historically, reconceptualising histories, and improvising musically in the present moment.

By way of a brief example, let us go back to my previous chapter’s bee, caught in the moment of nectar pursuit. Let us imagine that the bee is about to alight on the flower, and that both insect and plant exist in the potential that their union may bring about. At this moment, the bee’s buzz and the flower’s ‘ears’ guide the improvised encounter; the bee finding the right buzz frequency for the particular flower, and the flower tuning in to the buzz. The bee’s sonic performance is a unique expression of its present moment of relation to the flower, and the flower’s disposition is altered by the sonic presence of the bee – they exist in a state of reciprocity. Broadly speaking, their encounter is one of improvisation: a series of interactions between bee, flower, and all aspects of their environment that could only exist in that particular order and at that particular time.

If we historicise the bee, and imagine it through early modern perceptions, we might add a further layer to the scene and propose that the bee’s buzz is formed through the marks of its past histories; its previous flowers; its earlier flights. These processes by which I have imagined the hypothetical bee and flower do not only reconceptualise ways of listening to nature or trying

to re-imagine historical ears, but, I suggest, also require a certain type of improvisation themselves. It is this nature of re-imagined improvisation narratives that I describe as the ‘extemporary imagination’; a way of entering into the ‘live-ness’ of improvisation and recalling moments of presence while maintaining historical understandings. This type of time-travel becomes particularly useful for applying historical research to historical performance practice, as my recordings throughout the thesis have attempted to illustrate.

Conclusion

This chapter has made two broad arguments in relation to its particular explorations, but also more widely within the materials my thesis has presented in the previous three chapters. My first finding is that it is impossible to fully consider or understand early modern musical texts in isolation from knowledge about extemporary processes and practices. In fact, I suggest that extemporary practice and printed text exist in a series of possible relationships that are constructed through other performance parameters such as the performer’s state and disposition, and other sensory and environmental factors.

The second notion I have proposed in this chapter is that of the extemporary imagination, a category of imagination allowing us to reconceptualise music histories and ‘historically informed’ processes of improvisation. While my thesis has situated itself within early modern England and in the contexts of body, nature, and encounter with the Islamic(ate)/Ottoman world, it represents merely one ‘version’ of how improvisation might be mobilised to think and perform differently. Ultimately, what the reader of this thesis does with the information and ideas set down in it, will depend on the parameters of their own environments, histories, and senses.

CONCLUSION

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Not *otherwise*, as in, the political horizon awaits; *otherwise* as in, a firm embrace of the unknowable; the unknowable as in, a well of infinity I want us to fall down together.¹

The practice and field of ‘historical performance’² might seem to trade in the ‘unknowable’. In fact, the problems of a movement that seemingly places emphasis on historical ‘reconstruction’ or ‘authenticity’ are well-rehearsed within HP.³

In my own work I have made no attempts to know the unknowable. Instead, in Lola Olufemi’s words, I choose to ‘embrace’ it. To ask how the speculative pursuit of reimagining historical improvisation could foster an imaginative will to fall down a well of infinity together; how it could ‘result in more liberatory performances of early music’.⁴ Through researching processes of early modern improvisation, I believe we can experiment with practices of imagination that challenge the linear historicity of past-present-future, rendering ‘historical improvisation’ more broadly a mode of making music that is alive to the multiple past and present contexts of its performers and performances.

Additionally, researching historical improvisation practices has enabled me to uncover alternative stories of early modern English music history, situating my musical research within histories of the body, sounds of nature, Anglo-Ottoman relations, and the colonality of the travelogue. I argue that these contexts are not disconnected from our current socio-political realities as musicians improvising in the twenty-first century. It is my hope that my work may pave the way for historically informed musicians to become politically engaged in our music-making, understanding the histories that inform the music we make, and turning to improvisation as a way to create music that is alive with the possibilities of new futures. It is important also to acknowledge work that has been done on engaging the early music movement in more critical and racially/colonially/politically literate ways. Geoffrey Baker’s article of 2008 focussed on

¹ Lola Olufemi, *Experiments in Imagining Otherwise* (Maidstone: Hajar Press, 2021), p.7.

