

## Charles Ives and Gender Ideology

Judith Tick

*A leopard went around his cage from one side back to the other side; he stopped only when the keeper came around with meat; A boy who had been there three hours began to wonder, "Is life anything like that?"*  
Charles Ives, "The Cage"

Among twentieth-century American male composers, Charles Ives stands out as the prime example of an artist who ascribed a masculine ideal to music. His famous description of the birth of music—how "it's going to be a boy—some time!"<sup>1</sup> typifies the emotional investment he had in that ideal. Many people who knew Ives remembered his destructive bursts of anger, his redundant harangues on a few themes; many of us who read the *Memos* feel under the volcano.<sup>2</sup> Ives's various writings about music present the most extraordinary use of gendered aesthetics in the public testimony of an American composer.

How are we to understand Ives's language of prejudice? What is its function and meaning in his musical thought? In the last fifteen years, some answers have been suggested by biographers and psychoanalytically oriented historians and critics; those interpretations will be briefly surveyed here. My own goal, however, is to try to understand Ives by exploring the context of his language within the framework of gender scholarship: historically, by discussing the literature on American women and music from the period, and theoretically, by using gender as an analytic prism through which other ideas and values are refracted.<sup>3</sup> Like

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<sup>1</sup> Charles E. Ives, *Memos*, ed. John Kirkpatrick (New York, 1972), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> This phrase borrows the title of a novel by Malcolm Lowry. For one such harangue from Ives, see the Lehman Engel interview in Vivian Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered* (New York, 1967), p. 195; for another, see John Kirkpatrick's comments in Ives, *Memos*, p. 280.

<sup>3</sup> An excellent overview of the current theoretical literature on music and gender is Ellen Koskoff, "An Introduction to Women, Music, and Culture," in Ellen Koskoff, ed.,

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the concepts of race and class, that of gender can encompass multiple meanings, not only "the social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes" but also a "primary way of signifying relationships of power."<sup>4</sup> I hope to show, first, that Ives inherited both a social grammar of prejudice and an ideology of gender differences in art;<sup>5</sup> and, second, that through these Ives expressed other kinds of meanings and values.

The earliest and perhaps still the most influential interpretation is that offered by Frank Rossiter, Ives's third biographer.<sup>6</sup> Rossiter argues that "the connotation of effeminacy that art music had for Americans in the nineteenth century . . . is a crucially important means of approaching Charles Ives as a composer."<sup>7</sup> At the time (the mid 1970s) this analysis was not only provocative but brave. For one thing, with women's studies still in the early stages of development, few academics acknowledged gender as a viable historical variable, whereas Rossiter structured the argument of his book around it.<sup>8</sup> For another, Rossiter was exploring a darker side

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*Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Westport, Conn., 1987), pp. 1–24. See also Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1067.

<sup>5</sup> The concept of a "social grammar of prejudice," to be distinguished from ideology as a belief system, is developed by sociologists Gertrude J. Selznick and Stephen Steinberg: "As has been frequently remarked, people become prejudiced not by becoming acquainted with Jews, but by becoming acquainted with the prejudiced beliefs current in their environment. From the perspective of linguistics, prejudice is a social grammar. Every language has rules, most of them implicit, for the use of adjectives. A man is handsome, a woman beautiful; rooms are long and narrow, people tall and thin. Any prejudice, including anti-Semitism, can similarly be viewed as a set of implicit rules specifying which adjectives are relevant or appropriately applied to which groups: Negroes are lazy, Irish are drunkards, Scots are stingy . . . . It would be a mistaken view of prejudice, and its viability, to define only a false ascription as prejudice. Above all else, a prejudiced ascription is a differential ascription: the same trait may be as applicable to one group as to another, yet it is applied only to one." (*The Tenacity of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in Contemporary America* [New York 1969], p. 20.) The notion of "gender ideology" is defined in Koskoff, "An Introduction," p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Frank R. Rossiter, *Charles Ives and His America* (New York, 1975); this book was based on Rossiter's dissertation, "Charles Ives and American Culture: The Process of Development, 1874–1921," Princeton University, 1970. The first biography was Henry Cowell and Sidney Cowell, *Charles Ives and His Music* (New York, 1955), and the second David Woolldridge, *From the Steeples and Mountains: A Study of Charles Ives* (New York, 1974).

<sup>7</sup> Rossiter, *Charles Ives and His America*, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> This point about the structure of Rossiter's argument is made by Betty E. M. Chmaj in "'Reality Is on Our Side': Research on Gender in American Music," *Sonneck Society Bulletin* 16 (1990): 53–58. See also her observation about the "lack of recognition . . . of the role of [Ives's] wife" in Rossiter's biography ("Sonata for American Studies: Perspectives on Charles Ives," in Jack Salzman, ed., *Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies* 4 [1979], p. 52 n. 7).

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of this composer who was celebrated—perhaps even glorified—for his Emersonian transcendentalism.

Some of Rossiter's evidence comes from *Essays Before a Sonata* and the "Postscript to the 114 Songs," both published in 1921. For example, in the *Essays* the connection between Substance as masculine and Manner as effeminate is made explicit in an attack on the Liberace-like deportment of virtuoso pianists, with "their cissy-like postures over the piano keys."<sup>9</sup> Other citations in the dissertation draw, from the then-unpublished *Memos*, a set of caricatures of classical-music critics, such as "Rollo" and "Aunty," and a shocking level of invective based on sexual stereotypes:

Rollos—resting all their nice lives on, and now hiding behind, their silk skirts—too soft-eared and [-]minded to find anything out for themselves. Their old aunt (for her old aunt had told her) told Nattie when he was youthful: "This is a masterpiece—this is a great artist"—it has the same effect on their heads that customs stamps have on their trunks. Every thing *that* man did is "great" because they were *told* so when young and grew up with it hanging around their nice necks, and every thing *this* man did is "no good"—whether or not they have ever seen any of his pictures has nothing to do with it—Aunt put the bangle on his vest and it sticks there as a cobweb sticks to the pigsty window.

It has never entered their pretty heads—or even to sit down near the bangle for twenty, thirty, or fifty years or so, and hear anything out themselves, or think anything hard and long—it has never occurred to them—and how cross they would get, and scold and caper around peevish-like in their columns, if anyone should happen to say that music has always been an emasculated art—at least too much—say 88 2/3 %.

Even those considered the greatest (Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, etc.) have too much of it, though less [than] the other rubber-stamp great men. They couldn't exactly help it—life with them was such that they had to live at least part of the time by the ladies' smiles—they had to please the ladies or die. And that is the reason—through their influence—that no one can prove (not even the ladies) that there has been [any] great music ever composed—that is, in this world. And this is not [so much] criticising or running down or under-appreciating Beethoven, Bach, et al, as it [is] a respect and wonder that they didn't do worse under the circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "The pose of self-absorption which some men in the advertising business (and incidentally in the recital and composing business) put into their photographs or the portraits of themselves, while all dolled up in their purple-dressing-gowns, in their twofold wealth of golden hair, in their cissy-like postures over the piano keys—this pose of 'manner' sometimes sounds out so loud that the more their music is played, the less it is heard." (Charles Ives, *Essays Before a Sonata and Other Writings*, ed. Howard Boatwright [New York, 1970], p. 78.)

