A Story of Feminine Sacrifice: The Music, Text, and Biographical Connections in Amy Beach's Concert Aria Jephthah's Daughter

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A STORY OF FEMININE SACRIFICE: THE MUSIC, TEXT, AND BIOGRAPHICAL CONNECTIONS IN AMY BEACH’S CONCERT ARIA JEPHTHAH’S DAUGHTER

by

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Date ________________________________
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And most of all, to my niece, Evelyn Lucy—may you grow up to be as brave and bold, as warmhearted and hardworking, as Amy Beach herself.
Abstract

*Jephthah’s Daughter* (Op. 53), a concert aria for soprano and orchestra written by Amy Beach (1867-1944) in 1903, has long suffered neglect due to the fate of its manuscript and the fate of Beach’s work in general. This investigation seeks to probe how Beach engaged the Biblical subject matter and mid-1800s French text in her setting. I discuss this engagement through stylistic comparison with the musical traits of her other work, translation comparison between the literal meanings of the original poem and Beach’s English rendition, and contextualization of Beach’s setting within the history of how this story has been interpreted. The aria fits within Beach’s dramatic Romantic style and deliberate molding of text, and tells a story with notable connections to her life and work.
Note on Methodology

Since this aria fits most neatly within the late Romantic tradition, I have analyzed it in terms of traditional functional harmony and chromaticism. Use of more recent, 20th-century analysis techniques (such as set theory or Schenkerian analysis) may yield interesting further insights, but is beyond the scope of this study. All mention of specific pitches is in concert pitch, and uses a numerical system with C4 as “middle C.”

In hopes to make this analysis accessible to professional, amateur, and aficionado alike, I utilize the technical musical terms as appropriate and, to avoid clogging up the main paper with definitions, have included a glossary in Appendix A.

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Context

Amy Marcy Cheney Beach was one of the members of the Boston School, or the Second New England School—a group of composers hailing from the Northeastern United States working toward an authentically American body of art music. This group also included Edward MacDowell, John Paine, George Chadwick, Horatio Parker, and Arthur Foote. Beach’s inclusion as a female in this group represents a great accomplishment: she composed in league with her male contemporaries despite lacking their advantages of education and experience. Her *Symphony in E-minor (“Gaelic”)* was among the Boston School’s responses to Dvorak’s call for “American” music. It mirrored the structure and key center of Dvorak’s *Symphony No. 9 in E-minor (“From the New World”),* yet made her own statement about what constituted American heritage by using Irish and Scottish melodies, not Native American or African American, as source material. It was this work by Beach, the first by a female American for a full orchestra, that earned her membership as “one of the boys” according to Chadwick—a problematically gendered pronouncement, but nonetheless reflective of Beach’s impressive skill.¹

Beach was born Amy Marcy Cheney in 1867 to a paper-manufacturer father and amateur musician mother in Henniker, New Hampshire. Young Amy showed inclination toward music at a very early age. Adrienne Fried Block, Beach’s primary biographer, notes Beach’s ability to improvise an alto line before age two, outbursts of tears at hearing major tunes in minor keys, and synesthetic associations between colors and key centers.² Her first lessons in piano, at the encouragement of her aunt, were with her own mother. When she got older she began lessons with Ernst Perabo and, later, Carl Baermann. Her first foray into public performance at age seven

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² Block, 4–5, 10.
was highly successful, with the thriving artistic community in Boston, to where the family had moved by that point, taking note of young Amy’s promise. Her parents, however, sheltered her from further performance for the rest of her upbringing, fearing her exploitation as a child prodigy, a move for which Beach later expressed gratitude. It was not until the age of sixteen that Amy Cheney had her primary debut as a pianist. When she did debut, Boston was enamored with her performance and hailed the beginning career of a great talent.

Soon after, her pianistic career became curtailed by marriage at age eighteen to a well-respected doctor, Dr. Henry Harris Aubrey Beach. This marriage, somewhat arranged in nature, had a multitude of consequences for Amy: on the one hand, earning large sums of money as a pianist might have appeared unseemly for the wife of a doctor who, in the culture of the time, was expected to be the primary breadwinner. For this reason, she agreed to give up public piano performances aside from charity concerts once or twice a year. Additionally, there is some indication that he prevented Beach from any further composition training—at that point, she had only studied for a year with organist Junius Hill. On the other, the lack of concern about money that a Mrs. Beach could enjoy allowed her all the time she could desire for composition. Thankfully, Dr. Beach heavily encouraged his wife to use her time towards this end. He even went so far as to encourage her to take on the large forms, i.e. genres of art music utilizing an orchestra—which had little precedent for use by women at the time—and to remark, “I am content to be the tail to her kite.”

3 Block, 12–13.
4 Block, 13.
5 Block, 30–31.
6 The following paragraph, until otherwise cited, is a paraphrase of Chapter 5, “Two Ways of Looking at a Marriage,” from Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian.
Even with her husband’s encouragement toward the large forms, Beach’s most prolific areas of composition are in the socially acceptable small forms, i.e. piano pieces and art song commonly used as parlor music in domestic settings. But, as mentioned, she wrote larger pieces as well, and gained recognition and a respectable career as a composer as a result. Her first large-scale piece was a Mass in 1892, almost as if to make her breaking of social, musical norms acceptable by doing so in a sacred work. The next large works were the Gaelic Symphony, debuted in 1896, and her Piano Concerto in C-sharp Minor in 1900. Interspersed between these were several songs, including perhaps Beach’s most famous, “Three Browning Songs,” and her first concert aria, *Eilende Wolken*, both also in 1900.

Though some sources have mysteriously misdated *Jephthah’s Daughter*, Beach’s note at the end of the handwritten orchestral score gives the date as February 15 1903, with the piano/vocal reduction appearing via Beach’s longtime publisher A.P. Schmidt in 1903. The

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9 As pointed out by Susan Mardinly, “The Mass in E-flat, op. 5 was a deliberate attempt to succeed in what was heretofore primarily the province of men… Whereas an inspiration associated with feminine nurturing can be construed as the source for her avocational compositions, her success in appropriating the historically masculine elevated her to the level of serious composer. Considering the moral probity of Bostonian society at the turn of the century, it was a wise decision to pursue her first major piece in the genre of the sacred. At this juncture in history, any suspicion of dissolution of character, common in artists of genius, may have proved fatal to the compositional ambitions of a woman,” Susan Mardinly, “Amy Beach: Muse, Conscience, and Society,” *Journal of Singing* 70, no. 5 (June 5, 2014): 528.

10 A bit more information on this aria exists than that for Jephthah’s Daughter. Block explains its origins as a commissioned work by prominent contralto C. Katie Alves (*Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 73.). Since these two are the only concert arias written by Beach, an in-depth comparison of the two would be worthwhile, but such a comparison is beyond the scope of this study.

11 Namely, Walter S. Jenkins, *The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer: A Biographical Account Based on Her Diaries, Letters, Newspaper Clippings, and Personal Reminiscences*, ed. John H. Baron (Warren, Mich: Harmonie Park Pr, 1994). This source gives the composition date as 1901 on page 51, and even goes so far as to claim that Beach wrote nothing of consequence in 1903 on page 54.


work itself is a concert aria, not part of any opera, about the story found in the Biblical text of Judges 11. The vocal part is challenging, reaching down to C#4 and up to Cb5 to span almost two octaves. Beach places this high note after the vocalist has already sung for eight minutes over characteristically dense accompaniment. A dramatic, heavy soprano voice would be well-suited to the singing of this aria. By this time, Beach had begun her long-term friendship with operatic soprano Marcella Craft, who performed the lead in Strauss’ Salome under the direction of the composer himself, and was the first to dance the “Seven Veils” scene as well as sing the part. Since Craft’s voice was sufficient for the demands of the Salome role, and since this aria is similarly demanding, it seems possible that this work could have been written with Craft’s voice in mind.

