ADA'S PIANO PLAYING IN JANE CAMPION'S *THE PIANO*
Genteel Accomplishment or Romantic Self-expression?

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Since the late eighteenth century, when the piano first became available for the private home, numerous female characters in literature have demonstrated their skill on the instrument. In nineteenth-century British novels, the prevalence of piano-playing women reflected the contemporary social expectation that middle-class women display some level of competence on the instrument. Yet representations of women pianists in twentieth-century films such as Jane Campion's The Piano *(1992) reflect a persistent Romantic fascination with women's piano playing as a means of expressing authentic inner emotion, especially sexual passion. In this paper I provide an overview of existing historical scholarship on the significance of the piano in nineteenth-century British and colonial culture. In light of this cultural history, I examine Campion's feminist reworking of the Romantic ideal of the artist. Judith Butler's model of performative subjectivity enables us to see the constructed nature of the Romantic ideal of individual self-expression as deployed in* The Piano. *In Campion's film, Ada's pianistic performance functions as a literal metaphor for the constitution of her subjectivity in the Butlerian sense. Moving beyond a critique of the Romantic model of artistic self-expression, however, I read the central violent conflict of the film as a specifically Victorian collision between genteel feminine and Romantic models of musical performance, the locus of which is the body of the piano-playing woman—Ada.*

The Cultural Significance of the Piano in the Nineteenth Century

In nineteenth-century Britain and its colonies the piano was the symbol par excellence of class status. As historians and music scholars such as Cyril Ehrlich and Anthony Burgess point out, the piano was an essential social asset for the upper middle classes, becoming virtually ubiquitous by the early years of the nineteenth century: 'a fixture in every upper-middle-class parlor' (Bernstein 1986, 306).[1] With the rise of the middle classes and their increasing levels of disposable income, however, more people had more money to purchase for display. Industrial manufacturing developments meant that the piano could be produced increasingly cheaply and on a mass scale. This combination of the growth of the bourgeoisie and the availability of ever-cheaper instruments combined to make the piano more and more widespread as the nineteenth century progressed, and by the First World War even a working-class family could afford a piano.

Australian Feminist Studies, Vol. 21, No. 49, March 2006
Routledge Taylor & Francis Group
ISSN 0816-4649 print/ISSN 1465-3303 online/06/010023-12
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DOI: 10.1080/08164640500470610

As an indicator of gentility, however, the piano was a distinctly gendered symbol. A sign not only of gentility but of genteel *femininity*, piano playing was an essential element in the middle-class girl's 'armoury' of feminine accomplishments (Siepmann 1996, 160).[2] The fact that the piano was associated with the genteel woman from the moment of her emergence at the beginning of the nineteenth century is hardly coincidental, for both the cult of genteel femininity and the piano were (in their different ways) products of industrialisation, which enabled the emergence of an affluent and leisured middle class in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Thus in nineteenth-century Britain and its empire, it was overwhelmingly young middle-class women who played the piano—a cultural commonplace well known to any reader of Jane Austen or George Eliot.

In Victorian culture and literature, the piano represented a nexus of middle-class ideals, all of which centred on the home and the woman who occupied it. The piano's association with middle-class women and the fact that it was used primarily for music making in the home resulted in its becoming a symbol of domestic harmony, an ideal equated with femininity in Victorian gender ideology. Women used music at home to amuse their husbands and to 'uplift and charm their children' (Block 2001, 198).[3] As this suggests, the piano was also perceived as a 'force for moral good'—moral virtue being associated with middle-class women (Hyde 1998, 4). Finally, as a pursuit requiring a great deal of time in order to achieve a high level of proficiency, the piano represented leisure—something which, in middle-class Victorian England, was the prerogative of women (Peterson 1972, 10).[4] Unmarried girls, in particular, had an enormous amount of free time for music practice. As much as the piano was a symbol of class because its purchase required disposable income, piano *playing* was a class symbol because it required disposable time: the leisured hours of the genteel woman.

