

Time: Backward Listening

Do you remember what Darwin says about music? He claims that the power of producing and appreciating it existed among the human race long before the power of speech was arrived at. Perhaps that is why we are so subtly influenced by it. There are vague memories in our souls of those misty centuries when the world was in its childhood.

Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887)¹

For Sherlock Holmes, to listen to music is to undertake a sort of mental time travel into the depths of the individual soul: to awaken those ‘vague memories’ that speak from the spectrally indefinite ‘misty centuries’ of humanity’s collective evolutionary past. Read in the light of contemporary queer theorists’ concern with the temporal, Darwin’s theory of music’s origins opens up useful perspectives on the link between music, the body and temporal displacement. In *fin-de-siècle* literary texts, music’s agency to provoke such disruptive anachronicity is typically inscribed on the body: an abject degeneration towards an earlier stage of evolutionary development, a flickering oscillation between the human and the non-human, a stasis in which the body is held suspended in time. Musical listening is rendered queer in such texts not only because its reawakens an echo of those primitive desires insistently aligned in *fin-de-siècle* culture with the threat of sexual abnormality – a regression to the primitive, the instinctual or the bestial – but also because it threatens the reproductive drive towards the future upon which society’s heteronormative logics are predicated.

Such a motif emerges with particular prevalence in stories relating to the Pan myth, such as Arthur Machen’s ‘The Great God Pan’ (1890), E. M. Forster’s ‘The Story of a Panic’ (1902) and E. F. Benson’s ‘The Man Who Went Too Far’ (1904), in which the music of Pan unleashes queer desires that find their visual correlative on bodies subject to evolutionary time flowing in reverse. Yet fears about the backward agency of music also find a place in genres less salacious than *fin-de-siècle* supernatural fiction. Robert

Browning's philosophical poem 'Parleying with Charles Avison' (1887) presents an intriguingly ambiguous account of the origins of emotions evoked by music. This discussion seeks to suggest Darwin's usefulness as a model for thinking through those images of backwardness – reverse evolution, awakened primitive pleasures, abject emotions – that cluster around music in certain *fin-de-siècle* texts. Turning critical attention to the transformation and degradation of the body in these myths of music allows new perspectives on the queer agency of music in *fin-de-siècle* culture to emerge.

Queer Temporalities: A Backward Turn

In *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler articulates a future-focussed queer critical project based on the 'becoming possible' of forms of subjectivity that were previously unthinkable. The queer becomes a space in which the hegemony of the present is disavowed in favour of unlimited future potential.² For David Halperin, the queer 'describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance'.³ Annamarie Jagose articulates the queer in similar terms as 'a way of pointing ahead without knowing for certain what to point at'.⁴

In recent scholarship, queer theorists have moved beyond a focus on future-oriented accounts of queerness and turned instead to consider alternative articulations of temporality. The work of such critics has sought to address the manner in which discourses of temporality shape the experiences of queer subjects. Such discussions have contrasted so-called queer time with the heteronormative logics of 'straight time', defined by Rohy as 'regular, linear, and unidirectional' and associated by critics such as Lee Edelman with a 'reproductive futurism' that acts to devalue the queer subject.⁵ Normative conceptions of time are maintained through the recurrence of interconnected temporal metaphors: the *teleological* (time moves forwards towards a directed goal); the *progressive* (as time moves forwards, the present improves upon the past); the *linear* (time unfolds in a straight line); the *sequential* (the unfolding of moments in time follows a specific logic); the *reproductive* (the present attains meaning only where it feeds into the economic or biological production of the future). As Elizabeth Freeman has argued, the processes through which such normative temporal logics are sustained and naturalized have much in common with the operation of those discursive practices that present gender as a transhistorical natural truth, as opposed to a contingent social construct.⁶

For critics such as Jack Halberstam, the subversion of 'straight time' offers 'the [queer] potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space'.⁷

Queer musicology has typically followed the future-oriented critical project of Butler and Halperin. For critical musicologists such as Susan McClary and Lawrence Kramer, music offers just such a horizon of possibility for new articulations of subjectivity. Yet in the light of queer theory's turn towards temporal backwardness, an alternative critical approach might examine what it would mean for music to be understood in terms of backwardness, regression or a refusal of futurity. Music in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century texts is often presented as implicitly threatening the teleological imperative of 'straight time'. Vernon Lee follows Friedrich Nietzsche in criticizing Wagner's music for its 'lack of rhythm': a sense of 'aimless movement', an 'amazing capacity for *slowing off*'.⁸ In Thomas Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (*The Magic Mountain*, 1924), Settembrini praises the 'moral value' of that '[m]usic [which] quickens time, [...] quickens us to the finest enjoyment of time', while deriding that which acts against 'action and progress'.⁹ E. F. Benson's musical protagonists are repeatedly castigated by Puritanical fathers for the 'waste of time' spent practising the piano.¹⁰ Music's queerness, in this sense, lies in its threat to the straight linearity of temporal progress: its power to apparently pull the listener backwards in time, or to appear to suspend time, or to invoke a sense of time running faster or more slowly, or time moving sideways or looping in circles.

As Sam See's *Queer Natures, Queer Mythologies* demonstrates, Darwin's non-teleological model of evolutionary change – which 'conceptualizes nature as a non-normative, infinitely heterogeneous composite of mutating laws and principles' – is strikingly queer in its rejection of logics of reproductive necessity.¹¹ One particularly fruitful way of engaging with the queerness of musical temporality in *fin-de-siècle* texts is to trace through them the echoes of Charles Darwin's theory of the origins of musical emotion, which had been prominent in English culture since mid-century.

'Mental Reversions': Charles Darwin and the Origins of Music

The origins of musical expression, Darwin suggested, lie in providing an evolutionary advantage in sexual reproduction. Darwin first articulated his thoughts on the relationship between natural selection and the origins of music in an essay written in 1844, in which he noted the apparent significance of birdsong in the mating rituals of birds.¹² By the time this

essay was posthumously published in 1909, his views on the issue had been further developed in *The Descent of Man* (1871) and revisited in *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872).¹³ ‘Musical notes and rhythm were first acquired by the male or female progenitors of mankind’, he suggests, ‘for the sake of charming the opposite sex.’¹⁴ Neither the pleasures of performing music nor those of listening to it are ‘the least use to man in reference to his daily habits of life’; for this reason, the musical impulse is viewed by Darwin as ‘the most mysterious with which [mankind] is endowed’. In order to explain the intensity of our emotional response to music, Darwin looks to the origins of music in the courtship rituals of our primeval ancestors. Music is afforded the ability to awaken those instincts which lie deep within the pool of humanity’s ‘inherited associations’. ‘The sensations and ideas thus excited in us by music’, he suggests, ‘appear from their vagueness, yet depth, like mental reversions to the emotions and thoughts of a long-past age’.¹⁵ In support of his argument, Darwin cites Herbert Spencer’s observation that ‘music arouses dormant sentiments of which we had not conceived the possibility, and do not know the meaning; or [...] tells us of things we have not seen and shall not see’.¹⁶

