Introduction

Music was an essential aspect of social and cultural life in eighteenth-century Britain. Musicians flocked from France, Germany and Italy to settle in London, which was often said to be the European "capital of music." Concerts and operas, no less than domestic music-making, were an essential part of polite entertainment. Despite this, music seems to be rarely mentioned in most eighteenth-century fiction. Or is it? Is the familiar image of Britain in general – and of England in particular – as a "land without music" really borne out by the writings of such astute social observers as Samuel Richardson, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Fanny Burney or Jane Austen? The aim of this book is to investigate the various representations of, and allusions to, music in the novels of the Georgian period. It endeavors to study "the function, meaning and understanding of music in [eighteenth-, and early] nineteenth-century culture and society as mediated through works of fiction," to borrow and paraphrase Sophie Fuller and Nicki Losseff's own terms in the introduction to their collection of essays, *The Ideal of Music in Victorian Fiction*.[1] Scenes in which the characters play or sing, or in which they attend concerts, go to the opera, or listen to someone else making music, are important – sometimes crucial – literary indices that reveal these characters' emotions and feelings, or define their identity and their morality. They sometimes play a key dramatic role in the development of the plot. References to musical situations should not be read as if they were simply "decorative" elements contributing to a realistic picture of the social background. They are, I aver, part and parcel of the author's literary strategy and matter as much as any other element in the narrative. Conversely, these scenes do tell us something about the musical culture of the period, and it is often necessary to know the relevant aspects of the social and cultural context in order to understand how such passages may have been perceived and interpreted by contemporary readers. This book aims, therefore, to explore the structural, dramatic and metaphorical roles of music in a wide range of novels of the Georgian era, with regard both to the meaning of these musical scenes in the narratives themselves, and to the cultural context that gave rise to them.

Surprising as it may seem, there is at present no book offering a global survey of this question, which is all the more to be deplored as the novel is often considered to be the literary genre that underwent the most drastic change during the eighteenth century: a genre that became extremely popular and aptly reflected the preoccupations of the period. Whereas the presentation of music in romantic poetry has been studied,[2] there is to my knowledge no equivalent for prose fiction. It is true that there have been a few interesting articles on specific works or writers, which will be duly referred to hereafter (see Bibliography), and a few (slightly outdated) monographs on major authors such as Laurence Sterne or Jane Austen.[3] I have mentioned Sophie Fuller and Nicki Losseff's book of essays, *The Ideal of Music in Victorian Fiction*, but, even if it starts where the current book ends, it does not cover the same period. More recently, Gillen D'Arcy Wood has made a stimulating attempt to analyze musical culture in Britain in the last part of the period, covering aspects that will be tackled in this book, but his perspective is different since he is mainly concerned with changes in musical culture in the romantic period and his agenda is to study the opposition of virtue and virtuosity and what he calls the "professionalization" of female artists.[4] Whereas music is necessarily mentioned in studies of "novels of sensibility" at the turn of the nineteenth century, it is barely touched upon in studies concerned with the beginning of the period (Lawrence Woof's stimulating Ms. D. Phil. excepted[5]), in spite of the fact that it plays an important part in the novels of, for instance, Samuel Richardson. The study of music in the Georgian novel has been strangely neglected, either because it is considered to be of only circumstantial importance in the narratives in question, or because it is thought to be a "specialist" interest and hence below the notice of the serious literary critic.

My aim is therefore to read a significant corpus of Georgian novels in light of their musical inter-texts as part of a larger cultural discourse, an area which I think has so far been neglected. Just as it is impossible to grasp, say, the full extent of the transgression represented by the putting on of the play in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* without "an independent understanding of the issue" of amateur acting in the period,[6] it is impossible to understand aspects of eighteenth-century novels without grasping the importance of certain musical allusions in them. There are numerous passing allusions to musical activity – a lady singing and accompanying herself on the harpsichord, merry rural warbling and frolicking, melancholy strains of the heartbroken lover – but music itself rarely occupies center stage. However, it played a central part in eighteenth-century social

life, and public gatherings – festivities of all kinds, balls, assemblies, religious services – were always occasions for the performance of music. Indeed, the representation of music-making seems to acquire a growing importance in late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century novels written by female authors. Linked as it was with courtship, music was then more clearly perceived as a crucial social factor.

