

## CHAPTER 9



# The Dear Dead Past: The Piano in Victorian and Edwardian Poetry

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A woman was playing,  
A man looking on.  
And the mould of her face,  
And her neck, and her hair,  
Which the rays fell upon  
Of the two candles there,  
Sent him mentally straying  
In some fancy place.

THOMAS HARDY, 'At the Piano'<sup>1</sup>

It has become a commonplace that the piano played a vital part in the life cycle of the female members of the Victorian middle classes. Aristocrats did not need it and the working classes could not afford it, but the vast majority of middle-class girls played the piano during the period from late childhood until marriage as part of a canon of accomplishments that men were conditioned to consider attractive in a potential wife. Once the aim of acquiring a husband was realized, the practice usually ceased, to be revived only occasionally for the sake of whiling away an idle hour or of teaching one's children. Women who had not managed to get a husband were the ones who continued to play, and also to teach the piano as governesses. Serious, passionate, or even professional musicianship in married women was virtually unthinkable, despite a few high-profile and often foreign exceptions such as Lady Hallé, Arabella Goddard, and Clara Schumann, and scarcely exists in the fiction of the period. Instead, countless Victorian novels feature the piano as locus for amorous encounters, as a consoling companion for lonely or distraught women, and as an object of social status. All these link up with that great Victorian institution, matrimony, which, of course, as the classic conclusion or favourite topic of novels, is also a literary institution. But throughout the nineteenth century and up to the Great War the piano features in poems too, and while the scenes that these texts present (with only slight variations in mood throughout the period) at first seem very diverse, they can be read as a different genre's way of handling exactly the same fundamental quandaries about music and women.

Victorian stereotypes, whether expressed in non-fictional texts, novels, or poems, represent a particularly English response to a long-standing ambiguity in music's status. Since the Renaissance at least, music had been associated with women or love for women, and the contradictory connotations that woman and music shared in the Western patriarchal imagination generated many points of identity between them. Like woman, music had theoretically been exalted as divine — complete with a female patron saint; yet many forms of musical practice were considered inferior, and even morally dangerous to performers and listeners. This same ambiguity is discussed by Tili Boon Cuillé in the preceding essay. In England the inferiority of performance was reinforced by its strong association with 'others': foreigners, 'professional people' (a derogatory term), clergymen, and, of course, women.

Whenever women players are specified in Victorian literature, music tends to be synonymous with 'piano'. For centuries women had been restricted to plucked and keyboard instruments, which could be played more decorously than most string and wind instruments. The lute, which was among the piano's closest rivals, was long-obsolete by the nineteenth century, and the harp was also past its fashionable Regency prime. After a century of piano love poems, the terms 'instrument' and 'music' in connection with women had become shorthand for 'piano' — the default option. Leigh Hunt's poem 'The Lover of Music to his Piano-forte' is an extreme expression of such gendering: the piano, instead of being played by a woman, has itself been feminized and answers the male player with a voice that meets all the requirements of ideal Victorian womanhood:

O friend, whom glad or grave we seek,  
 Heav'n holding shrine!  
 I ope thee, hear thee speak,  
 And peace is mine.  
 [...]  
 To thee, when our full hearts o'erflow  
 In griefs or joys,  
 Unspeakable emotions owe  
 A fitting voice:  
 [...]  
 No change, no sullenness, no cheat,  
 In thee we find;  
 Thy saddest voice is ever sweet,  
 — thine answer, kind.<sup>2</sup>

In most other poetic scenarios, however, the piano is played by a woman in the presence of a male listener, and this constellation is so frequent that often neither player nor instrument need be named. Metonymic evocation is sufficient, as at the end of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'During Music', where 'small fingers' floating over 'keys' define the sex of the player and the instrument she uses; although even before this, the set-up must have been obvious to the reader:

What though I lean o'er thee to scan  
 The written music cramped and stiff;  
 — 'Tis dark to me, as hieroglyph  
 On those weird bulks Egyptian.<sup>3</sup>