The obscurity of this aria owes more to outside factors than to any deficiency in its quality. The most apparent factor is that Beach left the original score for Jephthah’s Daughter in Europe with Craft after having to cut short a European tour due to the outbreak of World War I. The score remained there for the next three decades and by the time it arrived back in the States, Beach’s career and popularity had greatly waned. Another part of the reason for Jephthah’s Daughter’s obscurity could be its difficulty, whereas much of Beach’s other vocal works are more accessible to the amateur or student. Finally, Beach and her compatriots were long dismissed in the shadows of the American ultramodernists from the 1920’s onward, since

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14 Amy Beach did write one opera, Cabildo, in 1932, but this opera’s subject matter is unrelated to either of Beach’s concert arias.
16 Another clue to this end is the inclusion of an Italian translation prepared by Beach’s friend Isadora Martinez—at this time, Craft was living and working in Italy (Block, 181.), and sang other Beach works in Italian translations there (Jenkins, The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer, 54.). Other well-known artists of the day that sang the aria include May Goodbar and Marcella Sembrich (Mardinly, “Amy Beach,” 535.).
17 Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian, 196.
18 Block, 253.
the latter group of composers were the first to cultivate a sound truly unique to the United States.\(^{19}\) Yet as Beach’s work sees rediscovery, this fascinating aria merits discussion as an example of Beach’s dramatic Romantic style and engagement of powerful text. In addition, it tells a story with notable connections to her life and work.

Before any further discussion of the aria, an explanation of the story is due. Found in Judges 11 of Hebrew Scripture, the story narrates that Jephthah, a Gileadite, has been cast out of his family since he was born from a prostitute. Despite his outcast status, his family comes to him seeking his military assistance against the threat of the Ammonites. To regain his place within the family, he agrees, giving the condition that he be reinstated as a member of the family if his assistance makes them successful. The family assents, and Judges 11:29 describes the Spirit of God coming upon him. However, even after receiving God’s Spirit, Jephthah takes an extra measure to boost his chances: he vows to God that if he is successful in battle, he will sacrifice to God the first thing of value he sees emerge from his house when he returns from battle. What he means to sacrifice is not made clear from the text itself, nor is the exact meaning of “sacrifice.”\(^{20}\) But the vow is made, the battle is won, and Jephthah returns home.

The first thing he sees, coming out to greet him in a joyous victory dance, is his only daughter. Jephthah is immediately stricken with grief due to the consequences he must now face: he must fulfill the vow made to the Lord and that means killing his daughter. He explains this to

\(^{19}\) This unique sound from the ultramodernists received its credence from its complete rejection of emotionality. Composers in this vein, including Henry Cowell and Ruth Crawford Seeger, dismissed any display of sentiment. For further discussion of this shift, see Hon-lun Helan Yang (Author), “Politics, Identity, and Reception: Composers of the Second New England School,” in The Past in the Present, vol. 1 (Papers read at the IMS Intercongressional Symposium and the 10th Meeting of the Cantus Planus, Budapest & Visegrád: Budapest, Hungary: Liszt Ferenc Zeneművészeti Egyetem, 2000), 405–23.

\(^{20}\) As Trible puts it, “The nature of the sacrifice is, however, as unclear as it is emphatic… A certain vagueness lurks in these words of Jephthah, and we do well to let it be. Did he intend a human sacrifice, male or female? A servant perhaps? Or an animal? The story fails to clarify here the precise meaning of his words.” (Phyllis Trible, “The Daughter of Jephthah: An Inhuman Sacrifice,” in Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 96–97.
her and she quietly agrees to take part in his vow. She, however, gives a condition of her own—that she be allowed to mourn her fate in the wilderness with her friends for a period of two months. The father agrees, she goes and mourns, and then returns to fulfill Jephthah’s rash vow. Amy Beach’s chosen text finds the daughter in the process of mourning her impending death and contemplating its implications. Let us first begin with her musical choices in telling this story.

**Music**

Due to the lack of training available in the United States and its relatively young status as a unified country, the initial American art music of which Beach was a part did not break particularly new ground. At this point in history, the German Romantic aesthetic was what Western culture considered valuable.\(^{21}\) Since Americans were so new to the world of art music, their compositions stayed well within this aesthetic in order to fit that time’s definition of art. To further nudge young America toward a German sound, many of the professional musicians in New England at the time were German transplants, there to cultivate America’s music scene or escape political conflict.\(^ {22}\)

Beach’s work especially was bound to a certain degree of conservatism. Historically, for a woman to compose at all was a risk rarely taken. Therefore, musical risks beyond that were rarer still. In addition, the cultural climate was a conservative one, with music held to Victorian standards of edification. Music’s importance, as Beach states in a 1905 essay titled “The Uplift

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\(^{21}\) This paradigm continues to this day, to some degree. Discussions of the Western canon center on Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, not Berlioz and Bellini, beginning with the construction of mythology around Beethoven in the nineteenth century. Taruskin explores this over the course of his *Oxford History of Western Music* (with the fourth volume being most pertinent here). For a very brief explanation, see p. 476 of the College Edition of the same (Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, College ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 476.)

of Music,” lay in its “moral influence and uplifting power” to cultivate “all that is good, just and beautiful.” The goal, then, was not radical experiments with sound, dissonance or tonality, as these might come at the risk of beauty. Even Debussy’s use of whole-tones struck Beach and her contemporaries as ugly and unnatural.

As a result of all this, Beach’s work falls neatly between Wagner’s chromatic stretching and Brahms’ lyricism—approaching the very edges of what tonality could do, but still firmly within its boundaries. Jeannette Wise Brown articulates the most distinct features of Beach’s personal style as follows: a pianistically conceived approach a la Liszt, trills and tremolos, chromatic scales, chromatic and “tonally ambiguous” vocal melodies that “rarely begin on the downbeat,” a “wide tessitura,” highly chromatic harmonies, “changing tempi within a single work or movement [as] an important means of contrast,” and counterpoint, albeit as a less common feature. In regards to her harmonies, Brown gives a very clear description:

“Harmonic analysis of a typical Beach composition reveals extreme chromaticism, rapidly changing tonal centers, and remote harmonies… harmonic re-orientations come along in such rapid succession that a new key is not fully established before another is heard… Beach may have borrowed from Berlioz the idea of third relationships and the use of diminished chords as bridges between tonal centers… Like Berlioz, Beach often used a diminished chord or a dominant

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23 Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian, 150.
24 Jenkins, The Remarkable Mrs. Beach, American Composer, 58.
26 Brown, 131.
27 Brown, 131.
28 Brown, 141.
29 Brown, 147.
30 Brown, 147.
31 Brown, 150.
32 Brown, 156–57.
seventh chord, or a sequence of both types, as a pivot for changing keys.

Cadences are commonly avoided, and the key change may be sudden or may follow a period of silence.”

This quote merits inclusion at length in discussion of this work due to how well *Jephthah’s Daughter* fits these descriptors. Brown accurately highlights Beach’s frequent modulation and preferred methods of doing so. In addition, Brown describes Beach’s typical form in a way worth comparing with the aria in question: “The multiplicity of melodic ideas, harmonic roaming, lack of thematic development, and lack of well-defined sections makes it difficult to characterize the forms of Beach’s music… All genres frequently include introductions and codas.” *Jephthah’s Daughter* certainly makes use of this harmonic roaming and a lengthy introduction, and does not develop the theme as clearly as a sonata-allegro might.

However, this work, best described as a recitative-aria in form, differs somewhat from this description. Sections are made clear through use of changing tempi. Shifts in tonal center and stability directly correspond with these section changes. The structure of the work, such as it is, takes its form from the structure of the text. The passage of the poem that Beach used begins with a six-line stanza in third person. The full poem found in Mollevaut’s original publication is mostly in third person. However, the one third-person stanza serving as introduction in the truncated edition proves effective for setting the scene of the daughter’s lament. Beach makes the logical choice, then, of setting this stanza as a recitative for the aria to follow.

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33 Brown, 147.
34 Please note that Brown’s use of the term “extreme” to describe Beach’s chromaticism only applies within traditional tonality, ignoring the even more expansive understandings of harmony to come in the 20th century.
35 Brown, *Amy Beach and Her Chamber Music*, 161.
36 The different versions of the text in question are to be discussed later in this paper, but for the sake of reference, see for the full text Charles Louis Mollevaut, *Elégies* (Bertrand, 1816). For the truncated text used in the aria, see *Chrestomathie de la littérature française, ou Morceaux choisis des meilleurs écrivains français... depuis 1520 jusqu’en en 1845, avec 176 notices biographiques, littéraires et bibliographiques...* (W.E. Dean, 1854).
The beginning section is distinguished as a recitative not by a direction to deliver the text in a speech-like fashion as a traditional recitative might, but more by its stylistic distinction from the rest of the aria. Whereas the melodies of the aria are highly lyrical, the intervals featured for the vocalist in the recitative section are dissonant and disjointed. In juxtaposition with diminished seventh chords in the accompaniment, they illuminate the anguish of the speaker being introduced. There is a sense of stillness in the accompaniment, created by the slow quadruple meter and the overall lack of harmonic motion. After some acceleration in mm. 25-29 and a tantalizing hint at the eventual key center of f-sharp minor in m. 30, the section ends how it begins, on a G-sharp half-diminished seventh chord. The vocalist enters this recitative section unaccompanied (ex 1), outlining that same diminished chord, and ends the section unaccompanied, singing an ascending tritone (ex 2). The unaccompanied entrance and exit for the vocalist further emphasize the isolation and despair of the subject.