Even if music is referred to only sporadically in the earlier fiction, it often plays – when it is mentioned – a very significant role and, as Gerry Smith puts it, "a reader fully sensitised to the role and representation of music is bound to encounter it throughout the canon of British fiction."[7] Writing about dancing in *Literature and Dance in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Cheryl A. Wilson explains:

> To fully participate in the social and cultural world of the nineteenth century was to dance or, at the very least, to watch others do so. Therefore, nineteenth-century readers and writers formed an understanding of social dance that was largely physical and derived from participation in the culture of dance as performer and spectator. Thus, by depicting a ballroom scene, borrowing the language of dance, or making a reference to dance, writers engaged with a lived experience, using dance as a physical action as much, if not more, than a literary convention.[8]

Similarly, eighteenth-century members of polite society, who constituted the bulk of the reading public of the fiction published at the time, were in constant touch with music as either performers or listeners. Music permeated their lives, both in the public and private spheres. Accordingly, I wish to argue that "musical scenes" in eighteenth-century novels – that is, scenes in which music was framed or referred to symbolically or metaphorically – triggered immediate impressions or associations of ideas that were replete with meaning for the contemporary reader. Conversely, musical tropes or techniques were sometimes used in the fiction itself as formal devices:

> Novelists from every generation, working within every genre, have responded to the power of music, by trying to harness its techniques and effects, and by attempting to recreate the emotions that come to be associated with particular musical styles, forms or texts. In fact, music represents a recurring feature of the canon – one ranging from those texts in which it plays a seemingly incidental (although usually strategically significant) role to those in which it permeates the formal and conceptual fabric of the literary text.[9]

As we shall see, while Samuel Richardson may be said to use music in his novels in a "seemingly incidental (although usually strategically significant)" way, Laurence Sterne plays on the formal characteristics of music to

alter the very nature, or "fabric," of the text, using words in the way that a composer uses musical notes.

Moreover, in quite a significant number of novels, the music heard or performed plays an important role as a mirror of the characters' inner feelings and state of mind. In most novels by female authors of the late eighteenth century in particular, music is presented as the female heroines' favorite entertainment and activity. They are "passionately" fond of it, which defines their sensibility and ready emotions. As music is beyond language, it can best express what the character himself or herself cannot formulate clearly but feels intensely. It is because music expresses meanings without the assistance of words that its impact is so strong.

The growing importance of music in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction thus hinges on the evolution of aesthetic theories of music in the period, which led to the gradual rejection of a mimetic conception of music and the emergence of a conception granting music its full autonomy as an artistic medium.[10] Writing about Beethoven in 1836, the amateur musician William Gardiner summarized this shift in outlook quite clearly:

> The effects of simple melody, connected with pleasing words, must have existed from all time, and its consequent pleasure must have been felt by every people; but in the compositions of Beethoven, we have an art, *sui generis*, in which sounds by themselves operate upon the imagination, without the aid of words, raising it to the highest regions of thought.[11]

Although writers of novels did not outline a clear theoretical discourse on music, their works of fiction nevertheless articulated – albeit unconsciously – the dominant views on music of their time. For the study of the representation of music in the novels of the period, it is therefore necessary to take into account the theories of music that developed at the same time. Literature can thus be considered as a particularly interesting *locus* where representations of music can be studied. Just as Richard Leppert convincingly argued that "precisely because musical sound is abstract, intangible, and ethereal – lost as soon as it is gained – the visual experience of its production is crucial to both musicians and audience alike for locating and communicating the place of music and musical sound within society and culture,"[12] I wish to suggest that literature can efficiently reveal the way music is perceived and "imagined" (or conceptualized) in a given historical period and cultural context. In particular, as we shall see, novels make it possible for one to grasp how given musical instruments are invested with meanings beyond their mere practical function as vehicles for specific

sonorities: they are seen also as vehicles for ideological meanings. Music is a practical activity – a social as well as an "embodied practice"[13] – but it also generates, and is constitutive of, a discourse. The discourse on music is an essential part of the way that music is perceived and consequently used, for music, as Lawrence Kramer remarks, is "a historical construction."[14] Fiction contains elements of the discourse on music that contribute to the fashioning of the role attributed to music at any given period. Studying, therefore, the representation of music in English novels of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries is a way to understand how music was shaped into meanings that consequently affected the way performance and reception were articulated.

