Chapter 15

Ethel Smyth as the composer Edith Staines in E.F. Benson's *Dodo* trilogy

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Contributing to the first published biography of the composer, author and onetime leading suffragette Dame Ethel Smyth (1858–1944), the writer Vita Sackville-West famously remarked that ‘She might concisely have entitled her successive books ME ONE, ME TWO, ME THREE, and so on, even as she called her sheepdogs Pan I, Pan II, Pan III, up to Pan VI’ (1959, p. 246). Sackville-West’s words referred to Smyth’s ten books of prose writings (autobiographies, biographical sketches, and polemical essays on the music profession and the status of women within it) published in her later decades, and, by implication, specifically to her chronological volumes of memoirs, *Impressions That Remained* (1919), *As Time Went On...* (1936a) and *What Happened Next* (1940), which collectively chronicled Smyth’s first 50 years. Yet, while her extensive prose writings have received significant scholarly attention, less frequently considered are the various fictional representations of Smyth to have appeared in a range of Anglo-American art over the decades, from novels to plays to radio, television and YouTube videos, doubtless a product of the fascinating and diverse life she led coupled to her distinctive and highly entertaining personality.

Smyth was no stranger to such modes of literary adaptation even in her own lifetime, appearing in novels first thinly disguised as the female composer Edith Staines in E.F. Benson’s *Dodo* (1893) and its sequels *Dodo’s Daughter* (1913) and *Dodo Wonders* (1921), and then as Rose Pargiter in Virginia Woolf’s *The Years* (1937), as well as contributing to the character of Miss La Trobe in Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1941) (Wood 1983, pp. 137–8). She might, indeed, on occasion have employed analogous strategies in her own creative output: Elizabeth Wood (1995, pp. 614–15, 628) has proposed that she modelled the feisty heroine of

her fourth opera, *The Boatswain's Mate* (1913–14), on none other than Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928), the charismatic leader of the Women's Social and Political Union under whose influence Smyth, who was to become Pankhurst's close friend and ally, pledged two years' service to the 'Votes for Women' campaign in the early 1910s (Wiley 2018a). Neither did Smyth's long-standing friend Henry Brewster (1850–1908), the librettist for her first three operas, escape being similarly immortalised, as the villainous Gilbert Osmond in Henry James's novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) (Stallman 1958).

Subsequently, the female composer Hilda Tablet, who featured in a series of seven satirical radio plays by Henry Reed broadcast on the BBC's Third Programme between 1953 and 1959, was a composite character based principally on a combination of Smyth and Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–83); four of the scripts were later published (Reed 1971). Smyth was not herself one of the central figures of the pioneering six-part BBC television mini-series *Shoulder to Shoulder* (1974) on the women's suffrage movement in Britain, episodes of which focussed on suffragettes including the Pankhursts, Annie Kenney and Lady Constance Lytton; but she nonetheless made an appearance in three of the episodes, played by Maureen Pryor, and the show's title is a phrase also used in Cicely Hamilton's lyrics to Smyth's suffragette anthem, 'The March of the Women' (1910) (IMDb n.d.).

Closer to the present, Smyth appears as a character in the opera *Violet* by Roger Scruton, premiered at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, London in 2005 under Tess Gibbs's direction, and based on the 1996 biography of keyboardist Violet Gordon Woodhouse written by her great-niece Jessica Douglas-Home; the role of Smyth is played by a male voice (accounts indicate that she had an extraordinary vocal range), and the score quotes from 'The March of the Women' (Scruton n.d.; Conway 2005). Smyth has also been the subject of an assortment of smaller-scale theatricalised shows that have between them established a tradition of dramatisations of the real-life person, as distinct from the