The Limits of Feminine Musicality

Despite its association with feminine virtue and cultivation, however, by no means all pianistic activity was considered appropriate for women. The Victorian notion that women and men occupied separate spheres—men the public world of work, and women the private sphere of home and family—defined the limits of proper female musicality.[5] Recent histories of women and music making in the nineteenth century stress that women were expected to (and generally did) restrict their musical activity to the home, as amateurs. Any kind of public or professional musical activity, including both performance and composition, was taboo for respectable women. 'Excessive' devotion to one's musical studies brought censure from family and society, and a slightly less than perfect technique was considered proper. Women amateurs generally performed showy salon and parlour music, and those women who did compose rarely ventured beyond these genres. Even music teaching was not considered quite genteel, as it breached Victorian gender ideology which stressed that the 'true' lady was a lady of leisure who did not work for pay (Vicinus 1972, ix).[6] Of course, many women who found themselves in straitened circumstances did exploit their accomplishments as governesses or music teachers, but their gentility and even their femininity were called into question as a result.

Deemed improper for women, yet effeminate for British men, public performance on the piano was left to foreign male virtuosi like Liszt and Paderewski, who were heavily associated with sexuality. As Siepmann writes:

> From the 1830s right up to the First World War, concert pianists on both sides of the Atlantic were the pop idols of their day, and their love affairs were the talk of high society and low. (1996, 6)

Women rushed the stage at their concerts, provoking a barrage of satirical cartoons, in which the pianists were depicted performing behind protective railings, or even guarded by police.[7] In her discussion of the piano virtuosi, Laura Vorachek argues that despite their sexual allure, the virtuosi were 'effeminized' through their contact with the piano, because of the strong association of the piano with women in Victorian culture (2000, 31–9). On the other hand, she suggests, the virtuosi's association with the piano also served to eroticise the instrument. Consequently, Vorachek argues, women's piano playing, too, became associated in Victorian literature and culture with female sexual activity, in stark contrast to the original significance of piano playing as an emblem of genteel femininity. With these exciting erotic connotations, it is no surprise that by the end of the nineteenth century the medical profession was blaming excessive piano practice for chlorosis, that quintessentially Victorian malady afflicting adolescent girls.[8]

The fact that feminine accomplishments were an asset in 'husband-hunting' provides part of the link, Vorachek suggests, between the seemingly conflicting associations of the piano in Victorian literature and culture with both genteel femininity and female sexuality. For young single women the piano was an authorised vehicle for sexual display, flirtation, and levels of physical intimacy between performers which would be taboo in other contexts. Vorachek points outs that the piano was also a site for the exhibition of women's bodies for the male gaze. Low-backed uprights, she notes, allowed the audience a view of the performer's upper body, while Derek Hyde writes that 'the mellow candlelight emanating from the two candlesticks held in the brackets of the piano often enhanced the performer's appearance considerably' (Vorachek 2000, 31; Hyde 1998, 32). The posture required for playing the piano compromised neither a woman's facial attractiveness (unlike orchestral instruments) nor her sexual decorum (unlike the cello).[9] As a consequence, Vorachek argues, women's sexuality—disavowed in Victorian gender ideology—was 'displaced onto the piano', allowing women a medium for the expression of their desire while maintaining their physical chastity (Vorachek 2000, 27). As she writes, 'figuring middle-class female sexual desire in the piano—outside the body but contained within the domestic realm—allows women access to it, allows them to arouse and manipulate their own sexuality, to seduce without contact' (Vorachek 2000, 37). The piano thus became a contradictory symbol of feminine virtue and disavowed female sexuality, whose sanctioned role in courtship only increased its association with illicit sexual activity and women's dangerous seductive power. The unusually intimate nature of musical performance which gave the piano its unique role in courtship thus made it an equally suitable vehicle for less socially acceptable desires.

As my preceding discussion of the virtuosi suggests, however, music as a genteel accomplishment for women was only one of two major ways of 'being a pianist' which the nineteenth century produced. The other was the Romantic model of the passionate virtuoso which came to inflect the genteel tradition. Yet in Romantic discourse the creative artist is exclusively male: women have no access to the ideal of the artist-genius. Although art in the Romantic model is predicated upon emotion, and women, in Victorian gender ideology, were the very vessels of emotion, Romantic discourse held that women 'could not objectify emotion by translating it into any other medium', and they were therefore