FIG. 9.1. *Etching* (1900), by Robert Walker Macbeth, 1848–1910 (Scottish);  
455 × 615 mm; after Sir Frank Dicksee, *A Reverie*, 1895  
Private collection: photograph Gary Irvine

The painting was supplied with an anonymous quotation which reads:  
In the years fled  
Lips that are dead  
Sang me that song

The male listener, far from participating in instrumental performance, is not ashamed to admit that he cannot even read music. This inability is not just a poetic device but represents contemporary reality. As a contributor to *Nature* remarked in 1874, 'Music hardly comes within the scope of a boy's education, at least in this country; while it is almost compulsory on girls, whether they have the talent for it or not'.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding the perceived dangers of music, its practice was forced on every girl in order to display her father's earning power and to bring about a desirable marriage. The time-honoured social practice of functionalizing female musical performance for courtship rituals reached a peak in the mid-nineteenth century, both exploiting music's erotic potential and containing it socially.

The literary effects of these inherent contradictions can be traced back to the early modern period, if not earlier. On the one hand, music becomes a favourite metaphor for all that is ordered, sacred and beautiful — 'harmonious' — about love, whereas, on the other, actual representations of music-making — usually women singing and playing the piano — more frequently exploit its earthy, sensual,<sup>5</sup> or quotidian, even commercial aspects. This second aspect has become proverbial through the piano's complicity in marriage and adultery plots in many familiar and much-quoted scenes in the works of Austen, George Eliot, and Thackeray, not to mention Tolstoy's 'Kreutzer Sonata'. In lyrical poems, however, music is free from such concrete narrative obligations. Love is usually in the air, but the social context, the making or breaking of marriages, need not be. Nevertheless, when the piano is put to more strictly 'poetical' uses, it presents a problem. In striking contrast to older instruments such as the harp, trumpet, or lute, the piano completely lacks allegorical or metaphorical potential. It is too modern a contraption to evoke biblical, classical, or truly romantic associations; we cannot see the Heavenly Host, Orpheus, King David, or even Don Juan sitting down to it. Nineteenth-century novels have taught us to imagine 'real people' on the music stool: pretty husband hunters, scheming adulteresses, sinister, exotic virtuosi, and desperate adolescents. This difficulty may explain Thomas Wade's mistaken assumption, in his 'Written after Hearing Great Music' (1869), that he was the first to write a piano poem:

Pianoforte! Ne'er before, perchance,  
Thy alien name with English verse was blent;  
But now 'tis meet thou to that place advance,  
As rival to whatever instrument.<sup>6</sup>

By 1869, of course, the piano had for a long time been *the* instrument without rival in fiction, real life, and poetry, and a surprising number of sincerely intended Victorian poems feature women at the piano. These texts usually retain the fundamental erotic connotations of the instrument, but attempt to eschew the domestic trappings that are so firmly attached to it in favour of more conventionally poetic associations. However, love scenes outside the drawing room are difficult to manage around a piano, and many 'piano poems', in fact, find the task of getting this clumsy piece of furniture into Heaven, or simply into the open air, very tricky.<sup>7</sup> John Nicholson's 'Dying Lover', for instance, has to transmogrify the instrument at the last second:

Go, touch my sweet piano's strings,  
And chant me into rest,

Till angels come, and on their wings  
 Convey me to the blest.  
 And mourn not as I soar away  
 To tune my *harp* on high;  
 Useless the tears upon my clay,  
 For I'm prepared to die.<sup>8</sup>

To avoid such contortions, the majority of Victorian piano love poems resort to a very particular solution: they kill the pianist. With striking consistency the woman pianist is depicted as actually dead, or at least far enough away in time and space to be no more than a memory.<sup>9</sup>

In Victorian prose fiction the death of a female character is, of course, not at all rare, but in novels women generally die as a punishment for having 'fallen' or for being at least at odds with society (and their transgressions frequently include playing the piano too well or for the wrong purposes). But poems do not need to sustain a narrative span leading to ruin as retribution, or to marriage as reward. They are at greater liberty to celebrate the musical power of an absent woman who never appears in the flesh, or to mourn a dead woman as a paragon of virtue and beauty, without the need for 'poetic' justice, that is, a moral or logical explanation of her death. Whether the poem looks forward to heavenly rapture or back to death or separation long ago, the piano — treasure casket, coffin, or sounding-board — is all that remains of the enchanting player, and thus acquires a peculiar dignity of its own. The inevitable undertone of domestic realism becomes poignant rather than prosaic or silly.