presentation of larger-than-life caricatures. These include Welcome! Company's *Ethel Smyth: A Passionate Life* (1995), written by Venetia Davan Wetton and performed by actresses Jean Trend (who had previously played Smyth in the 1981 BBC radio play *Only Goodnight* by Maureen Duffy) and Moira Govan, pianist Janet Haney and soprano Talitha Theobald; *Entirely Ethel*, written and performed by North England-based actress Jean Stevens; *Essentially Ethel*, another one-woman show, written in 2004 and performed across England ever since by actress Gill Stoker; and *Ethel Smyth—an extraordinary life* (2017) by the Galos Piano Trio, Felicity Broome-Skelton (violin), Heidi Parsons (cello) and James Longford (piano), featuring soprano and actor Sarah Gabriel (Galos n.d.). *Ethel Smyth: Grasp the Nettle* (2018–19) is a nationally touring professional solo production for actor-singer Lucy Stevens (no relation to Jean Stevens of *Entirely Ethel*) accompanied by Elizabeth Marcus at the piano, characterised by having been compiled almost exclusively from excerpts from Smyth's writings, together with quotations from contemporaries who knew her. Woking Community Play Association, a non-auditioning group that seeks to retell stories of people associated with the town of Woking, where Smyth lived for over three decades, has recently written and performed a play about her life, *Ethel Smyth: A Furious Longing—The Story of Woking's Composer* (2018) (Wiley 2018b).

While some of the aforementioned have enjoyed a transnational reach (the novels of Virginia Woolf—and, as we shall see, E.F. Benson—having particular mobility given their distribution in different countries), lately a number of works of art originating in North America have demonstrated the attainment of new levels of transnationality for fictional representations of Smyth in terms of the countries represented. Smyth is, of course, herself a transnational character, being a British composer who trained in Continental Europe (while not itself unusual at the time) and whose mother had been brought up in Paris. Recent projects to have appeared internationally include Red Hen Productions's play *PASSION: The*

Life and Loves of Dame Ethel Smyth (2017), written by Muriel Hogue and performed in Winnipeg, Canada featuring a seven-strong cast, directed by Kelly Daniels (Classic 107 2017); and *Ethel Smyth Plays Golf in Limbo* (2016), a ten-minute musical monodrama written by Brooklyn-based composer-librettist Rachel J. Peters for the Albatross Duo, Jennifer Beattie (mezzo-soprano) and Adam Marks (piano), which imagines the eponymous protagonist enjoying a game of golf in the afterlife while reflecting on the continuing plight of the female opera composer (Albatross Duo 2016). Smyth did not herself appear as a character in Sarah Gavron and Abi Morgan's internationally acclaimed film *Suffragette* (2015), but 'The March of the Women' is sung diegetically by a gathering of female protestors to open the scene in which the public announcement is made that women will continue not to be enfranchised.

While the checkered lineage of artistic representations of Ethel Smyth has accumulated a rich and diverse body of works transnationally over the decades, this chapter proposes to explore the earliest of this succession of literary portraits of the composer: the character of Edith Staines in E.F. Benson's *Dodo* and its two sequels. This was the only one upon which Smyth commented in print (even though her close friendship with Virginia Woolf was such that she surely knew of her appearance as Rose Pargiter, if not also Miss La Trobe), and it has the distinction of having evolved in tandem with her flourishing career as a composer and musician, which was essentially precluded after 1930 owing to the severity of the hearing problems she was by then experiencing. *Dodo* is also especially significant for having brought public attention to the notion of a woman composing large-scale musical works (even if it was not unique among Victorian fiction in this respect), at a time when female composers were more usually associated with smaller, desultory pieces suited to the domestic environment such as pretty songs and piano airs. *Dodo*, instantly and sensationally popular in its day, enjoyed a wide transnational circulation in English-speaking communities;

like its sequels, it was published on both sides of the Atlantic. But its claim to transnationality is increased by the distinctive publication history of its sequel, which, for reasons unknown, appeared in the US as *Dodo's Daughter* (Benson 1913) one year in advance of its UK publication as *Dodo the Second* (Benson 1914), emblematic of the story's popularity beyond British borders and illustrative of its wide geographical reach. Both editions were evidently intended to serve as the sequel to *Dodo* but, as was not uncommon at the time when the same book was printed in England and the US, the text was revised for the later publication. *Dodo* also appeared in an authorised German translation by Emmy Becher in 1895. If Smyth's autobiographical writings may as well have been titled 'ME ONE, ME TWO, ME THREE', as Sackville-West suggested, then her appearances as Edith Staines in Benson's trilogy surely correspond to Smyth I, Smyth II and Smyth III.