excluded from artistic production (Tick 1986, 333). Moreover, since women were associated in nineteenth-century gender ideology with the very qualities that Romanticism downgraded—such as culture, domesticity, and a passionless virtue—they were further distanced from the Romantic ideal. Instead, women's role was 'to serve as a muse for the creator, to inspire and nurture the man' (Reich 2001, 148). By contrast, the artist himself, in the Romantic tradition, expresses his 'true self' in his creative work, which therefore reveals his personality or 'soul' to the reader, beholder, or listener. In the Romantic model, the artist (epitomised in the figure of Lord Byron) withdraws from society, which is perceived to be hostile to the artist's 'genius' and is thought to repress the soul which the artist seeks to express in his work. The individual genius is exalted above the community, and the artist becomes associated with the antithesis of society: Nature. Unbridled emotion and 'natural' passion are valorised, as is the body as the seat of such passion.[10] It is the piano that stands foremost amongst the instruments as the vehicle for the self-expression of the Romantic individual, since it alone is almost always played unaccompanied. The piano is also particularly suited to Romantic ideals because of its expressive potential: its capacity to sustain notes, and to produce immense variations in tone and volume—unlike its predecessors the harpsichord and clavichord.[11]

Ada as the Romantic Artist

In a consciously feminist move, Jane Campion's film *The Piano* places a woman pianist, Ada, in the traditionally male role of the Romantic artist. This is by no means the film's only reference to Romanticism. As David Baker perceptively argues, *The Piano* is heavily invested in the Romantic cult of the emotions and the expression of the 'true inner self' through creative art (Baker 1997, 180–201). The film's treatment of Ada's piano playing strengthens this emphasis on Ada's inner, passionate self. As numerous critics point out, Ada's music is offered as the expression of her 'true' self; the piano a symbol for her 'authentically expressive body' (Gorbman 2000, 43). The representation of Ada playing the piano in her sleep links her music with the repressed unconscious expressed in dreams. Furthermore, Ada's self-composed music codes her 'true self' as 'uninhibited' and 'emotional', in accordance with the Romantic exaltation of emotion over reason.[12] Thus Jacobs, for instance, describes Ada's piano playing as 'a more genuine expression of the inner Ada' than her voice itself, noting that this piano playing is 'identified . . . both with the sunlit beauty of the outdoors and later with the indoor sensuality of sexual passion' (Jacobs 1994, 759). The authentic 'inner Ada' is thus associated with the conjoined ideals of Romanticism: erotic passion and Nature, especially the wild New Zealand landscape.

The stylistic features of Ada's music, and its peculiar importance for Ada herself, reinforce the Romantic idea that Ada expresses her 'true inner self' through her piano playing. Because Ada is mute, David Baker points out, her piano playing functions as the viewer's only window onto her soul (1997, 195). Claudia Gorbman provides an illuminating reading of the significance of Ada's music in her essay 'Music in *The Piano*' (2000). As Gorbman discusses, the 'impression of personal authenticity' is enhanced by the fact that Holly Hunter (who plays Ada) actually performs the music in the film, although many actors would use a body-double (2000, 47).[13] Importantly, as an expression of her inner self, Ada's music is untainted by the influence of others, since she composes, as well as performs, the music she plays. Moreover, her pieces resemble one another, using highly repetitive sequences and stylistic devices, suggesting that they express an 'essential' self which

remains unchanged. Gorbman notes that the association of Ada's music with her interior self carries over into its non-diegetic use too. 'Ada's theme' (the main melodic theme of the film), for example, recurs on the soundtrack as Ada gazes at her piano on the beach, as Stewart tries to rape her in the woods, and as he chases her with the axe. What links these scenes, Gorbman argues, is the emphasis on Ada's subjective experience: though accompanied by shots which are partly objective, the soundtrack confidently asserts that, as in the film's opening sequence, the viewer is inside Ada's head, privy to her interior self.

My point here is that the model of musical subjectivity on which *The Piano*'s representation of Ada relies is a masculine Romantic one, in which the interior self—the genuine, natural, and emotional self—is subject to the inhibiting and repressive constraints both of the rational self and of society, but finds expression in art. The film's reliance on this model has much to do with *The Piano*'s context of production and reception. The success of the film depends in large part on a post-psychoanalytic cultural responsiveness to the idea of individual agency expressed via the 'true' or essential inner life, as well as on a feminist ethic that has been established in the second half of the twentieth century on that very principle. At the same time, however, the viewer's response to Ada's quest for self-realisation is contingent upon recognition of the Victorian tradition of (feminine) gentility, which functions in the film as part of the repressive social apparatus thought to be hostile to Ada's inner self. Despite its investment in the Romantic ideal of the artist, *The Piano* demonstrates the limits upon this ideal when reinscribed for a 'genteel feminine' protagonist in a nineteenth-century setting, for the translation of the male paradigm for a female pianist only goes so far. Ada does not find fulfilment as the independent, socially estranged artist in the tradition of Wordsworth or Byron; nor does she emulate Liszt or Paderewski with a solo concert career. Instead, she finds her ultimate fulfilment in a romantic relationship with a man, Baines.

