

A Bicentennial Reflection: Twenty-five Years with Fanny Hensel

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This paper originated in the keynote address delivered at the Fanny Hensel bicentenary conference organized by the University of Oxford, Faculty of Music and held at St Catherine's College, Oxford, 22–24 July 2005. As its title suggests, it marks a quarter-century acquaintance with Fanny Hensel. Although in recent years my research has expanded into opera on film, and that has obviously taken me into very different terrain, still Hensel continues to exert a special fascination. Preparing the edition of her letters to Felix Mendelssohn¹ brought me into her private world, a world she assumed would remain private.² I came to admire, and even love, her intelligence, her wit and her musical sophistication. It is not unusual for researchers to be enthusiastic about the person they are studying or to identify with them – this may be one reason for choosing that person in the first place, and is undoubtedly a reason why we chose to celebrate Fanny Hensel's bicentenary with the Oxford conference. In short, Fanny Hensel fascinates us.

As I considered how I would craft the keynote paper, I found myself thinking of Robert Schumann's return after an extended period to the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, the journal he founded in 1834 and edited until 1844. In October 1853 we find him leading off with a guest editorial that has become legendary: 'Neue Bahnen', his heralding of a new saviour for music, none other than the fully formed god Johannes Brahms.³ My role is completely different, of course – no one was anointed at the conference, including Fanny Hensel, nor did I wish to take on such a role. But Schumann and I share a nostalgic return to something close to our hearts, and our respective subject positions reside at somewhat of a remove from the centre. While my views may not be as polemical as Schumann's, I will offer thoughts on the history and present state of Hensel research. My remarks fall into three broad areas: first, a flashback to the early years, or what I call *Realpolitik*; second, a discussion of disciplinary implications of Hensel research; and, third, a critical look at recent revisionism in the field.

¹ Marcia J. Citron, *The Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn, Collected, Edited and Translated with Introductory Essays and Notes* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1987).

² Briony Williams, however, has suggested that the eventual publication of their letters may have been in the Mendelssohn family's minds: see her paper, 'Biography and Symbol: Uncovering the Structure of a Creative Life in Fanny Hensel's *Lieder*', pp. 49–65 of this issue, and cf. Matthew Head's similar point in his paper, 'Genre, Romanticism and Female Authorship: Fanny Hensel's "Scottish" Sonata in G Minor (1843)', pp. 67–88 of this issue.

³ Oliver Strunk's English translation appears in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984): 362–3.

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Just as Schumann's views are prompted largely by personal experience, so my remarks here grow out of my own experiences with Hensel. This is a personal view. I have seen ups and downs, opportunities and challenges. Moreover, my subjective view is grounded in a specific standpoint, that of an American woman musicologist who began research on Hensel in the late 1970s. This perspective is central to my paper, which combines history and critique with the aim of providing a stimulating launch to the other essays of the proceedings.

I Realpolitik

To go back to 1979: Hensel is on my young researcher's brain. I had discussed her in a forthcoming article on lieder of female composers,⁴ and what I knew about her life and music fascinated me. I wanted to find out more. So I made my first visit to the Mendelssohn Archiv at the Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz in what was then West Berlin. Scharoun's sleek modernist library, next to the Berlin Wall, signalled Western prosperity to the East. To me the cavernous spaces inside felt cold and impersonal. The impression added to the uneasiness of being a Jew in post-Holocaust Berlin, at the crossroads of Cold War politics.

But what optimism lay behind the visit. There was a palpable sense of possibility, encouraged by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick's pioneering project on musical women that was then in process: a sense that musicology could expand its borders to include women as historical subjects.⁵ This meant asking new questions and creating new categories, challenges that would become apparent as one moved further into such work. Feminism in the US was in the heyday of what has been called its 'second wave' – a time of discovery and recovery of lost figures, with a new definition of what it means to be 'history worthy'.⁶ While feminist sensibility arrived relatively late to musicology – literature and history, for instance, were already immersed in it – the good news is that it did arrive (and we were still ahead of the more conservative disciplines of art history and philosophy). Another element, often overlooked, is that more and more women were earning doctorates in musicology and populating the field. I am not suggesting an essentialist connection between researcher and topic. What I am suggesting is that the expanded pool's collective subject position *vis-à-vis* the Western tradition nudged subtly but persistently towards an expansion of what could be studied. Whether this is explained by demographics, psychology, a sense of belonging or a new view of history, musicology was on the road to being transformed.

But to flashback to the *Realpolitik* of Berlin and my first visit in 1979: besides the literal politics of the city, past and present, there was a curious kind of politics in play at the library. I offer these remarks with no disrespect intended towards

⁴ Marcia J. Citron, 'Women and the Lied, 1775–1850', in *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150–1950*, ed. Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986): 224–48.

⁵ Bowers and Tick, eds, *Women Making Music*.