Following the ternary typology of the inter-relations between music and literature outlined by Steven Paul Scher (namely: music and literature, music in literature, literature in music),[15] Werner Wolf has remarked that one may

> differentiate between three possible general forms, in which music and literature may appear in one artifact: the form of a "mixture" of music **and** literature (as in opera), and two forms which seem unmixed on the surface: one in which literature is present **in** (expressed through, or turned into) music (as in the case of programme music), and one, the reverse case, in which music appears **in** literature (is expressed through, or "translated" into, this medium).[16]

I am concerned here with the latter perspective. This book is *not* about the relationship of words to music when the former are set to music by a composer; nor is it about the "music of the words," as is often – wrongly, I aver – and only "metonymically" written about poetic diction. As Calvin S. Brown remarks, "for fairly obvious reasons, music has exerted considerably more influence on poetry than on prose fiction. By its very nature, poetry demands a constant attention to problems of sound, and thus is likely to suggest musical analogies to its creators."[17] In the case of the novel, the question of sound is less central and music matters in it primarily as a topos. My aim is simply to trace references to music in eighteenth-century British fiction, in order to try to study, firstly, the part played by these references to music in the narratives studied (what does a given allusion to a musical situation add to the plot or characterization? What part may it play from the structural, psychological or dramatic point of view?); and, secondly, what can be deduced from the representation of music in the novels in question as to how music was conceived, imagined or perceived in Britain in the eighteenth century – all this being what one could call the "*imaginaire*" of music, a term which, unfortunately, has no exact equivalent in English[18] and which we must therefore endeavor to define.

As a production or a construct, music belongs to the sphere of the real: either written or printed on the score or performed by the musician, it is defined by a certain number of objective parameters – pitch, temperament, volume, rhythm, speed, style, orchestration, and so on – that can be analyzed technically. But music is also about something else: from the point of view of *reception*, it is the *locus* of a constant flux of representations and meanings that are projected both *by*, and *upon*, it – and these both proceed from, and modify, the perception of it. The *imaginaire* of music stems from the process whereby music is conceived and perceived in the (individual or collective) imagination. Music is imbued with extra-musical meanings that result from unconscious, socially and culturally determined representations. To "imagine" music means to represent it for oneself, beyond the mere perception of it through the senses, and to project sense upon it. The *imaginaire* of music supposes that something more than music is added to, or projected upon, music itself, something that is partly invented and that transforms music into a complex construct wherein the real is revisited by the imagination. Music, in other words, exists as mediated through a web of social, cultural and psychological modifiers that are historically determined. By collecting and analyzing these various mental "images" of music (as a phenomenon as well as a practice) as they appear in the corpus of texts selected, my aim is therefore to try and map out, so to speak, the way music was not only perceived, but also thought of, problematized and imagined. "The primary object of Archeo-Historicism is to reconstruct historical contexts," Robert D. Hume explains In *Reconstructing Contexts*, and "to strive to replicate as closely as possible the events, values, circumstances, judgments, and *Weltanschauung* of a particular past time and place."[19] He adds:

> Archaeo-Historicism, as I conceive it, is devoted to the reconstruction of historical events and viewpoint from primary materials. Possessed of such a reconstruction, one can attempt to read poems, plays, novels, operas, or paintings in the light of authorial viewpoint and the assumptions, knowledge, and expectations of the original audience. More broadly, one can attempt to understand the lives, choices, failures, and intellectual assumptions of the artists.[20]

I have endeavored to work from this perspective. This book suffers, however, from many shortcomings. First, the choice of the novels to which I have devoted some attention may be deemed arbitrary or random. Why restrict the Gothic novel to Ann Radcliffe, while Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* contains so many relevant musical references? Why insist so much on Frances Burney but tackle only a couple of novels by the prolific

Maria Edgeworth? Why not devote more pages to Henry Fielding? Why devote so much space to minor novels such as Anne Hughes's *Caroline* or Lady Morgan's *The Irish Girl*? The extent of a topic not previously tackled by anyone else in great depth is indeed the only excuse I can offer. It was not my intention to write a comprehensive study of all aspects of the question, and I hope rather that this book will open new critical vistas and that further studies will complement it, contradict some of its conclusions and delve deeper into the enormous corpus of eighteenth-century novels which I have only begun to analyze. From my perspective, it was important to include both canonical works and less well-known novels that could equally testify to the reality of the broadly shared conceptions of music in the period under study.