Performing Gender at the Piano

While *The Piano* itself draws upon a Romantic paradigm of artistry, I would like to examine Ada's representation within a 'performative' model of piano playing, in the sense that Judith Butler (1999) uses the term, in which music may be read as a vehicle for the performance (rather than the expression) of the self.[14] Indeed, in Butler's terms there is no 'true' self to be expressed through music: the semblance of identity is instead created through repeated bodily acts or performances of the body. Like any other physical act, piano playing is inevitably part of the pianist's performance of identity and, more particularly, of her (or his) performance of *gender* identity. Musical performance thus offers women the opportunity either to perform (and consequently reinforce) their conventional femininity or to transgress established gender roles; for instance, by appropriating musical practices culturally reserved for men. As Ellen Koskoff writes, '[m]usic performance can [thus] be used as a context for symbolic gender role reversal and/or transformation' (1987, 11).

The identity which Ada constructs at the piano is clearly at odds with the model of genteel feminine musicality which I discussed in my introductory section. Not only is music central to Ada's life; she combines performance at the piano with musical composition, a role from which women have traditionally been excluded. As I have argued, Ada thus usurps the Romantic male role of the creative artist, an identification reinforced by her characterisation as a whole.[15] One of the few exceptions to Ada's self-presentation in this mode is when she suddenly switches to playing Chopin in the middle of one of Baines'

'lessons'. In contrast to Ada's own passionate compositions, which supposedly express her authentic inner emotion, Chopin's music functions as the Romantic stereotype of feminine sensuality (Burgess 1981, 21). In this context, this is 'fake' eroticism, not the 'real' Ada—a ploy which successfully (albeit briefly) repels Baines. Ada, then, occasionally uses music to 'try on' conventional femininity. In the final scenes of the film at Nelson, her newly conventional piano playing indicates that as well as testing the keyboard of her new piano she is testing out a new version of her self more suited to this tamed, colonised space. She plays a 'domesticated' version of the Scottish folk tune she has played throughout the film (Attwood 1998, 98; Gorbman 2000, 50).

Yet as she projects it for most of the film, Ada's musical identity is not that of conventional Victorian femininity but of a contemporary model of femininity often associated with French feminist theory. Several critics have pointed out that Ada's piano playing functions as 'an almost absurdly *literal* uptake of . . . French feminist theory': either Cixous's *écriture féminine*, Irigaray's *le parler femme*, or Kristeva's *semiotic* (Baker 1997, 192).[16] Feona Attwood suggests, for instance, that through her music Ada performs a feminine identity which 'exceeds and disrupts the master language of the [patriarchal] Symbolic Order' (1998, 89). Indeed, Ada's music, which is highly repetitive and constantly in motion due to its use of arpeggiation, fits perfectly Renée Cox Lorraine's Cixous-inspired definition of 'feminine music', which 'might involve continuous repetition with variation, the cumulative growth and development of an idea' (2001, 11).

Importantly, this performance of Ada's feminine identity (a contemporary feminist model) functions simultaneously as an expression of her 'true self' in the Romantic vein, since the Romantic ideal of the artist has much in common with French feminist understandings of 'woman' (Baker 1997, 199, n. 10). As Baker points out, both models advocate the deliberate alienation of the individual from society, for instance, and valorise emotion over rationality. Ada's expression of her 'self' in the Romantic tradition is thus inflected for contemporary audiences by late twentieth-century feminism. Paradoxically, the film gains its contemporary feminist resonance in no small measure from the deployment of a traditional—and masculine-gendered—Romantic model of the self and of artistic expression. Moreover, the 'essential feminine identity' which Ada constructs through her music closes off the possibility of her using music to explore other potential identities beyond the limits of Romanticism.