⁶ The pioneer feminist historian Gerda Lerner has discussed the idea of 'history worthy' for women; see her 'Placing Women in History: A 1975 Perspective', in *Liberating Women's History*, ed. Berenice A. Carroll (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976): 357–67. For a study of Western music's engagement with the second and third waves of feminism, see Marcia J. Citron, 'Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research', *Women in Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 8 (2004): 47–60.

the staff or librarians of the Music Collection. But one had the sense of swimming in a murky sea with no defined shoreline and no guidelines for exiting from the waters and standing securely on land. As a researcher from across the ocean, I was seeking to discover the documents, musical and otherwise, that existed for Hensel. The problem was that there was no library catalogue of Hensel holdings, although Rudolf Elvers, the director of the archive, had published an article on Hensel's musical manuscripts held by the library.⁷ But no finding-aid listed letters, diaries or other miscellaneous material in the collection. For such items, the director told scholars on-site what was there for them to see. The information changed each time – I made three trips between 1979 and 1983 – and I wondered if something subjective guided this process; whether access was fragmentary or restricted because I was an unknown young American female researcher. And perhaps the documents were being reserved for someone else?

These thoughts were confirmed in print by Elvers himself in 1986. Christopher Swan, a reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor*, a Boston-based newspaper with national circulation, had just come across Hensel's music through a friend. Eager to share his discovery and enthusiasm, he wrote an article introducing her to the public. Swan relied mainly on input from the Hensel scholar Victoria Sirota, a Boston resident at the time, but he contacted others for the piece, including me. He also interviewed Elvers, who was in residency in the US that year, and received some surprising responses. Asked why so much of Hensel's music was still in manuscript, Elvers is described as saying that 'qualified musicologists are not interested' in doing the needed checking of sources towards producing an edition of Hensel's works. In Elvers's own words, 'I am waiting for the right man for the job to come along', after he complained about 'all these piano-playing girls who are just in love with Fanny'. Furthermore, in comparison with Felix, Elvers claimed that 'she was nothing. She was just a wife'.⁸

How else did these policies affect me personally? In 1979 and 1980 I was focused on studying Hensel's lieder. She wrote hundreds, as we know, and I requested a microfilm of the main manuscripts so that I could continue intensive work at home. This was denied – no Hensel works may be microfilmed, I was told. Instead, on-site, I copied out by hand the music to perhaps a hundred songs. These pencil versions formed the basis of my article on her lieder that would be published in 1983.⁹ I also wished to look at her diary (not knowing then that there were several diaries, arranged chronologically), and in 1980 there was one I was permitted to consult on-site (no microfilming allowed). I assumed this was the only diary in the library's possession. But later I learned the library had several more. On my third trip I was given permission to order a microfilm of letters by Abraham Mendelssohn. These were not key documents, and I never was cleared for a microfilm of anything by Hensel. Incidentally, the German musicologist Eva Weissweiler, who also began to work on Hensel in the late 1970s, relates in

⁷ Rudolf Elvers, 'Verzeichnis der Musik-Autographen von Fanny Hensel in dem Mendelssohn-Arkiv zu Berlin', *Mendelssohn Studien*, 1 (1972): 169–74. A list of her music in private hands appears in Elvers, 'Weitere Quellen zu den Werken von Fanny Hensel', *Mendelssohn Studien*, 2 (1975): 215–20.

⁸ See Christopher Swan, 'The Other Mendelssohn', *Christian Science Monitor* (27 Mar. 1986): 17.

⁹ Marcia J. Citron, 'The Lieder of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel', *Musical Quarterly* 69 (1983): 570–94.

a private communication that she encountered similar problems of access in her visits to the Staatsbibliothek over several years.¹⁰

The *Christian Science Monitor* article confirms the archive's practice of routinely denying permission for access to Hensel manuscripts. Christopher Swan relates one further such instance: 'The Portland [Oregon] String Quartet tried in 1985 to record [Hensel's String Quartet], but the group was refused a copy on the grounds that they were unknown to Dr Elvers. The publisher C.F. Peters sent a letter to the Berlin State Library in January 1985 requesting a copy of the quartet. A reply in September told them that it had been promised to someone else'.¹¹

The restrictive policies of the Mendelssohn Archiv eventually relaxed, some time around 1990 – another Berlin Wall coming down. Without this sea-change, we would not have the editions of Hensel's works we now have from Furore Verlag and elsewhere, nor the CD recordings of previously unpublished works, nor the gratitude expressed by later Hensel scholars for the library's cooperation regarding access to documents.¹² One is tempted to speculate further on the early restrictions, and I will return to them briefly later. But mostly I leave it to others to explore this area.

While the situation in Berlin was discouraging, the situation in Oxford was welcoming. In 1980 I spent a month at the Bodleian Library in order to explore Hensel's letters to Felix in the famous 'Green Books' collection. Where materials were withheld in Berlin, here materials were volunteered and shared. I will never forget the generosity of the late Margaret Crum, a high-ranking librarian at the Bodleian. Her detailed index to the Green Books' 7,000-plus letters addressed to Felix was in the press, and she kindly gave me a copy of the page-proofs, which I used to locate Hensel's approximately 300 letters.¹³ This saved enormous amounts of time. Moreover, the library helped me acquire photographic copies of the letters. I am forever grateful to the Bodleian's staff for their help.