Example 1

Example 2

The aria section includes the remaining four stanzas of the poem, all first person and nearly identical in structure. They each feature an ABAB rhyme scheme. Though the A rhyme changes with each stanza, the B rhyme remains the same, since each stanza ends with the word “mourir.” Beach’s translation choices with the original text are to be discussed later in this paper. Suffice it to say for now that her translation follows the original rhyme scheme very carefully. The first three stanzas of the original text end identically: “Et moi, je vais mourir!” or “And I, I
The final stanza ends slightly differently, with “Et je saurai mourir,” or “And I will be able to die.” Though this structure would appear to lend itself well to a strophic setting, Beach tended to avoid this structure. She instead opts for a through-composed aria, creating structural unity through a repeated motive and variety through repetition of key phrases—the latter of which Beach commonly did, as Block describes her “changing or adding a title, omitting a verse, or repeating a word or phrase in order to change the emphasis or equalize musical poetic time.”

The shift into the aria section occurs with a change into triple meter with a more mobile speed. Thirds on the offbeat in the right hand, scored for strings in the orchestral version, lend a sense of forward motion (ex 3). Harmonic analysis of this transition reveals motion descending along the scale toward the dominant seventh, C-sharp, which resolves to the tonic of the aria overall, F-sharp minor. A 9-8 suspension in the accompaniment leading into the resolution lends poignancy to this moment by slightly delaying the inevitable fall into the tonic (ex 4).

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**Example 3**

**Example 4**

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37 Unless indicated as Beach’s English translations, all English translations henceforth are those provided by Dr. Michelle Beauclair.
39 Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 147.
40 One of the two sources that explicitly discusses this aria describes this segment as a descending tetrachord or a Phrygian cadence (Block, 156.).
The vocalist enters on the offbeat of this measure, introducing what will become the central motive of the aria:

Example 5

This motive bears some examination. It does not appear to be molded to the French or the English text, making it potentially a rare instance in which Beach valued a musical idea over a poetic one. The chromatic twists and turns within the music fit well within Beach’s usual practice of highly chromatic melodies, as mentioned by Brown. Mardinly describes this melody as “distinctly Near-Eastern,” and “Aida-like,”\(^\text{41}\) which potentially places this aria within the then-common trend of Orientalism, whether or not this melody authentically reflects Middle Eastern music. The melody itself bears a sense of familiarity to the modern educated listener, but does not, to this scholar’s knowledge, directly quote any other work, only approximating themes in a myriad of other works in the Western canon.\(^\text{42}\)

The first and second verses of the first-person text merit grouping together, as Beach treats the two similarly. Both vocally start off with use of this motive, and begin and end with the

\(^{41}\) Mardinly, “Amy Beach,” 535.

\(^{42}\) For example, collaborative pianist Dr. Yuliya Minina, upon preparing this work, suggested that it sounded like a Tchaikovsky piece. Further conversations with various Seattle Pacific University faculty yielded a multitude of guesses, with no two the same, including Strauss’ Der Rosenkavalier, Puccini’s Madama Butterfly, and Bizet’s Carmen. Therefore, I have concluded that its seeming familiarity owes more to use of common principles than to direct quotation of any one work.
tonic of F-sharp minor. However, the first stanza stays diatonic, while the second launches into new territory through use of ii-V-I/i cadences in closely related keys. The instrumental transition between first and second stanza, mm. 61-66, utilizes a descending bass-clef scale and treble-clef offbeat thirds just as the transition into the first had used, with the addition of a chromatic ascending scale creating clearly visible and effective counterpoint (ex 6). As Brown notes, counterpoint tended not to feature as prominently as a consideration in most of Beach’s work, and when it did, primarily in her instrumental work.⁴³ Therefore, this passage demonstrates the interesting bridge this work makes between Beach’s better-known songwriting and her daring endeavors in the orchestral world.

Example 6

A couple other notable features of this second section occur at its beginning and its end. In the beginning, the use of tremolos in the second section creates tense stillness beneath the singer’s description of leaving her friends behind (ex 7). At the end, the accompaniment drops out after the dominant, and resolution to the tonic is only implied by the solo vocalist—again hearkening to the lonely state of the speaker—followed by another statement of the main motive in the accompaniment (ex 8).

⁴³ Brown, *Amy Beach and Her Chamber Music*, 156.
The transition out of this stanza and into the third launches a new section. This section lacks the connection to a clear tonal center. Instead, its coherence comes from voice-leading and use of the main motive. This motive shows up repeatedly in multiple places and registers during this passage. A doubling in tempo contributes to the heightened drama and instability. During the second half of this third stanza, tremolos in the accompaniment further this unrest. Yet despite this turbulence, the vocalist’s line remains lyric and connected, potentially highlighting the speaker’s attempts to show resolve and maintain strength even with the horror at the implications of her impending death.

The section ends with a sustained E5 for the vocalist in mm109-111, the root of the flatted second scale degree in the key to come (ex 9). The following section slows down again, and takes up root in a new stable key; the key signature implies that the new key will be G-flat major or something related (ex 9, cont.). Even with this stability, there is some moving back and forth between a dominant-seventh D-flat—the dominant of the new key—and an A major chord, which has as one of its tones the enharmonic of D-flat (ex 10). In other words, Beach oscillates between two chords that are a third apart, exemplifying her common use of chromatic mediant relationships.
Eventually, with the beginning of the final stanza, a temporary tonic arrives in m. 125. But rather than the G-flat major implied by the key signature, the new key is E-flat minor, with a high vocal entrance over *forte* block chords in the accompaniment (ex 11). The first line of the stanza ends on what appears to become the real tonic, G-flat. However, this first line repeats immediately in the key a chromatic mediant away, D major, and ends on A major (ex 12). Then the key moves back to G-flat via the dominant-seventh D-flat, hearkening back to the earlier oscillation between chords and keys, with a doubling in tempo.
Yet another chromatic mediant modulation to B-flat finds another crying out of the vocalist, delivering the first line of this final stanza, “Ah, Thou hearest my complaining!” once more. The accompaniment holds this B-flat major chord for three measures before breaking into an A-flat fully-diminished seventh chord. This chord is the same as the chord that began the whole aria, providing a powerful climactic flourish over which the vocalist cries the highest pitch, Cb5, and holds for several measures. Mardinly compares a similar moment in Beach’s earlier vocal work, “Dark is the Night,” to a scream from the singer, and such a descriptor certainly fits this moment as well—a final impassioned cry of desperation to God, as Jephthah’s daughter faces her fate. Her loud cry and the raging ascent of the accompaniment come to a full stop and a moment of grand pause (ex 13).

44 Mardinly, “Amy Beach,” 529.
After this moment, the treble offbeat thirds softly return in the accompaniment, this time in G major—the key half a step lower than the climactic chord, and a half step above the ultimate tonic center. Upon the re-entry of the vocalist in the pickup to m. 165, the accompaniment drops out again, allowing the singer to deliver another repetition of the second line of the final stanza at a hushed pianissimo (ex 14). This vocal line ends on a high G-flat in m. 168, launching into the final tonic of the piece, and the accompaniment re-enters beneath this high note. The offbeat thirds feature in this return, as does one last statement of the aria’s motive in mm. 168-171 (ex 15).

As this section and the aria begin to close, a trill in the left hand on the leading tone, F-natural, appears in the left hand in mm. 173-174, but resolves to the third of the relative minor, E-flat minor, in m. 175. At this time, the vocalist delivers another repetition of the third line of
text and the long-delayed statement of the final line on that same pitch, Gb, in a quasi-recitative, starkly contrasting with the mobile melodies for the singer in the rest of the aria (ex 16). The accompaniment’s harmony moves around within the key before finally settling on the tonic G-flat again. To conclude, the accompaniment oscillates between E-flat minor and G-flat major—yet more use of the third relationship—as the vocal line ascends in an arpeggio repeating the final line of text, landing on the high G-flat for the final word “die,” (ex 17). The accompaniment arpeggiates upwards as well as this high note holds, concluding with a gentle rolled chord in the high register.