Whose Body? Ada's Piano as Prosthesis and Love Object

As well as performing her gender, the piano-playing woman—like any musician—inevitably constructs her sexual identity through her music.[17] Historically, there is a strong connection in diverse cultural settings between music and sex, particularly for women. In both Western and non-Western culture, women use music to flirt and seduce, and a woman's musical activity, especially if she is young and unmarried, is often considered to be evidence of sexual activity (Koskoff 1987, 3). In Romantic metaphor, the connection between music and sex is explicit: the piano is identified with the female body, and playing the piano effectively becomes a sexual act. The Romantic composer and pianist Franz Liszt described how '[the piano's] strings tremble under my emotion, its yielding keys resound to all my moods' (Liszt to Adolphe Pictet in 1837, cited in Friedheim 1961, 155). The lone activity of the solo male artist is thus transformed, in Romantic metaphor, into a demonstration of erotic skill: his arousal of 'woman'.

This Romantic discursive convention helps to explain a recurrent symbolic slippage in *The Piano*, in which the piano itself functions ambivalently as a substitute not only for Ada's lover's (male) body, but also for her own (female) body. This slippage results partly from the reworking of the exclusively male Romantic tradition of the artist using a female protagonist. Reinscribed in this way, the model retains its erotic overtones, so that the woman's piano playing is still understood to be a sexual act. In a conventional heterosexual narrative, her instrument therefore comes to stand for the male body of her lover, either hypothetical or actual. However, the piano also retains its Romantic association with the female body, so that the instrument functions simultaneously as a substitute for, or an extension of, the woman's own body. Her sexual performance at the piano may therefore be interpreted as auto-erotic: Edmond de Goncourt, a French artist and writer of the nineteenth century, perceived an association between women's piano playing and female masturbation (Corbin 1990, 533).[18] Alternatively, as in *The Piano*, the instrument may serve as a prosthesis through which the pianist communicates her sexual desire.

At the most basic level of critical interpretation, Ada clearly 'expresses' her sexual identity through her music. True to the Romantic paradigm, it is Ada's projection of her sexual self through her music which attracts Baines to her.[19] For many critics, the representation of Ada's piano playing as an expression of her sexual desire leads to the obvious conclusion that her piano functions as a symbolic substitute for her body, the 'natural' medium for the expression of that desire. Certain key scenes reinforce the significance of the piano as a symbol for Ada's sexual body. As Norgrove writes:

> Shots of Stewart's attempted rape of Ada are interspersed with the fumbling antics of the Maori as they transport the piano through the forest. First dropping the piano and then ripping it apart, they are used to demean the metaphor of Ada's sexuality, as Stewart commits the concrete act. (1998, 50)[20]

In Baines and Ada's bargaining, the piano functions as an economic substitute for Ada's sexual body, which she gives—and only gives—in exchange for her piano. It would be more accurate, however, to describe the piano as an *extension* of Ada's own body: a prosthesis on which Ada is initially dependent for the mediation of her sexual desire. Logically, she discards the instrument at the moment when she embraces her own vital body and its inherent communicative capacity: speech.[21]

However, the fact that Ada's music is coded as an expression of her authentic sexual self does not necessitate the conclusion that her piano functions as part of her body. Rather, it suggests the ambivalence which, as I described above, inevitably results when the male ideal of the Romantic artist is re-inflected for a female musician. If Ada's music expresses her sexual desire, she communicates this desire both *through* her own body and *upon* her lover's body: her piano both translates her desires into sound in the same way that her voice might, and receives her touch. Ada's piano is thus 'both desired thing and part of self' (Segal 1997, 206).[22] Both Ada and Baines caress the piano, suggesting that it stands equally as a substitute for both their bodies. Like the husband and wife of Victorian marriage law, Ada and her piano are both one and distinct, an ambivalence without resolution.

The Symbolic Castration of the Female Pianist

Ada's overtly sensual piano playing certainly transgresses the bounds of proper Victorian femininity and female musicality, but this in itself is not what enrages her

husband. Indeed, Stewart is perversely attracted to Ada because of, not in spite of, her failure to enact proper Victorian womanhood. Instead, the problem for Stewart is his inability to harness his wife's sexuality and direct it towards himself. When Stewart chops off Ada's finger, this mutilation is punishment for her affair with Baines, but also for her wayward *musical* behaviour, which is so intimately associated with her illicit relationship. Not only is Ada's sexuality expressed via her music, but her and Baines's desire is mediated through the piano. Ada's symbolic castration strikes at her ability to communicate both sexually and musically, for she uses her finger both to 'write . . . her desire on the body', and to play her piano (Attwood 1998, 94).