However, the dead woman pianist solves more than just the poetological 'piano problem'. More importantly, the reminiscing male speaker is at liberty to indulge in memories of the woman's seductive power because he is safe from it. This becomes even more apparent when, as frequently happens, the piano itself becomes the addressee. The male speaker talks to the piano *about* the dead woman player, who is thus elided at the very moment of being voluptuously remembered. Female sensuality (vital to matchmaking at the piano, but always a dangerous property) is evoked, but at a safe distance, at which erotic fantasies can turn into an almost religious exercise, as in William Sharp's 'During music' (1884):

I hear old memories astir  
 In dusky twilights of the past:  
 O voices telling me of her,  
 My soul, whom now I know at last:  
 [...]  
 On one day yet to come I see  
 This body pale and cold and dead:  
 The spirit once again made free  
 Hovers triumphant overhead.<sup>10</sup>

Once the body is safely disposed of with no less than three unequivocal adjectives, 'pale and cold and dead', the spirit is free to be addressed as female.

These devious proceedings were quite new. Elizabethan texts had been very explicitly naughty in their description of the tactile values of keyboard performance,<sup>11</sup> and its erotic effects used to be pictured quite openly when the fortepiano was young. In 1788 a 'Seraphina playing the piano-forte' was implored:

Oh! let me burn beneath thy Phoenix eye,  
 And all the wiles of love and music try,  
 Conceive the angel flame, Promæthean fire,  
 And in sweet ravishments of love expire.<sup>12</sup>

Such intensity had become simply unthinkable half a century later. Unusually for a male poetic narrator, Nicholson's 'Dying Lover' (quoted above) does die near a piano, but not from powerful sexual excitement.

Many Victorian 'piano poems' elaborate one of three scenarios: first, an erotically attractive female is dying at the piano or has her death foreshadowed; alternatively, the keyboard instrument itself becomes a sign for 'memory', evoking a private or historical past; or, lastly, the woman pianist is already in the past, usually dead, but in any case only remembered.

The first scenario — death at the keyboard — can be morbidly dramatic, as in Thomas Hardy's 'The Chapel-Organist' (1884),<sup>13</sup> the interior monologue of a too-handsome girl who plays the village organ for free. Before being dismissed for 'the good name of the chapel', she plays, voluptuously and rousingly, for one last time, and then drinks poison while her feet keep the organ booming. The genre-specific conventions outlined above suggest that this death as punishment for sensuality belongs more typically to narrative fiction than to poetic representation of women at the keyboard, and in fact this poem does tell a story. Arthur O'Shaughnessy's 'Music and Moonlight' is more purely evocative, though far longer. After a great ball the speaker, in the sumptuous, now empty house overhears the belle of the evening playing alone. This drives him to more than five hundred lines of mythological rhapsodizing, at the end of which 'Chopin's soul' invites the girl

to be henceforth where never she need lose  
 That fair illumined vision's height  
 Then, she said not Yea,  
 But with intense emotion inward spoke.  
 And therewith something burst asunder — broke!  
 Down in that shrouded chamber far away  
 The grand piano snapt one string; but oh,  
 Pale Lady Eucharis fell back, as though  
 Her dream grew deeper; and at dawn of day,  
 They found her — dead; as one asleep she lay!<sup>14</sup>