Through music’s primeval development as a means of facilitating sexual reproduction, Darwin suggests, it became associated with ‘the strongest passions an animal is capable of feeling’: ‘ardent love, rivalry and triumph’.¹⁷ Listening to music prompts us to recall the ‘vague and indefinite’ echoes of powerful emotions associated with courtship: ‘The impassioned orator, bard, or musician, when with his varied tones and cadences he excites the strongest emotions in his hearers, little suspects that he uses the same means by which his half-human ancestors long ago aroused each other’s ardent passions, during their courtship and rivalry.’¹⁸ Darwin is unusual among Victorian theorists of music in relating the intensity of emotional response to music to sexual desire. While the association between music and sexual desire has its origins in antiquity and is a mainstay of literary texts across the centuries, nineteenth-century treatises on the psychology, philosophy and morality of music are broadly silent on such issues. Darwin affirms the connection between musical emotion and sexual desire drawn throughout my study: reading his works alongside contemporary queer theory makes it possible to ascribe to those ‘ardent passions’ referred to above a queerness that may never have been intended by Darwin himself. More strikingly, Darwin implicitly rejects prevalent liberal humanist claims of music and sociality that this study has sought to challenge. Music refuses to affirm a community of future-oriented desiring

subjectivities; it does not affirm new futures or allow for the articulation of secure new identities. Rather it acts as a 'temporal drag' in which the primitive past always impinges disruptively on the apparently sovereign present – a musical return of the repressed.

The antisocial queerness of Darwin's theory of music may best be understood by being contrasted with that of Herbert Spencer. As Peter Kivy has observed, Darwin's argument is best viewed as a response to contemporary debates about the respective origins of music and language initiated by Spencer in 'The Origins and Function of Music' (1857).¹⁹ In broad terms, Spencer argued that music originated as a form of 'emotional speech intensified':²⁰ a heightening of the emotional expressiveness of language. Darwin took the opposite view: the origins of language, he suggested, lay in music.²¹ For Spencer, the nature of music's origins had important implications for its wider social function: because of its beginnings in language, music reacts to and develops the emotional dimensions of language. In this way, Spencer argued, music becomes one of the 'chief media of *sympathy*' upon which 'our general welfare and our immediate pleasures depend'.²² Darwin's theory, in contrast, deprives music of the social usefulness conferred upon it by Spencer's theory. Music for Spencer offers the promise of a teleological development towards moral perfectibility; for Darwin, the emotions it awakens are echoes of the evolutionary past, not directing humanity to a more highly evolved future.

As Bennett Zon has noted, Darwin's ideas on the origins of music influenced a number of writers on musical aesthetics in late nineteenth-century England.²³ In particular, Edmund Gurney's *The Power of Sound* turns to Darwin's theory of the connection between music and primitive emotion to account for what he calls the 'impressiveness' – the powerful emotional effect – of music on the listener.²⁴ Gurney admits that the connection drawn by Darwin between musical emotion and primitive expressions of sexual desire may 'seem at first sight somewhat startling', but he goes on to insist that the 'extraordinary depth and indescribability of the emotions' evoked by music surely support such a 'far-reaching' thesis (119). In justifying his belief in Darwin's theory, Gurney suggests that music is peculiarly placed to produce an 'emotional excitement of a very intense kind' which cannot be 'defined under any known head of emotion':

So far as it can be described, it seems like a fusion of strong emotions transfigured into a wholly new experience, whereof if we seek to bring out the separate threads we are hopelessly baulked; for triumph and tenderness, desire and satisfaction, yielding and insistence, may seem to be all there at

once, yet without any dubiousness or confusion in the result; or rather elements seem there which we struggle dimly to adumbrate by such words, thus making the experience seem vague only by our own attempt to analyse it, while really the beauty has the unity and individuality pertaining to clear and definite form. (120)

If the power of music to evoke this peculiarly intense, uniquely vague emotion is due to its primeval connection with the mating rituals of early man, then music as an art form might become tainted, in the prudish Victorian imagination, through its association with sexual desire. 'Mr. Darwin grows here simply shocking', noted an anonymous writer in *The Orchestra* in a discussion of Darwin's thoughts on the origins of music.²⁵

Gurney addresses what he calls the 'derogatory' implications of Darwin's theory (121) in the following manner. First, he appeals to an evolutionary concept first articulated by Herbert Spencer: differentiation.²⁶ As organisms evolve they develop from a simple, undifferentiated homogeneity to a complex, differentiated heterogeneity, so that they are transformed into 'something unrecognisably high and remote from their original nature' (120). Musical emotion might have sexual excitement as its evolutionary source, but this emotional response becomes differentiated over time into something far removed from its origins. Indeed, Gurney suggests, it is precisely the fact that musical pleasure was first 'associated with the *most exciting passions*' – that is, sexual excitement – which affords it a 'correspondingly large' potential for such differentiation (120, Gurney's italics).

Second, Gurney refutes the idea that our experience of musical emotion is connected in any direct or perceivable way with the sexual excitement that lies at its evolutionary source. 'We know from individual observation', he suggests, 'how easily the recurrence of one element of an exciting experience recalls the *intensity and general quality* of the excitement, without involving any *detailed memory* of the concomitants' (120). Rather, over the course of the 'enormous period of time' separating us from our primeval ancestors, the 'coarse, definite passions and excitements' have become 'transmuted' into the complex aesthetic emotions we experience today. 'The differentiation in question is so complete', he concludes, 'that [one] can easily afford to ignore the early steps of it' (121). Yet despite his attempts to play down the significance of the 'early steps' of the origins of musical emotion, Gurney's views were widely derided for degrading music's idealized dignity. Gerard Manley Hopkins, for example, while sympathetic to Gurney's formalist stance on musical emotion, dismissed Gurney's Darwinist theories as 'poison', deriding the suggestion that

‘we enjoy music because our apish ancestors serenaded their Juliet-apes of the period in rudimentary recitatives and our emotions are the survival’.²⁷

Beastly Queers: Degeneration and Sexual Abnormality

Hopkins’s derision of such evolutionary theories of music’s origins can be understood within the wider context of late Victorian theories of degeneration. In general terms, as J. W. Burrow has noted, the overarching focus on progress and teleology in evolutionary theory was countered by those thinkers who constantly stressed the dangers of regression, sliding back, of chaos and dissolution.²⁸ The prevalence of such post-Darwinian fears of social and cultural degeneration in late nineteenth-century European thought has been explored at length by a number of historians and critics.²⁹ While in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) Darwin held with some confidence that ‘corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection’, his later writings – such as *The Descent of Man* – became more circumspect: ‘natural selection only acts in a tentative manner’; ‘we must remember that progress is no invariable rule’.³⁰ For Spencer, evolution provided an explanation not just for development towards ‘higher forms’, but also for ‘dissolution’ and regression to the so-called primitive. In *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880), Edwin Ray Lankester likewise warned that, as subjects of the ‘general laws of evolution’, humanity is ‘as likely to degenerate as progress’.³¹