¹⁰ E-mail communication to the author of 2 June 2005. My sincere thanks are due to Eva Weissweiler for her responsiveness and candour. Weissweiler also experienced inconsistent access at the Staatsbibliothek with respect to the correspondence between Robert and Clara Schumann – first she was permitted to see the documents, then she was not. She reports that the director of the library, named 'Vesper', wrote that it was a 'conditio sine qua non' that Weissweiler work with the Schumann scholar Wolfgang Boetticher to see the manuscripts (Boetticher, by the way, was a Nazi musicologist in the Third Reich). Weissweiler writes in the e-mail message: 'after that I asked Richard von Weizsäcker, mayor of Berlin at that time, for help (telling him some facts about Boetticher's Nazi-career), and was immediately allowed to continue my work'.

¹¹ Swan, 'The Other Mendelssohn', 17.

¹² See, for instance, Camilla Cai's expression of gratitude to the Archive's staff, in 'Fanny Hensel's "Songs for Pianoforte" of 1836–37: Stylistic Interaction with Felix Mendelssohn', *Journal of Musicological Research* 14 (1994): n. 26. Nonetheless, Eva Weissweiler observes in her e-mail message to me of 2 June 2005 that, although the situation improved somewhat, she still received fragmentary and inconsistent information from the new director of the Mendelssohn Archive, Hans-Günter Klein.

¹³ Margaret Crum, ed., *Catalogue of the Mendelssohn Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford*, 2 vols (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1980 & 1983). Vol. 1 covers the vast majority of the collection and includes the letters addressed to Felix, including those by Fanny. Crum's Preface notes that Rudolf Elvers was behind the project in his role as editor of the bibliographical series to which Crum's *Catalogue* belongs.

II Matters of Discipline

Historical musical women were starting to get attention in critical numbers – the First International Congress on Women and Music in New York in 1981 marks a key moment. Budding work on Hensel echoed research on other women: for example, Nancy Reich's work on Louise Reichardt and Clara Schumann.¹⁴ Scholarly isolation gave way to community. Another community was formalized when Hensel joined the purview of Mendelssohn research. This probably happened first in the journal *Mendelssohn Studien*, which remains a major venue for Hensel research. A personal connection came about when Larry Todd kindly invited me to speak about Hensel at the International Mendelssohn and Schumann Conference in 1982, a landmark event for American Mendelssohn scholarship. I was well into the Letters project at the time, and that was my subject on that occasion.¹⁵ In the current proceedings Todd explores stylistic affinities and differences between Hensel and her brother in the course of a close reading of one of her 'Songs for Piano'.¹⁶ Feminism and Mendelssohn studies have continued as the main interpretative pillars of Hensel inquiry, although other areas have emerged as well. These include cultural study, authorship, Bach reception and style-critical analysis. Twenty-five years ago, in the early 1980s, I never would have dreamed that Hensel research would come so far and yield so much.

Let me survey some of the highlights. Limits of space prohibit a full airing, and I apologize for the absence here of fine studies that might have to go unmentioned. Let us start with biography, where three major studies stand out. The first two are doctoral dissertations from 1981 by Victoria Sirota and Carol Quin.¹⁷ These women were real pioneers and confronted major challenges in piecing together the basic facts of Hensel's life and music, especially in the light of highly restricted access to the sources. From the early 1990s comes Françoise Tillard's rich study of Hensel's life and cultural milieu, translated from French into English and German.¹⁸ And as a marker of Hensel's fame beyond scholarly circles, we have Ute Büchter-Römer's monograph from 2001 in Rowohlts

¹⁴ Nancy B. Reich, 'Louise Reichardt', *Ars musica, musica scientia: Festschrift Heinrich Hüsch*, ed. Detlef Altenburg (Cologne: Gitarre und Laute, 1980): 369–77. Reich's *magnum opus* on Clara Schumann is the superb biography, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985, revised edition 2000); an earlier piece is Nancy B. Reich and Anna Burton, 'Clara Schumann: Old Sources, New Readings', *Musical Quarterly* 70 (1984): 332–54.

¹⁵ See my contribution, 'Fanny Hensel's Letters to Felix Mendelssohn in the Green Books Collection at Oxford', *Mendelssohn and Schumann: Essays On Their Music and Its Context*, ed. Jon W. Finson and R. Larry Todd (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1984): 99–108. A sesquicentennial conference in 1997 on both Mendelssohn and Hensel took place at Illinois Wesleyan University, organized by John Michael Cooper. Four papers on Hensel – by Hans-Günter Klein, R. Larry Todd, Camilla Cai and Françoise Tillard – appear in the expanded conference proceedings: *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*, ed. John Michael Cooper and Julie D. Prandi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹⁶ See R. Larry Todd, 'Fanny Hensel's Op. 6, no. 1 and the Art of Musical Reminiscence', pp. 89–100 of this issue.

¹⁷ Victoria Sirota, 'The Life and Works of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel', DMA diss. (Boston, 1981); and Carol Quin, 'Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel: Her Contributions to Nineteenth-Century Musical Life', PhD diss. (Kentucky, 1981).

¹⁸ For the English version see Françoise Tillard, *Fanny Mendelssohn*, trans. Camille Naish (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1996).

paperback series of composer biographies (Clara Schumann is the other woman in the series).¹⁹ Hensel has definitely arrived.

