

# Clementi the *Heresiarch* and a “Black Joke” of English Domestic Keyboard Culture

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ANY HISTORICAL STUDY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY printed keyboard music necessarily involves studying the cultural activities of women, who formed the overwhelming majority of those who performed from these prints. The predominance of women in English keyboard culture was first outlined by Arthur Loesser in his now classic 1954 study, *Men, Women and Pianos*.<sup>1</sup> More recently Michael Cole, Matthew Head, Richard Leppert, James Parakilas, and Ruth Solie have nuanced and contextualized the not inconsiderable ideological strictures that faced women at the keyboard.<sup>2</sup>

For most of the eighteenth century English domestic keyboard culture was dominated by one paradoxical characteristic. Whilst lauded as a worthy pursuit if practised in moderation, music also had the capacity to harm.<sup>3</sup> A zealous dedication to musical activities was viewed as suspect. Since keyboard music was for most of the century understood primarily as a courtship ritual designed to catch the attention of potential suitors, too much application gave rise to

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised and expanded version of a paper first presented at the AMS Regional Meeting of the New York State-St. Lawrence Chapter at Wilfrid Laurier University on 30 April 2011 and includes material from my dissertation, “Muzio Clementi, Difficult Music, and Cultural Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England,” (PhD diss., McGill University, 2011). Arthur Loesser, *Men, Women and Pianos* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Cole, “Transition from harpsichord to pianoforte—the important role of women,” in *Geschichte und Bauweise des Tafelklaviers*, ed. Boje E. Hans Schmuhl and Monika Lustig (Augsburg, Wissner, Blankenburg: Stiftung Kloster Michaelstein, 2006), 43–60; Matthew Head, “‘If the Pretty Little Hand Won’t Stretch’: Music for the Fair Sex in Eighteenth-Century Germany,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 52/2 (1993): 203–54; Richard D. Leppert, *Music and Image: Domesticity, Ideology, and Socio-Cultural Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); James Parakilas et al., *Piano Roles: Three Hundred Years of Life with the Piano* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Ruth Solie, *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> The paradox is memorably described by David Golby as “damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” David J. Golby, “Music and the Moral Dimension: ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t,’” in *Instrumental Teaching in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 27ff.

the suspicion that the keyboardist had neglected other accomplishments. Both Head and Leppert have called this kind of attitude “compulsory easiness,” where the “untutored naturalness of the lady at music was her ultimate artifice.”<sup>4</sup>

According to the many conduct books that served to promote this ideology, difficult music was particularly suspect as it additionally demanded odious labor in the form of repetitive practice. An excerpt of conduct literature printed in Bath around 1779 by an anonymous clergyman best expresses the most common form that the injunction took:

Let our daughters then be taught *Music* so as to *understand* what they *perform*, and *perform* no more than what falls within the *easy* compass of their execution; nor ever attempt any thing but *select pieces of familiar, easy, simple* construction, such as may delight the *ear* of their friends, and contribute to improve their own *Hearts* by directing its influence to the proper object.<sup>5</sup>

Nothing should even be attempted but that which is “familiar, easy, [and] simple.” To do otherwise would risk being viewed as boasting and vain; for a woman to play *really* well would mean dispensing with her natural humility. “An immodest woman,” the Reverend Mr. Wethenhall Wilkes preaches in *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady*, “is a kind of monster, distorted from its proper form.”<sup>6</sup> Ideally pieces should be sight-read with a relatively stagnant technique, or delivered with the minimum of practice; one should devote to them a couple of lessons at most.<sup>7</sup> There is a palpable tension in English culture of this period between music’s charms on one hand and its perceived potential for harm on the other.

In Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (written in 1796–97, but published in 1813), for example, the narrator makes clear the proper attitudes of decorum; the keyboardist who is modest, “easy and unaffected” (here, Elizabeth) is preferable to a showy, “pedantic and conceited” one (here, Mary).

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<sup>4</sup> The quotes are from Matthew Head, “‘If the Pretty Little Hand Won’t Stretch,’” 221 and 228; see also Leppert, “Music, sexism and female domesticity,” in *Music and Image*, 28–50.

<sup>5</sup> Anon., *Euterpe; or, Remarks on the Use and Abuse of Music, as a Part of Modern Education* (Pall-Mall: J. Dodsley, ?1779), 13–14.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. Mr Wethenhall Wilkes, *A Letter of Genteel and Moral Advice to a Young Lady* (1740; 8th edn., 1766), extract rpt. in Vivien Jones, ed., *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 30.

<sup>7</sup> On contemporaneous pedagogical activities see Richard Leppert, “Music Teachers of Upper-Class Amateur Musicians,” in *Music in the Classic Period: Essays in Honor of Barry S. Brook*, ed. Allan Atlas (New York: Pendragon Press, 1985), 133–58 and Deborah Rohr, *The Careers of British Musicians, 1750–1850: A Profession of Artisans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[Elizabeth's] performance was pleasing, though by no means capital. After a song or two, and before she could reply to the entreaties of several that she would sing again, she was eagerly succeeded at the instrument by her sister Mary, who having, in consequence of being the only plain one in the family, worked hard for knowledge and accomplishments, was always impatient for display. Mary had neither genius nor taste; and though vanity had given her application, it had given her likewise a pedantic air and conceited manner, which would have injured a higher degree of excellence than she had reached. Elizabeth, easy and unaffected, had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not playing half so well; and Mary, at the end of a long concerto, was glad to purchase praise and gratitude by Scotch and Irish airs, at the request of her younger sisters.<sup>8</sup>

Just as women's cultural activities were fraught with contradictions such as these, so too do we find these struggles reflected in the objects—including musical scores or novels—that were explicitly designed for female consumption. One composer whose works were regularly praised by commentators as being particularly suited for female consumption in the 1770s was Johann Samuel Schroeter.<sup>9</sup> His sonatas—or “lessons,” as they were regularly called—were universally applauded for their good taste and “affecting simplicity.”<sup>10</sup> The English predilection for calling sonatas lessons additionally underlined an agenda that undermined what could be a pleasurable “sounding” of the instrument (“sonata” being from the Italian *sonare*, or “to sound”) by replacing this concept with a pedagogical signifier—lesson—that emphasizes music's real function as a disciplinary agent.