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An illuminating satire on late Victorian high society recounting the life and loves of its protagonist, *Dodo: A Detail of the Day* was published in 1893 by Edward Frederic Benson (1867–1940), son of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward White Benson, at the start of a literary career that culminated in the Mapp and Lucia series of six novels for which he is now best known. Smyth was well acquainted with Benson's family: her memoirs describe his mother, Mary Benson, as 'the mainstay of my life' from 1886 onwards (1919, vol. 2, p. 188); through her, Smyth came to know the rest of the family, enjoying particular friendship with her daughter, Nelly, and remarking that 'Of the Archbishop I stood in deadlier awe than of anyone I ever met in the whole course of my life' (p. 191). She notes that out of the seven members of the family, six were authors (p. 192); A.C. Benson, one of the brothers, was to pen the lyrics to Elgar's patriotic anthem 'Land of Hope and Glory' (1902). Of E.F. Benson, Smyth writes that 'I was always fond because he was such a dear at home, not to speak of his intense funniness and proficiency in games' (p. 190). It is, however, difficult to believe that

Smyth—a well-educated, independent woman who habitually dressed in tweeds, and whose domineering personality enabled her to push the boundaries of a music profession that was then fiercely male-dominated—would have wholeheartedly shared in the humour of having been caricatured in *Dodo* as one of the characters that Benson had based on real-life individuals, specifically, the eccentric composer and New Woman, Edith Staines.

The obvious similarity of their names alone offered a major clue as to the identity of the person who provided the basis for Edith, one of the novel's secondary characters who provides suitable counterpoint to, and contrast with, its heroine. The earliest information with which the reader is presented about the fictional composer concerns the eponymous socialite, Dorothea 'Dodo' Vane (herself based on Margot Tennant, later Lady Asquith, wife of the Prime Minister), informing us that 'She's writing a symphony or something, and she's no use except at meal-times. I expect she will play it [to] us afterwards.' (Benson 1893, p. 76).

While Smyth never actually composed a symphony—unless one includes her oratorio, *The Prison* (1929–30), which is described as a symphony on its title page—she certainly aspired to write large-scale orchestral works, a lofty ambition for a woman composer in late nineteenth-century Europe and hence a highly distinctive topic for popular fiction in its day. Smyth also customarily played (and sang) at the piano by way of interesting potential patrons in her music, and one can imagine her offering postprandial performances in a domestic setting, even—as is suggested here—realising her orchestral works at the keyboard. This episode witnesses the first of several of Edith's performances of her own compositions, which include the scherzo of the piece she whimsically names the 'Dodo' Symphony, upon which she had been working while staying with the titular protagonist.

The portrait of Smyth as composer comes into sharper focus upon mention of another of Edith Staines's works, a Mass, first in passing (Benson 1893, p. 88) and later in connection with a domestic performance in lieu of a church service (pp. 114–17). 1893, the year of

publication of Benson's *Dodo*, was also the year in which Smyth's *Mass in D* (1891) was published, having received its first performance on 18 January of that year at the Royal Albert Hall—the same venue, incidentally, at which Edith's 'Dodo' Symphony was performed in the novel (p. 136). Dodo tells Edith that 'You sit down and write a Sanctus, which makes one feel as if one wants to be a Roman Catholic archbishop' (p. 93), a statement that at first glance seems to allude to Benson's father, but may also refer to the dedicatee of Smyth's *Mass*, Pauline Trevelyan, the devout Catholic under whose influence Smyth had sought to reconnect with her own faith; Edith even states (p. 113) that she 'nearly' became a Catholic. Subsequently (p. 114) we learn that Edith's work is a 'Mass in G flat', the musical joke being that G flat major, with six flats, would be a thoroughly awkward key for many instruments, and hence impractical for a piece of this scope, suggesting that the reader is not to take Edith—and, by extension, Smyth—too seriously as a composer. Later we witness Dodo entering the drawing-room as Edith is playing an overture to a 'nearly completed' opera (p. 133), foreshadowing Smyth's own six operas, the first of which, *Fantasio* (1892–4), she would have been writing at the time that *Dodo* was published.