<sup>10</sup> This excerpt appears in Rossiter's dissertation, "Charles Ives and American Culture," pp. 59–60; it is taken from the *Memos*, p. 30. However, Rossiter's biography does

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The emotional affect of Ives's prose was so intense, and the metaphors so sexual, that if Ives had been female Rossiter might have diagnosed him as hysterical. Perhaps Ives's "mercurial excitability," as John Kirkpatrick has called it,<sup>11</sup> impelled Rossiter to the second, more speculative, stage of his argument. According to Rossiter, Ives divided music into two great opposing camps. One, the cultivated tradition, was "effeminate, aristocratic, pretentious, easy on the ears, commercial and lacking in ideals in spite of its pretensions, only rarely breaking its bondage to women"; the other, the vernacular tradition, Ives saw as "masculine, democratic, down to earth, fervent, speaking to men of the substance of their daily lives." In Ives's writings Rossiter hears "the outcries of wounded manhood against an effeminate musical culture in which he feared he had become entangled."<sup>12</sup>

After citing various historians on the important role of women in American musical life, and the implications of effeminacy attached to the arts, Rossiter moves from "effeminacy" to "emasculatation," as if these were synonyms. To take but two examples, he declares that Charles's father, George Ives, was "emasculated" in front of his son by two music teachers in Danbury who neglected to give George credit for helping them arrange a concert for the YMCA; and that Charles "had his own emasculatation to worry about as well . . . when he was compelled . . . to venture into a field dominated by women." For instance, "when he was twelve, he appeared in a recital, [performing] a tarantella by Heller on a program that also included Lange's 'Chirping Crickets' and Behr's 'Fire-Balls' Mazurka."<sup>13</sup>

Building on such extravagant interpretations, Rossiter proposes a theory of emotive displacement as the first cause of Ives's modernism:

Instead of his having first rejected cultivated-tradition music on aesthetic and moral grounds . . . and then having attached connotations of effeminacy to what he had already rejected, it appears that the actual process was just the reverse: he first rejected such music for its sociosexual implications of effeminacy, and only then did he develop an aesthetic and moral rationale for that rejection. Only in this way can the underlying paranoia about masculinity and femininity in his writings about music be adequately explained.<sup>14</sup>

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not quote the source in full, probably because the *Memos* had by then become available. Rossiter's dissertation is more extreme in its use of what might be called the "feminization theory" than his book, which I take to represent his more considered views.

<sup>11</sup> *Memos*, Appendix 19, p. 280.

<sup>12</sup> Rossiter, *Charles Ives and His America*, pp. 42, 162.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 36–37.

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In Rossiter's view, Ives's rejection of "cultivated music" was validated by his youthful experiences with female musicians, who symbolized the larger fact of musical feminization. In effect, he accepts Ives's philosophical dualism as social reality. Who "wounded" our first modernist musical frontiersman, forcing him into the double existence of artist and businessman that Rossiter depletes? The Victorian lady musician.

Stuart Feder's work, which has recently culminated in a powerful and distinguished biography of Ives, uses psychoanalysis to analyze Ives's creative dynamic through his relationship to his father.<sup>15</sup> As in his previous work, Feder postulates a central fantasy of the rich affective life of men living and working together (as for instance in the march) and their creative life.<sup>16</sup> Absent from this fantasy are women, for, according to Feder, Ives defined the processes of creation as the province of men, a definition that flowed out of Ives's idealization of his father. Feder does mention Ives's conflicts regarding sexual identity and the threat of homosexuality, but these are not the focus of his study, "except insofar as they participate in characterological uniqueness, innovation, and creativity. For pathology is never the whole story." Although Feder criticizes the reductionist simplicity of Rossiter's assertion that music represents effeminacy and that other activities, say sports and business, represent the masculine, he accepts Rossiter's characterization of nineteenth-century American musical life as feminized, that is to say, as dominated by women.<sup>17</sup>

If Rossiter's emphasis on the role of women in the genteel tradition exaggerates their cultural power, the primacy of Feder's interest in the father-son relationship leaves virtually no place for them. In a sense, a recent interpretation by Maynard Solomon mediates between these two positions. In his controversial article about Ives's "veracity" as documenter of his own life and work, Solomon points out that the main objects of Ives's attacks were "effeminate" men. Solomon links Ives's compensatory "heroic pose of strength and masculinity" to the fact that his

extreme prudery, his fear of intimacy, his morbid aversion to the nude female body . . . connects to his preoccupation with emasculation, his incessant ranting against "effeminacy" in music, and his quite pathological

<sup>15</sup> Stuart Feder, *Charles Ives: "My Father's Song"—a Psychoanalytic Biography* (New Haven, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Stuart Feder, "Charles and George Ives: The Veneration of Boyhood," in Stuart Feder, M.D., Richard L. Karmel, Ph.D., and George H. Pollock, M.D., Ph.D., eds., *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Music* (Madison, Conn., 1990), esp. pp. 152–54; cf. Feder's "Decoration Day: A Boyhood Memory of Charles Ives," *Musical Quarterly* 65 (1980): 234–61.

<sup>17</sup> Feder, "Charles and George Ives," p. 125. See also Feder, *Charles Ives: "My Father's Song,"* p. 95.

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aversion to homosexuals, whom he variously derogated as "pansys," "lily-pads," "old ladies," and "pussy-boys."<sup>18</sup>

Solomon catalogues Ives's opinions of many great masters:

He thought Ravel and Stravinsky "morbid and monotonous." . . . Debussy's music was permeated by a "sensual sensuousness." . . . He praised Franck, d'Indy, Elgar for their "wholesomeness, manliness . . . and deep spiritual . . . feeling"; but he frankly condemned as "emasculated" works by Mozart, Mendelssohn, early Beethoven, Haydn, Massenet, Tchaikovsky, Gounod, Wagner, and Chopin. . . . Elsewhere he writes approvingly of the three B's—though, in an afterthought, he strikes Brahms's name altogether and finds none of them "as strong and great as Carl Ruggles . . . because [they] have too much of the sugar-plum for the soft-ears."<sup>19</sup>

Solomon concludes that Ives "wants to reject the sensuous in music, in sound, in life, to regard himself as a 'thinker,' a 'philosopher,' a 'rational' maker of music."<sup>20</sup> Yet this summary judgment does not really allow room for Ives's admiration for Scriabin, whose spiritual ambitions were not incompatible with a sensuous surface in his music, and whose resemblance to Chopin caused the Russian composer Cui to describe his style as "bits filched from the trousseau of Chopin," the sexual innuendoes simultaneously hitting both Chopin and Scriabin.<sup>21</sup>

Pushing the debate beyond Ives's psychology, Solomon widens the context for Ives's attitudes by pointing out affinities between Ives's war against "the indecent," the "decadent," and the "degenerate" and that being waged by some of the most anti-modernist critics of the period, such as Irving Babbitt and Daniel Gregory Mason. Thus Ives's gender discourse is both seen as the working out of psychosexual problems (a "pathological aversion to homosexuals") and ascribed to his intellectual reactionary tendencies. (How ironic that Mason—who wrote an essay on "Dissonance and Evil," who disparaged American music from 1914 to

<sup>18</sup> Maynard Solomon, "Charles Ives: Some Questions of Veracity," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 40 (1987): 466.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 451–53.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 467.

<sup>21</sup> Rossiter says that "Ives did become a patron of Miss Heyman's Scriabin activities" (*Charles Ives and His America*, p. 205). Katherine Heyman was a pianist and head of the Scriabin Society in New York. On 9 September 1927 Ives wrote to Heyman when she was in Europe giving concerts of Scriabin's piano music: "We wish you success in your 'Adventure,' not the success you deserve but that Scriabin does. You can't object to this." (Correspondence located in the Ives Collection, Beinecke Library, Yale University, and cited here with permission.) The comment from Cui is cited in an essay by Paul Rosenfeld, "Scriabin Again," in *Discoveries of a Music Critic* (New York, 1936), p. 160.

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1928 as the "Music of Indigestion," and whom Henry Cowell, Ives's great champion, called "the enemy"—is shown to be Ives's comrade-in-arms.)<sup>22</sup>

Solomon's conclusion is a variation on Rossiter's theme that Ives was ashamed of all art music. Ives has "the misfortune to believe that music and its composers are often—even usually—embodiments" of this decadence and degeneracy. By bringing Ives's attitudes toward homosexuality into the foreground, both Feder and Solomon have made explicit issues that Rossiter left latent.<sup>23</sup> Neither, however, concerned himself much with women's history or gender scholarship.