Ada's mutilation is only one example of a recurrent motif of disability and disfigurement associated with representations of women pianists. Even for Ada herself, the amputation of her finger merely substitutes one handicap for another, replacing her muteness as the sign of her incompleteness (Jacobs 1994, 777). In further examples, the heroine of Vikram Seth's *An Equal Music* (1999) a professional pianist, is gradually going deaf. In Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' (1979), the piano-playing heroine is threatened with decapitation, and ends the story with a permanent and disfiguring mark on her face. Mary Tyrone, in Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), once dreamed of becoming a concert pianist but is crippled by arthritis. This insistence on physical handicap is no mere literary phenomenon. Jeremy Siepmann suggests that until the twentieth century most professional female pianists were 'disadvantaged in some way': '[t]hey might be blind, like the noted composer-pianist Marie Theresa von Paradis (1759–1824), or simply ugly, like the brilliantly gifted Josephine Aurnhammer (1756–1820)' (Siepmann 1996, 160).[23] Clara Schumann, the leading female pianist of the nineteenth century, was apparently mute until she was almost five years old. The insistence by writers and historians on the woman pianist's failure to 'measure up' physically suggests a cultural imperative to defuse the ideological threat posed by these women's transgressive musical behaviour—accomplished discursively by denying such women's wholeness, and hence their value as women in the sexual economy.

Similarly, as Jacobs astutely points out, *The Piano* 'insist[s] . . . on a certain deprivation or at least deformity': even the cloth Ada puts over her head while she is learning to speak 'impose[s] a blindness in place of the muteness she has put aside. No full recovery of senses here' (1994, 777). Ada's continuing disability serves to defuse the threat posed by her invasion of the male musical sphere. Yet Ada's muteness differs from other disabilities because it is psychologically the very reason for her piano playing, which took over as her substitute voice when she decided to stop speaking. If Ada's music, as I have argued, functions as a literal enactment of 'femininity' in the French feminist tradition, her muteness indicates her rebellion, in Lacanian terms, against the Law of the Father. As Hoeveler suggests, Ada is the literal embodiment of Hélène Cixous's 'decapitated' woman, whose silence indicates both her subjugation under patriarchy and her resistance to that order. Ada's self-imposed muteness is therefore a 'problem' for patriarchy, which instead of inviting sympathy indicates her recalcitrance (Hoeveler 1998, 110).[24]

Yet it hardly needs to be said that Ada's muteness is a problem for her too, if only because it alienates her from relationships with other people (Attwood 1998, 99). With its investment in the Romantic ideal of the artist-genius, one reason why *The Piano* insists on Ada's physical disability is that, in the Romantic tradition, sublime artistry depends on the artist's personal deprivation as the inspiration and catalyst for artistic production. In Flora's (false) Romantic narrative, for instance, she describes how her mother stopped speaking

after Flora's father was struck by lightning and killed as the two sang a duet. As Jacobs writes, Flora

> places the origin of her mother's muteness as the culmination of a perfect artistic achievement, as the moment of exquisite passion . . . and as simultaneous with the death of the father as composer. (Jacobs 1994, 769)

Ada's disability, in Flora's narrative, is thus the prerequisite for the creation of sublime art. Her muteness, however, is also a symbol of woman's punishment and guilt for destroying the male artist-genius and usurping his role, for in the Romantic tradition the woman, not the man, would die.

Characters like Ada, *An Equal Music*'s Julia, and Mary Tyrone are thus 'punished' for invading the male musical sphere with symbolic castration in the form of mutilation or disability. In *The Piano* at least, however, '[Stewart's] power to castrate is ultimately shown to be illusory': though he successfully mutilates his wife's hand, Ada retains her desire for Baines and continues to play the piano (Attwood 1998, 94). What is most troubling about the film, as David Baker suggests, is that Ada's symbolic castration appears to save her from herself and even (paradoxically) from Stewart, since it enables her to discard her former handicap (her muteness) as well as her prosthetic piano, and with it her alienation from other people. Thus Baker argues that, according to the film's Romantic logic, the moment of Ada's mutilation

> is her moment of triumph . . . the moment of her *redemption*. The fingers that have kept her apart from the world in the opening sequence of the film have been symbolically removed. . . . Ada is thus able to connect with the community in Nelson, this connection with the community signalled by her beginning to learn to speak. (Baker 1997, 196)

While Ada's old piano (on which she performed the role of the artist) divided her from the world, her new piano in Nelson (on which she performs the suitably feminine role of the teacher) is a bridge between her and the world. Arguably, Ada's Romantic musical persona simply demonstrated her inability to communicate and connect with other people, which the film proposes as a feminist imperative towards self-fulfilment. Yet Ada only achieves self-realisation through the mutilation of her body in a possessive act of patriarchal violence, a paradox which distinctly troubles the film's contemporary feminist ethic.