When we first meet Edith Staines in the novel, as a guest of Dodo's, she has emerged from the drawing-room, where she has been composing at the piano, and complains of only having been given two poached eggs (and no grilled bone, let alone a brandy and soda) for breakfast. She habitually smokes cigarettes while composing 'to keep the inspiration going' (Benson 1893, p. 90), not a practice that one particularly associates with Smyth—even if her autobiographies incorporate multiple references to her having smoked—so much as a detail introduced by Benson to highlight her eccentricity (one may read her later participation in a shooting-party in the same light, since Smyth's memoirs relate that she was not a good shot). We are told that 'Edith Staines talked in a loud, determined voice' (p. 86), a depiction consonant with Smyth's own unwavering resolve to succeed in a profession unfavourable to

women but also with her tendency to speak loudly, exacerbated by the hearing problems she suffered in later life that had plagued her intermittently as early as 1891 (Wood 2009, p. 34). Dodo herself reinforces this characterisation immediately following their conversation, remarking that ‘Edith really is splendid. She is so dreadfully sure of herself, and she tells you so. And she does talk so loud—it goes right through your head like a chirping canary.’ (Benson 1893, p. 88). Such descriptions were surely intended to present an unflattering portrait of Smyth; some years later, Virginia Woolf was to compare talking with her to ‘being a snail and having your brain cracked by a thrush—hammer, hammer, hammer’ (Nicolson and Trautmann 1975–80, vol. 5, p. 160). Later in the novel we learn that Edith, like Smyth, had a certain predilection to dominate the conversation (Benson 1893, p. 103), and that she talked ‘at the top of her voice’ (p. 108); Dodo subsequently reiterates that she is ‘rather loud’ (p. 226). When Dodo looks into the drawing-room, she finds Edith ‘completely absorbed in her work’ (p. 91), and it is no stretch to imagine that one might have regularly found the industrious Smyth similarly captivated by the act of composition. Even during an evening at the opera, Edith sits in one of the boxes (p. 190), annotating a full score so that she can take up specific points with the conductor following the performance.

Like Ethel Smyth at the time (she was not awarded the first of her honorary doctorates until 1910), the fictional composer is referred to by the title ‘Miss Edith Staines’. Dodo reports that ‘if anyone ever proposed to [Edith], whom she cared to marry, she will feel it only fair to tell him that the utmost she can offer him, is to play second fiddle to her music’ (Benson 1893, p. 133). While in the two sequels to *Dodo*, to be discussed presently, Edith is indeed married, the view expressed here echoes Smyth’s own, articulated in her memoirs, that ‘My work must, and would always, be the first consideration’; she asked, ‘Where should be found the man whose existence could blend with mine without loss of quality on either side?’ (1919, vol. 2, p. 5).

Several other details in the novel participate in the characterisation of Edith as Smyth. Echoing the transnationality of the person on whom she was based, we are told that Edith has secured a German conductor, Herr Truffen, for her symphony (Benson 1893, p. 87), hinting at the musical training that Smyth had undertaken in Germany from 1877, firstly at the Leipzig Conservatorium and then privately under the pedagogue Heinrich von Herzogenberg, as well as the extensive contacts she had made during over a decade spent on the Continent, which led to her first three operas being premiered in German theatres. Apart from the transnational, Edith also played a good game of lawn tennis (p. 308), a sport in which Smyth enthusiastically participated, and through which she came to the attention of Durham University, which was to confer upon her the first of her honorary doctorates (Smyth 1928, p. 39). Finally, the appearance of ‘two large collies’ (Benson 1893, p. 393) belonging to Edith is surely an oblique allusion to Marco, Smyth’s dog at the time, a St Bernard cross she had acquired in 1887 as the first of a succession of dogs she was to keep for the remainder of her life. These pets were themselves to reach their literary apogee with Smyth’s *Inordinate (?) Affection: A Story for Dog Lovers* (1936b), a collected biography of some of her canine companions.