Constituted around a constantly shifting nexus of fictional narratives, sociopolitical commentaries and scientific treatises, the idea of degeneration never attained anything approaching definitional fixity. Rather than being a coherent set of principles, it is better understood as a set of discourses that acted to divide the normal from the abnormal, the healthy from the morbid and the civilized from the primitive. The association between degeneracy and homosexuality in late nineteenth-century scientific, medical and literary discourses has been well established.³² Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* (1895) undoubtedly assumed an extreme position in presenting homosexuality as the symptomatic condition of a wider cultural malaise, yet his views were nonetheless echoed in the work of other theorists of abnormality such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and August Forel.³³ As Kelly Hurley has observed, Krafft-Ebing characterizes virtually all of the subjects of his 237 case studies of ‘sexual abnormality’ in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1882–1902) as contaminated by an apparently degenerative ‘hereditary taint’, a family history of insanity, hysteria or neurasthenia.³⁴

In Victorian homophobic discourses, same-sex sexual acts between men were frequently characterized in terms suggestive of evolutionary backwardness: ‘beastly’, ‘animalistic’, ‘primitive’. Characterizations of Oscar Wilde were typical in this regard: H. G. Wells claimed that *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) – an unsettling fictional parable of the threat of reverse evolution – was to some extent inspired by Wilde’s trials, a ‘reminder that humanity is but *animal rough-hewn to a reasonable shape* and in perpetual internal conflict between *instinct and injunction*’. The novel was written, Wells suggested, to ‘give the utmost possible vividness to that conception of men as hewn and confused and tormented beasts’.³⁵ The Marquess of Queensberry drew upon similar associations when he sent to his daughter-in-law a picture of an iguanodon torn from the *Illustrated London News*, scrawling across it, ‘a possible ancestor of Oscar Wilde’.³⁶ In both instances, Wilde’s homosexuality is aligned with reversion to the bestial, the atavistic threat of unimpeded instinct and the negative *telos* of bodily dissolution to earlier evolutionary forms.

Exploring the intersection of discourses relating to homosexuality, atavism and music provides a new context in which to understand the elision of music’s temporalities, both in emergent sexological discourses and more widely. Those literary texts that associate music with the atavism and the abject body speak also to the concerns of contemporary queer theory with modes of temporality that underpin the replication of normative conceptions of the social. Music, in such texts, offers not the replication of such temporal structures – the teleological drive towards futurity – but a reversal or stasis that might allow for the articulation of alternative sexual subjectivities.

The Abysmal Bottom-Growth: Robert Browning and Musical Emotion

[...] fitly weave
March-music for the Future!

Or suppose
Back, and not forward, transformation goes?

Robert Browning, ‘Parleying with Charles Avison’, lines 387–90³⁷

Robert Browning’s ‘Parleying with Charles Avison’ from *Parleyings* (1887) is a text in which the pull of the musical future struggles with fears of regression. It reveals the manner in which the emotions elicited by music come to be invested with fears of queer evolutionary regression in late

Victorian culture. Much of the interest in Browning's text lies in the tension between a belief in the teleological drive of progress – embodied in the insistent forward momentum of Avison's March – and doubts about whether music is capable of articulating the values and truths of Victorian liberalism in a manner that can endure the passage of time. The ephemeral and immaterial nature of music makes it a fragile conduit to sustain one's hopes for the future. While Browning's text concludes with a jingoistic affirmation of the Enlightenment liberal and imperial values he associates with Avison's March, elsewhere he questions whether the apparently eternal truths afforded by music are destined to be revealed by history as mere 'nescience absolute' (line 342).

Critical work addressing Browning's engagement with music has often tended to focus on biographical and historical details – the music he performed or listened to, his technical knowledge of music theory, his musical education – at the expense of close attention to the ambiguities of his poetical treatment of the idea of music.³⁸ William DeVane reflects a critical consensus when he identifies the following tenets as central to Browning's 'philosophy of music': music is superior to other art forms in its ability to express emotional depth, and is associated with divine revelation, the miraculous and the redemptive.³⁹ Yet, as will be explored below, the treatment of musical emotion in 'Charles Avison' is more ambiguous than DeVane's characterization of 'music as a miracle' would suggest.⁴⁰ In her contextualization of Browning's views on music, Penelope Gay concludes that 'Browning was indebted to nobody for his musical philosophy': his thoughts did not, and need not be seen to, reflect a coherent external system of thought. She argues convincingly for the relevance of early nineteenth-century German Romantic conceptions of music – so embedded within the *zeitgeist* of much Victorian thought on music – while admitting that it is unlikely that Browning had direct knowledge of philosophers such as Hegel or Schopenhauer.⁴¹ However, in doing so, she too readily dismisses the relevance of contemporary English, Darwinist debates about music.

Most interesting for the purposes of this discussion is Browning's fascination with the nature of the emotions evoked by music and with the 'truths' obtainable from such emotions, which Browning articulates within a discussion of the relationship between 'Soul' and 'Mind' (lines 137–50). The Soul is characterized, in terms suggestive of fluidity and flux, as a tempestuous sea. It is from the depths of the Soul that emotions originate. The Soul is beyond the control of the Mind: it is 'what Mind may [...] not tame' (line 159), that which 'Mind arrogates no mastery

upon' (line 164). The operation of the Soul is not transparent to the Mind: it is 'unsounded' (line 161) and 'works beyond our guess' (line 160). Browning sets up a further division between Feeling (that which emerges from the Soul) and Knowledge (that which is produced by the active Mind). Feelings are figured as in a constant state of delicate ephemerality: they 'rise and sink / Ceaselessly' (lines 188–89), they represent a 'transient flit and wink' (line 189), and they are as momentary, fleeting and intangible as a 'ripple's tinting' (line 190: the light catching a ripple in a stream) or a 'spume-sheet's stread / Whitening the wave' (lines 190–91: the white line on the top of a wave that disappears when it reaches the shore). Feeling resists and refuses the solid permanence of Knowledge.

Music, Browning suggests, attempts to address some of the mysteries about the operation of the Soul. It promises to reveal 'what we Feel, hard and fast as what we Know' (line 194). It seeks to 'make as manifest / Soul's work as Mind's work' (lines 186–87): to explain the mysteries of the Soul in a way that makes it seem as logical and transparent as the operation of the Mind. That this attempt to pin down the flux of Feeling will ultimately prove futile is suggested by Browning's chemical metaphor: attempting to allow transient Feeling to attain the solidity of Knowledge is compared to 'run[ning] mercury into a mould like lead' (line 192). Mercurial emotion will retain its liquid state despite momentarily assuming the form of the mould into which it has been poured. While molten lead will set solid, take away the mould from around the mercury and it will, once again, lose its semblance of permanence.