Example 16

Example 17

This soft ending in G-flat major contrasts with the churning, unstable recitative, the woeful descent into f-sharp minor, and the spinning out of stability back into the same chaotic chord that began the piece. This contrast yields further dimensions of meaning and craftsmanship. As mentioned earlier, Beach experienced synesthesia, specifically color-pitch synesthesia. And this was no passing association for her, as Block points out by mentioning Beach’s “acute reaction to keys.” Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian, 268.
noted regarding this aria, she began this aria in the key of black—as if use of the descending tetrachord, employed since the Baroque era to depict lament, and the pathos-laden suspension of resolution were not enough to cultivate a mournful beginning.

Further worth noting, however, is where Beach takes the aria from that dark beginning point. A favored technique of the late Romantics was using enharmonic pitches to take a work from one tonal center to virtually any other tonal center. Beach certainly used this technique frequently, yet even though the ending key looks completely changed from the starting key on paper, she ends in the same key she had begun, since F-sharp and G-flat are enharmonic. All the tumultuous key-shifting and oscillating takes the initial minor key of the aria into its parallel major—essentially no different, yet redeeming the deep sadness of minor into the peace of major.

In other words, over the course of the aria, key-wise, Beach goes from utter instability, to black, to instability again, to grasping at stability, only to end up in the same instability in which the aria had begun, before finally achieving rest in the transfiguration of the initial black key. This move, while not exactly an example of progressive tonality, achieves a similar effect that Beach tended to favor in her later years, in which “the associated text usually begins with conflict or suffering but ends with transcendence or movement from the early to the heavenly spheres.”47 This parallel major bore another layer of significance for Beach. Block describes G-flat major, specifically its use in Beach’s Mass, as “a key [she] frequently uses for music of intense effect.”48 Therefore, through this transformational modulation over the course of the aria, Beach takes the subject and listener from anguish and instability to divine resolve.

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46 Block, 156., and Mardinly, “Amy Beach,” 535.
47 Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian, 266–67.
48 Block, 67.
Text

Beach brought this poem to life not just through aurally depicting its events, but by translating it and setting it for a vocalist. The fact that Beach translated the text and set it presents two issues for consideration. One is whether Beach wrote the translation to fit the melody, or wrote the melody to fit the translation: in other words, whether the original French or Beach’s native English was prioritized.\(^4^9\) Another is what bias Beach introduced to the text with her translation, since no translation is without bias.

Before examining either of those, some information about the original French text itself is due. Beach wrote on her score “Mollevaut” as author, and online databases, including the global library database WorldCat, misidentify the author as Etienne Mollevaut, an eighteenth-century politician.\(^5^0\) Further inspection yields the true author as a poet, not politician, named Charles-Louis Mollevaut (1776-1844), as listed by the Library of Congress catalog information for the piano/vocal score,\(^5^1\) and as listed by Sypherd in his 1948 study of artistic treatments of the Judges 11 story.\(^5^2\) The original poem is actually much greater in length than the sample set by Beach, and according to Sypherd, “the whole Bible story is told in the poem. The daughter is evidently sacrificed to a life of virginity.”\(^5^3\) The entire poem appears as “Le Sacrifice de Jephté”\(^4^9\) There is also an Italian translation included in this aria, prepared by an Isadora Martinez, who was a vocalist friend of Beach’s (Block, 347.). Also interesting is the fact that the Italian translation was published with the English text in the piano/vocal reduction distributed by Schmidt, yet not the original French. Sadly, consideration of the Italian text is beyond the scope of this study, since I seek to focus on understanding Beach’s personal engagement with the text. This is not to suggest that Martinez’ engagement and potential introductions of new meaning are unimportant. Further address of her contribution to this aria would be legitimate and welcome.


\(^5^2\) Wilbur Owen Sypherd, Jephthah and His Daughter: A Study in Comparative Literature (University of Delaware, 1948), 175.

\(^5^3\) Sypherd, 175.
in a larger volume of Mollevaut’s work from 1824 titled *Chant Sacrés*, which features several other Biblical narrative poems as well.\(^{54}\) In addition, a five-stanza selection appears in other anthologies of French poetry.\(^{55}\) It is this five-stanza selection Beach translates and sets. In this selection, death, not celibacy, appears to be the daughter’s fate. It is uncertain whether Beach knew of the full-length work and happened to select the same section that other books featured as a standalone, or if she only knew of the selection. It also merits mention that, according to Sypherd, “[Mollevaut’s] Jephthah poem, translated into English, was published in the *Yale Literary Magazine*” in 1841, to which Beach may have had access.\(^{56}\)

In regards to examining Beach’s translation choices, Beach notably had plenty of experience with translating French, as exemplified by her translation of Berlioz’ orchestration treatise. Her fluency in French was such that she would read French texts while practicing technical exercises at the piano.\(^{57}\) In addition to proficiency, the French language seems to have held some special emotional significance for her. At one point, she related to a friend the moving experience of reading the Gospel of St. Matthew in French for the first time.\(^{58}\) In addition, songs in French feature among her first compositions including “Jeune fille et jeune fleur” (1887), “Le secret” (1890), and all three of her Op. 21 “Three Songs” (1893). Interestingly, she received a bit of criticism for this choice in “Jeune fille et jeune fleur,” part of her Op. 1 “Four Songs,” since

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\(^{54}\) Sypherd, 175.

\(^{55}\) In this study, I consulted *Chrestomathie de la littérature française, ou Morceaux choisis des meilleurs écrivains français ... depuis 1520 jusqu’en en 1845, avec 176 notices biographiques, littéraires et bibliographiques ...*, though several other volumes of French poetry contain this same truncation as well.

\(^{56}\) From the French of Mollevaut, “Jephthah’s Daughter,” *The Yale Literary Magazine*, 1841.

\(^{57}\) Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 29.

\(^{58}\) Beach to Shaffner, July 6, 1933, correspondence, Beach Col. UNH; qtd. in Elizabeth Moore Buchanan, “The Anthems and Service Music of Amy Beach Published by the Arthur P. Schmidt Company” (American University, 1996), 55, http://search.proquest.com/docview/304233701/abstract/D9396E75CF44778PQ/7.
according to Ammer, “a reviewer pettishly said should be sent to a French critic, and weren’t there any English poets Mrs. Beach could ‘employ her excellent muse upon?’”

Overall, Beach’s translation remains quite faithful to the original, especially in terms of rhyme. She also maintains the overall structure of meaning, moving from nature-bound images, to lost identity as mother, to lost identity as daughter, and ending with an address to God. In some places Beach’s preservation of rhyme comes somewhat at the cost of clarity or poetic beauty. However, this may reflect as much on Beach’s poetic skill as anything else. Some changes in meaning may well be for maintaining the structure of the original text. Other changes, however, may not be entirely necessary for this purpose. It is these we will examine, moving through the poem in the order these occur.

The first instance occurs in the very first line. The French line ends with the phrase, “les coeurs mortels,” which translates literally, “the mortal hearts.” Rather than the word “mortal,” a clear cognate, Beach chooses the word “breaking.” This choice does not illustrate a clear metrical concern. “Breaking” and “mortal” are both two-syllable words accenting the first syllable. There appear two possible reasons for choosing “breaking” instead: a clearer vowel for the vocalist (a bright [e] vowel rather than a dark [ɔ] vowel), or the vivid change in meaning—illuminating the emotional distress of the speaker-to-be, rather than simply her mortality. The next line’s translation does not maintain Mollevaut’s original imagery but maintains the meaning: sleep causing people to forget their troubles. In the third line, Beach exchanging Mollevaut’s “veille” (“keeps watch”) for “wanders far,” a significant enough departure, but potentially reducible to metrical/grammatical concerns.

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60 Dr. Michelle Beauclair, in addition to providing a wonderfully clear direct translation, pointed out this overall structure in the first-person stanzas.
In the fourth line, Beach makes a far more significant substitution: rather than Mollevaut’s notion of “triste, pale, égarée,” (“sad, pale, lost”), we see “fearing, fearing the morrow.” This maintains internal consistency by rhyming with Beach’s choice for the line prior: “a maid in sorrow” rhyming with “fearing the morrow.” However, it introduces to Mollevaut’s image of a vigilant, yet helpless woman a new element, one of wandering and fear. Beach’s addition doesn’t necessarily contradict, but it represents an addition nonetheless. Another non-contradictory but significant addition Beach makes in this stanza is the swapping out of Mollevaut’s “sa peine et ses regrets” (“her pain and her regrets”) with “in her grief… all in vain.” Here, connotations of regret and of general pain translate into the specific notion of grief and, interestingly, into futility as implied by “all in vain.” Whether intentionally or otherwise, by the end of the recitative section, Beach has transformed the specific articulation of ideas by augmenting the heartbreak, fear, and futility experienced by the speaker.