But death at the piano can also be a very quiet and veiled affair. In Thomas Edward Brown's 'Preparation', keeping a virginal well tuned means keeping one's soul prepared for meeting God at death, 'for when He comes thou know'st not'.<sup>15</sup> The name of the historical instrument provides an additional echo of the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, the moral of which the poem is elaborating. William Watt's 'Stanzas on Hearing a Young Lady Perform on the Piano Forte' (1860) are not so openly admonitory, but the player, whose skill is favourably compared to that of Orpheus and Jubal, is reminded, albeit in the nicest possible way, of her final destiny:

Long be the time before thy hand  
 Forego to raise such concord grand,  
 And join the bright angelic band  
 In the realms of bless'd eternity.<sup>16</sup>

The Hereafter, promised as a reward for excellent moral (and musical) behaviour, also looms in Frances Ridley Havergal's 'Moonlight Sonata', which maps the musical work onto a spiritual itinerary, concluding that 'This strange, sad world is but our Father's school; | All chance and change His love shall grandly overrule'.<sup>17</sup>

Piano poems evoking memory — the second scenario — frequently include allusions to pre-piano times. The name of an earlier keyboard instrument — harpsichord, clavichord, dulcimer, or spinet — is frequently sufficient to establish the theme of loss and nostalgia. By 1800 the harpsichord was a thing of the recent past, something old-fashioned or ridiculous; after 1840 it was remote enough to become a dignified sentimental symbol for lost youth or love.<sup>18</sup> Such poems are not to be confused with jolly historical genre scenes that feature spinets as quaint or saucy accessories in 'Merry Old England' contexts;<sup>19</sup> old keyboard instruments are regularly shown as what they have become *since* their own epoch — not only historical, but old, unstrung, broken, and thus doubly apt to set scenes of loss and remembrance. Examples of poems in this vein are Andrew Lang's 'The Spinet',<sup>20</sup> Edward Waite's 'House Fantastic' (1904, an imitation of Poe's 'Raven'),<sup>21</sup> Norman Rowland Gale's 'The Old Piano' (1912),<sup>22</sup> and George Barlow's 'White',<sup>23</sup> where the last sight of the beloved is compared with falling rose petals and the 'last long wailing of a harpsichord'. In Francis William Bourdillon's 'The Spinet' (1888)<sup>24</sup> a widower is reminded of his long-dead wife by the strumming of his grandchildren on an old spinet.

A particularly ghostly version of this nostalgic allusion to instruments of the past became popular after 1890: willowy, pale, dreamy women scarcely 'perform' at the keyboard, but are seen, rather, or felt as a kind of visual emanation of music. Ezra Pound's 'Scriptor Ignotus' (1909) describes a lady organist recorded by an eighteenth-century Dante scholar:

Dear, an this dream come true,  
Then shall all men say of thee  
'She 'twas that played him power at life's morn,  
And at the twilight Evensong,  
And God's peace dwelt in the mingled chords  
She drew from out the shadows of the past,  
And old world melodies that else  
He had known only in his dreams  
Of Iseult and of Beatrice.'<sup>25</sup>

In 'Nel Biancheggiar' (1908) Pound audaciously uses the medieval dulcimer to celebrate a pianist friend's concerts in London in this misty way:

I feel the dusky softness whirr  
of colour as upon a dulcimer  
'Her' dreaming fingers lay between the tunes,  
As when the living music swoons  
But dies not quite, because of love of us  
— knowing our state /  
How that 'tis troublous —  
It will not die to leave us desolate.'<sup>26</sup>

James Joyce's early poem cycle *Chamber Music* (1907) exists in a similar twilight. Again, the instrument is only metonymically present in the 'yellow [i.e. *old*] ivory' of its

keys;<sup>27</sup> ‘one at twilight shyly played | And one in fear was standing nigh’. The love between these two creatures of course ‘came to us in time gone by’.<sup>28</sup> In all these texts the contemporary practice of piano performance by young women is made a vehicle for wistful historicizing.