All art forms, Browning suggests, are engaged in this attempt to make transparent to the Mind (to allow us to 'know') elements of the Soul (our Feelings). Music, in this regard, is most successful – but it still ultimately 'fails of touching' (line 199). Each art form attempts to 'stay the apparition' (line 218): to preserve or capture the ghostly, fleeting nature of feeling. The Poet's 'word-mesh' (line 219) and the Painter's 'Colour-and-line throw' (line 220) have been successful in capturing something of these fleeting emotions while fishing in the 'Soul's sea' (line 178). However, their nets have retrieved little, if anything at all, of the 'nether-brooding loves, hates, hopes and fears' (line 223) that lie deepest in the Soul. The 'brooding' of these feelings even hints that there may be something darkly menacing about these obscure emotions. As Browning writes, while Homer and Michelangelo have, respectively, captured and made immortal the pathos of Troy and the sublimity of the Creation, they have, nevertheless, been unable to make manifest those emotions that are '[e]nwombed past Art's disclosure' (line 224).

It is music, Browning asserts, that is best able to plumb the depths of the Soul:

Outdo

Both of them, Music! Dredging deeper yet,
Drag into day, – by sound, thy master-net, –
The abysmal bottom-growth, ambiguous thing
Unbroken of a branch, palpitating
With limbs' play and life's semblance! There it lies,
Marvel and mystery, of mysteries
And marvels, most to love and laud thee for! (lines 234–41)

Browning clearly wishes to attest to the beneficent nature of Music's power of emotional articulation: it is that which the reader is asked to 'love and laud'. Yet, in other respects, the text is strikingly equivocal as to the nature of the emotion music awakens from the depths of the Soul. Compared with the delicately 'sure and swift' motion of the painter's net, music's process of 'dredging' up emotion is forceful and laborious. To dredge is to disrupt the resting seabed, to dislodge that which has become buried, to descend to slimy detritus. That these feelings must be '[d]rag[ged] into day' suggests that there is resistance to such forceful compulsion; these are not emotions that wish to be brought to the Soul's surface. Emerging 'into day', these emotions more naturally inhabit a dubious realm of nocturnal darkness. Alongside denotations of profound depth, the 'abysmal' evokes the moral dubiety of the infernal. In the context of the pervasive sexual paranoia of late Victorian culture, this infernal 'bottom-growth' intimates abject associations of the anal or the sodomitical. In their explanatory note to the text, Stefan Hawlin and Michael Meredith suggest that the 'abysmal bottom-growth' is to be understood as a 'branching piece of coral'.⁴² Yet there is surely something more unsettling about the very indeterminacy of this 'ambiguous thing'.

Musical emotion is evoked in Browning's text through imagery of the abject body. A grotesque sea creature, limbs flailing, lungs throbbing and quivering as it gasps for breath – 'palpitating' through repeated liquid consonants ('limbs' play and life's semblance! There it lies'). Read in evolutionary terms, this is a striking image of music's power to awaken emotions connected with the primitive past. Here, musical emotion represents some primeval ancestor, having not yet evolved into a higher form, achieving only the 'semblance' of life. Its 'ambiguous' nature suggests that this creature cannot be easily classified in any existing taxonomy: it is '[u]nbroken' from the 'branch' that demarcates individual species identity. Such 'dredg[ing]' of emotion evokes parallels with the primordial 'mire',

'slush' and 'slime' of Browning's most notable engagement with the implications of Darwinian natural selection, 'Caliban upon Setebos' (1864). Indeed, the grotesque terms used to characterize Caliban are similar to those used to evoke emotions awakened by music: 'a sea-beast, lumpish', a 'drudge', 'snared' and brought to the surface to be 'pen[ned]' by Prospero.⁴³ Even the assertion that this object is a 'Marvel and mystery, of mysteries / And marvels' seems not to guarantee that this 'thing' is entirely pleasant or unthreatening. The faintly hyperbolic tone of the statement – attained through its chiasmic repetitiveness – is evocative less of the miraculous sublime than of something shouted by a Victorian freak-show proprietor to advertise his latest strange exhibit.

As Joseph Bristow has noted, while Browning engaged closely with evolutionary thought in a number of his works, he was generally dismissive of the implications of Darwin's theories.⁴⁴ He would nevertheless have been aware of Darwin's thoughts on music: as Hawlin and Meredith have noted, *Parleyings* is replete with references – some explicit – to Darwin's *The Descent of Man*.⁴⁵ Music in Browning's work often assumes a haunting, reversionary presence: in 'Charles Avison', musical emotions are 'ghost-like' (line 260), 'dawn-doomed phantoms' (line 265), while in 'A Toccata of Galuppi's', the 'cold music' of the eighteenth-century Venetian composer echoes through time 'like a ghostly cricket'.⁴⁶ Evolutionary resonances in this text are best understood as similar spectral hauntings, residual traces of those Darwinian models that Browning himself would almost certainly disavow.

In Browning's text, such are the 'ambiguous' psychological depths stirred by music that it risks awakening modes of evolutionary backwardness aligned in the Victorian imagination with the threat of sexual abnormality. Musical emotion is to be 'loved' and 'lauded', but it promises neither the progress towards greater empathetic connection postulated by Spencer nor the vision of the divine offered in Browning's other poems on music, such as 'Abt Vogler'. Browning's poem concludes with the assured march forward of Victorian liberal humanism, but this momentary problematizing of music's civilizing claims attests to music's queer power to unsettle the relentless replication of the normative future.

Pan, Music and Queerness

Here too was all the work by which man had been made repeated before my eyes. I saw the form waver from sex to sex, dividing itself from itself, and then again reunited. Then I saw the body descend to

the beasts whence it ascended, and that which was on the heights go down to the depths, even to the abyss of all being. The principle of life, which makes organism, always remained, while the outward form changed [...] I watched, and at last I saw nothing but a substance as jelly. Then the ladder was ascended again . . . [*Here the MS is illegible*] . . . for one instance I saw a Form, shaped in dimness before me, which I will not farther describe.

Arthur Machen, 'The Great God Pan' (1890)⁴⁷

Whereas Browning's text ultimately repudiates Darwinist fears of music and the abject body, *fin-de-siècle* texts on the figure of Pan wilfully embrace associations of music, sexual abnormality and temporal regression. The music of Pan acts upon the bodies of those who hear it to effect an often horrific reversal in evolutionary time. In Arthur Machen's 'The Great God Pan', Pan's daemonic influence ultimately sees evolutionary time collapse into a single moment, flowing backwards and forwards in turn, so that categories of sex and species dissolve into a primordial 'jelly'. Machen sends into reverse Ernst Haeckel's concept of recapitulatory development, in which 'ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny': each human foetus passes in its development through all stages of evolution from protozoa to invertebrate.⁴⁸ In Machen's book, Helen Vaughan – the offspring of her mother's impregnation by Pan – descends from the 'heights' of species development to the 'abyss' of the 'beasts'. The dissolution of her body is the physical correlative of the queer sexual anarchy she represents: she exposes a young boy to the molestations of a 'strange naked man' (193) in the woods, leaving him permanently traumatized; she engages a young girl in a 'peculiarly intimate' (194) relationship, introducing to her sexual pleasures that remain suggestively ambiguous; she precipitates a series of suicides by men in the intensely homosocial (and sexually paranoid) world of London's Clubland. Machen's Pan retains his association with music, his presence marked only by a 'sort of strange singing', a 'peculiar noise' (193), and recalled by Latin inscription, noting the Bacchic '*cantus tiliarum, et tinnitus cymbalorum*' ('singing of pipes and the tinkling of cymbals', 212) with which he is associated.