Translation issues appearing in the next stanza, the first of the aria section, do not present changes or additions in meaning as much as losses in meaning. Beach maintains a lot of the imagery, i.e. the vine drinking light at dawn, young palm trees, and lingering flowers. However, her translation does not quite preserve the significance of these images. These elements of nature, a common feature to Romantic poetry, in Beach’s translation merely “whisper on high” and “linger for the night.” In Mollevaut’s description, the palms “ne craint point de périr,” or “do not fear perishing at all” (emphasis mine). The flower “vivra plus d’un matin encore,” or “will live more than one more morning.” All these descriptions of nature, clear examples of temporal objects, are held up as examples of lasting things in contrast with the speaker and her fate. This is a powerful statement on Mollevaut’s part, and one that gets sadly lost in Beach’s rendition. Not to dismiss Beach’s impressive work as a translator—her French translation abilities remain
impressive given that she did not travel outside the United States once until 1910. However, the limitations of this translation must be acknowledged.

At the end of the stanza, we arrive at a fascinating feature of Beach’s translation, one that recurs throughout the aria. Each stanza in the French ends, as mentioned earlier, with “Et moi, je vais mourir!” or “And I, I am going to die!” Yet even though this line is the same in every stanza in the original, Beach translated this line differently every time. Each translation presents its own features of meaning and interest, but they all include the English word “must.” Though the obligatory element of “must” can exist in the French text as is, the French equivalent term of “dois” does not appear in Mollevaut’s text. The straightforward reading of “je vais mourir,” specifically the “vais,” is simply “going to” or “will,” to indicate future tense, rather than obligation or fate as Beach’s use of “must” implies. Yet a duty-driven “must” makes sense as a choice for someone living within the Victorian era, which emphasized duty as a primary virtue.

In the next stanza, Beach remains quite faithful to the original, altering the syntax but keeping the core idea the same: the image of her female friends becoming mothers one day, holding sons in their arms, a pleasure the speaker will never experience due to her impending death. However, in this stanza, the final-line question raised earlier is translated in a fashion most deviant from the original. Beach translates the line in this stanza to “Great Jephthah’s name must die!” This translation drives further the significance of the fact that Jephthah’s daughter will not bear children—it means the end of Jephthah’s line completely, since she is his only daughter.

Yet calling Jephthah’s name “great” carries a great deal of irony. For one thing, Jephthah’s name, at least at that time, might not have been best described as “great.” Jephthah was born from an alliance with a prostitute, and he was cast out of his family as a result. His winning of the battle had just regained him a place in the family, but as Jephthah himself stated,
the consequences of his vow “brought [him] very low.” However, Jephthah is also named as a judge, and he appears among the famed saints in Hebrews 11 of the New Testament of the Bible. Jephthah’s name has, in fact, lasted, ignoble as his lineage and some of actions were, though one could call noble his commitment to keeping his vow. The name of Jephthah’s daughter, despite her active role in the keeping of this vow, has not lasted. It is impossible to say what Beach’s thoughts were in raising the point of “Great” Jephthah’s name here, although this theme here of namelessness bears implications for further exploration later in this paper.

The third stanza, like the second, remains quite faithful to the original, again making alterations in syntax and order but preserving clearly Mollevaut’s ideas. In this stanza, having highlighted the speaker’s lost role as mother, the text highlights her lost role as daughter: when her parents someday are bent over with old age, she, unlike her friends, will not be able to provide support and comfort. The final line presents no particularly fascinating issues in its unique translation. It closely resembles that of the first, first-person stanza: the first ending in “Yet I alas, alas, must die! must die!”, the third ending in “But I, alone, alone must die, must die!” The meter and structure remain the same, with a couple words substituted that emphasize the speaker’s isolation.

The final stanza again veers into more interpretative territory, with Beach potentially venturing to make her own statements as she translates Mollevaut’s text. The first line addresses God both in original and translation, but while Mollevaut has God hearing “une vierge plaintive,” “a plaintive virgin,” Beach has Him hear “my bitter complaining.” She skirts the term “virgin” completely, and makes her address “bitter” rather than “plaintive” or some synonym thereof. In the next line, Mollevaut’s text has the request in response to the father’s tears that

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61 Judges 11:35, NRSV.
God “daigne les tarir” (“deign to dry them up”), which Beach’s text asks God to “heed his lonely cry”—a difference that, as with some choices earlier, does not quite contradict but does add a different shade of meaning.

The third line in both texts requests that the amount of time the daughter does not get to live be added on to her father’s life, but Beach’s translation decidedly avoids the bolder implications of Mollevaut’s text. Mollevaut says of the daughter’s lost days, “ta rigeur me prive,” “Your rigor/severity deprives me of [them].” This makes a much stronger statement regarding God’s role in this situation, making Him a potentially culpable participant in the sacrifice to come. Beach’s text, describing these days as “lost to me,” only bears the shadow of this notion, rather focusing on God as hearer of grievances. The final line in the original is similar in structure to the final line of the previous stanzas, still ending in “mourir” but reading in full, “et je saurai mourir,” or “and I will be able to die.” Beach translates this, “Then shall I learn to die,” which in context conveys a similar sense of resignation to her fate.

Having analyzed Beach’s translation choices, there remains the question of whether she wrote this translation and made these choices before or after creating the melody. We know that Beach’s practice in songwriting was mental repetition of a memorized text until a melody naturally arose from the text.62 The question is whether she turned over Mollevaut’s text or her own in her mind. Beach’s knowledge of French was primarily though reading and writing, since, as stated, she remained in the United States exclusively until 1910.63 Yet her learning of French and German would have had some outside guidance from her time in school.64

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62 Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 147.
63 Block, 180.
64 Block, 29.
Examining this question in terms of word/tone synthesis, the French generally fits the melody better. Multiple places in the vocal line follow the stylistic convention of setting French text by lengthening the penultimate syllable and shortening the final syllable—often an unaccented schwa essentially inaudible in spoken French—only to make the final consonant clear. This use of agogic principles, giving a long note to an accented syllable and a short note to an unaccented syllable, appears consistent throughout the aria. The main exception to this is one spot that places the French preposition word “de,” meaning “of,” on a high, relatively long note in m. 73. The English word here makes much more sense, as this high/longer note is the first, accented syllable of the word “secret.” No places are egregiously bad in English, but the translation is somewhat awkward. One eyebrow-raising instance of this is the phrase “lonely o’er the desert wild.” Though leaving out a consonant in this manner appears somewhat frequently in texts of this time, as seen in nineteenth-century hymnody, this removal of a consonant could signify a translation choice made to fit a previously prescribed meter.

The publication choices for the aria, however, present a strong argument against French as being the most prioritized text. A.P. Schmidt’s published vocal/piano reduction of the aria only includes the English and the Italian text, with the only hint of a French text being the attribution of the original text to Mollevaut. In Sypherd’s listing of Beach’s aria, he even lists the author of the text as Beach, not Mollevaut. Given the close relationship between Beach and Schmidt, and her tenacity regarding adherence to her choices, regardless of marketability, it

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65 Due to the currently limited knowledge of scansion and French possessed by this scholar, only a surface-level discussion of the merits of Beach’s setting of each text is possible. I have chosen, instead, to focus broadly on concerns of word/tone synthesis and point out areas of significant deviation. Further specific analysis of the accent patterns of each text, as compared to the contour of the melody, would be welcome.

66 Sypherd, Jephthah and His Daughter, 238.

67 Brown states, “From comments found in the Beach/Schmidt letters, it is easy to determine that she was not receptive to suggestions that she revise her music after she deemed it completed. There are several instances in the Beach/Schmidt letters of her refusal to alter melody lines that the publisher felt were awkward, or to shorten length
would be surprising indeed if Beach had wanted the French text in the published reduction and not gotten her way. Sadly, the existing correspondence between Beach and Schmidt from 1903 gives no clues to this end. It only compliments Schmidt’s artistic choices in the title page and bookplate and gives corrections regarding the inclusion of a Strauss transcription.68 These letters do not further specify what works Beach is correcting. Given that these letters are from October and the aria’s orchestral score is dated February, the publication in question may not even include Jephthah’s Daughter. However, in regards to “Elle et moi,” published the year prior, Beach expressed her desire that English, French, and Italian all be included in the publication by Schmidt.69 Inclusion of the English and Italian texts only in publication, then, remains a mystery.