Finally, poems where the female performer herself exists only in her lover’s memory form a large group that is especially representative of certain gender stereotypes. Typically, the male speaker touches a single key or chord — he does not, of course, actually play, let alone perform on the piano. The only audience is the piano itself, whilst the speaker remembers how she, now dead or gone, used to play or sing. Theodore Wratishaw’s Verlaine translation ‘Le Piano que baise’ (1893) depicts such a scene:

The piano over which a light hand strays  
Shines vaguely in the evening grey and rose,  
While as with rustling of a wing that plays,  
An ancient air most weak and charming flows  
Discreetly and as though heart-broken goes  
Throughout the boudoir where her memory stays.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, the speaker in Philip Marston’s ‘A Remembered Tune’ records how ‘[m]y hand strayed o’er the piano keys, | And it chanced on a song that you sang, my dear’.<sup>30</sup> In John Payne’s ‘At the Piano’ (1903), the touching of the keys prompts a sensual resurrection:

As o’er the answering keys my fingers stray,  
[...]  
The memories of many a bygone day,  
The curtain of the Present drawn away  
Is from my thought and with the veil’s undoing,  
The dear dead past arises, the renewing  
Seeking of that which moulders in the clay.  
[...]  
I, as o’er the abyss  
Of thought I lean and watch the wraiths emerging,  
Feel on my lips once more my first love’s kiss.<sup>31</sup>

In Mary Elizabeth Coleridge’s ‘To a Piano’ (1908), the instrument ‘only to one hand on earth replieth’, but that hand is gone, the speaker cannot play, and the instrument remains mute:

If I might win me that remembered strain  
By reverent lifting of thy gleamy lid,  
I could forget the sorrowful refrain  
Of all the world shall do — is doing — did.  
Pandora’s prisoned hope was not more vain.  
The casket’s there, the melody is hid.<sup>32</sup>

The allusion to Pandora’s box is, of course, another reminder that it is not only sad but safer if the sensual attractions of music remain locked away. The closed instrument stands in for the objectified female body, which, thus safely displaced and locked up, can be allowed to be erotically responsive to the male touch.<sup>33</sup> The straying fingers



of the dreamy reminiscer figure in all these texts, re-enacting the physical touch of the vanished woman player who also used only her fingers, a highly erotic and at the same time decorous body part.

This trope becomes rather gruesome in Thomas Hardy's 'Haunting Fingers' (1884), where a group of old musical instruments is conversing in an attic, and a harpsichord, 'as 'twere from dampered lips' remembers

The tender pat  
Of her aery finger-tips  
Upon me daily — I rejoiced thereat!

Macabrely, we are told that its keyboard is

filmed with fingers  
Like tapering flames — wan, cold —  
Or the nebulous light that lingers  
In charnel mould.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly eerie, Hardy's 'The Re-enactment' (1884) has a ghost entering a woman's room, first mistaking the speaker for his 'lady fair', then ordering her to rearrange the furniture in the old way so that he could again envision his long-gone lover serving him — pouring tea and, of course, playing the piano to him:

'Aha — now I can see her!  
[...]  
She serves me: now she rises,  
Goes to play.  
But you obstruct her, fill her  
With dismay,  
And all-embarrassed, scared, she vanishes away!<sup>35</sup>

This is indeed rather an embarrassing instance of the difficulties of what F. R. Leavis called 'that most dangerous theme, the irrevocable past'.<sup>36</sup> It is this difficulty together with a frequent disregard of the practical givens of keyboard music-making that makes Victorian piano poetry a rather deplorable sub-genre.

Leavis, however, showed himself receptive to the potential power of the piano poem to evoke memory when he analysed an example of the genre approvingly because its 'particularity' in remembering an 'unbeglamouring' situation something tangible, 'the presence of something other than directly offered emotion, or mere emotional flow — the presence of something, a specific situation, concretely grasped'.<sup>37</sup> The poem in question is the 1918 version of D. H. Lawrence's 'Piano',<sup>38</sup> in which a woman's singing transports the speaker back to a childhood experience of sitting under the piano 'in the boom of the tingling strings | And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings'. The mother's 'poised' feet and the tinny vibrations, more felt than heard, of a modest family instrument playing hymns on 'the old Sunday evenings at home' retain the realist bearings that suit the piano so well and lend a particular force to the 'flood of remembrance' provoked by 'the insidious mastery of song'.