² NB throughout this thesis I have used the terms historical performance and historically informed performance (and their acronyms HP/HIP) interchangeably.

³ For example, see Nicholas Kenyon, *Authenticity and Early Music: A Symposium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁴ Kailan R. Rubinoff, ‘(Re)creating the Past: Baroque Improvisation in the Early Music Revival’, *New Sound* 32, Special issue on improvisation, ed. by Marcel Cobussen and Mira Veselinovic- Hofman, (Spring 2009) <https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/f/K_Rubinoff_Recreating_2009.pdf> [accessed 17 March 2022]

Latin American baroque music to call on Philip Bohlman's description of musicology as a political act, urging practitioners of early music 'to transform performance into a post-colonial act'.⁵ While I would argue for a practice that is *anti-* or *de-*colonial rather than simply 'post', this article was an important moment of reckoning for performers engaging with the colonial legacies of baroque music. Olivia Bloechl's 2015 essay on the critical study of race in early modern European music has also made waves of change in the landscape of early modern music histories and racial literacy,⁶ while Kailan Rubinoff's chapter on 1968 situates the early music movement within counter-cultures and political protest, shedding light on a much-neglected part of the history of the early music movement that deserves much more study.⁷ More recently, Melodie Michel⁸ and Eric Lubarsky⁹ have contributed PhD dissertations on early music and Latin America, and modalities of living and HP, respectively.

These calls for more critical and politically-engaged models of HP have been reflected by musical projects that embrace a more cross-cultural perspectives. Jordi Savall and Hespèrion XXI must of course be mentioned here, along with cross-collaborative albums such as *Istanbul* (2009) *Armenian Spirit* (2012), *The Routes of Slavery* (2017), and *Ibn Battuta, The Traveller of Islam* (2019). Additionally, groups such as the Pera Ensemble have specialised in historical music of the Ottoman empire, while Saraband and soprano Fadia el-Hage present performances of J.S. Bach that highlight some of the connections between Arabic classical music and Western baroque music.

Inspired by some of the alternative histories sought out through these cross-cultural collaborative recordings, throughout this thesis, I have grappled with the types of histories we consider relevant to historical musicology, and that we consider informant to 'historically informed performance.' During the writing of this thesis, I started teaching a new course on historical improvisation at the Royal College of Music in London. I designed the course at the end of 2019, with the intention of exploring 'historical improvisation both as a practical skill and as a way to explore some of the histories by which we are usually *not* informed as historically

⁵ Geoffrey Baker, 'Latin American Baroque: Performance as a Post- Colonial Act?', *Early Music*, Vol.36, Issue 3 (August 2008), 447.

⁶ Olivia Bloechl, 'Race, Empire, and Early Music', in Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg (eds.), *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), pp.77-107.

⁷ Kailan R. Rubinoff, 'A revolution in sheep's wool stockings: early music and "1968"' in Beate Kutschke and Barley Norton (eds.), *Music and Protest in 1968* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp.237-55.

⁸ Melodie Michel, 'Early Music and Latin America: Transhistorical Views on the Coloniality of Sound', PhD dissertation, UC Santa Cruz, 2021.

⁹ Eric Lubarsky, 'Reviving Early Music: Metaphors and Modalities of Life and Living in Historically Informed Performance', PhD dissertation, Eastman School of Music, 2017.

informed performers.’ The rest of the course description echoed some of the central concerns of my thesis topic:

You will learn to improvise over some popular repeating bass lines of the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries, studying historical texts alongside contemporary theory to re-imagine how the notion of ‘history’ is constructed, and how that intersects with the present-ness of performance and improvisation. The course aims to inspire you to form inclusive understandings of creativity, history, and identity, encouraging you to create your own historical archive that informs your music-making, and to think critically about your role as a ‘historically-informed’ musician in today’s society.