The place of the Pan motif in late Victorian English literature has received increasing interest from scholars since the publication of Patricia Merivale's *Pan the Goat God* (1969).⁴⁹ While recent work by Nicholas Freeman and others has more fully acknowledged the importance of Pan in queer subcultures, little attention has been paid to the musical aspects of Pan's queerness.⁵⁰ As Merivale notes, 'an eerie piping is one of the most characteristic manifestations of Pan's power; it is found in virtually every

prose fiction in which he appears'.⁵¹ Stories on Pan draw on a long cultural tradition in which music is aligned with the threat of unleashed, unstable sensuous desire. Judith Ann Peraino rightly observes that 'the figure of Pan, perhaps more than any other, manifests the queer sexual potency of music'.⁵² Attending to the resonances of mythical figures of music at the *fin de siècle* is a useful strategy for exploring those queer aspects of musical culture that slip between the lines of more empirically historicist accounts of musical culture.

Pan's music can usefully be understood through a specifically Darwinian lens, related to a threat of pulling the listener back towards the primitive past, a dislocation of the forward movement of evolutionary development. In the context of the *fin de siècle*, stories about Pan engage particularly closely with the natural world in a post-Darwinian context. For Robert Louis Stevenson, the Pan myth provides an alternative articulation to science's 'feint explanation' for the 'troubled and uncertain element in which we dwell': 'So we come back to the old myth, and hear the goat-footed piper making the music which is itself the charm and terror of things.' Yet implicit in Stevenson's nostalgic account is an acknowledgment that nature must now inevitably be understood in Darwinist terms. The violence of the Pan myth, he suggests, articulates the brutal truth of a natural world 'where one thing preys upon another'.⁵³

In 'A Study of Dionysus' (1876), Walter Pater reflects on the multiplicity of meanings that attach to the figures of Pan and the Satyrs, ranging from associations with 'insolence and mockery' to 'unmeaning and ridiculous fear'. More interesting, though, is a conception of Pan held only, Pater suggests, by a sensitive minority of readers:

But the best spirits have found in them also a certain human pathos, as in displaced beings, coming even nearer to most men, in their very roughness, than the noble and delicate person of the vine; dubious creatures, half-way between the animal and human kinds, speculating wistfully on their being, because not wholly understanding themselves and their place in nature.⁵⁴

Appealing specifically, in what Thais Morgan describes as Pater's 'aesthetic minoritizing discourse', to those 'best spirits' that constitute his homosexual readership, Pater posits the Satyrs as figures that speak with a particularly powerful sense of 'human pathos' to those 'displaced beings' whose sense of identity is painfully confused by its failure to conform to pre-existing modes of categorization.⁵⁵ The figure of the Satyr resonates with the delicate sadness of the Victorian queer subject: uncertain in how to articulate their desires, marginalized in society, their very sense of being tainted by a sense of regretful longing for something out of reach. For

Pater, Pan is also a temporally ‘displaced’ subject – like those ‘gods in exile’ explored in Chapter 2 – who finds himself a revenant at odds with those modes of self-understanding offered by modernity.

Elsewhere, Pan is more explicitly associated with same-sex sexual desire. In Aleister Crowley’s enraptured fantasies of animalistic pleasure, the depiction of sexual pleasure in encounters with Pan could scarcely be more overt: ‘the heavy breath and the rank kisses of a faun are on my neck, and his teeth fasten in my flesh – a terrible heave flings our bodies into mid-air with the athletic passion that unites us with the utmost God’.⁵⁶ As the introduction to his (anonymously published) erotic orientalist poem-cycle, *The Scented Garden of Abdullah, the Satirist of Shiraz* (1910), Crowley includes a paean to the pleasures of sexual passivity (attributed – clearly satirically – to the ‘Reverend P. D. Carey’). Pan is transplanted from the pastoral margins of the Mediterranean to a park square in metropolitan London, where the narrator engages in an *al fresco* nocturnal rendezvous: ‘In the hush of the sunset come noiseless hoofs treading the enamelled turf; and else I know it a fierce lithe hairy body has gripped mine, and the dead wand of magic shudders its live way into my being, so that the foundations of the soul are shaken.’⁵⁷

One specific source for the prevalent associations between Pan and anal sex in *fin-de-siècle* literature may be the somewhat notorious sculpture of *Pan and the Goat*, excavated at Pompeii in the 1740s and kept in the so-called Secret Cabinet in the National Museum of Naples. In the most explicit way, the sculpture shows Pan copulating with a goat. The goat lies on its back in what could be called – with some definitional violence – the missionary position, while it is visibly penetrated by Pan’s erect penis. As Mary Beard has noted, access to the Secret Cabinet became increasingly unrestricted as the nineteenth century progressed. Knowledge of the erotic contents of the gallery was widespread throughout Europe and America from the 1830s onwards as a result of the circulation of numerous catalogues and illustrated books.⁵⁸ The Secret Cabinet may have plausibly formed part of E. M. Forster’s tourist trail when he visited Naples in 1902. The Baedeker travel guide gives directions to ‘the RESERVED CABINET (*Raccolta Pornografica*), to which men only are admitted; it contains mural and other paintings not adapted for public exhibition’. The untranslated – and therefore all the more suggestive – phrase ‘*Raccolta Pornografica*’ (‘Pornographic Collection’) was a relatively recent addition to the guide, added only in the eighth and subsequent editions from 1883.⁵⁹ It seems likely that Arthur Machen had this sculpture in mind when, at the horrific climax to ‘The Great God Pan’, he hints at ‘a horrible and unspeakable

shape' reminiscent of 'ancient sculptures [. . .] which survived beneath the lava, too foul to be spoken of' (229). Here, the buried physical artefact, like Browning's 'abysmal bottom-growth', is emblematic of those backward sexual desires that threaten to return by bridging the gap of historical and evolutionary time.