One of Thomas Hardy's best-loved piano poems equally avoids the ridiculous through particularity, and this is especially impressive because he uses all the tricky

conventional elements of 'piano poetry' that Lawrence avoids.<sup>39</sup> 'The Duettist to her Pianoforte: Song of Silence' (1884) assembles the complete cast of the usual lyric effusion — the male speaker, the dead or absent woman player, the apostrophe to the piano, and the touch of the fingers — but exact historical detail and the domestic realism associated with the instrument join with Hardy's haunting iterations to set this poem apart from others in the genre:

Since every sound moves memories,  
 How can I play you  
 Just as I might if your raised no scene,  
 By your ivory rows, of a form between  
 My vision and your time-worn sheen,  
 As when each day you  
 Answered our fingers with ecstasy?  
 So it's hushed, hushed, hushed, you are for me!  
 I fain would second her, strike to her stroke,  
 As when she was by,  
 Aye, even from the ancient clamorous, 'Fall  
 Of Paris,' or 'Battle of Prague' withal,  
 To the 'Roving Minstrels,' or 'Elfin Call'  
 Sung soft as a sigh:  
 But upping ghosts press achefully,  
 And mute, mute, mute, you are for me!

Should I fling your polyphones,  
 plaints and quavers  
 Afresh on the air,  
 Too quick would the small white shapes be here  
 Of the fellow twain of hands so dear;  
 And a black-tressed profile, and pale smooth ear;  
 — The how shall I bear  
 Such heavily-haunted harmony?  
 Nay: hushed, hushed, hushed you are for me!  
 And as I am doomed to counterchord  
 Her notes no more  
 In those old things I used to know,  
 In a fashion, when we practised so,  
 'Good-night! — Good-bye!?' to your pleated show  
 Of silk, now hoar,  
 Each nodding hammer, and pedal and key,  
 For dead, dead, dead, you are to me!<sup>40</sup>

The concluding line contains a unique touch, in that the instrument — not a dilapidated spinet but a mid-nineteenth-century upright — is no coffin or casket but has itself died with the beloved. But instead of being laboriously made to ascend to Heaven, it is described in earthly detail. Popular sheet-music and the technicalities of four-hand playing are movingly evoked: the beloved's face is remembered in the profile view her duet partner would have seen when the two practised together. The nonce-word 'counterchord' encapsulates a frequent structure of simple four-hand writing (the secondo player, at the lower half of the keyboard, accompanies the double-octave melody of the primo with his chords), and may even allude to the effort it takes a not

very advanced pair of players to sound these chords at the right time against the tune. The insistence on the piano's old-fashioned and worn-out trimmings (faded silk front, ivory keys, wood shining with use) further turns this moving poem into a farewell not just to an individual love but to a whole epoch, without having to resort to spinets and pseudo-Elizabethan jargon. The very conventionality, the humdrum quality of the domestic piano is used for a maximum of poetic poignancy.

In nineteenth-century fiction, women protagonists who do not marry suffer 'death or despair or disappearance',<sup>41</sup> that is, they exit the plot, depart this life, or become 'disinfected' as confirmed spinsters. While plot conventions make the actual death of nubile middle-class pianists in novels rather rare,<sup>42</sup> it is poetry's favourite genre-specific strategy for dealing with the sexual power of female musicians who are, as it were, sacrificed on 'the household altar'.<sup>43</sup> The poems discussed in this essay communicate, in a peculiarly direct and absolute fashion, the familiar mixture of fascination and fear that female sensuality provokes: they deal out death far more freely than narrative texts, which need to explain death as retribution. In his extraordinary 'Duettist', Thomas Hardy reveals himself as truly the 'last Victorian' by endorsing the implicit message of most nineteenth-century piano poetry: that the only good woman pianist is — distanced and silenced — a dead woman pianist.