Yet concepts of gender roles—whether of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, or homosexuality—are interrelated through their historical constructions.<sup>24</sup> To take but one example, one of the critics cited by Solomon as a warrior against "decadence and degeneracy" also wrote that the "predominance of the feminine over the masculine virtues . . . has been the main cause of the corruption of literature and the arts during the past century."<sup>25</sup> With respect to Feder, his biography enriches and deepens our understanding of Ives. Nevertheless, a psychoanalytic perspective masks the power of society to transmit gendered views of culture, rife with prejudice and viable precisely because issues other than sexuality are engaged through tropes of masculinity and femininity.<sup>26</sup> "In the absence of countervailing forces, prejudice is as

<sup>22</sup> MacDonald Smith Moore discusses Mason's essay on dissonance in *Yankee Blues: Musical Culture and American Identity* (Bloomington, 1985), pp. 53–55. Moore sees many parallels between Mason and Ives as Yankee composers. For the indigestibility of American music, see Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Dilemma of American Music and Other Essays* (New York, 1928), p. 12. Cowell's comment is in a letter to Charles Ives, 16 May 1933, cited in Rita Mead, *Henry Cowell's New Music 1925–1936: The Society, the Music Editions, and the Recordings* (Ann Arbor, 1981), p. 241.

<sup>23</sup> Solomon, "Charles Ives," p. 469. The history of the link between "effeminacy" and music in American thought remains to be documented. In a recent paper Philip Brett has referred to Ives's "homophobic panic" in the context of new approaches to the issue of "essentialism" in music ("Musicality: Innate Gift or Social Contract?" paper read at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society, Oakland, 1990). One starting point for American historians that seems potentially relevant to Ives is Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York, 1977), particularly the section entitled "'The Choice of Hercules': Manliness or Effeminacy?" (pp. 243–50). I wish to thank Adrienne Fried Block for this reference.

<sup>24</sup> This point is astutely discussed by Linda K. Kerber in "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75 (1988): 9–39. The present essay is indebted to many of Kerber's observations about the distinctions between ideology and society, and the intellectual consequences of accepting the dualism implied by the trope of "separate spheres."

<sup>25</sup> Irving Babbitt, *Representative Writings*, ed. George A. Panichas (Lincoln, Neb., 1981), p. 86.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Melosh discusses how "image makers used images of manhood and womanhood as tropes in a political rhetoric directed to issues other than gender," in her

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easily acquired as language itself."<sup>27</sup> In my view, Ives used aspects of the gender ideology of music to discuss not just sexuality but power and entitlement. He held and used misogynist and homophobic beliefs partly because he had learned them (that is to say, they had a cognitive component) and partly because he needed them (that is to say, they had an emotive component.)<sup>28</sup> Obvious though it may seem, it is worth pointing out that how well we can distinguish between what he learned and what he needed—that is, between the social context of his prejudice and the functions that it served—depends partly on how well we understand the cultural sources of his beliefs with respect to women.<sup>29</sup>

Between 1890 and 1930 the American literature discussing gender and music reflects the extraordinary changes of that period in both American musical life and the socioeconomic status of American women. The growth in institutions of classical music (such as orchestras and conservatories), combined with the movement of women out of the home and into the work force, challenged the old ideologies defining music as a feminine "accomplishment" confined to the parlor. This is not the place to review that history in great detail. It will suffice merely to remind the reader of fairly recent documentation of the high proportion of female students in American conservatories; the entrance of women into the occupation of "music and music teaching," as the U.S. census called it; their "emergence as the chief promoters of culture"; and the appearance of the first generation of female composers of American classical music.<sup>30</sup>

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*Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* (Washington, D.C., 1991), p. 4.

<sup>27</sup> Selznick and Steinberg, *The Tenacity of Prejudice*, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Selznick and Steinberg distinguish between the emotive and the cognitive components of prejudice. (*The Tenacity of Prejudice*, pp. 135–37.)

<sup>29</sup> This essay is primarily concerned with women's history, and that limitation is duly noted. It does not discuss effeminacy as a concept or the implications of Ives's language with respect to homosexuality. That work remains to be done.

<sup>30</sup> A selective list of titles includes: Judith Tick, "Women as Professional Musicians in the United States, 1870–1910," *Yearbook of Inter-American Research* (1973), revised as "Passed Away Is the Piano Girl: Changes in American Musical Life, 1870–1910," in Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950* (Urbana, 1986); Adrienne Fried Block and Carol Neuls-Bates, eds., *Women in American Music: A Bibliography of Music and Literature* (Westport, Conn., 1979); Christine Ammer, *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* (Westport, Conn., 1980); Block, "Why Amy Beach Succeeded as a Composer: The Early Years," *Current Musicology* 36 (1983): 41–60, and "Arthur P. Schmidt, Music Publisher and Champion of American Women Composers," in Judith Lang Zaimont, ed., *The Musical Woman: An International Perspective*, vol. 2, 1984–85 (Westport, Conn., 1987): 145–76; Laurine Elkins-Marlow, "Music at Every Meeting: The Role of Music in the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the National League of

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Such changes help explain the sheer quantity of literature discussing gender and music, as well as its wide range of themes and its controversial nature. Writ large over this diverse literature are tensions and disputes generated by shifts in power and gender roles.<sup>31</sup> Further muddying its waters is the debate over biological determinism. Themes and values in the literature include identity and commitment (the process of becoming a composer), professionalization (the socioeconomic choice of occupation), and aesthetics (the relationship between gender and musical content—touching on styles, genres and composers, and performance).

Ives's musical environment was far more complex and the gender ideology that supported it far more diffuse and contradictory than past interpretations of the "feminization" of American musical life have implied. Without doubt, "music," at its most general level of meaning, was regarded in the nineteenth century as a female accomplishment.<sup>32</sup> But it therefore occupied domestic space, in the parlor. And even then, the function of such "accomplishment" was to encourage music-making by women, not to prohibit men from taking it up. Public music-making by professionals was never sex-typed as female, a distinction reflected in the 1910 census, which divides the occupation into the two categories of "musician" and "music teacher." As Henry J. Harris stated in his pioneering sociological study published in 1915, "The great majority of musicians are men while the great majority of the teachers of music are women."<sup>33</sup> In 1910 it was also the case that a slightly larger number of native-born than of foreign-born men were musicians.

During the period in which Ives came of age as a composer (ca. 1890–1910), the assertion was widely made that women were innately incapable of composing in the "higher forms," that is, symphonic music

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American Pen Women," paper delivered at the Sonneck Society annual meeting, April 1990. The phrase in quotation is from Linda Whitesitt, "The Role of Women Impresarios in American Concert Life, 1871–1933," *American Music* 7 (1989): 159.

<sup>31</sup> Catherine Parsons Smith discusses this literature in "On Feminism and American Music," paper delivered at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society, Austin, 1989. It will appear as "On Feminism and American Art Music" in Susan Cook and Judith Tsou, eds., *Cecilia: Feminist Perspectives on Women and Music* (University of Illinois Press, forthcoming). Linda Kerber notes that "the ideology of separate spheres—like all ideology—is not frozen in time but is in a constant state of refinement until it fits reality so badly that a paradigm shift in conceptualization is unavoidable." ("Separate Spheres," p. 27.)

<sup>32</sup> "Accomplishment" was a nineteenth-century term that included amateur musical education. Its use in the literature on gender and music, and the kinds of education in female academies and seminaries of the period that were associated with it, are discussed at length in Tick, *American Women Composers Before 1870* (Ann Arbor, 1983).