'The Man Who Went Too Far'

In E. F. Benson's 'The Man Who Went Too Far', music's queer backwardness relates to the manner in which it prompts a bestial return to nature, invested in the text with a simultaneous sense of pleasure and disgust.⁶⁰ Here, the music of the pipes lures the epicurean Frank towards a deadly sodomitical encounter with Pan at the story's conclusion. At first, Frank spends his days swimming in the 'river Fawn' (159) and his nights sleeping in a hammock under the stars. This 'glorious specimen of young manhood' (160) is visited by his old friend Darcy, who is astounded to note that Frank (much like Wilde's Dorian Gray) seems to be ageing in reverse: he is thirty-five but looks little over twenty. Frank recounts how he has heard 'a strange unending melody': 'Pan playing on his pipes, the voice of Nature' (164). He is initially 'terrified', but over the course of six months he learns to 'put [himself] in such an attitude towards Nature that the pipes will almost inevitably sound' (165). Frank looks forward to a 'Final Revelation' whereby he will receive 'sight of Pan' (166). Darcy is sceptical of Frank's idealization of nature. Indeed, when Frank flees in horror from the sound of a crying child, Darcy suggests that his understanding of nature is lacking in a crucial respect: it fails to account for the misery of nature. He suggests that Frank's revelation will be one not of joy, but of 'horror, suffering, death, pain in all its hideous forms' (170). Later that night, Darcy is woken by a 'quivering sobbing voice' followed by a 'little mocking, bleating laugh' (170). In the darkness, he observes a shadowy Pan-figure jump from Frank's hammock and make its escape. Frank lies dead, and on his bare chest are 'pointed prints' as if 'some monstrous goat had leaped and stamped upon him'.

The homoeroticism of Benson's text is thinly veiled: the narrator revels in the ephebic youthful beauty of Frank's bronzed body, paying close attention to glimpses of his naked flesh. Insistently dwelling upon the exposures afforded by rolled-up sleeves and unbuttoned shirts, Benson's narrator evidently agrees with Roland Barthes that 'the most erotic portion of the body [is] where the garment gapes'.⁶¹ The celebration of the sensuousness of naked male flesh is, of course, a recurrent motif of the

homoerotically inflected paganism posited by many queer writers at the *fin de siècle*. As Oscar Wilde quipped in November 1894: 'To be really medieval one should have no body. To be really modern one should have no soul. To be really Greek one should have no clothes.'⁶²

Here, too, as in Machen's novel, an encounter with Pan is aligned with bestial sexual pleasure. Frank's final encounter with Pan is evidently to be understood in sexual terms. At the text's conclusion, it is clear that Pan has joined Frank in the hammock where he sleeps: his 'black shadow jump[s] into the air' and makes his escape with 'frolicsome skipplings' (171). The 'pointed prints' that Pan leaves on Frank's body, having 'leaped and stamped upon him', are perhaps even suggestive of sexual penetration in the impression they have left in his skin. When Benson came to recast this story as part of a longer novel, *The Angel of Pain* (1905), the premeditated brutishness of 'stamped' was replaced with 'danced', reverting to a tradition in which Pan is mischievous rather than vicious.⁶³ The text's opening frame narrative informs us ominously that Frank was '*done to death*' – a phrase which, in retrospect, might suggest that he was killed through the violence of sexual penetration. The threat (or allure) of sodomitical passivity lurks at the margins of the text: Frank suggests to Darcy that in order to gain sight of Pan one must be 'open, resting, receptive' (166). Elsewhere, Frank informs Darcy that he will see 'birds and beasts' behaving 'somewhat intimately' to him – though he surely never anticipates a bodily intimacy of this sort. E. M. Forster certainly seems to have recognized the sexual implications of Benson's tale. In a discussion of literary treatments of 'homosex' in his *Commonplace Book* in 1926, he notes the 'Satanic intimacy' of the 'Pan school', a literary fashion that 'peter[s] out in [Robert] Hichens and E. F. Benson'.⁶⁴

Frank's final encounter with Pan is presented in ambivalent terms; his exclamation of 'My God, oh, my God; oh, Christ!' (170) suggests a terrifying vision of the horrors of nature, but also the ecstatic pleasure and pain of anal penetration. Indeed, the final expressions on Frank's face suggest an experience which may have been profoundly terrifying, but nevertheless ultimately gives a sense of pleasure: as he expires the look of 'supreme terror and agony of fear' is replaced with the 'smiling curves' of his 'beautiful mouth'. Still, 'repulsion and deathly anguish' have 'ruled dreadful lines on [Frank's] smooth cheeks and forehead' (171).

Underlying Benson's tale are opposing views of the natural world. The text contrasts Frank's neo-pagan understanding of nature – beneficent, life-affirming, vital – with Darcy's Darwinist pessimism: the natural world is driven not by some 'great native instinct to be happy', but rather by the

brutal imperatives of survival and reproduction ('[f]ood, food and mating'). Darcy chides Frank for his naivety in overlooking the fact that 'all Nature from highest to lowest is full, crammed full of suffering, every living organism in Nature preys on another' (170).

Frank's knowledge of Pan's existence is principally based upon his aural perception of the sound of Pan's pipes: his growing spiritual intimacy with Pan is reflected by their sound growing closer and closer. The sceptical Darcy is unable to hear this music at all, even when to Frank it is 'close, oh so close' (168). Frank's first encounter with Pan's music is described in a manner that is reminiscent of the music of Wagner:

Well, as I sat there, doing nothing, but just looking and listening, I heard the sound quite distinctly of some flute-like instrument playing a strange unending melody. I thought at first it was some musical yokel on the highway and did not pay much attention. But before long the strangeness and indescribable beauty of the tune struck me [...]

It never repeated itself, but it never came to an end, phrase after phrase ran its sweet course, it worked gradually and inevitably up to a climax, and having attained it, it went on; another climax was reached and another and another. Then with a sudden gasp of wonder I localised where it came from. It came from the reeds and from the sky and from the trees. It was everywhere, it was the sound of life. It was [...], as the Greeks would have said, it was Pan playing on his pipes, the voice of Nature. It was the life-melody, the world-melody. (164)

As noted in Chapter 4, Wagnerism was frequently associated with homosexual subcultures at the *fin de siècle*. Benson himself was an enthusiastic Wagnerian whose novels often hint suggestively at such associations. In *The Book of Months* (1903), for example, the protagonist's pursuit of pagan beauty sees him travel directly from a performance of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth to the island of Capri, a well-known homosexual resort, where he admires the 'smooth swift limbs' of some local 'young Apollo[s]'.⁶⁵ Here, the music of Pan – like Wagner's notorious '*unendliche Melodie*' – is an 'unending melody', its wave upon wave of ecstatic climaxes suggestive of those rising musical sequences that became something of a cliché of Wagner's musical style following *Tristan und Isolde*. Yet if this music invokes Wagner's, it does so in a way that aligns it with discourses of evolutionary retrogression. Edmund Gurney, for example, in terms strikingly similar to those of Browning, characterizes Wagner as 'throw[ing] himself fearlessly into the sea of music': 'sinking, finds himself naturally in the variegated home of invertebrate strains, things with no shape to be squeezed out of, no rhythmic ribs to be broken, tossed hither and thither, as hard to grasp as

jelly-fish, as nerveless as strings of seaweed'.⁶⁶ In Benson's text, Pan's quasi-Wagnerian 'unending' music stretches backwards and forwards across evolutionary time, bringing with it a threat of bestial sexual awakening associated with the stirring of primitive, abject queer desire.