Another weakness I readily concede is the fluctuation between textual analysis and cultural-historical discourse that is inherent in the methodology I have adopted. In particular, I am aware that the shadow of another, yet to be written book is lurking in the wings of this one: it would consist of a more systematic study of the way musical instruments were represented in people's imagination in Britain in the period under study (that is, the "instrumental *imaginaire*"). My fascination with the question has led me to investigate the particular meaning of some of them (the organ, the harp and the pianoforte, notably) but others – such as the lute, the flute and the guitar – are mentioned only superficially. No doubt a fascinating question is pending here, and while my own study on the English eighteenth-century organ,[21] or Claire Berget's thesis on the viol in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries[22] – which are not properly musicological, nor organological studies, but belong to the field of cultural history – point the way, a lot of work remains to be done to draw a complete picture of the cultural representations of musical instruments. The current work occasionally tackles the issue, but its articulation with the literary interpretations of the texts studied may seem awkward. There again, I think and hope that further works may develop along these lines in a more controlled manner in the future.

Finally, it may be deplored that, beyond the specific studies devoted to several authors in the course of the book, no global overview or general "thesis" should clearly emerge. It would indeed be difficult to bring the variety of novels tackled here under a single paradigm and boldly to assert that the conceptions and representations of music expressed by so many different authors can be shown to build up into a consistent theory. I do think, however, that a gradual evolution did slowly take place in the course of the Georgian period, as outlined in the pages that follow. Above all,

however, I have endeavored to sensitize the modern reader of eighteenth-century novels to the importance of taking their musical dimension into account in order better to understand some of the implicit cultural issues addressed by the authors through references to music in their fiction.

This study is divided into four main parts, each of which is then divided into a few thematic chapters. Starting with a study of the historical and cultural contexts at the beginning of the period, I first pay attention to some periodical essays by Joseph Addison and Richard Steele in *The Spectator*, a magazine which constitutes a laboratory of fiction on the eve of the eighteenth century, before the Georgian era proper. I then consider such novelists as Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollett. I attempt to show that, in the earlier novels, music was generally referred to essentially inside the confines of a prescriptive moral discourse. The characters' use of, or attitude toward, music was to be seen as an index of their moral standards. The long-lasting debate over the morality of Italian opera thus made its way, in transposed form, into the fiction. In the second part, I concentrate on the "sentimental" novel, starting with Laurence Sterne and then looking at the works of Henry MacKenzie and Oliver Goldsmith. As we shall see, Sterne is in a class of his own, the only author of the period to have foreshadowed a proper "musicalization" of fiction. However, the tide of sentimental literature seized upon music as a particularly appropriate vehicle for the expression of feeling. The moral imperative receded somewhat and it was the shimmering of the musical medium as a catalyst of deep and subtle inner emotions that took precedence. The third part tackles the question of the sublime and its impact on the treatment of music in the Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe. After a study of the theoretical and ideological discourse on the sublime in the period, I argue that Radcliffe redefines the sublime through – and thanks to – music, substituting mystery for terror as its fundamental, organic principle, and thus foregrounding a "feminine" conception of the sublime. The fourth and last part deals with female novelists of the "age of sensibility" from the last decades of the eighteenth century to the Regency. Music plays a very important part in their novels and is used, I suggest, as a particularly effective means to define female identity. The references to the art, practice and consumption of music in these works correspond, therefore, to an ideological agenda, while they are also implicitly embedded in the conviction that music exists in a mysterious and ineffable world beyond language, which is particularly suited to the expression of deep and secret emotions. In this last phase of development, the choice of the musical instruments mentioned acquires specific meaning. Thus, it is when music detaches itself

from all extra-musical meaning and becomes fully autonomous as an art form that the character of the instrument used for performance really begins to matter. Gradually moving away from moral strictures to become a discourse on the emotions and feeling, the fictional representation of music in the Georgian novel thus accompanies the general evolution of the aesthetic theory of music from the early eighteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century.