The excerpt shown in Example 1 is typical, and, with its charming *galanterie*, has all the hallmarks of the graceful characteristics we associate with English music of the period. It is not technically difficult: the triplets beginning at m. 12 are grounded by repetitive patterns in which the hand is not asked to leap

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<sup>8</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London, 1813; Rockville: Arc Manor, 2008), 16–17.

<sup>9</sup> Schroeter was renowned for his graceful and natural performance. “His touch was extremely light and graceful so that just to watch him play became a pleasure in itself,” wrote the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* (quoted in *Grove*). Even if his music conformed to ideological standards of simplicity and grace, his lifestyle did not. He eloped with a wealthy student (Rebecca Schroeter, née Scott) and as Ronald Kidd comments, “her wealthy family, apparently distraught by the marriage, settled a yearly allowance of £500 on Schroeter with the proviso that he abandon his career as a public performer.” Ronald R. Kidd, “Schröter,” in *Grove Music Online*, accessed May 27, 2011, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/43982pg3>.

<sup>10</sup> *Gazetteer* (April 18, 1791) quoted in Simon McVeigh, *Concert Life in London from Mozart to Haydn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 146. McVeigh notes how Schroeter was “regarded as a touchstone of exquisite sensitivity.”

slight-readable;  
symmetrical;  
transparent texture

Allegro

grounded  
hand position;  
slow moving thumb

normative scale figure

thumb always on lower keys ('naturals')

repetitive practice  
built into work

normative scale figures

normative scale figures

Example 1 Galant characteristics in Schroeter's *Op. 1 No 1* (1777).

or jump around much, and the scale at m. 17 is exactly like the scales a music-master might teach, straight up with no kinks or hairpin bends. The sensitive second theme, beginning in m. 25 with sonorous sixths, is also not difficult to execute. The thumb finds itself always on a lowered key, and Schroeter is careful at m. 38 to avoid tricky parallelisms when the theme moves more quickly. Schroeter even builds in a little bit of practice into the piece itself. The closing section, from m. 41, has a little pattern that is repeated six more times, and is itself patterned from three circulating figures. If a keyboardist did not get it right the first time, she might the second, with a minimum of fuss. It is an elegant piece whose “familiar, easy, simple construction” would have pleased our Bath clergyman.

## The Black Joke and Bawdiness

In the same year as Schroeter’s lesson, a set of variations on a tune called “The Black Joke” was published in London. The composer was Muzio Clementi, an intelligent Italian harpsichordist who had been brought to England as a teenager. Now twenty-five years old, he was renowned for his dazzling performances on the harpsichord of difficult passages, specifically consecutive octaves, sixths and thirds played at great velocity.<sup>11</sup> Unger, Plantinga, and Rowland have noted the hazy details that surround Clementi’s move from Dorset to London,<sup>12</sup> but it seems likely that “The Black Joke” was Clementi’s first publication after two, maybe three, years in the metropolis. It seems probable that he arrived in London in mid-to-late 1774 and fairly soon was working at the King’s Theatre as a conductor and opera harpsichordist. Fanny Burney encountered Clementi in London in February 1775, where he was demonstrating keyboard instruments to potential clients at John Joseph Merlin’s workshop. She reported in her diary:

We then proceeded with Mr. Twining to M<sup>r</sup> Merlin, the famous mechanic, to hear his new Invented Harpsichord [a combination piano-harpsichord], the tone of which is the sweetest I ever heard. We found there a young man, Mr. Clementi, who plays the second Harpsichord at the Opera, & he, very good naturedly,

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<sup>11</sup> Clementi “[h]as composed some setts [sic] of lessons, which abound in passages so peculiar and difficult, that it is evident they must have been practiced for years preceding their publication. We particularly allude to the successions of octaves with which he has crammed his lessons. Mr. C. executes these exceedingly well, and is a most brilliant composer.” Anon., *ABC Dario Musico* (Bath, 1780), 17.

<sup>12</sup> Max Unger, *Muzio Clementis Leben* (Langensalza: Hermann Beyer & Söhne, 1914), 17–19; Leon Plantinga, *Clementi: His Life and Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 36–38; David Rowland, ed., *The Correspondence of Muzio Clementi* (Bologna: Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2010), liv.

sat down & showed the Instrument off to great advantage. He has studied & understands it, & is a very good player. Indeed, Mr. Burney excepted, I do not recollect ever hearing a better.<sup>13</sup>

We also know that Clementi played a concerto and then a sonata on the harpsichord at the Hickford Rooms on 3 April and 18 May 1775 respectively.<sup>14</sup> These are the first indications of Clementi's presence in London.

But the 'Black Joke' was a risky topic for a young virtuoso's first appearance in print in the capital city. The tune had a long history in English popular culture since early in the eighteenth century, earning itself a suitably coy entry at the end of the century in Francis Grose's *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1796):

[The Black Joke:] A popular tune to a song, having for the burden [i.e. refrain] "Her black joke and belly so white;" figuratively the black joke signifies the monosyllable. See MONOSYLLABLE.

The curious reader flips to: "Monosyllable: A woman's commodity." The word, which still shocks today, was variously known around 1796 and probably earlier, as the "Bottomless Pit," "Brown Madam," "Mrs. Brown," "Buckinger's Boot" (after a famous man without arms or legs), "Bun," "Mother of All Saints," "Mother of All Souls," or the "Tuzzy-Wuzzy." The final reference to the monosyllable is under "Venerable Monosyllable: *Pudendum muliebre*."<sup>15</sup>

The tune, with its lyrics, first appeared around 1728 and was sold in single-sheet editions (see Figure 1). Immediately, it became widespread and popular and there were parodies and imitations. "The Black Joke" soon gained a measure of respectability by being set to other words, such as in Charles Coffey's 1729 ballad opera *The Beggar's Wedding* where the song beginning "Of all the girls in our town" is marked as being sung to the tune of "Coal-black Joke."<sup>16</sup> The original

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<sup>13</sup> Fanny Burney, February 28, 1775, in *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Lars E. Troide (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 2:68. For more on Merlin's "new Invented Harpsichord" see Michael Latcham, "Harpsichord-pianos in the eighteenth-century," in *Instruments à claviers – expressivité et flexibilité sonore*, ed. Thomas Steiner (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 142–44. The instrument in question was patented in 1774 and Latcham describes it as having two separate actions but a single soundboard.