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Benson’s 1913 sequel, *Dodo’s Daughter*, is significant to the portrayal of Smyth as Edith Staines not just because it reached American reading publics in advance of their British counterparts, as noted, but also because Smyth had enjoyed substantial success in the field of composition in the intervening period. However, while Smyth had secured performances in America by this time—including a landmark production of her second opera, *Der Wald* (1899–1901), as *The Forest* at The Metropolitan Opera, New York City in 1903 (the first and, for over a century, the only instance of a work by a woman composer being presented at that

venue)—and she had also made international headlines for her suffragette activity (Anon. 1912), it is less likely that American readers would have been familiar with her.

Only once in *Dodo's Daughter* is Edith Staines referred to as such (i.e. in the way in which the character's similarity to Smyth would have been readily apparent from her name), and it is in the context most recognisable as having been based on Smyth, as well as the first mention of Edith in the book. Bertie, Edith's son, tells us that 'my mother wrote the "Dod[o] Symphony" for instance. She's something; she was Edith Staines, and when she has her songs sung at the Queen's Hall, she goes and conducts them.' (Benson 1913, p. 22). By 1913, Smyth—who often conducted her works in public—had herself secured performances at Queen's Hall (a prestigious London concert venue, and home to The Proms at the time), including a concert of her music that took place under her baton on 1 April 1911 at which several of her songs were performed (Anon. 1911, p. 321), suggesting that Benson had continued to follow Smyth's career since the days of *Dodo*. Later in the novel, Edith conducts her own quartet (Benson 1913, p. 86), another allusion to Smyth, whose String Quartet in E minor, begun in 1901 but abandoned for over a decade following composition of the first two movements, was completed by 1913, and premiered in full on 23 May of that year; we also learn that Edith, like Smyth, has been made a 'music-doctor' (p. 118).

In *Dodo's Daughter*, Edith Staines has become Edith Arbuthnot, wife and mother, a significant departure from the unmarried (and lesbian) Smyth and one whose adherence to prevailing social conventions thereby diminishes her eccentricity. In the time that has elapsed since the first novel, Edith has also—in characteristic fashion—'loudly proclaimed that she could never be friends with Dodo again' (Benson 1913, p. 40), although they are quickly to reconcile. One can easily imagine Smyth similarly making clear exactly where she stood in relation to those with whom she was acquainted, and sadly she endured major fallings-out with some of her closest friends, most notably Elisabeth von Herzogenberg, the musically

talented wife of her composition tutor with whom she lodged during her period of study in Germany, about which she wrote at length in her memoirs.

Smyth's Teutonic training is itself hinted in *Dodo's Daughter*: the violist and cellist who perform her quartet are identified, somewhat negatively, as 'young and guttural Germans' (Benson 1913, p. 85), with whom Edith speaks in their native language, much as Smyth had acquired a working knowledge of German from her extensive time abroad. Other of Edith's works mentioned in the novel include the music she had composed for Dodo's (third) wedding, which she has also arranged to be performed at Queen's Hall as a 'Marriage Suite', and which includes an anthem, a hymn and two psalm chants. Another of these pieces is a 'rather Debussy-like wedding march' (p. 118), which, while it has no direct analogue in Smyth's output, nonetheless reflects Smyth's time spent on the Continent as well as the contemporary French influences apparent in some of her music, such as her third opera (her latest, by the time of publication of Benson's sequel), *The Wreckers* (1902–4), originally written to Henry Brewster's French libretto as *Les naufrageurs*, or her four *Songs* (1908), which set French texts for mezzo-soprano or baritone and chamber ensemble. Edith's music is labelled 'highly original' (p. 118) and 'exceedingly up-to-date' (p. 119), both of which would have been fair descriptions of Smyth's works, even if they fell short of the modernist aesthetics of leading Continental composers in the first decade or so of the twentieth century such as Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Bartók. Benson also describes how 'Edith proceeded straight up into the seventh heaven of her own compositions, which, good or bad, were perfection itself to their author' (p. 310; the final clause is omitted from the English edition), echoing what Virginia Woolf was to remark ironically about Smyth in her diaries some years later: 'As she conducts, she hears music like Beethoven's' (Bell and McNeillie 1977–84, vol. 4, p. 10). It is difficult to envisage Smyth sharing in Edith's idealised and unrealistic view that 'every one who aspired to the name of Musician [...] should be able to play every

instrument in the band' (Benson 1913, p. 149)—for much of the book, Edith is learning the double bass (not an instrument one associates with Smyth)—but Smyth's orchestrations, with their highly imaginative use of colour, demonstrate that she had a secure understanding of the constituent instruments nonetheless.