Frank gains access to a music which has always been playing, though until now unheard – the cantus firmus of simultaneously destructive and generative evolutionary change. While he is initially 'terrified with the infinite horror of a nightmare' (164) by this music, he later actively seeks it out as a source of 'the full knowledge, the full realisation and comprehension that I am one . . . with life' (166). A key aspect of Frank's character, though, is his failure to recognize the suffering inherent in nature; Darcy chides him for 'leaving [it] out altogether' from his philosophical outlook: 'you run away from it, you refuse to recognize it' (170). That his ultimate encounter with Pan prompts a scream of 'supreme and despairing horror' might suggest that Frank has been naively *mishearing* the nature of Pan's music – and that its message is altogether a much bleaker one than he initially realized. Yet Pan's music also works as a source of *seduction*: it leads Frank towards what is a profoundly ambiguous sexual encounter with Pan at the story's conclusion. It is this music that first prompts his desire to 'know Pan', and he is continuously drawn back to the 'meadow where the Pan pipes sounded' (169) with the zeal of an addict. This Wagnerian music seductively promises 'knowledge', 'realisation' and 'comprehension' (170). Ultimately, the essence of nature that it reveals collapses the distinction between man and animal, prompting an experience of queer sexual pleasure aligned in the text with abject evolutionary backwardness.

Pan's Masturbatory Music: 'The Story of a Panic'

E. M. Forster's 'The Story of a Panic' similarly aligns a musical encounter with Pan with a queer subversion of the logic of evolutionary development.⁶⁷ In Forster's story, a group of tourists travelling in southern Italy go on a day trip to the countryside. The cast is familiar within the Forsterian corpus: a morally prudish narrator, an affected artist, a curate, two fussy maiden aunts and their fourteen-year-old nephew Eustace, described by the narrator as 'conceited and arrogant', 'indescribably repellent' (1). While exploring the scenery, they have a picnic, observe the beauty of their surroundings and discuss whether 'the great God Pan is dead' (7). Suddenly the group become panic-stricken – the narrator reflects that he was 'more frightened than he ever wish[es] to become again' – and all,

except for Eustace, flee from the hillside in terror. Regaining their composure, they return to the spot to find Eustace 'lying motionless on his back', though he is soon roused and seemingly unaffected. Next to him on the ground are a 'goat's footmarks in the moist earth' (15). Upon returning to their hotel, the narrator is struck by Eustace's new-found energy and enthusiasm. But he soon becomes irritated by his 'promiscuous intimacy' with Gennaro, an 'impertinent fisher-lad' who works as a 'stop-gap waiter' at the group's hotel (19). The narrator awakens later that night to see Eustace running wild in the garden, 'saluting, praising, and blessing the great forces and manifestations of Nature' (29). Gennaro is summoned to capture the rampant schoolboy and is eventually persuaded to betray his friend. His concerned aunts attempt to lock Eustace in his room, but both he and Gennaro escape by jumping out of a window. Eustace escapes over the garden wall, but Gennaro collapses on the asphalt path by the hotel: 'something had gone wrong inside him, and he was dead' (41).

Eustace invokes the spirit of Pan by blowing on a whistle that he has carved from a piece of wood. Clearly, the whistle is meant to be understood as equivalent to Pan's pipes; Eustace's act of hewing it into shape has obvious, if not exact, parallels with Pan's construction of his pipes in Ovid's account of the Pan and Syrinx myth in *Metamorphoses*.⁶⁸ In the context of the sexual awakening that follows, Eustace's construction of a whistle can be read as an act of phallic empowerment. Here, unlike in other accounts of encounters with Pan, it is not Pan's music which unleashes queer sexual excess, but rather a wilful act of musical self-assertion that allows apparently primeval desires to resurface. The music Eustace produces is neither seductive nor sensuous; it is brutal, forceful and crude. The narrator describes it as 'excruciating', 'ear-splitting' and 'discordant', and quite unlike anything he has heard before. Although the narrator subsequently rejects the 'superstitious' interpretation that Eustace's music has unleashed the 'panic' that descends on the group, such an interpretation is nonetheless invited by the sequence of his narrative. Certainly, one member of the party, Leyland, takes this view, and he proceeds to cut Eustace's whistle in two in an attempt to frustrate its disturbing power.

Music frequently functions in Forster's texts to awaken aspects of intense emotional experience that might otherwise remain unarticulated or obscured to its listeners or performers: hearing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony in *Howards End* affords to Helen Schlegel an epiphany of the apparent 'panic and emptiness' of modernity; for Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View*, playing Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 32, Op. 111,

allows for an expanded sense of the self-affirming possibilities of desire; in *Maurice*, queer desire finds tentative expression through a pianola recording of the March from Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' Symphony. Here, the agency of music is equally powerful, though more ambivalent: Eustace's spontaneous musical noise prompts the backward turn of evolutionary progress, towards an awakening of quasi-primitive sexual desire which is intensely pleasurable but also oddly unsettling.

Forster was confused when his short story was interpreted by his queer Cambridge contemporaries as a parable of homosexual initiation. Charles Sayle, a librarian at Cambridge and author of pederastic poetry, summarized the story to John Maynard Keynes in the following manner: 'B[ugged] by a waiter at the hotel, Eustace commits bestiality with a goat in the valley where I had sat. In the subsequent chapters, he tells the waiter how nice it has been and they try to b[ugged] each other.'⁶⁹ There is little in the text itself to support such an explicit reading except perhaps the fact that, after his first encounter with Pan, 'Eustace walked with difficulty, almost with pain'. But Sayle's interpretation is based less on any internal textual evidence than on the more general associations between Pan and anal sex circulating in homosexual subcultures at that time – a tradition of which the sexually naive Forster may not, at least at the time of writing, have been aware. Nevertheless, the text's intense portrayal of emotional, if not explicitly sexual, intimacy between Eustace and Gennaro makes it, as Joseph Bristow has argued, 'as richly homoerotic as any of [Forster's] fictions'.⁷⁰

Much of the interest of the text arises from the strategies in which Forster's priggish, morally censorious narrator – Mr Tytler – attempts to deny or obscure the sexual implications of the events he observes. As his narrative progresses, his apparent fascination with the sexual becomes increasingly evident. Yet it is masturbation, rather than 'buggery', that emerges as his principal obsession. In late nineteenth-century England, masturbation was one of the many sexual activities associated with dominant discourses of degeneracy, pathology and abnormality; it was the subject of an intense moral crusade on the part of late nineteenth-century campaigners for social purity.⁷¹ Forster himself appears to have absorbed such clinical notions; an early draft of *Maurice* included references to masturbation as 'degraded' and 'fatigu[ing]'.⁷² The connection that the text hints at between the figure of Pan and masturbation has its origins in a common Classical myth, in which Pan first taught the shepherds – who had little else to entertain themselves on the solitary hillside – to masturbate.⁷³ Thus when Mrs Tytler – the narrator's equally priggish

wife – begins to chide Eustace for his apparent laziness with Isaac Walton’s warning that ‘Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do’ (14), it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the adolescent Eustace’s encounter with Pan may have instigated some mischief of a masturbatory kind. The narrator notes repeatedly that Eustace has ‘lain on his back’ (13 and 15) – a resting position that Victorian treatises on the dangers of masturbation warn against for its propensity to encourage the sin of self-abuse.⁷⁴

Imagery of moving hands and fingers, typically imbued with a sense of the threatening or disgusting, betrays the narrator’s fascination with masturbatory pleasure. The ‘valley and ravines’ of the Italian landscape in which the ‘panic’ occurs have the ‘general appearance [...] of a many fingered green hand, palm upwards, which was clutching, convulsively to keep us in its grasp’ (3). The motif of this ‘convulsive’ grasp occurs later in the narrator’s account, where Eustace is observed to have ‘convulsively entwined [his hand] in the long grass’ (13) – an indication that the boy has achieved some morally suspect, if unspecified, intimacy with the world of nature. In both cases, it is the hands and fingers that are peculiarly guilty of a ‘convulsive’ movement, associated with both agitation and lack of self-control.