<sup>14</sup> *Gazeteer*, March 31, 1775; *Morning Post*, May 16, 1775. See Plantinga, *Clementi*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 3rd ed. (London: Printed for Hooper and Co., 1796), 31, 36, 39, 40, 43, 157, 226, 236, and 238.

<sup>16</sup> Edgar V. Roberts, "An Unrecorded Meaning of 'Joke' (Or 'Joak') in England," *American Speech* 37/2 (1962): 138.

1. No mortal sure can blame ye man,  
Who prompted by Nature will act as  
he can  
    With a black joke, and belly so white:  
For he ye Platonist must gain say,  
That will not Human Nature obey,  
In working a joke, as will lather like soap,  
And ye hair of her joke, will draw more yn  
a rope,  
    with a black joke, and belly so white.
2. The first that came in was an English boy,  
and then he began for to play and toy,  
    With her black etc..  
He was well vers'd in Venus's School,  
Went on like a Lyon came off like a fool,  
    From her coal black etc.
3. Then Shonup a Morgan from Holly-head  
Was stark staring mad to go to bed,  
    To her black etc.  
His cruper her saddle did not fit,  
So out of door she did him hit;  
    With her Coal black etc..
4. Then hastily came in a Hilland man,  
His chanter and pipe both in his hand,  
    To her black etc.  
But his main spring it was not strong  
For he could only flash in the pan  
    Of her Coal black etc.
5. A Frenchman oh yh wth ruffles and wig  
With her he began for to dance a Jig  
    With her black etc.  
and wn he felt wt was under her smock,  
Begar said Mounsier 'tis a fine Merimot  
    With a Coal black etc..
6. A rich Dutch skiper from Amsterdam  
He came wth his gilt ready in hand,  
    To her black etc.  
He fancy'd himself very fit for ye game,  
She sent him to Holland all in a flame,  
    By her Coal black etc.
7. The good Irish Man he cou'd not forbear  
But yt he must have a very good share,  
    Of her black etc.  
Madam said he for money I have none.  
But I'll play a tune on ye jiging bone  
    Of your Coal black etc.
8. Then next came in a brave Granadeer,  
and calls in for plenty of Ale and beer,  
    For her black etc.  
The cuning sly Jade show'd him a trick  
and sent him away wth fire in his stick  
    From her Coal black etc..
9. Traverse ye Globe and you'll find none,  
Who is not addicted and very much  
prone,  
    To a black etc.  
The Prince, ye Priest, ye Peasant do love it,  
and all degrees of Mankind do covet  
    A Coal black etc.
10. The rigid recluse wth his meager face,  
From fasting and prayer wd quickly cease,  
    For a black etc.  
Let ye Clergy Cant and say wt they will  
They stop ye mouth and tickle the Gill  
    Of a Coal black etc.
11. The Bishop in his Pontifical Gown,  
Wou'd tumble another Susanna down,  
    For her black etc.  
The Lawyer his Clients cause wd quit  
To dip his pen in ye bottomless Pit  
    Of a Coal black etc.

**Figure 1** Lyrics taken from “The Original Coal-black Joke” Brit. Mus., G. 316. e. fol. 99.



**Figure 2** Detail from Plate 3 of William Hogarth's *Rake's Progress* (1735).

tune, with its constant refrain of “black joke, and belly so white,” existed with a myriad of verses. Street singers would invent their own scenarios, retaining only the burden. Indeed, “The Black Joke” became so closely associated with sex, brothels, and prostitutes that William Hogarth shows a woman singing it in plate 3 of *The Rake's Progress* (see detail in Figure 2). Tom Rakewell is about to be entertained by a stripper-cum-prostitute who will dance for his pleasure on the shiny plate that the servant holds up. The penny ballad sheet entitled “Black Joke” that the pregnant beggar-woman holds as she sings makes it clear to viewers what Tom will see in the mirror.<sup>17</sup> The most common narrative spun out through the many verses revolves around various men from different countries and professions who come to seek the services of a prostitute, addicted as they are to the alluring black joke and white

belly. The prostitute always appears to have the upper hand,<sup>18</sup> and the men come away with a venereal disease (see Figure 1, verses 6 and 8) or can't perform (verses 2, 3 and 4). Edgar V. Roberts makes a strong case for the continuing obscene associations of the tune, lyrics, and implications of the “black joke”

<sup>17</sup> For more on Hogarth's musical imagery and “The Black Joke” see Jeremy Barlow, *The Enraged Musician: Hogarth's Musical Imagery* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 140–42, 156, and 286–87.

<sup>18</sup> Another version of the lyrics from 1735 paints the prostitute as a cunning pickpocket. See Barlow, *The Enraged Musician*, 286–87.



throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup>

Even without its original bawdy texts, the song was well-enough known that the tune became associated with the sexual act itself, as a much-printed anecdote from around 1731 seems to indicate:

*Broadway, in Gloucestershire, Jan. 16.* This Week a Fidler that had been playing here pretty late, in his Way home, being sleepy, stept into a Barn to take a Nap, and was no sooner laid down but in came a Man and a Woman, who presently became very familiar with each other, and struck a Bargain; the Man desir'd the Woman to pull off her Petticoat, she answer'd, she would, if he pull'd off his Breeches, accordingly they both agreed, and to it they went, and as soon as the Fidler heard they had done, he strikes up the Black Joke, which they thought was the Devil, come to play them a Tune to the Dance where they had been at, so out they both run, the Woman without her Hoop, the Man without his Breeches, in which was 50 s. and a silver Watch. The Fidler has had both cry'd, but nobody owns them.<sup>20</sup>

The potency of the song was so strong that in 1770, and seven years before Clementi published his set of variations, a performance of the tune without the words was enough to carry with it all the weight of its many obscene connotations, as a concerned reader related in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*:

*A Protestant* remarks, that the tune of the Black Joke, lately played on a Sunday before some Soldiers at St. James's Park, in their march to the Parade, was very unsuitable to the day, and highly offensive to every hearer; he therefore hopes, through this hint the indecency will be corrected.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> That the song with the original bawdy lyrics remained known later in the eighteenth century is made clear by a satirical dialogue in the *Morning Post and Fashionable World* 7039 (August 22, 1794) where a witness called French Horn, under cross examination, is asked questions to which he answers with snatches of popular song that the narrator pretends not to understand. "When asked to describe his person, he answered 'His *bald* pate Jove would cuff, he's so bluff, for a straw,' which seems to allude to some person who is a little bald, and somewhat bluff; and when asked about his dress, he answered, 'Black joke and belly so white;' alluding, as I suppose, to his wearing black breeches, and a white waist-coat." And in the *Sun* 645 (October 22, 1794) a parody of "The Black Joke" appeared by Danny Sheridan, apparently his "account of the Dinner given by a Great Man at the Shakspear [sic], where every Man paid for himself." The repeated eponymous refrain is once parodied with "With their Black Legs and Stocking so white," indicating that the words were still current. Roberts also uncovered usage dating to 1835 where a drunk Oxford freshman sings the tune at his tutor's door, the inference being that the song is highly offensive. Roberts, "An Unrecorded Meaning of 'Joke' (Or 'Joak') in England," 140.