Stylistic studies of individual pieces and genres have blossomed. Early examples include my 1983 essay on Hensel's lieder, and Sarah Rothenberg's 1993 article on *Das Jahr*.²⁰ Sesquicentennial conferences in 1997 offered many stylistic inquiries. These include articles by Larry Todd and Camilla Cai from the commemoration at Illinois Wesleyan University organized by John Michael Cooper.²¹ Celebrations in Berlin also featured explorations of style – too many to be listed individually, but published in the collections edited by Beatrix Borchard and Monika Schwarz-Danuser, and by Martina Helmig, respectively.²² Several participants in the Oxford conference (2005) investigated Hensel's music in detail: these included Matthew Head, Larry Todd, Briony Williams, Susan Wollenberg and Edith Zack.²³ Topics ranged over genres, single works, and comparison with other figures.

Most contextual study has placed Hensel in the sphere of the Mendelssohns or that of the *salon* as a site for women. Notable is a group of essays in the *Musical Quarterly* of 1993, organized by Michael P. Steinberg, that derive from a Cornell conference on gender and memory in the cultural identities of Fanny and Felix.²⁴ In 1991, Nancy Reich authored a seminal article on the importance of class in understanding Hensel's musical life.²⁵ Many studies have engaged with the public–private dichotomy between Fanny and Felix – for example, my essay of 1984 on Felix's influence on Fanny *vis-à-vis* professionalism, and

¹⁹ Ute Büchter-Römer, *Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001). Other German-language books on Hensel have appeared recently, including a new biography whose publication coincides with the bicentenary year: Thea Derado, *Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel* (Lahr: Kaufmann Verlag, 2005).

²⁰ Citron, 'The Lieder of Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel'; and Sarah Rothenberg, "'Thus Far, But No Farther": Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel's Unfinished Journey', *Musical Quarterly* 77 (1993): 689–708.

²¹ R. Larry Todd, 'On Stylistic Affinities in the Works of Fanny Hensel and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy': 245–62; and Camilla Cai, 'Virtuoso Texture in Fanny Hensel's Piano Music': 263–78; both essays in Cooper and Prandi, eds, *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*.

²² Beatrix Borchard and Monika Schwarz-Danuser, eds, *Fanny Hensel geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Komponieren zwischen Geselligkeitsideal und romantischer Musikästhetik*, 2nd edition (Kassel: Furore, 2002); and Martina Helmig, ed., *Fanny Hensel, geb. Mendelssohn Bartholdy: Das Werk* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1997).

²³ Zack's paper, not included in these proceedings, was 'Fanny Hensel's Cantata *Hiob*: A Transpersonal Commentary on Divine Darkness'.

²⁴ The collection appears under the title 'Culture, Gender, and Music: A Forum on the Mendelssohn Family', with the explanation that a performance of Hensel's *Das Jahr* formed the 'centerpiece' for the conference at which these studies originated. In addition to Rothenberg's essay "'Thus Far, But No Farther'", intriguing pieces include David Warren Sabeau, 'Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy and the Question of Incest' (709–17); and John E. Toews, 'Memory and Gender in the Remaking of Fanny Mendelssohn's Musical Identity: The Chorale in *Das Jahr*' (727–48). Michael P. Steinberg sets up the essays with a helpful introduction (648–50).

²⁵ Nancy B. Reich, 'The Power of Class: Fanny Hensel', in *Mendelssohn and His World*, ed. R. Larry Todd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 86–99; and in a revised version, 'The Power of Class: Fanny Hensel and the Mendelssohn Family', in *Women's Voices Across Musical Worlds*, ed. Jane A. Bernstein (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004): 18–35.

Tillard's article of 2002 on the public–private opposition between the two.²⁶ In the present collection Beatrix Borchard and Cornelia Bartsch address the meaning of 'Leipziger Straße Drei' for Hensel.

And last, but in no way least, are documentary studies. In separate projects Eva Weissweiler and I compiled editions of Hensel letters.²⁷ Of great importance is the 2002 appearance of Hensel's *Tagebücher*, in a handsome volume edited by Hans-Günter Klein and Rudolf Elvers.²⁸ At last these critical documents are available to everyone. Nancy Reich compares them with Clara Wieck's diaries in the essay following.²⁹ We also have at least one detailed catalogue of her works, with incipits for the published pieces.³⁰ In addition there are many useful source studies available in print. One example is Annegret Huber's 1997 piece on the discrepancies among the manuscript sources of Hensel's 'Choleramusik' of 1831 and their consequences for performance.³¹ Hensel scholarship has clearly developed a rich methodology. It is in fact more accurate to refer to methodologies in the plural, to account for the diversity of approach. And I would suggest that this diversity signifies more than just the effects of different topics – rather, that it acts out disciplinary trends in musicology itself.

Let me begin with my home turf, American musicology. Since the early 1990s, US musicology has experienced a struggle between so-called Old Musicology and New Musicology. In broad terms, Old Musicology denotes traditional methods based on German positivism: archival work, philological comparison of sources, and scientific objectivity in using evidence. New Musicology rejects the idea of objectivity and verification as sole criteria for scholarly authority and replaces it with another epistemology. The range of acceptable evidence is much broader, and for some exponents the researcher is accorded authority merely by virtue of his or her individual subjectivity. At its best, New Musicology calls for cogent argumentation and depends on intellectual engagement with other research.