<sup>33</sup> Henry J. Harris, "The Occupation of Musician in the United States," *Musical Quarterly* 1 (1915): 303. The figures are given in Table II (p. 302): 39,163 of 54,848 musicians are men; 68,783 of 84,452 teachers of music are women.

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and opera. Although women were encouraged to study and perform music, the language of creative musical achievement was patriarchal.<sup>34</sup> In the extensive debate that surrounded the first generation of American women composers, who emerged at the turn of the century—should or could they compose?—Rupert Hughes typifies a general position: perhaps "art knows no sex," but women writing in what he called "man-tone"—symphonic or operatic genres—were "seeking after virility."<sup>35</sup> A contemporary of Ives, the composer Mary Carr Moore (1873–1957), expressed the central problem of her generation:

But of all the difficulties I encountered, perhaps the greatest has been in the fact that I am an American and a woman. That combination, I assure you, has been the most discouraging obstacle of all! So long as a woman contents herself with writing graceful little songs about springtime and the birdies, no one resents it or thinks her presumptuous; but woe be unto her if she dares attempt the larger forms! The prejudice may die eventually, but it will be a hard and slow death.<sup>36</sup>

By 1910 we find in place assertions of male creative superiority on many levels. The psychologist Havelock Ellis analyzed biologically determined limits to the creative potential of women.<sup>37</sup> Critics and journalists such as George Upton and Lawrence Gilman drew on nineteenth-century aesthetics of music to perpetuate the masculine/feminine dichotomy through "das ewig-weibliche" or the "eternal feminine" in music.<sup>38</sup> Other late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers tracked

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Edith Brower, "Is the Musical Idea Masculine?" *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1894): 332–39.

<sup>35</sup> Rupert Hughes, *Contemporary American Composers* (Boston, 1900), pp. 425, 438. The Boston composer Mabel Daniels grew up with this ideology and retained its core throughout her life. She "[did] not believe women are able to compose a long list of symphonies, operas, string quartets and all kinds of concerted music, for the sole reason that they do not have the physical stamina of a man." ("Music After College—as a Profession," *Radcliffe Quarterly* [May 1957]: 11. I am indebted to Sara Jobin for this source.)

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Catherine Parsons Smith and Cynthia S. Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore, American Composer* (Ann Arbor, 1987), p. 173.

<sup>37</sup> Cited by Huntington Cairns in "The Woman of Genius," in Samuel D. Schmalhausen and V. F. Calverton, eds., *Woman's Coming of Age* (New York, 1931), p. 391.

<sup>38</sup> George P. Upton, *Woman in Music* (Chicago, 1880), pp. 23 ff.; Lawrence Gilman, "Women and Modern Music," in his *Phases of Modern Music* (New York 1904): 93–101. See also T. L. Krebs, who writes about vocal music as the essence of "das ewig-weibliche" because it appeals more directly to the heart ("Women as Musicians," *Sewanee Review* 2 [1893]: 77), and Fanny Bloomfield-Zeisler, who insists that she is not an apostle of "Woman's Emancipation" and claims that there are "many fields of intellectual activity upon which women never do or can trespass without sacrificing their more delicate and sensitive nature, the 'ewig weibliche.'" Rather, "what we need now is not to imitate man and try to become great in a field in which he has achieved success, but to develop those qualities which specifically belong to woman," that is, beautiful melodies ("Woman in Music," *American Art Journal* 58

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composers by style, for example, labeling Chopin and Mendelssohn as feminine, Beethoven and Wagner as masculine.<sup>39</sup> Basically, this ideology reflects what historian Rosalind Rosenberg has described as "the Victorian faith in sexual polarity—from the doctrine that women are by nature emotional and passive, to the dogma that men are by nature rational and assertive."<sup>40</sup>

In many respects Ives's attitudes reflect that Victorian perspective. Yet it would be a mistake to think that gender ideology in music disappeared during his later years and that his *Memos* mirror only a distant past. American society had changed dramatically in his lifetime, but the literature on gender and music changed far less. The feminization of music remained a viable tenet of gender ideology throughout the 1920s. It found itself, however, increasingly mired in contradictions, for after 1910 significant shifts took place in the labor force that constituted "music and music teaching" in the United States. For the first time since 1870, in the 1920s the gender proportions of the profession reversed: census data for 1930 showed that men outnumbered women in the field.<sup>41</sup> In an article entitled "The Feminization of Music," a faculty member from the Peabody Conservatory catalogued every associated ill, from the lack of men in the conservatories to the sentimentalization of style: "Is it not that the women have required it of us that we have come to gush and sentimentalize to the extent we do now?" he asked the 1922 convention of the Music Teachers National Association. He continued: "I believe the male has naturally a finer sense of rhythm and proportion than his mate. . . . The man's composers are Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, with ninety per cent of [women] preferring Chopin."<sup>42</sup> In his article for Harold Stearns's *Civilization in the United States*, Deems Taylor claimed that "women constitute ninety per cent of those who support music in this country. . . . This well-nigh feminization of music is bad for it. . . . Their pre-dominance in our musical life aggravates our already exaggerated tendency to demand that art be edifying. . . . The feminine influence

(footnote continued from previous page)

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[17 October 1891]: 1, 3). For a recent critical study of this concept and its relationship to nineteenth-century music, see Lawrence Kramer, "Liszt, Goethe, and the Discourse of Gender," in his *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800–1900* (Berkeley, 1990), pp. 102–34.

<sup>39</sup> James Huneker claimed that women could never play Beethoven as well as men. ("The Eternal Feminine," in *Overtones: A Book of Temperaments* [New York, 1904], pp. 277–306.)

<sup>40</sup> Rosalind Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, 1982), p. xiv.

<sup>41</sup> Sophonisba P. Breckinridge cites the figures of 85,517 men and 79,611 women in the occupations of music and music teaching as indicating a "real decline" for women. (*Women in the Twentieth Century: A Study of Their Political, Social, and Economic Activities* [New York, 1933], pp. 188, 202.)

<sup>42</sup> Harold Randolph, "The Feminization of Music," *Papers and Proceedings of the Music Teachers National Association, 1922* (Hartford, 1923), p. 198.

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helps to increase the insularity of our musicians."<sup>43</sup> Mary Herron DuPree claims that "direct reference to America's 'manliness complex'" was "rather rare" in the 1920s, suggesting that perhaps the perception of music as "women's work" was abating; she cites an interview with Russian pianist Mischa Levitzki, who claimed it was a widespread problem, but an editorial rebuttal appeared soon after.<sup>44</sup>

The literature on women and music rode the tide of interest in the "new woman" of the 1920s. One article queried, "Now that women vote like men, why shouldn't they play the piano like men?"<sup>45</sup> A young composer, who had been hailed as a "flapper genius," voiced her resentment about the condescension that greeted her work, "either in a too facile praise . . . or in a wholesale condemnation."<sup>46</sup> This small sampling of the literature proves her point: "Women are naturally mechanical, therefore no woman is really musical."<sup>47</sup> The "emotional life of Woman" is "antagonistic to the creative process in music." "Today there are many feminine composers to constitute a rebuttal to the statement that women are incapable of composing great music." "To me there is a certain queerness in the interpretation of a man's work by a woman." A survey asks, "Are Men Better Musicians Than Women?"<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Deems Taylor, "Music," in Harold E. Stearns, ed., *Civilization in the United States: An Inquiry by Thirty Americans* (New York, 1922), p. 205. This anthology is a blistering attack on American culture edited by a "lost generation" writer who in his introduction deplors the feminization of American culture as a whole. For the cultural placement of this book, see Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Middletown, Conn., 1973), p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> DuPree discusses the issue of women and music and the "manliness complex" in "The Failure of American Music: The Critical View from the 1920s," *Journal of Musicology* 2 (1983): 311–12. The interview is Henrietta Malkiel, "Levitzki Holds the Musical Mirror Up to America," *Musical America* (26 January 1924): 5; the rebuttal, Editorial, "Music and Manliness," *Musical America* (2 February 1924): 20.