<sup>20</sup> *Read's Weekly Journal or British Gazetteer* 305 (January 23, 1731).

<sup>21</sup> *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* 12/882 (June 14, 1770).

c. 1730

No mor-tal sure can blame the man who prompt-ed by na-ture will act as he can, with a

5 black joke and bel-ly so white: For he the Pla-to-nist must gain-say, that will not hu-man

10 na-ture o-bey, in wor-king a joke, as will la-ther like soap, and the

13 hair of her joke will draw more than a rope, with a black joke and bel-ly so white.

[A] Clementi, 1777 **Allegro** b. i.  $\alpha$  continuation/fragmentation

V I ii<sup>6</sup>

6  $\hat{5}$   $\hat{6}$   $\hat{7}$   $\hat{8}$  [B]  $\hat{5}$   $\hat{5}$

V I

12  $\hat{4}$   $\hat{3}$   $\hat{2}$  [A]

V I

$\alpha$

15  $\hat{1}$

**Example 2** The earliest “The Black Joke” and Clementi’s version compared.

Given this background, “The Black Joke” would seem to be an unusual choice for a set of variations destined for the parlour or music room. If a concerned writer was moved to take up his pen to write to his newspaper about the impropriety of the tune in a public space, what would he think if he heard his daughter or sister play the tune in his home on a square piano in a private space he understood as his domain? Can this really have been an innocent choice of tune on Clementi’s part? Clementi was surely aware of the ribald or controversial connotations of the tune and he may have sought to distance or disguise himself somewhat from the work when it first appeared.<sup>22</sup> First, the first edition and newspaper notice of “The Black Joke” was advertised as being composed by a “Sigr. M: C:” whereas Clementi’s previous 1773 publication had his full name.<sup>23</sup> Later, when Clementi revised “The Black Joke” around 1824, he renamed it “The Sprig of Shillelah, with Variations, and a Coda for the Piano Forte.”<sup>24</sup> As the tune in a varied form was now known by this name in some parts of the United Kingdom, perhaps Clementi wanted, as a seasoned professional, to remove once and for all the stigma of the title, his days of “The Black Joke” long behind him.<sup>25</sup>

Clementi’s adaptation of the tune sticks remarkably close to the original. Example 2 shows the bawdy tune in its earliest version alongside Clementi’s adaptation of it for keyboard. The tiny ternary form is further marked by an

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<sup>22</sup> The much-reprinted biographical sketch of Clementi from 1820 does not refer to “The Black Joke” by name, but instead to a “well-known popular air with variations.” *The Quarterly Musical Magazine & Review* 2/7 (1820): 308–16. Clementi had no qualms recommending it by name in 1805, asking Collard to put into the case of an instrument destined for sale in Russia “my Black Joke variations (the old Edition).” Rowland, *Clementi Correspondence*, 153.

<sup>23</sup> *Morning Post*, April 24, 1777. See Alan Tyson, *Thematic Catalogue of the Works of Muzio Clementi* (Tutzing: Schneider, 1967), 98. Clementi reused (and heavily simplified) “The Black Joke” in his so-called 1780–81 “Oeuvre 1,” printed in Paris. There his name does indeed appear on the title-page; the piece itself is part of a sonata and is marked “Black Joke. Air anglais avec des variations: allegro.” See Tyson, *Clementi Catalogue*, 34. Were the French aware of its bawdy connotations? Or by including it was Clementi acknowledging the so-called Parisian *anglomanie*, by then exercising considerable influence over the spending habits of the bourgeoisie?

<sup>24</sup> Barry Cooper, “A Clementi discovery,” *The Music Review* 44 (1983): 178–85. See also Barry Cooper’s preface to “The Sprig of Shillelah with Variations and a Coda,” in *18 Compositions without Opus Number for Piano or Harpsichord, Muzio Clementi Opera Omnia*, Vol. 51, ed. Andrea Coen (Bologna: Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2004), xi–xiii.

<sup>25</sup> Other names for the tune include *Darling Nedeem*, *Irish Dragoon*, *O! Love is the soul of a neat Irish man*, *Paddy McShane*, *Sublime was the warning*, *Thistle sae green* and *When the bright spark of freedom*. *Ibid.*, xii.

"Black Joke" chromaticism

Ending of "The Black Joke" (1777).

[*f assai*]

[instrument sways on its stand]

[awkward, painful hand position]

$\flat^3 \quad 2 \quad \sharp^1 \quad \flat^1$

"bel - ly so white?"

*dim.*

*pp*

$\hat{5} \quad \hat{6} \quad \hat{7} \quad \hat{8}$

[structural harmony evaporates]

[cadential confusion]

Ending of the "new and improved edition" of "The Black Joke," renamed "The Sprig of Shillelah" (c. 1824).

$\hat{5} \quad \hat{6} \quad \hat{7} \quad \hat{8}$

"bel - ly so white."

*p*

*f*

"Black joke" allusion in the ending of the finale of Op. 33 No. 1 (1794).

$\hat{5} \quad \hat{6} \quad \hat{7} \quad \hat{8}$

"bel - ly so white."