Considered as a whole, Hensel scholarship reflects the tensions between Old and New Musicology. Editions, bibliographies, source studies and traditional musical analyses continue to appear, and they are still needed. We have only

²⁶ Citron, 'Felix Mendelssohn's Influence on Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel as a Professional Composer', *Current Musicology* 37–8 (1984): 9–17; and Tillard, 'Felix Mendelssohn and Fanny Hensel: The Search for Perfection in Opposing Private and Public Worlds', in Cooper and Prandi, eds, *The Mendelssohns: Their Music in History*: 279–90.

²⁷ Citron, *Letters of Fanny Hensel to Felix Mendelssohn*, which offers English translations and commentary as well as the original German versions. Weissweiler's editions include *Fanny Mendelssohn: Ein Portrait in Briefen* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1991), and 'Die Musik will gar nicht rutschen ohne Dich.' *Fanny und Felix Mendelssohn: Briefwechsel 1821 bis 1846* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1997).

²⁸ Fanny Hensel, *Tagebücher*, ed. Hans-Günter Klein and Rudolf Elvers (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2002). For an insightful review, see Rebecca Grotjahn, 'Die "story" der unterdrückten Komponistin – ein feministischer Mythos? Anmerkungen zu einigen neuen Publikationen über Fanny Hensel', *Frankfurter Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 7 (2004): 31–3.

²⁹ See Nancy B. Reich, 'The Diaries of Fanny Hensel and Clara Schumann: A Study in Contrasts', pp. 21–36 of this issue.

³⁰ Paul-August Koch, *Fanny Hensel geb. Mendelssohn. Kompositionen: Eine Zusammenstellung der Werke, Literatur und Schallplatten* (Frankfurt: Zimmermann, 1993): I wish to record my gratitude to Eva Rieger for sending me a copy.

³¹ Annegret Huber, 'In welcher Form soll man Fanny Hensels "Choleramusik" aufführen?' *Mendelssohn Studien*, 10 (1997): 227–45.

begun to scratch the surface of publishing Hensel's music and analysing it. New Musicology in its postmodernist incarnation has not made major inroads into Hensel research, at least to my knowledge. Yet the general spirit of New Musicology's expanded horizons with respect to topic and critical theory has informed some work. It surfaces in Hensel research that stresses socio-cultural issues and uses critical theory to interpret her life, career, music and historical position. Papers by Matthew Head and Paula Higgins delivered at the Oxford conference fall into this category.³² Theories of gender drawn from the fields of history, literary studies and the social sciences have proved especially attractive.

Hensel scholarship also has implications for international musicology. I am struck by some basic differences between German and Anglo-American approaches to Hensel. These are broad comparisons, perhaps overly broad, and no doubt many exceptions can be found.³³ But on the whole, German scholarship on Hensel has emphasized positivist work and taken the lead in publishing the music, producing source studies and analysing the works. This is not surprising: the manuscripts reside in Germany, and German musicology in general emphasizes these methods. In comparison with the situation in the US and Britain, critical theory and feminism are still outsiders in relation to the core of German musicology, especially as applied to iconic German figures. Hensel may not belong to that select group by virtue of her own reputation, but she has a foot in the door because she is a Mendelssohn. It should be noted that many German studies explore Hensel's cultural position in the *salon* or in Bach reception. These interpretative pieces obviously go beyond positivism. But they tend to avoid interpretation that deals in ideology, subjectivity or metaphor. Anglo-American work – especially American work – differs from German work in its readiness to integrate these latter concepts and methods when appropriate. Of course, many Anglo-American scholars still focus on documents and stylistic analysis. But collectively they draw on a wider range of approaches, reflecting a pluralism that might be compared to pluralistic values in the larger culture.

Another factor enters into national differences: that of the scholar's relationship to the topic of Hensel. This refers to insider–outsider status, or one's subject position to the material. Hensel was German, a denizen of German culture, and thus German scholars have a closer subject position to Hensel. Language, place, customs, history, the very air they breathe: there is a certain affinity that no one else can have. Foreign scholars, relatively speaking, inhabit an outsider subject position. Hence one could argue that they are less qualified to research German figures. Perhaps this accounts in part for Rudolf Elvers's limits on Hensel documents: the 'piano-playing girls ... in love with Fanny' were mostly American musicologists, and the Portland String Quartet to whom he denied access is an American group. On the other hand, if one took this assumption to heart, no one could study another country's culture. That is patently absurd. In fact, outsider status has distinct advantages in conferring an independent, although not value-free, standpoint capable of injecting fresh ideas into received knowledge. Moreover, there is no such thing as a pure insider subject position. Take the case of Hensel. Besides being German, Hensel was a woman and a

³² Higgins's paper, which does not appear in the proceedings, was "'The Most Frightening Creature Imaginable': Fanny Hensel and the Anxiety of Authorship'.

³³ This comparison inevitably leaves out some important work produced elsewhere: for example, Tillard's biography, which originated in France.