However, by the time I started teaching, the decision was taken to move teaching online due to Covid-19. As we worked our way through the course texts I had carefully selected and paired with historical musical materials for improvisation, the strain and disconnect caused by constant news of illness and death, the weight of transnational grief, internet issues, the difficulties of improvising online, and the impossibility of improvising collectively made me question further the way I was using ‘history’ in my practice. Why were we all making such a concerted effort not to include our present circumstances in the intensely personal practice of improvisation? How could our imaginations not be implicated in such a practice? And what kinds of histories inevitably kept making their ways into our archives, or being left out?

As I sit now writing this conclusion with just over a month to go before my final submission date, I am teaching the same course again. This time we meet in person, we sit in a circle, we get our instruments out and we make music together. In this practical setting, improvisation clearly presents itself as a way to imagine otherwise – to think musically against the grain of a classical conservatoire training that prizes perfection, to unpick the authority of a written score. It also challenges the histories we choose to study and by which we are informed, asking whose voices are left unwritten in any given text.

My thesis has asked how we can use different kinds of histories to inform our improvisation, rather than propose that any kind of reconstruction of how ‘historical’ improvisation sounded might be possible. On the contrary, I believe that this former approach imbues improvisation with the potential to transform the field of historical performance more broadly. By approaching historical improvisation in this way, I believe that the field of historical performance might become an exciting area for creatively developing critical-historical perspectives that can bring

multiple current contexts into dialogue with the texts we encounter, resulting in historical re-conceptualisation and reimagination.

EPILOGUE: ALBUM LINER NOTES

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bulbul: a solo recorder album

Bülbül. Nightingale. The migrating bird, suspended between skies: never home, always on her way there. The bird who sings to the rose, the soul that yearns for the divine. The bird who suffers injustice and is given a new tongue. This album takes inspiration from the stories of the nightingale to imagine different ways they might sound through the recorder. The proximity of birdsong to the sound of the recorder is evident, yet here I use it to push at the boundaries of how the recorder is meant to sound; the stories it is meant to tell, the histories it is meant to embody.

Track List

Asfour tal men el shebbak (Marcel Khalife) [3:24]
Division by Mr Gorton (from The Division Flute, 1706) [01:37]
Semaii Huseyni (Ali Ufki) [01:59]
Engels Nachtegaeltje (Jacob van Eyck) [04:50]
Zourouni [01:50]
Improvisation: The Bee [03:56]
A Chantar (Beatriz de Dia) [03:46]
Partita in C minor, BWV 1013/In Damascus (J.S. Bach/Mahmoud Darwish) [04:58]
Ya Shady el-alhan [03:08]
Free Improvisation: Home [01:59]
Istanpitta Tre Fontane [04:05]
Ya Tayr el Werwar [01:56]
Dido's Lament [03:03]

Total playing time: [37:12]

Improvisation: how we live now; the way creativity seeks freedom; an alternative way to imagine the world. The way I relate to you across an ocean of difference. A mode of listening; a rhythm of breathing. The song of the nightingale, the buzz of the bee, the opening of a flower. How I read texts, and how you write my thoughts. The communities we dream to find, the cities and sonicities we dream to inhabit.

Asfour tal men el shebbak

This song is about a bird who comes to the window and asks to be hidden.

Where is he from? The neighbour's house, the bounds of the sky.

What is he scared of? The cage that he fled.

Where are his feathers? Time has ravaged them.

It is a song about a bird's freedom, but about other freedoms too: the freedom of everyone who has escaped a cage, and who remains incarcerated in one; our freedom to live under the sky, within her bounds. The freedom to recognise our interconnectedness: how birds in the sky are in community with neighbours living side-by-side, how the trees and the stars yearn to meet, residing alongside us within the skies. We recorded this track in total darkness.

