

David Deutsch, *British Literature and Classical Music: Cultural Contexts 1870-1945*, Bloomsbury, 2015, pp. x + 262, \$104.00.

Bloomsbury's 'Historicizing Modernism' imprint has already produced impressive recent scholarship on Mina Loy, T.E. Hulme, and Samuel Beckett.¹ David Deutsch extends from these single-author studies to offer a carefully researched and well-organised account of the importance of classical music in British literature. Although his definition of 'classical music' attempts to police its boundaries, foregoing 'more popular, ephemeral, and often simpler pub songs, music hall patter songs, and drawing-room tunes' (p. 3), his historical span is ambitious, taking us from Walter Pater to Christopher Isherwood. The title offers us 'British Literature' rather than 'modernism', and the substitution is welcome: previous literary-musical studies have often attempted formal and sociological analysis that ended up silencing many important literary voices from the period. Instead of being caught up with a critical language that must accommodate Virginia Woolf, Edith Sitwell, W. H. Auden and Siegfried Sassoon, Deutsch explores the social, rather than the experimental, possibilities of musical culture for writers from the period. By acknowledging that, for many modernists, musical allusion was a form of cultural positioning rather than an attempt to craft an interdisciplinary aesthetic, he frees himself of many of the difficulties of previous studies (which had to explain, for instance, why Woolf writes about Beethoven rather than Stravinsky). As he notes, it is 'a different story, with a few more characters' (p. 10).

The first chapter considers how music was used as a trope by Oxford scholars and critics in the late nineteenth century to promote social harmony. There are some wonderfully attentive readings of Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873) and *Plato and Platonism* (1893) and here, but Deutsch is clear-sighted about the ironies of application: Pater celebrates abstinence and temperance in an attempt to legitimise homoeroticism. As Deutsch notes, Lord Clarendon

worried over the licentiousness and effeminacy of music, but its powers were being used for practical as well as moral arguments. Deutsch is revealing on the development of Sunday music concerts, which prompted a more general expansion of entertainment. This sustained focus on Pater's turn to Plato does important work for the rest of the book, uncovering an origin for the musical language that was to become used by writers from Oscar Wilde to George Bernard Shaw.

The second chapter is particularly impressive, setting out the distinctive musical rhetoric crafted by writers including T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley in order to differentiate themselves from both the aristocracy and the middle-class. While many of the excerpts Deutsch chooses have been subject to previous analysis, as in the opera scene from Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922), Deutsch crafts a distinctive argument. The class anxieties affecting Gordon Comstock in George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) or Rhoda in Woolf's *The Waves* (1931) are not always comparable, and the chapter must necessarily collapse a variety of different literary forms and techniques; nevertheless, the thesis is persuasive.

The fascinating third chapter is perhaps the most original, exploring the representation of lower-middle and working-class musicians and audiences in works by Thomas Burke, Somerset Maugham and Compton Mackenzie. Few literary-musical studies of the period have found space for the jobbing pit musician. Deutsch convincingly argues that the intelligence and gentility signalled by these performers was in dialogue with the cultural distinctions being meted out in the opera stalls. Here, Deutsch's expansive approach pays dividends: Toynbee Hall tells us a great about Covent Garden Opera House, and vice versa.

The fourth chapter takes us back to Pater, reading the queer subcultures of turn-of-the-century London through the work of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis. Musical becomes a synonym for homosexual, and, ironically, the attentiveness of the queer concert-goer

becomes a way for the same-sex partner to identify them. Deutsch sets out a careful musical-sexual hermeneutics: the more usual literary examples are read alongside Beverley Nichols' novel *Prelude* (1920). Deutsch traces these increasingly ambivalent metaphors into the work of Auden and Isherwood, when class conflict and international violence trouble the careful symbolism outlined in Robert Hichens' *The Green Carnation* (1929).

The final chapter considers how the various British subcultures claiming classical music dealt with the growing anxieties about the German empire. While the opening of the chapter returns us to the ever-familiar scene of Forster's Queen's Hall concert in *Howards End* (1910), extended readings of Dorothy Richardson's *Painted Roofs* (1915) and Shaw's music reviews bring new insights to the analysis. Of particular note is Deutsch's exploration of the work of Katharine Burdekin, a novelist often missing from critical discussions of the period. The final section of the chapter shows how fascism silenced the European classical ideal in works by D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley and Storm Jameson. Yet here, and elsewhere throughout the book, Deutsch is careful not to flatten his account in the interests of creating a coherent picture. As he notes, public broadcasters from the period took pains to unite Britain and Germany through a shared cultural heritage.

Deutsch's meticulous research draws on a variety of materials: diaries, music programmes, newspapers and music education books, alongside novels and poetry. Whatever the source, he has a wonderful ear and eye for the unexpected: an orange thrown by a bored spectator at the Holywell Music Room that broke a Cremona violin; dogs yapping during concerts; the profound ambivalence prompted by a Nazi choir performing a Bach chorale in Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937). However, in a work that discusses the shabby gentility of the Edwardian music teacher, the erotic scandals of nineteenth-century Magdalen College, the cosmopolitan possibilities of Wagner, and the wartime National Gallery Concerts by Myra Hess something must be excluded. Though the study takes Pater's

aesthetics as its starting point, it has little to say about the qualities of the literature it discusses: for instance, Deutsch ends a chapter on the cultural positioning of Eliot, Woolf and Huxley with the apologetic equivocation that ‘it seems worth acknowledging that their musical associations and experiments are appealingly and brilliantly done’ (p. 87). Though Deutsch is careful to trace the tropes that pass from Pater through Woolf to Isherwood, some consideration of their effect would help particularise the analysis at times. Nonetheless, a study that does so much to uncover how early twentieth-century literary culture cultivated its appreciation for classical music is to be warmly welcomed. Deutsch’s ambitious approach to his story is not only full of characters, but also characterful.

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ⁱ See Sandeep Parmer, *Reading Mina Loy’s Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), Henry Mead, *T.E. Hulme and the Ideological Politics of Early Modernism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), and Iain Bailey, *Samuel Becket and the Bible* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).