**Story**

Numerous studies exist already noting the textual and musical choices Beach tended to make. Why does this aria matter? What captures the imagination of this scholar—and, I suspect, that of Amy Beach—is the rich story Mollevaut tells. The story has long been popular among Biblical scholars and artists alike, with a 1948 study counting no less than a hundred and fifty treatments just in the musical medium by that year.70 Discussion of this story is among the most common topics addressed by church fathers since the beginning of Christianity.71 How people

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69 Beach to A.P. Schmidt, 10 March 1902, Arthur P. Schmidt Collection, Library of Congress, Music Division, qtd. in Laurie Katharine Blunsom, “Gender, Genre and Professionalism: The Songs of Clara Rogers, Helen Hopekirk, Amy Beach, Margaret Lang and Mabel Daniels, 1880–1925” (Brandeis University, 1999), 112, http://search.proquest.com/docview/304492724/abstract/CA7870F82E9B49A3PQ/7.
70 Sypherd, Jephthah and His Daughter.
have read it has changed over time, and the reading of it decidedly reflects the culture of the
time.  

At first, the apparent reading was that she died. During the medieval period, the notion of
her becoming part of the temple rather than actual sacrifice came into popularity. This view
comes from reading Jephthah’s phrasing of his vow as a traditional sacrifice, i.e. killing, or
giving what he saw first to the Lord as a contribution to the temple. The latter possibility is
clearly far more palatable. In this way, she fulfills the vow by being given to the Lord, and the
tragic element of her losing her ability to carry on the family name remains. At the time, a
woman’s primary purpose was to continue the family, and loss of the ability to bear children
would have dealt a tragic blow to her identity, even if it did not end her life as a literal sacrifice
would. This view gained popularity in the Renaissance and Baroque periods—and, interestingly,
depicters of the daughter’s story began giving her a name, thus giving her a more individual
identity and making the story more palatable by allowing her survival.

As time went on, however, the survival view became less popular, yet the notion of
Jephthah’s daughter as a self-actualized individual remained. This is the view we see articulated
in Mollevaut’s text and thereby Beach’s treatment. By 1903, the time at which Beach was
writing, cultural context had shaped the story into one containing the human sacrifice present in

\[\text{72 For an excellent discussion of this in the art world, see David M. Gunn, “Cultural Criticism: Viewing the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter,” in Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies, ed. Gale A. Yee, 2 edition (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007). He analyzes changing depictions of the sacrifice scene in illustrated Bibles intended for use in homes. His narration of the great shifts in the eighteenth through the beginning of the twentieth centuries alone shows the extent to which cultural context has shaped reading of this story, let alone the Bible at large.}\]


\[\text{74 One example of this includes Pseudo-Philo naming the daughter Seila, as discussed in Elisheva Baumgarten, “‘Remember That Glorious Girl’: Jephthah’s Daughter in Medieval Jewish Culture,” The Jewish Quarterly Review 97, no. 2 (2007): 180–209. Another example of this is Handel’s Jephte, which features the daughter with the name Iphis, and also features the survivalist interpretation of the story.}\]
Biblical times, with the individualism of Modernity. No wonder, then, that Beach’s treatment contains such pathos. As an articulation of this new context, just five years prior, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote in a Biblical commentary for women a scathing critique of Jephthah’s actions and the daughter’s response. Stanton argued that the actions of Jephthah’s daughter ought not to serve as an example for women, and expressed a wish that the daughter had instead stood up for herself and her dignity as a human being rather than property ripe for sacrifice.\(^7\) Beach’s treatment, and her life in general, happened during such an incredible shift in the cultural view of the rightful place of women, that it is worth noting Beach’s glorifying lament alongside Stanton’s bitter polemic.

Clearly the story bears much cultural significance in its own right, due to the horror of human sacrifice. Yet it is important to address the significance of the subject being a woman. As Thompson points out, the other closely related stories along these themes end very differently: Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is ended before it occurs by God’s sending of a ram, and the sacrifice of Christ ends with His resurrection and the launch of the church.\(^7\) The fate of Jephthah’s daughter is very different; she dies and remains nameless. Even with so many treatments of this story already in existence, the choice of a female composer to add her voice to the discussion is interesting at the very least, given the female center of the story.

What could have motivated Beach to write this aria? She wrote for no patrons, and had no financial need to please any outside forces. Her compositional output to that point indicates that despite the constraints of society at the time, she wrote for her own fulfillment, even breaking the molds of acceptable genres for females to do so. An interview with \textit{The Etude} confirms this, as its author William Armstrong states, “If you should put the direct questions to

\(^7\) qtd in Gunn, “Cultural Criticism: Viewing the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter,” 231–32.
\(^7\) “Sacrificing Jephthah’s Daughter: The Life and Death of a Father’s Only-Begotten,” 34.
her as I did you would learn that she composes when she feels the inclination moves her to it.”

This element of personal choice holds true for texts as well. Block states:

She selected texts by other poets [besides her husband] for the special resonance that they held for her. She would further appropriate the poem by changing or adding a title, omitting a verse, or repeating a word or phrase in order to change the emphasis or equalize musical and poetic time. She would then add melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic accents that bring to the foreground certain images—or suppress others—and compose an accompaniment that added its own meaning, thus changing the meaning of the vocal. In this way, Beach effected “a transformation of poetic and dramatic content,” in the words of Edward Cone, that makes a poem her personal statement.

Yet this discussion demands a great deal of caution. From Beethoven on, the inclination to connect a composer’s output to that composer’s biography has remained strong. In some cases, this may be appropriate and serve to enrich understanding of compositions; however, in other instances, such connections can prove misleading. Taruskin discusses this in relation to Tchaikovsky and Beethoven, namely regarding the rumor that the tragic sound of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony corresponded to a pre-suicidal despondence, contrasting this rumor with the exuberance of Beethoven’s Second Symphony. Taruskin writes,

The finale of Chaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, like the finale of Beethoven's Second, should stand as a warning, rather than an encouragement, to those who under the influence of “pop romanticism” would assume that art is by nature

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78 Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian, 147.
autobiographical. The cases are complementary: Beethoven's Second, one of his most cheerful (and in the finale, downright hilarious) works, was composed concurrently with the composer's despairing realization, attended by thoughts of suicide and expressed in his heart-rending “Heiligenstadt Testament”… that his deafness was irrevocable. The agonizing, heart-rending finale of Chaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, by contrast, was composed during as happy a period as the composer ever knew.79

As Taruskin makes clear, a composer’s life and work do not always make a clean match. In Beach’s case, however, the connections are especially tantalizing. Block, as the pre-eminent Beach scholar, related Beach’s own statement, “‘A composer might remain apparently unaffected by even the most terrific onslaught upon all that was deepest in his life, and years afterward give expression in music, perhaps unconsciously, to all that the experience had cost him.’ Thus, [Beach] concluded, a musical composition may be ‘a veritable autobiography.’”80 Using this statement as inspiration, Block argued that Beach wrote her Piano Concerto as an expression of lament against the authority of Mrs. Cheney and Dr. Beach.81 However, other scholars have argued against a programmatic, biographical reading of Beach’s instrumental work.82 Another layer to the arguments surrounding program music is that this work has text embedded in it. The aria tells the story of Jephthah’s daughter; this is not a narrative imposed on the music by retroactive application of text or meaning. The question of programmatic meaning

80 Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 132.
81 Block, 131–41.
82 See, for example, Anna Poulin Alfeld, “Unsung Songs: Self-Borrowing in Amy Beach’s Instrumental Music” (University of Cincinnati, 2008), http://search.proquest.com/docview/304666332/D9396E75CF44778PQ/2/. This thesis was not available for review at the time of writing, but its abstract suggests an anti-programmatic stance in analyzing Beach’s instrumental work.
applies more to the question of whether Beach told elements of her own story in telling the tragic one of Jephthah’s daughter. This question is one that, lacking access to Beach’s own specific thoughts on the aria, we can never answer.