### Notes to Chapter 9

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1. In *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hardy*, ed. by Samuel Hynes, 5 vols (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1982–95), II (1984), p. 279.
2. James Henry Leigh Hunt, 'The Lover of Music to his Piano-forte', in *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt*, ed. by Humphrey Milford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 355.
3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 'During Music', in *The Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Edited with Preface and Notes by William M. Rossetti*, rev. and enlarged edn (London: Ellis, 1911), p. 195.
4. Anon., 'The Education of Women', *Nature*, 10 (17 September 1874), 395–96 (p. 395).
5. In her article in this volume Tili Boon Cuillé describes the similar sensual connotations that music has in Rousseau's writings, as well as the literary tactics that Germaine de Staël employs in order to distance the musical protagonist of her novel *Corinne* from such demeaning associations.
6. Thomas Wade, 'Written after Hearing Great Music', in *The Poems and Plays of Thomas Wade*, ed. by John L. McLean (Troy, NY: Whitston, 1997), p. 368.
7. Compare, for example, Rudyard Kipling's 'The Song of the Banjo', in *The Complete Verse* (London: Kyle Cathie, 1990), pp. 82–84 (p. 82):
 

You couldn't pack a Broadwood half a mile —  
 You mustn't leave a fiddle in the damp —  
 You couldn't raft an organ up the Nile,  
 And play it in an Equatorial swamp.
8. John Nicholson, 'The Dying Lover', in *The Poetical Works* (Bradford: Thomas Brear, 1876), p. 243 (my emphasis).
9. I am indebted to Daniel Albright for the interesting piece of information that the end of *Tristan* acquired the title 'Liebestod' only in its form of Franz Liszt's piano transcription.
10. William Sharp, 'During Music', in *Earth's Voices, Transcripts from Nature, Sospittra, and Other Poems* (London: Elliot Stock, 1884), pp. 114–15.

11. Shakespeare's Leontes coins a suggestive verb to express this: 'But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers, | As now they are! [...] Is she | Still virginalling | Upon his palm?' (William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), pp. 1564–1605: I. 2. 125–26). The allusion is even cruder in Shakespeare's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*: 'She met him in an arbor: | What did she there, coz? play o' th' virginals? *Arcite*. Something she did, sir. *Palamon*. Made her groan a month for't | Or two, or three, or ten' (William Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), pp. 1639–82: III. 3. 34–37). In Shakespeare's Sonnet 128 ('How oft when thou, my music, music play'st') two male personae (the speaker and the keyboard instrument) are sharing not memories but the actual body of a woman player: 'Since saucy jacks [i.e. keys] so happy are in this, | Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss' (William Shakespeare, *The Sonnets & A Lover's Complaint* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986)).
12. Robert Colvill, 'To the Elegant Seraphina, Performing on the Piano Forte, at a Private Concert', in *The Poetical Works* (London: Dodsley, 1789), pp. 97–99 (p. 99).
13. Thomas Hardy, 'The Chapel-Organist', in *The Complete Poetical Works*, II, 406–12.
14. Arthur Edward William O'Shaughnessy, 'Music and Moonlight', in *Music and Moonlight: Poems and Songs* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1874), pp. 7–37 (p. 137).
15. Thomas Edward Brown, 'Preparation', in *Poems*, 2 vols (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1952), II, 380–81.
16. William Watt, 'Stanzas on Hearing a Young Lady Perform on the Piano Forte', in *Poems, on Sacred and Other Subjects, Humorous and Sentimental* (Glasgow: William Eadie, 1860), p. 254.
17. Frances Ridley Havergal, 'The Moonlight Sonata', in *The Poetical Works*, 2 vols (London: James Nisbet, 1884), II, 14–31.
18. Mrs Transome in *Felix Holt*, in her mid-fifties in 1832, considers 'her young accomplishments [...] almost ludicrous, like the tone of her first harpsichord and the words of the song long browned with age' (George Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 89). Dickens's hopelessly loyal, faded Miss Tox, who remains devoted to the cold Paul Dombey throughout his two marriages, owns and plays 'an obsolete harpsichord, illuminated round the maker's name with a painted garland of sweet peas' (Charles Dickens, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale, Retail and for Exportation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 86).
19. For example, compare Austin Dobson's 'Gentlewoman of the Old School' (in *Collected Poems*, 9th edn (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1913), pp. 14–18) —
- Perchance could sum, I doubt she spelt;  
[...]  
I know she played and sang, for yet  
We keep the tumble-down spinet  
To which she quavered ballads set  
By Arne or Jackson
- and many others such as William Thomas Moncrieff's 'Good Old English Gentlewoman' (in *An Original Collection of Songs* (London: John Duncombe, 1850), pp. 150–51); and 'Nell Cook' from the *Ingoldsby Legends* (Thomas Ingoldsby (The Revd Richard H. Barham), *The Ingoldsby Legends, or, Mirth and Marvels* (London: Richard Bentley, 1840), II, 91–99).
20. Andrew Lang, 'The Spinnet', in *Poetical Works*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1923), II, 25.
21. Edward Waite, 'House Fantastic', in *The Collected Poems of Arthur Edward Waite* (London: William Rider, 1904), p. 112.
22. Norman Rowland Gale, 'The Old Piano', in *Song in September* (London: Constable, 1912), pp. 78–80.
23. George Barlow, 'White', in *The Poetical Works*, 11 vols (London: Henry T. Glaiser, 1902–14), volume II, 119.
24. Francis William Bourdillon, 'The Spinnet', in *Young Maids and Old China* (London: Marcus Ward, 1888), n.p.
25. Ezra Pound, 'Scriptor Ignotus', in *Collected Early Poems* (London: Faber, 1977), pp. 24–26.
26. Pound, 'Nel Biancheggiar', in *Collected Early Poems*, p. 72.
27. James Joyce, *Chamber Music*, in *Poems and Shorter Writings* (London: Faber, 1991), pp. 11–48 (p. 14).