<sup>45</sup> "Here and There," *Musical Leader* (29 September 1921): 301.

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Starr McLain, "Women as Composers," *Musical Leader* (5 November 1931): 7.

<sup>47</sup> "Lecturer Declares Women Not Really Musical," *Musical Leader* (28 July 1921): 100, reporting on a talk by J. Swinburne before the Royal Musical Association in London. Swinburne's talk was published in the proceedings a few months later and duly reported in an article by D. C. Parker, "Is Woman a Failure as a Musician?" for *Musical America* (10 December 1921): 45.

<sup>48</sup> R. M. Knerr, "Noted Feminist Defends Women's Place in Music," *Musical America* (21 January 1922): 5. This article reported on a speech by W. L. George, whom the writer describes as a "noted English writer and feminist" who "defends Woman as Man's Intellectual Equal in Literature But Makes Suggestions Concerning Her Restricted Prowess in Music." M. T. Reilly, "Women in Music," *Musical Leader* (16 April 1925): 387, 414. Carlos Salzedo, "Personality and Interpretation," *Aeolian Review* 3 (1924): 8. Esther Waite, "Are Men Better Musicians Than Women?" *Musical Digest* 13 (1928): 26, 54, 61. Waite's subtitle, "Both the Affirmative and Negative Sides Are Heard on This Absorbing Subject," was the lead for a survey of opinions by contemporary performers of both sexes.

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The prevailing aesthetic discourse that equated masculine or virile with vital and original received a different gloss from some Modernist critics. Catherine Smith believes that "anti-feminism was as fundamental to American musical modernism as it was to literary modernism," citing among others this critic for *Modern Music*, who in 1929 wrote that

one begins to sense a distinctively American quality in some of the American music that has been written recently. One senses in it a distinguishing virility—the virility with which it so constantly seeks to express its ideas and feelings. This characteristic was absent before. The older American music was a labored and generally weary reiteration of thoroughly alien forms and styles.<sup>49</sup>

When Ruth Crawford's Sonata for Violin and Piano was premiered in 1927, the critic for the *New York Herald Tribune* described it as "the most masculine in quality that the afternoon brought forth."<sup>50</sup> And the leading modernist critic of the twenties, Paul Rosenfeld, linked effeminacy to Edward MacDowell's musical weaknesses in terms resembling Ives's. Rosenfeld condemned MacDowell's "sentimentality":

The feelings entertained about life by him seem to have remained uncertain; and while fumbling for them he seems regularly to have succumbed to "nice" and "respectable" emotions, conventional, accepted by and welcome to, the best people. . . . Where his great romantic brethren, Brahms, Wagner, and Debussy, are direct and sensitive, clearly and tellingly expressive, MacDowell minces and simpers, maidenly, and ruffled. He is nothing if not a daughter of the American Revolution.<sup>51</sup>

Thus gender ideology could be used to praise and contain the achievements of a woman by explicitly or implicitly describing her as "writing like a man," and to reproach a man for writing like a woman.

From aesthetics to sociological observation, engendered views of culture provided a contemporary rhetoric for controversies that had little to do with gender. Attitudes toward patronage are a case in point. In the 1920s the power of patronage when wielded by upper-class women made a progressive group of women particularly vulnerable to social criticism as women rather than as members of a wealthy leisured class. A common attitude was "that the patronage of women assured the continued weakness of American composition."<sup>52</sup> It did not matter much what kind of

<sup>49</sup> Irving Weill, "The American Scene Changes," *Modern Music* 6, no. 4 (1929): 7–8, cited in Smith, "On Feminism and American Art Music."

<sup>50</sup> "Music by Six Young Americans Is Heard by a Large Audience. Composers' League Has Program for Native Writers with Works for Piano, String and Voice Given," *New York Herald Tribune*, 14 February 1927, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Paul Rosenfeld, *An Hour with American Music* (Philadelphia, 1929), p. 46.

<sup>52</sup> DuPree, "The Failure of American Music," p. 305.

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music they supported. Consider the reasons offered for the life and death of the New York-based and short-lived National Symphony, founded by Edgard Varese in 1919. Walter Damrosch called the birth of the orchestra—which played the new music he deplored—the mistake of a susceptible patron, Gertrude Payne Whitney, who had been taken in by a "young handsome European composer" (Varese).<sup>53</sup> After a single, disastrous season the orchestra failed, and Paul Rosenfeld blamed its death on women as well—"but one of the innumerable consequences of the fact that in America musical organizations have patronesses more often than they have patrons." In fact, New York women such as Blanche Walton and Claire Reis sustained the activities of new music in New York; as Carol Oja has documented, women were criticized by some as *too* supportive of modern music in the 1920s.<sup>54</sup> The virulent attack by a modern biographer of Ives on one of the most important patrons of the period, Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge, shows how tenacious such scapegoating attitudes are.<sup>55</sup>

In sum, gender ideology in Ives's culture covered a spectrum of beliefs, some far more noxious than others. Its relationship to social realities was dynamic rather than static, characteristically lagging behind social change. At its crudest it stigmatized classical music as "effeminate" and simultaneously defined its highest achievements as masculine. At its most fundamental level, it continued to promote Victorian dichotomies of biologically determined sexual difference. Its viability cut across stylistic and political divisions, resonating in the attitudes of conservatives and progressives, Victorians and modernists, men and women. And so the terms *masculine* and *feminine*, or *effeminate* and *feminized*, were used similarly by people of highly disparate musical orientations and taste.

Although gender ideology largely reflected the inequalities and asymmetries in American society,<sup>56</sup> depending on one's point of view men or

<sup>53</sup> Walter Damrosch was the conductor of the New York Symphony and a major establishment figure in New York's musical life. For his ambivalence about women, see the chapter on "Women in Musical Affairs" in his *My Musical Life*, 2d ed. (New York, 1930), pp. 323–32.

<sup>54</sup> Paul Rosenfeld, "Musical Chronicle: The New or National Symphony Orchestra," *The Dial* (December 1920): 670. I am indebted to Carol J. Oja for this reference. The issue of female patronage of modern music is documented in Oja, "Women Patrons and Promoters of New York's New Music During the 1920s," paper read at the national meeting of the American Musicological Society, Chicago, 1991.

<sup>55</sup> "The Elizabeth Sprague Coolidges of this world are a perennial curiosity." Their fathers make their fortunes, and then they "beget daughters who inherit (a) their money, and (b) a vague, uncomprehending awareness of who rather than what their ancestors have been—viz. 'artists.' That, plus daddy's money, gives them a sense of power: wealth *plus* art = 'culture.' They will never become patrons of the arts." (Wooldridge, *From the Steeples and Mountains*, p. 172.) I am grateful to Wayne Shirley for this reference.

<sup>56</sup> Koskoff, "An Introduction," p. 9.

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women could be and indeed were viewed alternately as its victims or its benefactors.<sup>57</sup> To put this in terms of feminist theory: like most gender ideologies, ours has had the potential to be both instrumental and prescriptive for both male and female musicians.<sup>58</sup> That is to say, the rhetoric of music as a female sphere on the one hand sanctioned female musicality through sexual difference, and on the other rejected the possibility of creative equality with men. The parallel for men is that they could be harmed by the identification of music with feminization and/or effeminacy, or they could be empowered by their dominant role in music history.<sup>59</sup> Small wonder, then, that it is possible for contemporary historians to tap this literature to document the effects of prejudice on both men and women.