Where *Dodo* had introduced Edith as a tennis-player, the sequel refers to golf (Benson 1913, pp. 255, 319, 369), highlighting her Englishness with reference to another sport about which Smyth was also passionate, and to which she had particularly turned at this time (St John 1959, p. 116); she held, indeed, that her pursuit of golf had been indirectly responsible for her receiving her Damehood in 1922 (Smyth 1928, pp. 39–40). Other details of her characterisation are consistent across the two novels: Edith continues habitually to talk 'at the top of her voice' (Benson 1913, p. 149); likewise, following a performance of her quartet, we find that 'Edith was lecturing about the music they had just heard' (p. 86), making herself the subject of conversation in much the same way that, as Sackville-West noted, her prose writings are all about her. We are also told that 'Edith did not generally use long words, but chose them carefully when she indulged in polysyllables' (p. 36). While in 1913 Smyth had yet to publish the first of her ten books, in which she writes fluently and learnedly (even if her prose can sometimes be quite bruising), with an elastic vocabulary, one can imagine that she had nonetheless already cultivated the art of selecting her words judiciously.

The last in the trilogy, *Dodo Wonders* (1921), was published just eight years after the second; Dodo is now a grandmother in her mid-fifties. More importantly, these two publications fell on either side of the First World War, which had major implications for Smyth given her Continental contacts; for example, two of her operas were to have been produced at German theatres in 1915. At the outset of the final novel (set during the war), Dodo is talking to Edith, who had 'just returned from a musical tour in Germany, where she had conducted a dozen concerts consisting entirely of her own music with flaring success'

(Benson 1921, p. 7), discovering, by her own report, that ‘They hated me and my music, and everything about me, because I was English’ (p. 9), the first indication of any such opposition received from abroad. Whereas Smyth continued to secure concerts in Germany in the inter-war period, she never quite regained the foothold in Continental Europe that she had enjoyed prior to the outbreak of hostilities, and it is highly probable that she would have encountered some strong anti-English sentiment while working over there. We are specifically told that Edith’s concert tour of Germany had taken her to Leipzig (p. 9) and Berlin (p. 18), the cities in which Smyth’s operas *The Wreckers* (as *Strandrecht*) and *Der Wald*, respectively, had been premiered.

In *Dodo Wonders*, Edith continues to be strong and steadfast in her views; for instance, we are told that her ‘honesty about music was quite incorruptible’ (Benson 1921, p. 46), a detail that one can easily envisage being true of the highly opinionated Smyth as well. She persists in ‘thump[ing] out’ tunes at the piano in her characteristically loud manner (p. 78), a habit that Smyth’s own hearing problems, which substantially worsened in the late 1910s, would only have intensified. Edith has also kept up her passion for golf (pp. 124, 217, 286), playing at the Mid-Surrey links, a further allusion to Smyth who had lived in the county of Surrey in South-East England for the majority of her life (Wiley 2018a), and who moved to Woking, taking up residence in a house she had built for her adjacent to the Golf Club, in 1910; at her request and in recognition of her love for the sport, following her death, her ashes were scattered in the woodland in its vicinity.

While there are fewer references to Edith’s musical endeavours in *Dodo Wonders* than its two predecessors, at one point in the novel we learn that since Dodo had not attended the performance of Edith’s Mass at St Paul’s Cathedral, presumably the same Mass as mentioned in the original *Dodo*, Edith ‘consoled her after dinner by playing the greater part of it on the piano, singing solo passages in a rich hoarse voice that ranged from treble to

baritone [...] When no solo was going on she imitated the sounds of violin and bassoon and 'cello with great fidelity' (Benson 1921, p. 124). This description resonates unmistakably with Smyth, whose custom was to sing any and all vocal parts at such gatherings, and who, in a well-known anecdote, once performed the 'Sanctus' and 'Benedictus' from her Mass in D for Queen Victoria and her entourage, 'singing the chorus as well as the solo parts, and trumpeting forth orchestral effects' as best she could (Smyth 1921, p. 100). The allusion also curiously anticipates subsequent history, since Smyth's Mass, long neglected following its 1893 premiere (even if obliquely immortalised in the pages of *Dodo*), was rediscovered and given a second performance in revised form on 7 February 1924, following what Smyth described as 'thirty-one years of suspended animation' (1936a, p. 173). At least it would appear, on the evidence of *Dodo Wonders*, that the work had not been entirely forgotten.