*p*

*ff*

**Example 3** Ending strategies in 1777 and c. 1824 versions with a "Black Joke" allusion in a 1794 sonata.

odd phrase structure of 6 measures + 10 measures,<sup>26</sup> which contributes to the shock value; the bawdy burden comes in each time at an unexpected and asymmetrical place (two measures early, as it were, if we expect a normative 8 + 12 measure phrase). The melodic contours of the c. 1730 tune and the 1777 setting are very similar, although Clementi eschews dotted rhythms in favour of sinuous eighth notes. This attenuates the punchiness of a burden that paints for its listeners and singers the most attractive and hidden parts of the prostitute: “Black joke and belly so white.” But the characteristic ascent from the fifth to the eighth scale degree remains (“belly so white”). The virtuosic coda that Clementi appended in the 1824 revision picks up on this motif in place of the remarkable slithering ending of the 1777 version. But that earlier gesture may have stayed in Clementi’s fingers, however; this particular ascent occurs also at the end of the finale of op. 33, no. 1 (1794). The 1794 ending appears as a synthesis of both the plain “belly so white” motif which was emphasised in the 1824 version as well as the “black joke” chromaticism that ends the 1777 version, which appears to be originally conceived as a sour inversion of the “belly so white” idea (see Example 3).

Plantinga recognised the salient feature of Clementi’s “The Black Joke” in 1977: it begins simply, in two parts, and then takes the player through progressively more difficult and thicker textures. “After an innocent, thin-textured opening, complications mount until both hands are playing octaves and wide-spread chords that use almost the entire available range of the keyboard.”<sup>27</sup> Dynamic marks appear. Articulations become more complex. A new world of sound and touch opens up. The final variation ends with one of the most remarkable passages of music in the 1770s, a highly chromatic, tonally ambiguous attempt at a musical “black joke” that laughs at formal cadential closure and evaporates into pianissimo, returning to the sparse two-part texture that opened the work, but a texture now utterly transformed (see Example 4). The player is astonished by the varied effects that can be achieved not only with many voices and thicker textures but also with the challenges of two-part writing. From the simple harmonization of the tune to the spectacular finale, Clementi employs a remarkable crescendo of virtuoso effects and textural possibilities.

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<sup>26</sup> Barry Cooper also notes the unusual phrase structure. “Its unusual 6-bar plus 10-bar structure, with the form A2B4|C2C2D2B4, readily distinguishes it from most other Irish melodies.” Cooper, preface.

<sup>27</sup> Plantinga, *Clementi*, 40.

[Var. 21]

*f assai*

*dim.*

*pp*

ii<sup>6</sup>    vii<sup>7</sup>

V    iii? I<sup>6</sup>?

ii?    I    ii?    (V)    I

**Example 4** Coda of the final variation of Clementi's 1777 "The Black Joke."

What did a male listener think of his daughter or sister playing the tune of the “Black Joke”? Was it scandalous? Or was it simply a pleasant tune, understood by players and listeners as being completely evacuated of its controversial content? Most accounts seem to suggest that the tune was still offensive and reviewers were sometimes sensitive to the propriety of a theme, and thence its variations. In 1820 a reviewer thought that “Mr. Klose’s air” for flute and piano “is coarse and common-place, a great portion which censure devolves upon the choice of his subject [a popular tune called “My native land, good night!”].”<sup>28</sup> But there is no direct charge of impropriety at Clementi’s “The Black Joke.” No reviews exist of the work.

## A Crude In-joke?

The possibility exists that the set of variations constitutes an elaborate kind of “in-joke.” If women had little exposure to the tune or its lyrics on account of their impropriety, they would have been unaware of the ribald connotations—unlike the men listening who would “get” the joke. In this scenario, Clementi’s choice appears cruel and manipulative, here making the female performer the unknowing focus of a crude joke. In one anecdote, it is possible that a reference to “The Black Joke” might very well have been meant to function in this way:

It is reported that a Lady is at the Expence of defending the Negroe Cause, and that being asked her Reason for being so favourable to those Gentry, replied, it was her Humour, and she conceived it a good Jest to puzzle the Lawyers; I believe, says the Gentleman who asked the Question, you do it for the Sake of the Jest, but give me Leave to call it by its true Name, and say it is for the Sake of the Black Joke.<sup>29</sup>

Is the gentleman here making a simple word pun or a lewd inference that the lady really only wants to have sex with Negros, a scenario only meant to be comprehended by his male companions? Did she understand the reference to the Black Joke? It is impossible to determine, but the lady in the scenario was certainly abreast of serious current affairs; a month later Lord Mansfield gave his famous judgment for Somerset’s Case that emancipated thousands of slaves within the United Kingdom.<sup>30</sup> In this case, the last laugh seems to be on the offensive gentleman.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Quarterly Musical Magazine & Review* 2/7 (1820): 359.

<sup>29</sup> *Public Advertiser* 11012 (May 18, 1772).

<sup>30</sup> *R v Knowles, ex parte Somerset* (1772) 20 State Tr 1.

That women were craftier and more knowledgeable than most men gave them credit for during this period is obvious when one considers the myriad characterizations of women in the plethora of novels penned by women. Art historian Matthew Craske discusses a male “in-joke” of this kind that backfired on a creator who underestimated his audience. Johann Zoffany’s *Tribuna at the Uffizi* (1772–78), exactly contemporaneous with Clementi’s “The Black Joke,” depicts a crowd of connoisseurs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. Ostensibly designed to masquerade as a virtuoso mass portrait piece, Craske points out that in fact most of the connoisseurs crowd around the erotic prints. Their investigations of the artworks with eyeglasses and magnifying glasses are motivated less by aesthetics and more by prurience and lasciviousness. Commissioned by Queen Charlotte, consort to George III, the painting did not find favour. As Craske comments,

It seems to be a wholly upright image of worthy virtuosity but contains an encoded piece of gentlemen’s club humour to which the worthy patroness was expected to be entirely oblivious. She might not have been as naïve as expected. There were reports that the Queen turned against the painting on the grounds that it was ‘improper’ and refused to have it in her state apartments. Although Horace Walpole suggests that the impropriety was that of crowding the painting with men unworthy of Royal attention, it may be that privately she realized the presence of subversive sexual innuendo.<sup>31</sup>

Clementi could not afford to have this kind of spectacular misjudgment taint the beginning of his London career. Perhaps the fact that he signed “The Black Joke” with his initials rather than his full name was a safeguard (however flimsy) against precisely this kind of scandal.