Division by Mr Gorton

Playing these solo divisions from *The Division Flute* (London, 1706) feels like an example of how one should improvise; playing out the movements of someone else's body before you. I wonder, how do you re-inhabit this space, once it's already been mapped out in the text? Is it a matter of timing, articulation, playfulness – trying to put the extemporary back in, imagining the improvisation that inspired someone to write it down?

Ali Ufki, Semaii Huseyni

This piece is from a collection that represents the earliest-known example of Ottoman music notation, the *Mecmuâ-I Sâz u Söz* (c.1650). The book was compiled by Ali Ufki (c.1610-1675), born in Poland as Wojciech Bobowski and known as a court musician and interpreter in the early modern Istanbul court. His music collection contains instrumental and vocal music from court and folk genres ordered according to their *maqamat* (modes). While these pieces of music are notated and not necessarily representative of improvised music, they form an important source for the understanding for music of this period from Turkey, Egypt, and the Levant, and their

presence should disrupt the Eurocentrism of ‘baroque’ music-making today. I wanted to imagine the effects of this music being brought to England from Turkey by English travellers in the seventeenth century, what it would have sounded like on an instrument like the recorder. This re-imagining also took me away from the score, free to take ‘liberties’ and create my own version of this music.

Jacob van Eyck, Engels Nachtegaeltje

The improvised divisions of renaissance Dutch recorder-player Jacob van Eyck (c.1590-1657) are well-known to recorder players. This set of improvised variations takes a popular English song about the nightingale as its theme, and the recorder’s proximity to birdsong melts into the proximity of the printed text to transcription.

Zourouni

This song is by the Egyptian composer Sayyed Darwish (1892-1923), and known to me (and many others) as sung by Fairuz. The title means ‘visit me’, and the refrain repeats it over and over, tinging the otherwise optimistic melody with melancholy. This recording is just one version of the song imagined on solo recorder.

Improvisation: The Bee

I improvise here with a sample of a queen bee ‘piping’, the sound she makes when it is time to swarm. One of the inspirations for this track is a beekeeping treatise by a seventeenth-century beekeeper called Charles Butler, in which he notated the piping song, exactly as it sounds here. In the 1632 edition of his book *The Feminine Monarchie*, Butler writes that ‘in the Bees Song are the grounds of Musicke’, alluding to the song of the bee as the ground (repeating bass line) of music. I wanted to re-imagine what we could do as historically informed musicians with this historical text – how we could perform our own musical improvisations today over the ground bass of the bee. This track also takes inspiration from other musicians who have recorded music-making with natural sounds, for example Beatrice Harrison’s cello duet with a nightingale in 1927, and more recently, Sam Lee’s collaborations with nightingales.

A Chantar

This song by Beatriz de Dia (c.1160-1212) is known for being the only *canço* by a trobaritz (female troubadour) that exists with its music intact. The music for *A Chantar* is found in *Le manuscript di roi*, a collection of songs copied around 1270 for Charles of Anjou, the brother of Louis IX. The lyrics of this poem cast her as a betrayed lover, and in performing the song without words, I use my own voice, trapped in the recorder as a drone, to evoke her frustration and betrayal.

J.S. Bach, Partita BWV 1013: Allemande

The pairing of J.S. Bach's Partita and Mahmoud Darwish's *In Damascus* is one that happened naturally for me. I learned to play this Partita in Damascus in 2010 – the first and only trip I made there. Years later when I first read Darwish's poem 'In Damascus', it had a violin soundtrack accompanying his reading. I longed to replace it with this movement, to respond to Darwish's sampled stanza about the revolving dialogues between violin and oud with the revolving semiquavers of Bach's Allemande, to imagine them both together despite the huge gap between both worlds.

In Damascus:

Dialogues revolve

Between violin and 'oud

About the question of wujud (existence)

And about the endings...