Conclusion

In watching and analysing a film such as *The Piano*, which draws so heavily upon the Romantic tradition of artistic self-expression, it is easy to understand music as occupying a transcendent, power-neutral zone somehow outside patriarchy. My aim in this paper has been to show that the musical space is in fact heavily culturally coded, and inevitably inflected by patriarchal traditions such as genteel femininity and Romanticism. As Suzanne Cusick points out, 'understand[ing] music as a way of performing the [gendered] body . . . require[s] moving decisively away from the premise that music is primarily a transcendent or aesthetic experience' (1999, 42). In *The Piano*, we can see the collision of two intertwined traditions of musical performance—that of the Romantic artist and that of the genteel woman. As Campion demonstrates, within the Romantic tradition the genteel feminine model of music making functions to repress Ada's 'true self'. Yet within the genteel feminine tradition, Ada's self-expressive, eroticised piano playing is unacceptable.

Her musical trajectory in the masculine Romantic vein is cut violently short, abruptly restoring her to a (more) properly feminine musicality—a symbolic violence troublingly common to the representation of female pianists right through from the early nineteenth century to the present day, and which strikes at the heart of their sexual and musical power.

NOTES

* I would like to thank Dr Amanda Nettelbeck for her support and advice in preparing and revising this paper, as well as two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

1. For historical details on the prevalence of the piano I draw in this paragraph on Ehrlich (1990), Burgess (1981), and Sennett (1981).

2. For further discussion of the significance of music as a feminine accomplishment in the nineteenth century, especially in relation to Victorian literary representations, see Burgan (1986).

3. For ideas in this paragraph see also Reich (2001, 159), Leppert (1992, 115), Vorachek (2000, 29, 31), and Poovey (1988, 8).

4. See also Sennett (1981, 197).

5. For the notion of separate spheres, see Poovey (1988, 8). For details of what constituted proper female musicality in the nineteenth century, see Vorachek (2000, 31), Geitenbeek (1995, 192–3), Hyde (1998, 1), Siepmann, (1996, 160), Block (2001, 193), Russell (1994, 87–9), Plantinga (1990, 1), Bernstein (1986, 305), and Reich (2001, 148).

6. On the questionable gentility of governesses and music teachers, see Peterson (1972, 11, 14, and 211, n. 50).

7. For examples of cartoons see Grover (1976, plate 58) and Burgan (1986, 68).

8. See, for example, 'The Piano as a Cause of Neuroses' (1899, 988).

9. See Reich (2001, 169–70), Block (2001, 206), and Hyde (1998, 32).

10. On the Romantic model of the artist, see Sennett (1981, 197–8) and Baker (1997, 182).

11. For more on the piano as the archetypal Romantic instrument, see Reich (2001, 159) and Burgess (1981, 17, 36).

12. See Jane Campion's script for *The Piano* (1993, 35) cited in Jacobs (1994, 759).

13. Further discussion in this paragraph is drawn generally from Gorbman's analysis (2000, 42–58).

14. See especially Butler (1999, 163–90).

15. See generally Baker (1997, 180–201).

16. See also Attwood (1998, 89) and Hoeveler (1998, 110).

17. If only by the projection of a *de*sexualised persona. See Cusick (1999, 25, 29).

18. Corbin does not specify the source of de Goncourt's comment. See also Vorachek (2000, 41, n. 14). In contemporary lesbian musicology, female music making is sometimes understood as a metaphoric enactment of lesbian sexual desire. See Cusick (1994, esp. 78–9).

19. See Gorbman (2000, 46, 56), Segal (1997, 207), and Jacobs (1994, 759).

20. Norgrove's postcolonial critique focuses on the representation of the Maori in this scene. On the piano as a symbol for Ada's body, see also Attwood (1998, 98) and Segal (1997, 206).

21. See Hoeveler (1998, 111), Segal (1997, 206–7), and Attwood (1998, 96).

22. See also Attwood (1998, 96).

23. Siepmann attributes this remarkable comment to Mozart.

24. See also Cusick (1999, 30–1) and Roscoe and Hardy (1996, 150).

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