## **Radical Pianism?**

Perhaps women were indeed aware of the tune’s ribald connotations, knowing that its impropriety precluded performance in courtship or family rituals and that its overt crescendo from simplicity to difficulty meant that it could only be attempted in private. Clementi directs the performer to pound away at her square piano or harpsichord. The repeated chords at the close make a square piano literally sway on its stand; Clementi’s piece threatens to shake the very foundations of domestic music-making with their ideological emphasis on a

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew Craske, *Art in Europe 1700–1830: A History of the Visual Arts in an Era of Unprecedented Urban Economic Growth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 179–80.





**Figure 3** Awkward, painful position of the left-hand in the final fatiguing measures of Clementi's "The Black Joke" (1777). Clementi repeats the position for two measures and notates that the first and fifth finger hold the octave as the second finger taps out the dissonant leading note. Photo by author. Many thanks to John Koster, curator, for his kind permission to photograph this on a Zumpe square of 1776 (National Music Museum, University of South Dakota, Vermillion).

quiet hand, a retiring demeanour and a stagnant technique only enlivened by occasional sight-reading.

This is a work that takes the performer from banal simplicity to a high level of technical challenge, flirting with pain. The final bars employ a strange kind of notation that Clementi was never to use again. Small notes indicate the dissonant leading tones that are to be played by the left-hand's second finger. Is this an *ad libitum* indication? Or does he want the dissonant note to be softer? Does the small-note notation "excuse" the extreme dissonance? In any case, the position itself is painful and challenging, even more so on the wide, solid keys

of a Zumpe square (see Figure 3). At this stage both hands have additionally been tired by the preceding passagework.

This acidic passage shares some musical characteristics with an anecdote related by Susan Burney. Attending a rehearsal of the pasticcio *Alessandro nell'Indie* in November of 1779, Susan related to her sister Fanny the chaotic situation: "The Wind Instruments were all out of tune, & tho' I pitied poor Cramer [the leader] 'twas impossible not to laugh."<sup>32</sup> Cramer was forced to stop at one point when the bassoonist "was dreadfully & ridiculously out of tune." Clementi, at the second harpsichord, apparently made light of the mistake and

play'd over the passage wth. natural notes in the treble, & flat in the Bass. I don't know whether you can understand what I mean, but it had the most dissonant & comical effect & produced the best imitation of their accompt. that can be conceived.<sup>33</sup>

Clementi's waggishness seems to have been an integral part of his personality. Samuel Wesley reminisced in 1836 that: "He was a Person of a very lively Mind, and cheerful Conversation, and had a Taste for Literature—He was however too much given to Punning upon words, a Custom not indulged by a real, genuine Wit."<sup>34</sup> Perhaps Clementi subjected Wesley to one of his puns in questionable taste, like the suggestive pear-shaped hand position found at the end of "The Black Joke," where the straining index finger meets the thumb in pulsating movements.<sup>35</sup>

The only other composer of difficult music who ever found widespread favor in England before Clementi's arrival was Domenico Scarlatti.<sup>36</sup> But Scarlatti's music had a limited impact on keyboard culture of the 1750s and later

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<sup>32</sup> Fo. 38r. Quoted in Curtis Price, Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, *Italian Opera in Late Eighteenth-Century London, Vol. I: The King's Theatre, Haymarket 1778–1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 191.

<sup>33</sup> Fo. 38v. Quoted in *ibid.*, 192.

<sup>34</sup> Samuel Wesley, *Reminiscences* (unpublished, c. 1836), British Library, Add. MS 27593.

<sup>35</sup> Tom Beghin has also pointed out that Haydn makes use of suggestive hand positions at a keyboard instrument with a short-octave arrangement in his Capriccio on the popular tune "Acht Sauschneider müssen sein." Tom Beghin, "Short Octaves müssen sein! Hanswurst, Sauschneider and Haydn's Capriccio in G Major, Hob. XVII: 1" (paper presented at the Canadian Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Montreal, 16 October, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> For more on the English reception of Scarlatti see Richard Newton, "The English Cult of Domenico Scarlatti," *Music & Letters* 20/2 (1939): 138–56, and Todd Decker, "'Scarlattino, the Wonder of his Time': Domenico Scarlatti's Absent Presence in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Music* 2/2 (2005): 273–98.

partly because the composer himself was not present as an active advocate and promoter of his style.<sup>37</sup> Clementi, by contrast, was a palpable presence in the English keyboard scene in the late 1770s, and he appears to have become aware of the vast potential for female amateurs to improve their technical abilities and widen their keyboardistic vocabulary. His sly commentary in these “Black Joke” variations, with their cultural crescendo from domestic docility to vigorous virtuoso-ship, appears to outline a potentially revolutionary break with the prevailing ideology of the culture. Clementi’s early foray onto the English keyboard music market leads the performer directly to the paradoxes inherent in English keyboard culture, sites of pleasurable revulsion and repulsive pleasure. The marked and masked contradictions associated with music, sex, and difficulty are here all found in a remarkable concatenation.

As “The Black Joke” was a set of variations without an opus number, signed semi-anonymously by Clementi with only his initials, it might have been understood and perhaps excused at the time as a stand-alone oddity by a virtuoso performer. But Clementi’s next publication, his op. 2 in 1779, even more strongly outlined his new agenda of publishing and promoting difficulty.<sup>38</sup> It also contained the work that was to do most to establish his reputation: op. 2, no. 2, later to be known as the “Octave Lesson,” became an instant hit. Perceived as highly difficult at the time, due to its plethora of consecutive octaves, its rapidity and its extroverted texture, it also appeared transgressive by 1770s cultural standards. Like the final variations of “The Black Joke,” a compelling performance means a great amount of physical activity and practice: the hands must fly quickly from one part of the keyboard to another and it is hard to play the piece with the still and inert body that was the proper posture recommended by conduct literature.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Decker also notes that whether “amateur female players—among them Susan Burney—would have attempted to play Scarlatti’s difficult sonatas in the context of domestic musical soirées remains an open question.” Decker, “Scarlattino,” 289.

<sup>38</sup> For a fuller account of Clementi’s op. 2 see Tyson, *Clementi Catalogue*, 13–16; Bernard Harrison, “The Revision of Clementi’s Opus 2 and the Transformation of Piano Performance Style,” in *Muzio Clementi: Studies and Prospects*, ed. Roberto Illiano, Luca Sala, and Massimiliano Sala (Bologna: Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2002), 303–22; James Parakilas and Gretchen A. Wheelock, “1770s to 1820s: The Piano Revolution in the Age of Revolutions,” in Parakilas et al., *Piano Roles*, 77–93 and Helyard, “Muzio Clementi, Difficult Music, and Cultural Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England.”