(my translation)

In advance of the recording, we made a loop of the Palestinian author Mahmoud Darwish reading a stanza from his poem *Fe Dimishq (In Damascus)*. My intention has been to play the Allemande over the top of the reading, to respond to it with my recorder, to dialogue with the poem about the question of existence and improvise the endings with my breath and phrasing. I am grateful to the Mahmoud Darwish Foundation in Ramallah, Palestine, for granting me permission to use this sample of Darwish's voice.

Ya Shady el-Alhan

Composed by the Egyptian composer Sayyed Darwish (1892-1923), this song's title calls upon Shady 'of the melodies' to make music. To me it's a song about singing, about finding community with others through sound (how I first got to know the piece), and about how we choose songs. This was the first song we recorded, and it set the tone of the album in some ways, allowing me to feel my way around the space and my instrument.

Free Improvisation: Home

Recording improvisation is always some form of contradiction; by attempting to fix and capture something, some of the improvisatory quality is lost. Yet it was important to me to include some free improvisation on the album too, while acknowledging that some parameters are lost here – that of the audience, the space, the extraneous sounds that always make up an improvisation. Perhaps your (the listener's) space and surroundings as you listen to this track will add yet another layer to the improvisation. You too are an active part of the music.

Istanpitta: Tre Fontane

Listening to this piece is what made me originally want to learn the recorder. To my ears, the piece seemed to inhabit so many different worlds – and in fact, several scholars have commented on the incongruity of the istanpitta dances within contemporaneous fourteenth-century repertoires, and their proximity to elements of Turkish and Arabic music.¹⁰ I have enjoyed playing with this ambiguity and overlap, as well as with the rhythms made from my breath that underlay the track.

Ya Tayr el-Werwar

The third and last 'bird song' on this album, composed by Elias Rahbani (1938-2021), sung by Fairuz, and reimagined here on recorder. The song takes place in the sky, flying with the bird on their way to greet the singer's loved ones and ask how they are...

¹⁰ The use of Arabic music performance (and improvisation) traditions in HP has characterised a great deal of medieval music practice. For accounts of how performers of medieval music cultivated an 'Arabic' sound and aesthetic in the absence of a Western 'living tradition', see John Haines, 'The Arabic Style of Performing Medieval Music', *Early Music*, Vol.29, Issue 3 (August 2001), 369-380, Jonathan Shull, 'Locating the Past in the Present: Living Traditions and the Performance of Early Music', *Ethnomusicology Forum*, Vol.15, No.1 (June 2006), 87-111 (100 – for particular discussion of improvisation), and Kirsten Yri, 'Thomas Binkley and the Studio der Frühen Musik: Challenging 'the Myth of Westernness'', *Early Music*, Vol.38, Issue 2 (May 2010), 273-280.

Dido's Lament

The ground bass of Dido's Lament is well-known, as is the story of Dido the Queen of Carthage who falls to her own death after being abandoned by Aeneas. My recreation of this song re-imagines it from the bottom up, layering bass lines and singing distractedly over them with multiple voices. I wanted to ask, what does it mean to perform such grief? And despite the historical origin of the song, how could we not use it as a place to sing of our own griefs? I take the composer Henry Purcell's original song as an example of how he imagined her to sound at this moment, and use the bass line that he composed her improvisations over as the basis for my own improvised song. There is something grounding about a ground bass. It brings us close to the earth, its smell and its feel under our feet. Perhaps this is why so much music from so many different contexts use a repeating bass-line, the comfort and earthiness is a way of making music that plants us. And throughout this album I have found myself outside, in nature, under the sky, and so the earth seems a natural place to stop.

Fatima Lahham is an improvising recorder player. She has performed all over the UK and Europe, both as a soloist and with collaborators. Fatima's music-making takes inspiration from medieval to contemporary music, Fairuz, birdsong, politics, and the idea of home. Her aim is to tell stories about what is not being heard, that push at the boundaries of the imagination to create new worlds. www.fatimalahham.com

Recorder & Voice: Fatima Lahham

Recording Producer & Sound Engineer, Myles Eastwood

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