The writings of Charles Ives thus hold up a mirror that both reflects and distorts the world around him.<sup>60</sup> Those of his prejudices that were more or less routine should be distinguished from the hostile beliefs that mark his extremism. In some respects he simply conformed to his culture. Rather conventionally, he confessed to "feeling partially ashamed" of his musical interests as a boy, "an entirely wrong feeling but one typical of boys in small towns"; similarly, throughout his lifetime he assumed men and male achievement to be at the center of any discussion of musical genius or, indeed, of high culture in general. Chivalrous and sentimental about women in the family, a Victorian gentleman in mores,<sup>61</sup> he was condescending in his artistic judgments. He was "skeptical and impatient about any music written by a woman," according to Sidney Cowell, who co-authored the first biography of Ives,<sup>62</sup> yet his deeds could transcend his own limits. For example, when Henry Cowell proposed Ruth Crawford's *String Quartet 1931* as the first recording of the New Music series

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<sup>57</sup> Kerber, "Separate Spheres," p. 18.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>59</sup> Whitesitt, "The Role of Women Impresarios," cites both kinds of perspectives in the past and present literature.

<sup>60</sup> For two recent discussions of Ives and gender, see Nora M. Beck, "An Examination of Gender in Selected Writings and Music of Charles Ives," and Lawrence Kramer, "Ives's Misogyny and Post-Reconstruction America." Both papers were delivered at the conference on Feminist Theory and Music: Toward a Common Language, Minneapolis, June 1991. I wish to thank both authors for sharing drafts of these papers with me, and Beck for her references to my work as well.

<sup>61</sup> Vivian Perlis points out that "one of the paradoxes in Ives is that he could be both ultra-modern and terribly old-fashioned, way ahead of his time and far behind it." She cites John Kirkpatrick's opinion of Ives and his wife Harmony as "very old-fashioned." ("Charles Ives: Victorian Gentleman or American Folk Hero?" in William Ferris and Mary L. Hart, eds., *Folk Music and Modern Sound* [Jackson, Miss., 1982], pp. 141–42, 144.)

<sup>62</sup> Personal interview with Sidney Robertson Cowell, 15 January 1988. Quoted by permission.

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in 1931, Ives questioned the decision—would Crawford be "mansized enough?"—but after hearing Cowell's spirited defense of the work, went on to fund the project.<sup>63</sup> It is telling that when Ives published his *114 Songs* he adopted a female persona as a composer. As if he were a Victorian lady amateur, Ives postscripted a note to this publication addressed to the "gentle borrower" of his music, describing this unusual act of private publication as "cleaning house." Perhaps such humility was supposed to disarm the receiver of his music and to counterbalance the radical content of the musical items "left out on the clothes line."<sup>64</sup>

Despite the common ground between Ives and his environment, it must not be forgotten that he was an extremist about effeminacy. That attitude is marked perhaps more by what he did not say than by what he did. That is to say, Ives was reticent on most of the standard issues of the literature on gender and music. Having chosen to remove himself from the profession as such, he was not concerned about the sex-distribution within the musical labor force. Nor did he participate in the Victorian debate over the potential of the woman composer, or marshal its substantial literature in support of his arguments about the essentially masculine nature of music. Unlike modernist male writers waging "the war of the words," he did not "define his artistic integrity in opposition to the musical incompetence of women"<sup>65</sup> or to the older tradition of music as feminine accomplishment.<sup>66</sup> Female musicians were on the periphery of Ives's universe, and there is no mention of any professional female musician—either composer or performer—in the *Memos*.<sup>67</sup>

Ives was playing for bigger stakes. As Linda Kerber has written, "We live in a world in which authority has traditionally validated itself by its distance from the feminine and from what is understood to be

<sup>63</sup> Cowell wanted to record music by Henry Brant and Ruth Crawford. Ives writes, "I know nothing about Brant's or Crawford's music, except what you . . . & others have told me—which is that 'in time & a nice tide' they may get mansized (even Miss C.)." This incident is discussed in Rita Mead, *Henry Cowell's New Music 1925–1936: The Society, the Music Editions, and the Recordings* (Ann Arbor, 1981), p. 256.

<sup>64</sup> Ives, "Postface to *114 Songs*," reprinted in *Essays Before a Sonata and Other Writings*, p. 130.

<sup>65</sup> This is the thesis of Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, 2 vols. (New Haven, 1988), vol. 1, p. 157, which has been applied to American music by Smith, "Feminism and American Art Music." Some of the composers she cites seem to fit the model much better than Ives.

<sup>66</sup> "Younger American men apparently believed they had to make the public distance between this older notion of the place of art music [as feminine accomplishment] and their own aesthetic posture as wide as possible." (Smith and Richardson, *Mary Carr Moore*, p. 173.)

<sup>67</sup> "Although Ives often mentioned ladies metaphorically in his *Memos*, real women received little attention. In fact, only a dozen-odd of women are mentioned by name." (Nora M. Beck, "An Examination of Gender in Selected Writings and Music of Charles Ives," unpublished paper, p. 21, cited here with permission of the author.)

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effeminate."<sup>68</sup> In my view, Ives's most vituperative outbursts of sexist prejudice derive from that search for validation and from his turbulent confrontation with the authority of the great tradition of European classical music.

In considering the nature of this confrontation, we need to distinguish questions of stylistic influence and indebtedness from questions of artistic status and patterns of recognition. With respect to style, like "every major composer of his era," whether neoclassic or progressive, Ives "used material from the past to establish a relationship with the past . . . [invoking] the past in order to reinterpret it."<sup>69</sup> Perhaps as a corrective to the emphasis on Ives's extraordinary powers of reimagining the vernacular past in his music, some recent scholarship has focused on reconnecting him to the classical mainstream, on demonstrating the extent to which he absorbed technique and vision from any number of European composers, both past and contemporary.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps it is in the nature of artistic gratitude to be ambivalent about one's debts. Ives's ambivalence is so loaded with hostility that it has led J. Peter Burkholder to conclude that Ives "set out to disinherit himself from European music" in order to deny the influence of the past; and, further, that his name-calling of European composers was a way of effecting the rupture.<sup>71</sup>

Certainly, Ives's statements about effeminacy and music, which do not appear until after 1905, seem to be correlated with the evolution of his radical experimental style, which crystallized around the same time.<sup>72</sup> Ives presented some of these compositions as declarations of stylistic independence and dissent. The Piano Study no. 20 (1907–1909) has a note burlesquing Rachmaninoff as "Rachnotmanenough."<sup>73</sup> Another burlesque exercise was a "Take-off" on the Andante of Haydn's "Surprise" symphony (1909?) with the following marginal notes: "All this G string had to be made after getting back from the K. . . . Q concert in winter '09 (nothing but triads. . . .)"<sup>74</sup> He travesties the Haydn Quartet as "nice little easy sugar plum sounds for the soft ears' pocketbooks," "perfumed sounds for the Dress Circle cushion chair ears," "velvet pocketbooks," "nice sweetie silk bonnet melodies," "nice sweetie jellycake har-

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<sup>68</sup> Kerber, "Separate Spheres," p. 39.

<sup>69</sup> Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), pp. 2, 1.

<sup>70</sup> For one example, see J. Peter Burkholder, "'Quotation' and Paraphrase in Ives's Second Symphony," *19th-Century Music* 11 (1987): 3–25.

<sup>71</sup> J. Peter Burkholder, "Charles Ives and His Fathers: A Response to Maynard Solomon," *Newsletter of the Institute for Studies in American Music* 18 (1988): 10.

<sup>72</sup> Ives says this stage in his evolution came in about 1908 (*Memos*, p. 74).

<sup>73</sup> Rossiter, *Charles Ives and His America*, p. 36.

<sup>74</sup> John Kirkpatrick, ed., *A Temporary Mimeographed Catalogue of the Music Manuscripts of Charles Edward Ives* (1960; rpt. New Haven, 1973), p. 221.