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Smyth's first biographer, Christopher St John, remarks that *Dodo* had already appeared in a dozen editions in the year following its original publication (1893), concluding that 'Its popularity must have been due to the widely circulated *on dit* that Mr Benson's characters were far from being wholly fictitious; he had drawn them from celebrities in the fashionable world' (1959, p. 62). While St John believed that Smyth would have been 'rather flattered at finding herself included among the social celebrities parodied in *Dodo*' (p. 63), and more recently the actress Prunella Scales has noted that the portrait was 'gleefully acknowledged by the subject' (1986, p. [vii]), it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that she might at the same time have been slighted by the caricature. Smyth had little to say about the novel in her own writings, other than that 'I found myself permanently installed there as [...] a young lady who ate eggs and bacon on the lid of her piano while composing;—no mean feat, by the by' (1936a, p. 204). Her memoirs recount the story of how the Bensons, fearing that she had been offended by the parody, invited her to dine with them (pp. 205–6); but that the reality

was that she considered Edith Staines to be ‘the one decent character in the book’ (p. 206). This view is consonant with modern evaluations of Benson’s fictional composer: Sophie Fuller, for instance, also finds Edith to be ‘one of the most rounded and compelling characters in the novel [...] even if she is too ridiculous to be regarded as a great composer’ (2004, pp. 48, 49). *Dodo* and its sequels, therefore, present a portrait of Smyth that is simultaneously satirising and admiring.

Smyth, who recognised that late nineteenth-century Britain was not the place from which to launch an international career in music composition and hence sought training in Germany, and who enjoyed success in her lifetime in Continental Europe and America as well as in England, already constitutes a transnational subject; *Dodo* and its two sequels, as novels published in both the UK and the US (with no consistent pattern as to which country was the first in which the book appeared) likewise represent iterations of transnational writing. What is particularly telling in this respect is that the real-life individuals upon whom E.F. Benson based the characters of his novels essentially took the form of semi-public in-jokes; for example, in writing of the reaction of her close friend Lady Mary Ponsonby (the wife of Queen Victoria’s private secretary, to whose memory *Impressions That Remained* is dedicated), Smyth observed that ‘Most of the people who composed “Dodo’s” set were, in real life, either related to [the] Ponsonbys or younger members of families they had consorted with since time was’ (1936a, p. 204).

In placing them before national and international audiences, and (even more so) in publishing in the US in advance of the UK, both countries in which they were evidently popular, Benson heightened not just the transnationality of his novels, but also that of the people on which the characters were based. For Ethel Smyth, this inaugurated something of a fascinating tradition of fictional representations that, as we have seen, has continued up to the present, even if *Dodo* itself has had little direct impact on the later artistic portraits. But for

Edith Staines, this meant that communities of readers in England and (especially) beyond were finding out about the fictional composer without necessarily being acquainted with the person on whom she is—notwithstanding piecemeal details such as Edith’s having a family of her own in the sequels—for the most part quite faithfully based. Thus Smyth, through her literary surrogate, was placed before new reading audiences unfamiliar with the composer herself—and crucially, given the social context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, those likely also unfamiliar with the very notion of a woman composing large-scale pieces such as symphonies and Masses. Smyth once reflected that her own prose writings had led to ‘a certain curiosity as to the author’s music’ (1933, p. 37), generating interest in her works among readerships who were previously unaware of her compositional activity. At the same time, we should acknowledge the role of Benson’s texts in bringing a fictionalised version of Smyth—as well as the phenomenon of the female composer of large-scale works itself, all but unknown in the days of *Dodo*—to widespread attention transnationally.

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