Jew who converted to Lutheranism. Are these necessary qualities in a scholar? Obviously not. But more than anything, Hensel is a historical figure, remote in time from the present. This alone prevents pure insider status. We are all at a historical distance and thus 'outside' to some extent. Thus supposed insider advantage through nationality withers somewhat before the reality of the passage of time.

The discussion prompts me to wonder: who 'owns' Fanny Hensel? The politics of ownership do not normally surface in musicology – all qualified scholars are generally deemed worthy of examining evidence. Yet the restricted access to Hensel of the past, and the disparate approaches in play, make it more than simply a fanciful query. The range and depth of inquiry at the Oxford conference suggest that we all 'own' Hensel; so does the public as it enjoys performances of her music. Hensel does indeed belong to everybody, and no one can claim privileged ownership any more. This marks a rite of passage into cultural authority: for Hensel, of course, but also for scholars who work on her.

I would like to address another disciplinary matter, forming another point of tension. By 1991, after some major studies on female composers, including Hensel, had appeared, new currents in feminist musicology began to cast doubt on the value of the earlier work. A subtle but palpable split began to colour conferences and publications. At the risk of exaggerating, let me characterize the divisions I sensed: sexuality and representation were 'in', biography and analysis of historical figures were 'out'. Reliance on ideology and metaphor was 'in', while reliance on historical documents, if not 'out', was becoming questionable. It is a mistake, however, to reduce this simply to Old Musicology versus New Musicology – their differences mix topic and approach in complex ways – although it is true that the new preferences became part of New Musicology. In any event, Paula Higgins offers an insightful perspective in an important essay of 1993, 'Women in Music, Feminist Criticism, and Guerrilla Musicology: Reflections on Recent Polemics'.³⁴ She notes that the pioneers of the 1980s were performing something of a 'revolutionary act' by 'inject[ing] women at all into a musicological discourse overwhelmingly dominated by the notion of male genius as musicology'.³⁵ In Ruth Solie's memorable phrase, such work was 'changing the subject'.³⁶ As a member of the academy, I can say that it did feel risky professionally to be working in new terrain. Actually it often seemed like virtual terrain. Your colleagues had never heard of your figure, so how important could she be? Or you might be suspected of special pleading because you were a woman doing research on a woman. Through the haze of memory I recall that I felt part of a daughterly challenge of sorts to the patriarchal entity that is musicology.

The privileging of sexuality and representation over biography and analysis was ushered in formally with Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings*.³⁷ I cannot think of any book that has exerted a greater impact on musicology. It inspired all of us who were interested in musical women and became a beacon to budding scholars

³⁴ Paula Higgins, 'Women in Music, Feminist Criticism, and Guerrilla Musicology: Reflections on Recent Polemics', *19th-Century Music* 17 (1993): 174–92.

³⁵ *Ibid.*: 178.

³⁶ Ruth A. Solie, 'Changing the Subject', *Current Musicology* 53 (1993): 55–65 [issue entitled 'Approaches to the Discipline', ed. Edmund J. Goehring].

³⁷ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

for what might be possible in the field. But it has a major problem. As pointed out separately by Elizabeth Wood, Paula Higgins and others, McClary ignores historical female figures in favour of living women and she engages women in history only as characters or ideas in works by men – in other words, in terms of their representation.³⁸ Higgins is persuasive when she contends that McClary reinscribes patriarchy by insisting on a certain way to work on women, and by relegating pioneer scholars to the role of nurturers – presumably nurturers and foremothers to the fully formed feminist product that is McClary's work.³⁹ *Feminine Endings* laid down the gauntlet of a politicized feminist musicology. For a while at least, ideology, sexuality and representation, with a heavy dose of metaphor and literary freedom, were accorded top billing. More traditional approaches garnered much less respect.

I rehearse this history because it has a bearing on Hensel work. For one, in avant-garde musicological circles feminist work means only the newer methods, not the traditional ones. As I mentioned, to my knowledge Hensel and her music have not been subjected to avant-garde interpretation. Could this be because her music is deemed conservative? Or is it fall-out from the privileging of women in male representation over the study of women in their own right, as seen in *Feminine Endings*?⁴⁰ Second, these politics suggest that feminism in musicology has not been monolithic or unified for some time, a point to keep in mind for the next section of my paper. And third, it is interesting that the first mature biography of Hensel, by Tillard, did not issue from the US, where many musicologists work on women, but from France, where feminist theory has been absent from musicology. In general, biography from a feminist perspective, which tries to incorporate critical theory, is a very challenging enterprise – Judith Tick's magnificent study of Ruth Crawford Seeger is among the most successful examples.⁴¹ How do you tell the events of a life without relying on facts and documents – a narrative and evidentiary method seemingly at odds with avant-garde feminist musicology?

I see a middle ground for Hensel: the usefulness of gender as an analytical category. This is nothing new – in fact, it is quite a dated suggestion. But I offer it now as a way to resolve various tensions I have discussed. Gender serves history and ideology equally well, and it coordinates as gracefully with documentary evidence as with metaphorical arguments. This middle ground lay at the heart of my book *Gender and the Musical Canon*. As the title suggests, gender operates as the mobile element to navigate the waters of historical documents and critical theory. In the chapter devoted to creativity, Hensel appears in a discussion of the implications of anxiety of authorship for women composers and its impact on her subjectivity and career. The next chapter, on professionalism, engages issues surrounding publication for Hensel. In both places, historical evidence interacts with cultural interpretation through the lens of critical theory. Although the centre of gravity of my research has shifted in recent years, I believe that gender

³⁸ Elizabeth Wood, 'Settling Old Scores' [Review of McClary's *Feminine Endings*], *The Women's Review of Books*, 8/12 (Sep. 1991): 11; and Higgins, 'Women in Music': 187–8.