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monies."<sup>75</sup> In the margin of a manuscript of the Second String Quartet Ives wrote "This is music for men to play—not the Lady Bird K . . . . Q."<sup>76</sup> With its expression mark of "Andante Emasculata" in the second movement, the quartet savages both tonal music and its status as a commodity for "conspicuous consumption"<sup>77</sup> by a leisure class. In the *Memos* Ives embellishes his account of this concert even further, damning it with his favorite epithet of "nice":

mellifluous sounds, perfect cadences, perfect ladies, perfect programs, and not a dissonant cuss word to stop the anemia and beauty during the whole evening. . . . I got to feel, at a Kneisel Quartet concert, finally that I was resting my ears on a perfumed sofa-cushion—so got out!<sup>78</sup>

Other works are described as opposition or reaction. The chamber piece "In Re Con Moto et. Al" was intended to be "a piece that no permanent-wave conductor of those days could conduct."<sup>79</sup> The Third Sonata for Violin and Piano was "to make a nice piece for the nice ladies" after a "famous German Virtuoso violinist" had said his first sonata "bore no resemblance to music."<sup>80</sup>

As an artist, then, Ives used and absorbed the great tradition of Europe, while at the same time he chafed under the confines of what Charles Seeger used to call "the prison of good music."<sup>81</sup> Ives once wrote that Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms may be the "best music we know" but—invoking the image of a cage—it was "too cooped up."<sup>82</sup>

Yet the issues of style and compositional indebtedness do not, in my view, suffice as explanations for the ways gender ideology served Ives. His profound hostility is not just ingratitude run amok. Ives's other writings, particularly in the *Memos*, move beyond style to social context. Implicated as well as (if not even more than) composers are performers, critics, and their upper-class constituency of patrons and listeners—in short, what was once fashionably called "the establishment." As Lehman Engel, who met Ives in the early 1930s, observed, "He was constantly throwing out

<sup>75</sup> Rossiter gives the complete marginal note, only the first few words of which are printed in the Kirkpatrick catalogue. ("Charles Ives and American Culture," p. 308.)

<sup>76</sup> Marginal notes to the score, printed in Kirkpatrick, ed., *A Temporary Mimeographed Catalogue*, p. 60.

<sup>77</sup> This famous phrase comes from Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions* (New York, 1899).

<sup>78</sup> *Memos*, p. 73.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>80</sup> Kirkpatrick, ed., *A Temporary Mimeographed Catalogue*, p. 79.

<sup>81</sup> Charles Seeger to Ruth Crawford, 11 November 1930, Seeger Estate, private collection, quoted by permission.

<sup>82</sup> *Memos*, p. 100.

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venom about the musical establishment of his day."<sup>83</sup> His name-calling of composers belongs to a larger cultural dissent.

In America early twentieth-century composers were forced to compete as never before with music from a great past that lived through orchestral performances and the advocacy of great conductors. American composers carried a double burden. Although in some senses they shared in the family tradition as "Western" composers, they were its stepchildren, having to prove their status by developing a national identity or school. The famous literary critic Van Wyck Brooks described the interplay between the past and the present in late-nineteenth-century Boston in a tone that throws some light on Ives's own attitudes. The cultural life of Boston had become

higher and dryer than ever. Having become a religion, it was dying as culture; and it regarded with a glassy eye the poor little efforts of poets who struggled beneath it. It identified itself with Dante, Browning, with Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, Walter Pater, and felt that because it somehow knew these authors it was entitled to regard with scorn the ingenuous beings who also tried to write. Did they think they could write as well as Browning? What nonsense, then, to try to write at all.<sup>84</sup>

With similar bitterness, Ives forged links between the sanctification of the past and the intolerance for modernity that marked the reception of his music. American composers had to work in the vacuum of an extended tradition of classical music. "To try to write at all" was an act that often provoked comparisons with the European masters. To write as a radical modernist exceeded that point of comparison and therefore the boundaries of what was permitted. Ives used gender ideology to articulate his own resentments at and frustrations with his critics and to retaliate for the condescension and rejection he found so hard to endure.

One need only pick up the opening of the *Memos* with its caricatures of music critics (quoted above) to see the extent to which Ives's hatred of conventional tonal style is inseparable from his hatred of institutions (including establishment critics) and of the overbearing presence of music from the past. Some of that fury must have come from the *Memos*' having been written so close in time to one of Ives's great disappointments: the critical rejection of his music at the Pan American concerts conducted by

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<sup>83</sup> Engel writes, "He hadn't approved of it, probably largely because they hadn't approved of him, hadn't accepted him in any possible way." (Quoted in Perlis, "Charles Ives," p. 197.)

<sup>84</sup> Van Wyck Brooks, *New England: Indian Summer 1865-1915* (New York, 1940), p. 442.

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Nicolas Slonimsky in Berlin and Paris.<sup>85</sup> But even in an earlier letter to Slonimsky, discussing commercial media, Ives trumpeted the same theme:

Radio: Art and business all hitched up together. 91 3/8 % (I like to be precise) of all radio and phonograph records—are "sebaceous cysts," and soft ones at that—and they sell—though if a 3-year-old is always fed candy for breakfast he will always be a 3-year-old—and the oatmeal market will die. The letter from the Victor Co.—"all commitments are made by themselves"—unnecessary statement!—just look at them, g—d—soft-headed lists! 955/8% "ta ta" stuff.<sup>86</sup>

The covenant between the European past and the upper classes is a main theme in the *Memos*. Two illustrative excerpts, which need full quotation, reveal Ives's politics, in which taste, class, and power are conjoined. First:

A stronger use of the mind and ear would mean less people (usually ladies) whose greatest interest and pleasure in art, in music, and in all nice things, is to get their names down among the Directors and Patrons of Rollo's friends, and in giving dinners to European artists, conductors, etc., with more reputation than anything else (that is, artists and conductors, not dinners)—letting themselves become dumb tools of a monopoly, kowtowing to everything the monopolists tell them about America being an unmusical country, and creating a kind of American Music inferiority complex. These commercial monopolists, whether prima donna conductors, violinists or singers, have so long fostered and held their monopolies (for just about a hundred years in this country) that as a result too much of the American ear has become a Soft-Static Co. (Limited) and the Gabrilowitsches et al. have got the money and coll[ected] the ladies' smiles.<sup>87</sup>

That world is captured in the frontispiece photograph for Daniel Gregory Mason's autobiography. Together are the symbols of Ivesian resentment: the virtuoso (Josef Hoffman) and his patron (Edward De Coppet, the most famous New York pre-World War I melomane) in elegant dress.<sup>88</sup>

Ives's fulminations against his own situation as a scorned modernist occasionally transcended the personal element to become broader protests against what recent historians have called the "commodification of

<sup>85</sup> In his preface to *A Temporary Mimeographed Catalogue* Kirkpatrick makes this clear, framing the opening sections of the *Memos* for the reader by giving details of Slonimsky's concerts and the critical reception (pp. 12–16).

<sup>86</sup> Charles Ives to Nicolas Slonimsky, 26 December 1930. Reprinted in Nicolas Slonimsky, ed., *Music Since 1900*, 4th ed. (New York, 1971), p. 1325.

<sup>87</sup> *Memos*, p. 41.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel Gregory Mason, *Music in My Time and Other Reminiscences* (New York, 1938). Mason devotes a chapter of his book to another Ives villain, Ossip Gabrilowitsch.