28. Joyce, p. 42.
29. Theodore Wratlslaw, 'Le Piano que baise', in *Caprices* (London: Gay and Bird, 1893), p. 26.
30. Philip Bourke Marston, 'A Remembered Tune', in *The Collected Poems of Philip Bourke Marston* (London and Melbourne: Ward, Lock, Bowden, 1892), p. 348.
31. John Payne, 'At the Piano', in *Vigil and Vision: New Sonnets* (London: Villon Society, 1903), p. 48.
32. Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, 'To a Piano', in *Poems* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1908), p. 58.
33. I am indebted to Delia da Sousa Correa for suggesting this angle.
34. Hardy, 'Haunting Fingers', in *Complete Poetical Works*, III (1985), pp. 357–59.
35. Hardy, 'The Re-Enactment', in *Complete Poetical Works*, II, 74–77.
36. F. R. Leavis, *The Living Principle: 'English' as a Discipline of Thought* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1977), p. 76.
37. Leavis, p. 78.
38. D. H. Lawrence, 'Piano', in *Complete Poems*, ed. by Vivian de Sola Pinto and Warren Roberts, 2 vols (London: Heinemann, 1972), I, 148.
39. Compare John Lucas's comment that 'Hardy is too intelligent to indulge in a timeless, idyllic past': *Modern English Poetry from Hardy to Hughes* (London: Batsford, 1986), p. 32.
40. Hardy, 'A Duettist to her Pianoforte: Song of Silence', in *Complete Poetical Works*, I (1982), pp. 353–54.
41. This is the frequent fate of John Galsworthy heroines as formulated by the critic Elizabeth Drew in *The Modern Novel: Some Aspects of Contemporary Fiction* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1926), pp. 167–68.
42. The strength of such genre conventions also appears in the fact that Mary Elizabeth Coleridge wrote not only 'To a Piano', but also a novel where the overheard piano playing of *The Lady On the Drawing-Room Floor* promotes a late but happy marriage.
43. 'In every house there is an altar [i.e. the piano] devoted to saint Cecilia, and all are taught to serve her to the best of their ability' (Roland Pearsall, *Victorian Popular Music* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1973), p. 74).