Even if no one can claim any direct intention on Beach’s part, the similarities between her experience and that of Jephthah’s daughter are too potent to ignore, and bear some examination. These shared experiences include childlessness, namelessness, and resolve in the face of patriarchal control. The first is what Block chooses to mention in her address of Jephthah’s Daughter, stating: “The reference to Jephthah’s daughter, who would die childless, had resonance for Beach’s life: after seventeen years of marriage, there were still no children, nor would there be any, something she may have regretted.” Block’s source for this statement was a 1986 interview with Beach’s friend from later in life, David Buxbaum. Yet earlier in the biography in which Block makes this claim, she states, “Amy Beach mentioned in an interview that she regretted not having a child. There is no way of knowing whose decision this was, or whether there was even a choice, since both of Henry’s marriages were childless.” To complicate the question further, Brown states in her book on Beach published four years prior, “There were no children from the marriage, and this issue was not brought up in either interviews or other sources.” Block’s statements could stand as a correction to Brown’s claims. However, as it currently appears, Beach’s own views on her childlessness do not exist in clear, personal form, lost in buried interviews with her and/or her friends.

In any case, whether or not Beach wanted children she, like Jephthah’s daughter, did not have them, and this lack may well have been the influence of patriarchal control—that is, the

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83 Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian, 156.
84 Block, 50.
85 Brown, Amy Beach and Her Chamber Music, 31.
decisions of the male authorities in her life. Block explores the potential causes of Beach’s childlessness, musing that Dr. Henry Beach would probably have had more of a say as a physician and as twenty-five years her senior. She also notes that childbearing was still somewhat dangerous to a woman’s health; even if she had survived, children could distract from a compositional career. Since Dr. Henry Beach was highly protective of Amy in both these respects, these also could have provided incentives for him to prevent the conception of children in their marriage. In all fairness to Dr. Beach, Amy may well have assented at the time to the prevention of children due to the dangers and distractions they could present. Yet even so, issues large and small in their marriage reveal that Dr. Beach tended to have the final say, from acquiring pets to composition lessons.

Another arena in which assent to patriarchal control manifests is the issue of Beach’s name. Prior to marriage, Amy Beach had begun a musical career as a pianist under the name of Amy Marcy Cheney, such that the name of Amy Cheney had become well-known in Boston as a pianist of great promise, as mentioned earlier in this paper. Yet upon her marriage, this name and the pianistic career with it disappeared. Amy took on the name Mrs. H.H.A Beach, and Block states, “it was a name she was pleased to bear.” This name-taking was no accidental thing, either. In one publication soon after her marriage, she pointedly corrected her name on the publication to appear as “Mrs. H.H.A. Beach.” Even so, Block describes the process as “taking

86 In Amy Beach’s case, as with many women throughout history, the enforcer of patriarchal control has in fact been female. Beach’s mother, Clara Cheney, steered Amy Beach toward her marriage to Dr. Beach, and socialized Amy as a socially conservative woman in the society of that time. So, even though one of the main decision-makers in young Amy’s life was a woman, those decisions were nonetheless an outgrowth of patriarchal control. For a more detailed discussion of this, see Adrienne Fried Block, “The Child Is Mother of the Woman: Amy Beach’s New England Upbringing,” in Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music, by Susan C. Cook (University of Illinois Press, 1994).
87 These sentences paraphrase Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian, 50–51.
88 Block, 50–51.
89 Block, 47.
90 Blunsom, “Gender, Genre and Professionalism,” 103.
Henry’s name” and in so doing “completely obliterate[ing] her own, which had gathered considerable luster in two years, and cloaked her identity in her husband’s, thus erasing the reputation she had built as Amy Mercy Cheney.”91 Later in life, upon Beach’s traveling to Europe, Block states that “[Beach] liked using Henry’s name better than her own,” yet “she was nevertheless willing to change it if a billing as Amy Beach would help her career.”92 After returning to the U.S., she went back to the name “H.H.A. Beach,” having been asked as “Amy Beach” if she were the daughter of Mrs. H.H.A. Beach.93

Taking Beach’s name, at least at the outset of her career, had considerable advantages due to her new husband’s elevated social status. Furthermore, keeping his name after his death allowed her to keep the reputation she had built as a composer during his life. It would be unwise to ignore Beach’s stated preference for using her husband’s name. She may have done so out of the personal devotion she claimed as well as the professional advantages it afforded. Yet considering the issue of her name yields an important connection to Jephthah’s daughter, especially given that one of Beach’s greatest translation liberties appears in the line “Great Jephthah’s name must die!” in the third stanza. As discussed in the prior section, Jephthah’s lineage died with his daughter, as did the daughter’s own name. In similar fashion, Beach indisputably gave up her name and some portion of her identity with it, even if she claimed a choice in doing so.

But in the notion of choice, we see the most significant connection between Jephthah’s daughter and Amy Beach. Both women displayed a degree of agency, despite the patriarchal powers attempting to control them. In other words, even as they abided by the decisions of the

91 Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 51.
92 Block, 183.
93 Block, 198.
male authorities driving their lives, they chose to grant assent and their own voice. For Jephthah’s daughter, this comes in her response to her father after he has informed her of his rash vow. As Trible points out, rather than trying to avoid the consequences, she displays ownership and actualization in her response, even boldly negotiating terms on which she will fulfill his vow by requesting a period of mourning with her friends.\(^{94}\) Despite being treated as mere property, she displays personhood, even in assenting to death. It remains open to debate whether or not Jephthah’s daughter gives a good example to young women in how she handles her personhood, as Beach’s contemporary Stanton reminds us.\(^{95}\)

Amy Beach, intentionally or otherwise, lived into a similar model for existing as a woman in a man’s world—verbally assenting to patriarchal constraints, yet still carving her own path and providing an example for women after her to follow. As Block points out in her analysis of Beach’s marriage, there exists no firm indication of whether or not Beach had any inclination to rebel against her mother’s desire that she marry Dr. Beach, or against Dr. Beach’s desires regarding her career after their marriage.\(^{96}\) Amy Beach’s own statement on the sacrifice of her pianistic career was that “I was happy and Dr. Beach was content.”\(^{97}\) Regarding the sacrifice of opportunities in education during her upbringing, Block argues that these were directly tied to her gender, and that had Amy Beach been male, her parents’ hesitation to send her abroad would not have existed.\(^{98}\) Even opportunities in adulthood for learning from a composition teacher, or learning by teaching students of her own, were curtailed by her marriage to Dr. Beach—the former potentially to avoid the unseemly appearance that a woman alone with a man of her age

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\(^{95}\) Gunn, “Cultural Criticism: Viewing the Sacrifice of Jephthah’s Daughter,” 231–32.
\(^{96}\) Block, Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian, 50.
\(^{97}\) H.A.S., “At 74, Mrs. Beach Recalls Her First Critics,” Musical Courier (15 May 1941) 7, qtd. in Blunsom, “Gender, Genre and Professionalism,” 49.
\(^{98}\) Block, “The Child Is Mother of the Woman: Amy Beach’s New England Upbringing.”
might create, and the latter by the unfavorable connotation of earning “pin money” as a woman teaching music.

Beach’s upbringing and socialization as a woman meant the sacrifice of opportunities to grow as a pianist, composer, and teacher, as well as a certain degree of loss in the realms of motherhood and identity. Yet she still exercised autonomy and claimed for herself what circumstances denied her. For piano performance, she gave charity concerts and private performances in her home. For learning composition, she acquired an impressive collection of scores, went to countless orchestral performances, translated treatises, and sent her scores to colleagues to gain feedback. For teaching, she wrote articles delineating the process by which she had taught herself, encouraging readers, especially young girls, to “work out their salvation” in the absence of tangible composition teachers. All of these things represent an incredible tenacity and determination to shape her own trajectory as a musician, even as she surrendered to the sacrifices placed upon her by patriarchal constraints.

Conclusion

One close resemblance this aria bears to Beach’s prior works is the song “Jeune fille et jeune fleur,” about a father burying his daughter. This song also features a French text and is also set in Beach’s black key of F-sharp minor—unsurprising given the similarly dark content. This song was written for Dr. Beach soon after Amy Beach’s marriage to him, and according to Block, was used to symbolic effect in her 1900 piano concerto to make a statement regarding her

100 Block, 47.
102 Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 132.
feelings on her semi-arranged marriage. It is impossible to say for sure whether Beach connected this song and its theme not only with her piano concerto but with *Jephthah’s Daughter*, or if one or both of this references was to make a specific statement about Beach’s own life. In other words, songs like “Jeune fille et jeune fleur,” large-scale works like her Piano Concerto, or arias like *Jephthah’s Daughter* may or may not “suggest a dark underside of an apparently happy and productive life.”