<sup>39</sup> “It is a matter much deserving the attention of a Lady how she is to present and deport herself while at the Piano-Forte. I have repeatedly noticed some Capital Performers, who, while they highly gratified the Ear, have very much offended the Eye, by a most ungraceful, not to say

<b>Opus 1</b>	<b>Variations on “The Black Joke”</b>	<b>Opus 2</b>
1773	1777	1779
Solo sonata	Solo variations	Solo and accompanied sonatas
“Muzio Clementi”	“M: C:”	“Signor Clementi”
Dedicated to Sir Peter Beckford	[Dedicated to No-One?]	[Dedicated to Every-One?]
Rural	Rural becoming Cosmopolitan	Cosmopolitan
<i>Galant</i>	<i>Galant</i> becoming Difficult	<i>Galant</i> AND Difficult
Domestic	Domestic becoming Public	Domestic AND Public
Understated	Understated becoming Outrageous	Understated AND Outrageous
Uncontroversial	Controversial becoming even more so.	Uncontroversial AND controversial
Easy	Easy becoming Difficult	Easy AND difficult
Unmarked	Marked by lewd connotations and difficulty	Marked by difficulty (solo), unmarked in easiness (accomp.)
Progressive (easy to hard)	Progressive (easy to difficult)	Progressive in solo sonatas (difficult to extremely difficult)

**Table 1** *Op. 1, “The Black Joke,” and Op. 2 compared.*

While encapsulating its own radically progressive technical agenda, “The Black Joke” also occupies an interesting space in the no less progressive cultural scheme that appears in op. 1 and op. 2 (see Table 1). If op. 1, rather common-

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distorted, Position of their Body and a disgustingly awkward motion with their arms and hands.” Anon., “Desultory Remarks on the Study and Practice of Music, Addressed to a Young Lady while under the Tuition of an Eminent Master. Written in the Years 1790-1 and 2,” *European Magazine and London Review* (October 1796): 272.

place solo sonatas without accompaniment, can be seen to constitute a farewell to the provincialism of Dorset and Sir Beckford, then “The Black Joke” is a paean to the heady cultural and social extremes of Europe’s largest and most cosmopolitan city. Set to a bawdy tune and meant for the pleasure and amusement of the solo player, it sketches out technical challenges that Clementi would extend and consolidate in op. 2, a collection of three difficult solo sonatas and three simple accompanied ones.

Contrasts between “solo” and “accompanied” and “difficult” and “easy” are marked out in op. 2 in striking ways. In one bold stroke, Clementi has created a new kind of keyboard music that calls attention to the difference between a prevailing culture of printed keyboard music and another more revolutionary one. The difficult sonatas allow other performers to partake in a virtuosity that had previously remained a private affair, practiced amongst a small class of male specialists. It affords female players the new kind of musical expression that appeared towards the climax of “The Black Joke.” Clementi’s initial safeguards against charges of impropriety for the female keyboardist in op. 2 appears to be that the controversial kinds of difficulties that exist in the solo sonatas are not present when the soloist is being accompanied, and therefore under both musical and social surveillance and observation. The orchestral sounds in “The Black Joke” and op. 2 additionally introduce visions of more public spaces into the solo performer’s imagination. Tempting images of public performance are here introduced in that most domestic of genres, the solo sonata/lesson.

Naturally gender and class-related anxieties arose in the wake of the “Octave Lesson.” There was a fear that female amateurs were sounding too much like male professionals. A writer around 1790 sternly tried to convince his hypothetical female correspondent that Clementi’s music was totally bankrupt:

Thus having analyzed before you the merits of this famed Performer, you find them to be composed of Brilliancy and Frivolity of florid Embellishment, of superficial Graces, of Fillagree Cadences, &c. *en fin*, of Rapidity and Vapidity. We cannot therefore rank him as an Apostle of the Orthodox Church of Music, and it may be truly said of him that his Talents are wholly at his Fingers ends, where, though not à *gauche*, he certainly is *adroit*.<sup>40</sup>

But women soon found that sonic brilliance could be achieved after even just a few hours of practice, here encouraged either by the personal tuition of

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<sup>40</sup> Anon., “Desultory remarks,” 114. For more details on the progeny and authorship of these letters see Peter A. Brown, “‘Celerio, le Dieu de Clavecin.’ An Appraisal of Clementi?” *The Musical Times* 120/1638 (1979): 645–57.

Clementi himself, or, failing his presence, his printed exercise manuals, which became best-sellers. As the eighteenth century drew to a close, we find that conduct books do indeed reflect—or are more tolerant of—these changing practices and the restrictions placed on dedicated and sustained keyboard practice are lessened, sometimes even evaporating altogether.<sup>41</sup> Regula Trillini has noted a similar pattern in novels of the period, noting that it is “near-industrial rattle of showy accomplishment that resounds loudest both through Regency fiction and the turn-of-the-century debate about female education,” in stark contrast to the more timid “tinkling” of earlier decades.<sup>42</sup> In conduct literature, keyboard performance is described less as an ornamental component of courtship rituals and more as an integrated part of a widespread education. Because women became personifications of leisure as the century progressed and their leisured behavior was in fact linked directly to their husband’s class status we find that the higher her class, the more leisured the lady should be. And yet conduct books continually preach the dangers of this leisure, this idleness.<sup>43</sup> One virtuous way was to fill it was with keyboard practice.

Clementi’s difficulties could not entirely liberate women from a repressive ideology of simplicity and banality. Indeed, endless scales and arpeggios might have entrapped her even further. But it is clear that the musical vocabulary newly available to her was greatly enlarged and legitimized. To borrow a term from Pierre Bourdieu’s comprehensive theory of culture, by affecting so profoundly the status of difficult music Clementi might rightly be described as a *heresiarch*.<sup>44</sup> *Heresiarch* is the term Bourdieu uses to describe talented individuals who, within their sphere of influence, are *doxa* breakers—those who reject, or explode, the shared and unquestioned opinions and perceptions in culture

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<sup>41</sup> Helyard, “Muzio Clementi, Difficult Music, and Cultural Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England.”

<sup>42</sup> Regula Hohl Trillini, *The Gaze of the Listener: English Representations of Domestic Music-Making* (New York: Rodopi, 2007), 66.