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culture."<sup>89</sup> Although this concept has generally been applied to popular music, Ives was not alone in suggesting that classical music from the past was being "commercialized," that, to sustain profits in the marketplace, listeners were conditioned to accept only those works as "good music." The notion that appears in the previous excerpt, that art is controlled by a cultural "monopoly," occurs in a later statement in a context that is even more revealing than his reaction to the Kneisel Quartet:

(Sep 4 [5], '34)—in London. . . . The music on the boats and Green Park didn't bring it home to me more strongly and hopelessly surely, than sitting there for an hour or so and hearing those groove-made chewed-cuds (those sound-sequences tied to the same old nice apron-strings, which have become greasy in the process.)—that music (and all art, like all life), must be part of the great organic flow, onwards and always upwards, or become soft in muscles and spirit, and die! I was never more conscious of the vapidness of the human minds that accept anything, round, soft, fat, or bazoota, which somebody else with a nicer silk hat than theirs hands them—commercial silk hatters—music conservatories (the better known the worse)—the paid newspaper critics—the prima donna monopolists—and perhaps the lowest of all, the publishing, the broadcasting, and recording for profit. The Valse Triste (as brown-sugar-coddle as it is) is bigger than what we heard last night—for the first is a nice lollipop, and it doesn't try to be something else—but these symphonies, overtures etc. are worse because they give out the strut of a little music making believe it's big. Every phrase, line, and chord, and beat went over and over the way you'd exactly expect them to go . . . trite, tiresome awnings of platitudes, all a nice mixture of Grieg, Wagner and Tchaikovsky (et al, ladies). But the worst part—a thing hinting that music might some day die, like an emasculated cherry, dead but dishonored—was to see those young people standing downstairs, seriously eating that yellow sap flowing from a stomach that had never had an idea. And some of them are probably composing, and you can see them going home, copying down those slimy grooves and thinking that they are creating something—helping music decline—dying—dying dead.<sup>90</sup>

For Ives the Proms concert evening precipitated his worst nightmare, an apocalyptic vision of the Death of Music in surrealistic imagery: round, soft minds melting like clocks in a Dali painting, yellow sap flowing from a stomach—is this poisoned mother's milk? And the ultimate dishonor: music as an "emasculated cherry"—cherry here indicating not a hymen but, probably, a homosexual. This entire jeremiad is informed by political

<sup>89</sup> Charles Hamm, "The Periodization of North American Music," paper delivered at the meeting of the American Musicological Society, Oakland, 1990, uses the work of Jacques Attali to suggest that "commodification" be the general descriptive term applied to the culture that accompanied the "rise of an American brand of capitalism."

<sup>90</sup> *Memos*, pp. 135–36.

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reaction that uses gender as a way to talk about the realities of the marketplace.

The politics of culture makes strange bedfellows. Ives's indictment of a commercialized repertory of classical music is echoed in some writings by Daniel Gregory Mason, who excoriated Toscanini concerts as "museums of the past" servicing "fashion-enclaved, prestige-hypnotized minds."<sup>91</sup> Both Mason and Ives, who once called Toscanini "Toss a Ninny," foreshadow the crusade against Toscanini undertaken by Virgil Thomson and spurred by his distaste for the rigidity of a repertory commercializing the great masterpieces and the "greatest symphonies" of the past.<sup>92</sup> Ives's denouncement of "the business-man-musician-European . . . the commercialists . . . always (most always) on the side of the conventional and so sellable," occasionally gendered as the "Prostitution of Art," can also be compared to Theodor Adorno's criticism of "Capitalist Monopolies."<sup>93</sup>

Other ultramodern composers were equally belligerent about performers. Carl Ruggles is alleged to have ranted privately about

Juilliard, leaving his millions to music and they spend it all teaching good-for-nothing fiddlers and pianists. Nothing for the composer. That fathead of a John Erskine sitting at the head of it, and Ernest Hutcheson, emasculated moron. Toscanini? Third rate conductor. A damn swine.<sup>94</sup>

And Varese is reported to have

felt a resentment toward the great virtuosi who all without exception performed the same works of old masters—and only a limited few of those—over and over again, ignoring completely contemporary composers who wrote in a new idiom, unfamiliar and unpopular. "They don't give a [shit] about music," he said, "only their 'careers'—their 'interpretations.' They still think I'm a circus freak."<sup>95</sup>

Ives used the *Memos* to strike back. The purpose of Ives's militant gender ideology was to weaken his adversaries by inverting gender discourse, rendering the patrimony—the heritage of male achievement—suspect on its own terms. By denying the Great Masters the authority of what might be called "the Eternal Masculine" he made his own bid for the reordering of power and artistic entitlement. If "they"—the Eurocentric conglomerate of performers, promoters, and critics—defined conso-

<sup>91</sup> Mason is quoted in Joseph Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini* (New York, 1987), p. 238.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>93</sup> *Memos*, p. 94. Adorno is cited by Horowitz, *Understanding Toscanini*, pp. 236–40.

<sup>94</sup> This comment is quoted by Ruth Crawford in an unpublished memoir, ca. 1930, Seeger Estate, Library of Congress.

<sup>95</sup> Quoted in Louise Varese, *Varese: A Looking-Glass Diary* (New York, 1972), p. 195.

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nance as natural, he redefined it as effeminate and therefore unnatural. If new music was pilloried by snobbish comparisons to the Old Masters (as it often was), then Ives desecrated the false idols. If Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms were ranked as hard and masculine, then he suggested that they were instead soft and tainted with effeminacy. In this sense his name-calling was purposeful. His project was the emasculation of the cultural patriarchy.

That he undermined his own cause by relying on the language of gender prejudice is only one of the ironies attending the life and works of this great composer. Let me remind the reader that the literature about gender and music in American culture has not been surveyed here as an apology for Ives but, rather, to demythologize his anger and to confront our own cultural legacies. "In isolation, anger is privatized and neutralized, unrecognizable," its political implications suppressed.<sup>96</sup> Thus the "manner" of Ivesian polemics has to some extent undone its "substance," not only diminishing his historical stature as an American paradigm but obfuscating the political content of his dissent. Given our post-Freudian habit of reading sexuality into every context, it is all the harder to read it out where it misleads. Given our cultural addiction to the music of the past, we have been uncomfortable confronting Ives's apostatic treatment of the canon. In our gender ideology of music the "masculinization" of high art has been no less powerful and pervasive than the "feminization" of musical "accomplishment," these associations retaining some resonance even today. Unless we distance ourselves from this legacy, we run the risk of cementing the orthodoxies of "separate spheres" into our own interpretations, rather than recognizing the continuum of possible adaptations and resistances between individuals and society and between men and women who, as composers and musicians, are bound together as much as torn apart by the ideology surrounding music and gender.

It is beyond the scope of this essay to do more than acknowledge the complexity of the larger relationship between Ives's rhetoric and his music. To paraphrase a historian of science, "Just as music—always more abundant than its representations—inevitably transcends our laws, so the practice of composition—always more abundant than its ideology—transcends its own prescriptions."<sup>97</sup> It is open to question whether Ives's "music issues from a contest between opposing aspects of his own nature" or whether "the Ives who talked about the emasculation of music is not

<sup>96</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington, 1989), p. 193.

<sup>97</sup> "Just as nature—always more abundant than its representations—inevitably transcends our laws, so the practice of science—always more abundant than its ideology—transcends its own prescriptions." (Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* [New Haven, 1985], p. 136.)

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the Ives who wrote the music."<sup>98</sup> The "Ives who talked" learned the social grammar of his culture; the "Ives who wrote" used its related ideology as a defense against rejection, an important element in his modernist dissent and his presentation of himself as an artist—a way, that is, to distance himself from the inherited patrimony on his own terms.

Women—either as "Woman" or as real women—were only a small part of this polemic. The ultimate misogyny in Ives's aesthetic is its total devaluation of feminine values, the despoiling of difference as it was understood then. Like the boy who watched the leopard in the cage, we witness Ives's turbulent intellect pace between his false antinomies, his words and music offering up the challenge of his unanswered question: "Is life anything like that?"

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<sup>98</sup> The first quotation is from Solomon, "Charles Ives," p. 467, the second from J. Peter Burkholder, quoted in *ibid.*

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