Nevertheless, this statement of a female’s perspective of the potent, painful narrative of Judges 11 remains important and fascinating on multiple fronts. Musically, Beach utilizes her lush, skillful harmonic language to take the anguished speaker from the darkest key she could imagine to the redemption of this same key. Textually, Beach introduces Victorian propriety and passion to the original French poem, making its meaning accessible to audiences in multiple countries. Historically, Beach’s life displays apparent parallels to that of her subject, in terms of their powerful responses within a patriarchal paradigm.

Because of the rich harmonic and emotional ideas surrounding this aria, and because of the uniqueness of a female voice artistically addressing this female story, *Jephthah’s Daughter* could certainly stand to feature in more discussions, recordings and performances of Beach’s work and of Judges 11 artistic treatments. Beach’s work has recently seen a resurgence of publication and recording, including a recent reprinting of some her works (*Jephthah’s Daughter* included) by Classical Vocal Reprints. Yet there exist no recordings of this aria, even for soprano and piano, let alone soprano and orchestra. The most recent performance with reasonable

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104 Block, *Amy Beach, Passionate Victorian*, 156.
Internet publicity was in Boston in 1995. Regarding Judges 11 treatments, scholarly analysis of the story is as healthy as ever, in part as a response to Trible’s landmark analysis. Yet an updated survey of artistic treatments would certainly be welcome, given that seventy years have passed since Sypherd’s volume was published.

It is this scholar’s hope, then, that scholarship continue to explore the works of women like Amy Beach, paying attention to their unique perspectives, and opening access of these perspectives to an audience beyond the ivory tower. This may require thinking outside the notion of the Western canon as it has been passed down thus far in music teaching, and adjusting one’s paradigm comes with its own set of difficulties. The reward, however, is the cultivation of a more just canon, incorporating the stories of the historically marginalized in addition to the traditional white, male narrative. The name of Jephthah’s daughter may have died. The names of other women, Amy Beach included, need not die.

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Appendix A—Glossary of Musical Terms

Chromatic mediant—use of the relationship between notes a third apart as a means of moving forward or modulation.

Diatonic—see “tonic.”

Enharmonic—when two or more names for a note correspond to the same pitch. For example, the first black key in a three-black-key group on a piano could be called F-sharp or G-flat.

Modulation—changing keys within a piece.

Orientalism—a trend most prevalent in music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (though still present today) of using stereotypes of non-Western cultures to depict these cultures. This often rendered these cultures “exotic” at best or fetishized and dehumanized at worst.

Recitative-aria—a vocal form which begins with a text-driven “information dump” regarding the situation of the singer (the recitative), and then becomes a melody-driven, lyric expression of the emotions of the singer (the aria).

Sonata-allegro—an instrumental form dealing generally with two themes that are introduced in the exposition, transformed in all manners in the development, and returned to in the recapitulation.

Suspension—when one note is held onto longer than the rest in moving from one chord to another.

Tessitura—the area in which most of a part (generally in reference to vocal lines) is written. For example, a piece can have a low lowest note and a high highest note, but have the part spend most of its time within a narrow set of notes in the middle. Such a piece would have a wide range and a narrow tessitura.
Tetrachord—a set of four notes.

Through-composed—when a piece has little to no repeated structure, simply moving from one idea to the next.

Tonic—the “home” or center of a piece, or a segment of a piece. Also called key. A piece or segment of a piece staying in the same tonic center is called “diatonic.”

Tritone—historically described as “the devil in music,” this highly dissonant interval rests just between two very consonant intervals (the perfect fourth and the perfect fifth), and as a result, has a very tense sound to the Western ear. Once banned during the Medieval/Renaissance period due to its perceived devilish qualities, it has since become a driving force for harmony, and an aural indicator of unrest.
Original French Text by Mollevaut (1824):

La nuit même à l’instant où dans les cœurs mortels
Le sommeil a versé l’oubli des maux cruels
Seule veille et s’afflige une vierge éplorée
Seule au fond du désert triste pâle égarée
De sa voix gémissante à l’écho des forêts
Elle conte en ces mots sa peine et ses regrets :

« La jeune vigne en paix boit les feux de l’aurore
Le palmier verdoyant ne craint point de périr
La fleur même vivra plus d’un matin encore
Et moi, je vais mourir !

« Mes compagnes un jour au nom sacré de mère
En secret tressaillant d’orgueil et de plaisir
Verront sourire un fils aussi beau que son père
Et moi, je vais mourir !

« Aux auteurs de leurs jours prodiguant leur tendresse
Sous le fardeau des ans s’ils viennent à fléchir
Elles seront l’appui de leur faible vieillesse
Et moi, je vais mourir !
Poetic translation for *Jepthah’s Daughter* by Amy Beach (1903):

Darkness hovers o’er the land, when from the breaking heart,
Deep in slumber’s soft embrace, the woes of life depart, depart;
Lonely, lonely, wanders far, a maid in sorrow
Lonely o’er the desert wild, fearing, fearing the morrow,
Her sweet voice, now so plaintive is echoed again,
Ere these words in her grief she utters all in vain!

“‘At dawn the tender vine may drink Aurora’s light,
While the palms, fresh and green, shall whisper on high,
The flow’r, pale and fair, will linger for the night,
Yet I, alas, must die!”

“The friends I leave in sadness, when mother-love shall waken
In their hearts filled with rapture, will breathe a secret sigh;
A son in their arms will rest, while I am forsaken!
Great Jephthah’s name must die!”
“If their father shall bow ‘neath the burden of years,
Their love so pure and tender will be forever nigh,
Strength unto him will give, and soothe his trembling fears,
But I, alone, must die!”

“O Thou, who art in Heaven! Thou hearest my bitter complaining,
O Thou, who art in Heav’n! Thou hearest my bitter complaining,
Behold the grief of my father, and heed his lonely cry,
All the days lost to me, give him whose life is waning!
Then shall I learn to die!”
Appendix C—Bibliography

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Appendix D—Faith and Scholarship

This thesis connects to my faith on multiple fronts. First, my interest in studying and advancing the work of female composers finds its seed in my feminist beliefs. These beliefs in turn originate from the Christian faith from which everything in my life springs. I believe that the power of the Gospel renders every human being equal before God, endowed with purpose and potential by divine creation and redemption. If this is the Gospel I believe, and this the God I serve, allowing statements of what it means to be human to remain obscure, due to the sex of their composers, strikes me as irresponsible at best and morally wrong at worst.

Focus on Beach’s work has introduced another dimension to the intersection of my faith and my scholarly work. As I study Beach, I notice how her deep-seated faith manifests in her commitment to creating beautiful music, whether articulating pleasant or painful ideas. She also tends to find redemption in the end, as she does even in this horrific narrative of Jephthah’s Daughter. Beach treated her faith, and all parts of her life, as an area for continual study and hard work. I think it no coincidence that she referred to continual score study as “working out your salvation.” Her life and faith were imbued with scholarly depth, a model to which I aspire in my own life and faith. (As it happens, Beach’s outward expression of this commitment via confirmation in the Episcopal church is a direction in which I am currently leaning as well. I must admit, part of this leaning is out of excitement at sharing this tradition with Beach!)

Finally, this work has proven particularly potent for the scholarly examination of my faith. Taking on the story of Judges 11 was no small feat. Both of my readers shook their heads in initial conversations about this aria, saying something along the lines of, “I have a very difficult time with that story. It’s patriarchal, it’s horrible, and it doesn’t make sense.” I’d known this story before, but never have I had to engage with it in such depth and detail. At many
intervals, I found myself very angry at God, wondering how the same God from whom all my notions of love, grace, justice, and feminism originate could have allowed such an awful thing as the sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter. Emotionally difficult as this journey has been, I’m glad I chose to take it on. I discovered, for example, the notion that Jephthah’s daughter serves as one primary precursor of Christ’s self-sacrifice for the sake of someone else. The image of Christ so apparent in a woman I consider powerful and redemptive.

Though a scholar looking in retrospect can only see hints at a composer’s true thoughts, how I would love to sit down and have a conversation with Amy Beach: to ask her if that suspension of resolution on the third page was her sobbing at the horror of Jephthah’s daughter’s fate, to learn if that modulation to the parallel major was her attempt at making peace with what God allowed to happen. In the absence of that possibility, I consider it an immense privilege to study the work of Beach and other women, and to contribute my own works to a more just canon of Western music.