³⁹ Higgins, 'Women in Music': 176–7.

⁴⁰ For a general discussion of the historiographical implications of centred and decentred subjectivity for female composers, see Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, reprint edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000): 118–19.

⁴¹ Judith Tick, *Ruth Crawford Seeger: A Composer's Search for American Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). See my review in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26/1 (autumn 2000): 324–6.

as a way to negotiate history and critical theory still remains a very attractive path for future Hensel work. Judith Butler's slant on gender as a category that performs subjectivity could prove useful for theorizing female musicians, including Hensel.⁴²

A related area that is yielding rich results for Hensel is that of authorship studies. Paula Higgins has been working on Hensel and authorship theory for some time. Starting with a 1989 paper that links anxiety of authorship with Hensel, Higgins has given presentations devoted to the topic at many venues (including Oxford in 2005). If her recent essay on genius and the reputations of Renaissance composers is any indication, then we have something to look forward to.⁴³ Matthew Head also discusses authorship for Hensel in his contribution to the Oxford proceedings. He turns to her Sonata in G minor and focuses on the meanings of the genre of sonata for female composers. This continues his general interest in female authorship of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as embodied in his fascinating recent article on female authorship and the composer Minna Brandes.⁴⁴

III A Bump in the Road

In contrast to the rich and perceptive work on Hensel at the Oxford conference and cited in this paper, Hensel studies have hit a bump in the road. A revisionist critique of feminist work on Hensel is the main point of 'The "Suppression" of Fanny Mendelssohn: Rethinking Feminist Biography', an article that appeared in the journal *19th-Century Music* in 2002.⁴⁵ Essentially – and I mean that in both senses of the word – the author, Marian Wilson Kimber, castigates feminist scholarship on Hensel. According to Kimber, feminist work has stolen Hensel's agency as an individual by placing, in Kimber's words, 'sole blame' on Felix, and it casts Felix as the villain (also Kimber's phrase). Kimber claims that feminist work stresses Hensel as a victim, that it trumps itself as something new but in fact repeats commentary on Hensel from the nineteenth century, and that it regularly uses 'Mendelssohn' rather than 'Hensel' for her surname and thereby pushes its own agenda over that of the composer. The author asserts that feminist scholars are creating fiction and satisfying personal frustrations in their own lives when they propose certain narratives about Hensel's life and career. Kimber reminds the reader that scholarship must rely on historical evidence, not made-up fictions.

In order to counterbalance these powerful accusations I offer the reactions of the German musicologist Rebecca Grotjahn to Kimber's essay, in a review in the

⁴² See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁴³ Paula Higgins, 'The Apotheosis of Josquin des Prez and Other Mythologies of Musical Genius', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57/3 (autumn 2004): 443–510.

⁴⁴ Matthew Head, 'Cultural Meanings for Women Composers: Charlotte ('Minna') Brandes and the Beautiful Dead in the German Enlightenment', *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57/2 (summer 2004): 231–84.

⁴⁵ Marian Wilson Kimber, 'The "Suppression" of Fanny Mendelssohn: Rethinking Feminist Biography', *19th-Century Music* 26/2 (autumn 2002): 113–29.

Frankfurter Zeitschrift für Musikwissenschaft of recent Hensel work (the English translations are mine).⁴⁶ Grotjahn writes:

A many-headed female-author-collective, it would appear, tells the ‘story of Fanny Hensel’s suppression’ ... Who is behind this? The main sources for Kimber are a children’s book by Gloria Kamen, the biography by Françoise Tillard, as well as – at the margins – an essay by Sarah Rothenberg. Other works are used only as a quarry for individual examples torn from their context, and many assertions even stand completely undocumented. The claim, stated several times, that in feminist biography Hensel functions ‘only (!) as a symbol of the suppression of women’, creates a caricature of Hensel research that one could ignore, were it not for the fact that [the essay] is a political tract, appearing in one of the more highly read scholarly journals.⁴⁷

After Grotjahn grants that a few of Kimber’s observations on biographical method are, ‘despite everything, worthy of consideration’, she tackles Kimber’s strategy of using a children’s book to represent Hensel scholarship. Kimber contends that a children’s book conveys the ‘stories’ that a society uses to impart self-understanding to its children, and hence these represent the real views held by a society. Grotjahn recognizes the faulty logic and rightly observes, ‘One could surely just as easily say: Children’s books tend towards simplification’.⁴⁸

With regard to the demonizing of Felix that Kimber sees in Tillard’s book, Grotjahn notes that a re-reading of the biography shows that Tillard is misrepresented. In Grotjahn’s words:

[Tillard writes that] Hensel had nothing against her brother publicizing her works under his name, and moreover it was usual in this time for female authors to conceal their names in publications. No doubt Felix Mendelssohn is exonerated by these arguments. That Hensel-biography [collectively] demonizes Felix as the ‘villain’ is of course, moreover, polemic; for a majority of the female authors are aware of the fact that the problem did not lie in the person of the brother. Using that to dispose of the issue as unproblematic, moreover, reveals a deeply unhistorical outlook ... Hensel’s consent [for Felix to include some of her *Lieder* in his opp. 8 and 9] does not change the fact that the female composer as *female author* – like her composing and literary female contemporaries – was a victim of social, or rather mental, structures.⁴⁹

Grotjahn further refutes Kimber’s claim that Hensel did not express dissatisfaction with her life. Again in Grotjahn’s words, ‘In her letters and diaries one repeatedly encounters statements that not only show proof of her dissatisfaction with the restrictions placed on her, but also a critical awareness of the meaning of gender roles’. And near the end, Grotjahn addresses Kimber’s charge of victimhood: ‘That the biography of a woman lets itself be told as a victim-story does not mean that she *was* a victim; similarly, Kimber does not adequately demonstrate that the protagonist is “in reality” a satisfied, successful, strong woman’.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Grotjahn, ‘Die “story” der unterdrückten Komponistin’: 27–45. My thanks are due to Paula Higgins for bringing Grotjahn’s essay to my attention. Italics and exclamation marks in the translations appear in the original.

⁴⁷ Grotjahn, ‘Die “story” der unterdrückten Komponistin’: 27–8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*: 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 29.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 30–31.

I would like to add three observations of my own. First, Kimber's assertion that feminist scholars routinely distort history by using Mendelssohn instead of Hensel as her surname is itself a distortion: one need only do a tally among major publications to see that Hensel is used more often.⁵¹ A second problematic point is that Kimber's called-for interpretative nuance, a trait she claims is missing from feminist work, in fact already exists in major work on Hensel that Kimber essentially ignores. Just as Grotjahn sets the record straight for Tillard's biography, so numerous places in mainstream Hensel work could be cited that present a balanced view of Hensel. Third, and most importantly: as Grotjahn implies, Kimber lumps feminist work into one monolithic category. Not only does this essentialize feminist work by removing nuance and context, but it suggests that the author is not conversant with feminism and its methods. As I discussed earlier, feminist work in musicology embraces a variety of approaches. Putting all this evidence together, I have no option but to concur with Grotjahn's appraisal that Kimber's piece is polemical and political.

In speculating on what might motivate such a position, I wonder whether it reflects a backlash movement against feminism in society that arose in the US in the early 1990s. The movement is called post-feminism, and one of its key claims is echoed in Kimber's essay: that feminists emphasize victimhood when they explore historical figures and thereby deny a woman's individuality and agency.⁵² Another possible motivation could be the desire to 'defend' Felix Mendelssohn from perceived attacks on his reputation by the proponents of his sister's cause – an idea proposed by Paula Higgins in a private communication and suggested by her paper at the Oxford conference.⁵³ But, as Grotjahn observes, the majority of Hensel scholars, especially the major players, recognize Felix's generous spirit towards his sister and acknowledge that his negativity towards publication largely reflects prevailing attitudes for his class and gender with regard to professionalism for women.

Looking at the bigger picture, one could say that in general it is positive when a field matures to the point where controversy is generated. But revisionist critique, like all scholarship, must be well argued, and it must be knowledgeable about the work under review. Objectively viewed, Kimber's political mission cannot be said to advance Hensel research, and it occupies a curious position on the margins of Hensel work. Meanwhile, Hensel scholars are continuing to develop their research along new paths, in a spirit of community. My paper bears traces of this sensibility: that, despite differences in approach, a core of scholars – a Hensel 'tradition', if you will – has emerged. This is cause for celebration.

Delivering my keynote address in July 2005, I felt that the best way to close was to hand over the podium to Hensel. She speaks eloquently through her music, and it was time to hear her voice: 'Die Dichterin spricht', as Robert Schumann might put it (the last piece in Schumann's *Kinderszenen* op. 15 for piano is entitled 'Der Dichter spricht'). There are many Hensel works one could choose. In the spirit of commemoration behind that conference, I turned to her

⁵¹ The question of naming female authors in writing about them is a very interesting one, deserving more space to consider than can be allotted here. (It could be argued that a surname that is not your husband's, but yours from birth, would buttress female agency.)

⁵² For a fuller version of my observations on Kimber's essay, see Citron, 'Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research', *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture*, 8 (2004), esp. 57–60.

⁵³ Paula Higgins, e-mail communication to the author, 14 December 2003.

piano set *Das Jahr*. It consciously marks a happy time in Hensel's life: her trip to Italy in 1839–40. We had time for one excerpt and, since it was July, that is the movement we heard.⁵⁴ The bitter-sweet tonal ambiguity that opens this gem breathes the same air as many a Schumann work, while the middle suggests the weight of Beethoven. The piece features a sense of harmonic individuality that in the event became a theme of many papers of the Oxford conference.

⁵⁴ Sarah Rothenberg was performing ('Fanny Mendelssohn-Hensel: *Das Jahr*', Sarah Rothenberg, piano, Arabesque CD Z6666, 1996).