Elsewhere in the story, hand movements are characterized by words with masturbatory connotations. Gennaro, in his final betrayal of Eustace’s confidence, for example, ‘stuck his hand out with a *jerk*’ (35). As Albert Barrère and Charles Godfrey Leland’s *Dictionary of Slang, Jargon and Cant* (1889) attests, ‘jerking’ was already a slang term for masturbation in Forster’s youth.⁷⁵ Gennaro’s hand movements are a particular source of discomfort for the narrator: ‘He came close up to me with horrid gesticulating fingers’ (25). For Forster’s casually xenophobic narrator, such exuberant manual gesticulation – an Italian cultural stereotype – is another distasteful example of uncouth Mediterranean manners. But once again the disgust invested in this hand movement is connected with an echo suggestive of ejaculatory sexual pleasure: ‘*he came* close up to me’ (25). Such is the pattern of masturbatory imagery in the narrator’s account that even his rather mundane observation about Eustace withdrawing to ‘loosen the bark from his whistle’ (5) begins to accrue sexual connotations.

In the narrator’s sexually paranoid account, the repeated rhythmic patterns of natural sound or bodily movements become evocative of the rhythms of overheard masturbation or sexual congress. Before the ‘panic’ sets in, the narrator notes the distant sound of ‘two boughs of a great chestnut *grinding together*’. These ‘grinds grew shorter and shorter, and finally [the] sound stopped’. Looking over the ‘green fingers of the valley’,

he observes that the trees have resolved into a post-coital calm, 'absolutely motionless and still' (8). Eustace's increasingly erratic behaviour is characterized by the rhythmic sound of him 'pattering up and down the asphalt' (26) – apparently the sound of his feet as he darts excitedly around the grounds of the hotel. The narrator only ever hears distant aural traces of the boy's movements, rather than catching clear sight of him. Thus the unknown source of these 'ghostly patterings' (27) becomes enveloped within the narrator's pervading sexual paranoia. Gennaro 'patters off' through the darkness towards the 'pattering' Eustace, and only after he has emitted 'absurd cries of pleasure' (34) – surely suggestive of the ejaculatory or orgasmic – does 'the pattering cease'. 'Pattering' as a term suggestive of masturbation – particularly in the case of Forster's censorious narrator – is perhaps no more absurd than the 'sharing' that euphemistically describes physical expressions of same-sex desire in Forster's *Maurice*.⁷⁶ A similar suspicion regarding the regular rhythmic pulse of the masturbatory might attach to the 'faint but steady stound' (38) that the narrator overhears emanating from Eustace's bedroom. Here, the rhythm of masturbation becomes its own form of Pan-inspired musical performance.

Like that of Frank in 'The Man Who Went Too Far', Eustace's queer sexual awakening and his associated neo-pagan urge to commune with nature are presented by the narrator as a reversion towards the bestial. His energetic bodily movements are likened to those of dogs, goats and moths, and he seeks the fellowship of a 'poor dazed hare' (20), which sits terrified on his arm. He utters unsettling cries that the narrator 'should not have thought the human voice could have produced' (40). The narrator himself admits to similar fears of regression when he acknowledges that, in his moment of panic, he had 'been afraid, not as a man, but as a beast' (10). As Eustace reaches the heights of his ecstatic reverie, the linear logic of evolutionary progress is subverted by moments in which the narrator perceives Eustace to flicker between different stages of evolutionary development:

There [...] was something white. I was too much alarmed to see clearly; and in the uncertain light of the stars the thing took all manner of curious shapes. Now it was a great dog, now an enormous white bat, now a mass of quickly travelling cloud. It would bounce like a ball, or take short flights like a bird, or glide slowly; like a wraith. [...] And at last the obvious explanation forced itself upon my disordered mind; and I realized that Eustace had got out of bed, and that we were in for something more. (26–27)

Evolutionary time accelerates backwards here, so that Eustace is transformed – in the narrator's 'disordered' perception of events – over a short course of time from a human into an intangible 'cloud'. Much as in

Machen's tale, his metamorphosis represents a descent away from clear species identity (the human, the canine), to an 'enormous white bat' – a creature that confuses a systematic division of the mammalian and avian – and finally to an ephemeral, transparent 'wraith'.⁷⁷ Here, the confused flux of evolutionary time finds an equivalent in the frenetic, apparently random, variation in physical movement through space: bouncing, flying, gliding.

Pan's musical impact on Eustace is likewise portrayed through a moment of evolutionary flux. Eustace ecstatically sings 'anything that came into his head [...] five-finger exercises, scales, hymn tunes, scraps of Wagner' (28). In doing so, he flits at random between musical forms representative of increasing levels of complexity. The trajectory of music history was commonly understood by Victorian music theorists through the prism of evolutionary theory.⁷⁸ The composer C. Hubert H. Parry took the opposing view to that of Edmund Gurney cited above: the music of Wagner, he suggested, stood at the apogee of music's evolutionary development.⁷⁹ Eustace darts from monodic practice exercises and scales of childhood piano lessons, to homophonic hymn tunes, to the apparent evolutionary pinnacle of the Western art music tradition in 'scraps of Wagner'. His fevered oscillation between musical forms serves to collapse the distinction between them in terms not only of musical complexity but also of moral propriety. Forster draws upon prevalent associations of Wagner's music with erotic licentiousness: it is the music of awakened sexuality. Yet even the ostensibly innocent 'five-finger exercises' here also attain sexual associations, another example of the narrator's *idée fixe* of masturbatory hands and fingers.

Pan's music elicits, then, forms of sexual pleasure – the masturbatory, the sodomitical – that are not only aligned with the subversion of progressive linear evolutionary development but, in their sterility and non-reproductive capacity, also refuse those reproductive imperatives which, as queer theorists such as Lee Edelman have suggested, underpin the heteronormative replication of the social. In responding to Darwin's theories of music's origins, such queer texts present music not as the horizon of futurity, but as a temporal drag that acts to pull subjects back in evolutionary time. The queerness of such texts lies in the challenge they present to music's grand humanistic claims as an exalted site of liberal self-cultivation. In these texts, the music of Pan performs its anti-humanist provocation upon the material body, acting upon it to collapse the distinction between aesthetic and sexual pleasure, the human and the animal.