<sup>43</sup> For more on this culture see Sarah Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> In this respect, Bourdieu comments that “to ‘make one’s name’ [faire date] means making one’s mark, achieving recognition (in both senses) of one’s difference from other producers, especially the most consecrated of them; at the same time, it means creating a new position beyond the positions presently occupied, ahead of them, in the avant-garde.” Pierre Bourdieu, “The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods,” in *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 106.

that are internalized and “natural.”<sup>45</sup>

In essence, Clementi’s “brand” of difficulty and its attendant culture of industrious practice were quickly, efficiently, and strategically commodified.<sup>46</sup> Difficult music intended for widespread consumption had little to no cultural capital in the 1770s. But after arriving in London, Clementi essentially identified a niche market of keyboardists and then stimulated a need for which he himself could supply the new demand, composing and publishing difficult sonatas (the software), the didactic instruction books for their use (the manual), as well as having a hand in the construction of instruments (the hardware)—all these designed to best show off both the sonatas themselves as well as the performer’s hard-won technique.<sup>47</sup> Only the emerging culture of capitalism—unique to England—enabled Clementi so effectively to maintain control over, and to profit from, all of these elements. Indeed, Clementi’s vast wealth at the time of his death is testament to his success in this regard.<sup>48</sup>

A good example of ingrained attitudes or *doxa* at work was our earlier Jane Austen quote from 1797, in which Elizabeth was praised for being “easy and unaffected” at the keyboard whereas Mary was marginalized for being “pedantic and conceited.” These entrenched restrictions against technical aptitude do begin to change over the course of Clementi’s career and his attendant promotion of keyboard practice. Even Jane Austen changed her tune. In her 1816

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<sup>45</sup> For an overview of Bourdieu’s theoretical apparatus see Cécile Deer, “Doxa,” in *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, ed. Michael Grenfell (Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing, 2008), 119–30.

<sup>46</sup> For a fuller account of Clementi’s promotional activities see Rohan H. Stewart-MacDonald, “Clementi, the Market Place and the Cultivation of a British Identity during the Industrial Revolution,” and David Rowland “Clementi & Co. in International Markets,” in *Instrumental Music and the Industrial Revolution*, ed. Roberto Illiano and Luca Sala (Bologna: Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2010), 471–510, 525–42; Dorothy de Val, “Clementi as Entrepreneur,” in *Studies and Prospects*, 323–35.

<sup>47</sup> James Parakilas and Gretchen A. Wheelock make this point brilliantly in *Piano Roles*: “In this cultural revolution Clementi showed a particular genius for understanding how apparently different systems of production and marketing could be coordinated so that each promoted and expanded the others: concert life and domestic music making; piano manufacture and piano instruction; music publishing, musical journalism, and the musical canon.” *Piano Roles*, 93.

<sup>48</sup> Frederic M. Scherer in a study of twenty-three eighteenth- and nineteenth-century musicians has shown that Clementi’s comes in second after Rossini for the largest estate at the time of his death (£45,664). By contrast, Mozart’s estate at the time of his death was in debt by the equivalent of £99 whereas Haydn had savings of £950. Frederic M. Scherer, *Quarter Notes and Bank Notes: The Economics of Music Composition in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004), 105.

*Emma*, the protagonist, in comparing herself with the more musically accomplished Jane Fairfax,

did unfeignedly and unequivocally regret the inferiority of her own playing and singing. She did most heartily grieve over the idleness of her childhood and sat down and practiced vigorously an hour and a half.<sup>49</sup>

Some kind of skill in music beyond the bare minimum exemplified by Elizabeth in 1797 is most definitely felt, in 1816, to be an embodied form of cultural capital. An adroit accumulation of cultural capital can better one's position in the social field, in the eyes of friends and family.

That standards had changed dramatically and that this progress was understood as laudable is clear from an 1830 newspaper article, in which a correspondent relates a decades-old conversation with the composer Latilla.

One day I showed him the celebrated Muzio Clementi's production, Op. 2, known as the *Sonata dei ottavi* [Octave lesson] [...] After examining with attention the first allegro, he exclaimed, "This is, indeed, delightful music; but if Clementi can execute things of this kind, Clementi is no man, but the very old One himself. [...] What would Latilla now say, could he start for a moment into life, and see the very sonata in question easily executed by some dozens of noble ladies?"<sup>50</sup>

Clementi's agenda of promoting technical excellence amongst amateurs was best achieved through his popular practice manuals and didactic editions, which were filled with the codes needed to decipher the performance of difficult passages. His brand of fingering emphasized a streamlined *legato* approach that facilitated velocity. In his sonatas formal structures evoke concertos and symphonies, and textures make the piano sound like an orchestra. Long pedal markings add "reverb" to an instrument in a small room, thus suggesting to the performer and listeners the expansiveness of a public space generally considered off-limits for the majority of female amateurs. Clementi might be seen here to evoke the fantasies of an aspiring pianist like Mary from *Pride and Prejudice* who, unlike the majority of her peers, relished, rather than was revolted by, the idea of public performance.

Like the cunning prostitute in "The Black Joke" narrative who always has the upper hand over the hapless and horny men, Clementi invited the wily

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<sup>49</sup> Jane Austen, *Emma* (London, 1816; London: Richard Bentley & Sons, 1882), 196–97. See also Kathryn L. Shanks Libin, "Music, Character, and Social Standing in Jane Austen's *Emma*," *Persuasions* 22 (2000): 15–30.

<sup>50</sup> Giacomo Ferrari, "Aneddoti Piacevoli & Interessanti," *The Harmonicon* (1830): 371.



performer in the late 1770s to imagine for herself what having the upper hand in keyboard technique might be like. In “The Black Joke” Clementi appears to be offering a radically different perspective at odds with the culture he found himself in. Maybe keyboard music for women need not be subservient to the codes of courtship which demanded modesty and retiringness. Perhaps it could be something else entirely, something more expressive, challenging, ultimately perhaps more fulfilling. Previously these kinds of virtuoso tricks had been the provenance of male professionals and had rarely made it to print. “The Black Joke,” while starting out sounding like a dutiful wife-to-be, ends up sounding like a confident virtuoso. Its publication is a fitting metonym for the technical and cultural agenda promoted by Clementi, a mission that he accomplished in spectacular fashion.