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PhD Thesis in Musicology

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Elgar as Post-Wagnerian: A Study of Elgar's Assimilation of Wagner's Music and Methodology

January 2008

Laura A. Meadows



- 6 JUN 2008

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the relationship between the compositional method of Elgar and that of Wagner.. To some, this is a discourse that has always had an obvious answer: Elgar is a post-Wagnerian composer. However, this seems an inadequate response, for there has been very little analysis of exactly *how* Elgar was post-Wagnerian. It is this question – of *how* Elgar was post-Wagnerian – with which this thesis is primarily concerned. Evidence is presented that Elgar was, firstly, profoundly influenced by Wagner from an early age and this influence gradually infiltrated his compositional thoughts. Elgar's Wagnerism affected almost every facet of his compositional life and in this thesis three of these areas are dissected in detail: leitmotif manipulation, harmony and orchestration. In addition to this, the background to Elgar's Wagnerism is closely examined – how the movement became so influential in England in the 1880s, the level of contact Elgar had with Wagner's music during his most impressionable years and why Elgar succeeded in absorbing Wagner's musical language, when so many other British composers attempted to emulate his style and process yet fundamentally misunderstood it.

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PART A: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION: PRELUDE TO WAGNER AND ELGAR

Much is said of the influence of Brahms and Wagner on Elgar's music, but in neither case is their influence as strong as has sometimes been made out.¹

Wagner's Reign

'In everything I do,' wrote Brahms in a letter to Clara Schumann, 'I tread on the heels of my predecessors, whom I feel in my way.'² Brahms, of course, was not referring to Wagner, but his image is amusingly appropriate since, if he were treading on his predecessors heels, then they must be in front of him – they have already been where he is going. With Wagner as predecessor, any composer in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would surely have endorsed this observation and indeed, the Wagnerian legacy has never been doubted. Speaking of *Tristan*, Chabrier once said, 'there is enough music for a century in this work – the man has left us nothing to do.'³

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, many composers became increasingly burdened by the 'weight of the past', and, as Susan Youens puts it, many felt 'a sense of creative impotence in the face of prior greatness.'⁴ The final decades of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth centuries have been characterised by Dahlhaus as an 'age virtually held in thrall to the harmonic consequences of *Tristan*',⁵ and, again referring to *Tristan*, Joseph Strauss suggested that 'it is no exaggeration to say that, in some sense, every subsequent work particularly in the generations immediately following Wagner, has had to come to terms with it.'⁶

¹ Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974) p. 72

² David Brodbeck, Letter of March 1870, quoted in *Compatibility, Coherence and Closure in Brahms' Liebeslieder Waltzes, Explorations in Music, the Arts and Ideas: Essays in Honour of Leonard B. Meyer*, ed. Eugene Narmour and Ruth A. Solie (Stuyvesant: Pendragon, 1988)

³ Robin Holloway, Remark made in 1879: *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenberg, 1979)

⁴ Susan Youens, 'Schubert, Mahler and the Weight of the Past', *Music & Letters*, vol. 67, p. 256

⁵ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (University of California Press, 1989) p. 315

⁶ Joseph Strauss (1990) *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard) p. 144



G. K. Chesterton once wrote: 'A man cannot be wise enough to be a great artist without being wise enough to wish to be a philosopher.'⁷ Chesterton had Bernard Shaw in mind, but the maxim could easily be applied to Richard Wagner as well. For Wagner not only composed music dramas but also theorised in his numerous prose essays that opera should be something more than mere vulgar entertainment. He maintained that the ideal art of the past had been Greek tragedy. Its form included music, dance, and poetry, synthesis of the arts. Its subject matter was myth, which Wagner defined as 'a view-in-common of the essence of things,' and its performance was a religious occasion in which the entire community took parts. By the nineteenth century, Wagner argued, art had retreated from its lofty function in Greek civilisation and had reached its nadir in opera. Indeed, attending the opera was an opportunity for social preening and display, and it scarcely mattered what took place on the stage as long as a pleasant aria or two were sung and as long as the girls in the chorus were pretty. Wagner set out to change all that. He insisted that the lights be dimmed during a performance, that latecomers remain outside, that the prelude be heard in silence, and that the applause not interrupt every scene. He demanded an improvement in the standard of acting in opera, and he required careful and appropriate staging, although Wagner's particular taste in staging is no longer popular. Generally speaking, he succeeded in inducing the public to take opera far more seriously than it had before.⁸ However, when Wagner's art was advertised not only as an entertainment but also as a religious experience and when his music dramas violated previous musical and moral convictions and appeared to expose or to arouse inner, often repressed, archetypal human emotions, then his art became much more controversial.

In nineteenth-century England, a small group of individuals or, as Shaw explained, 'an inner ring of superior persons,' made the first effort to understand Wagner's music and concepts. The group consisted largely of men and women in the creative arts and members of the Anglo-German community. Later, as these individuals attempted to win converts, they helped make Wagnerism a highly partisan issue. The phenomenon of Wagnerism in the nineteenth century has been obscured by events in the

⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (London: John Lane, 1905) p. 29

⁸ So much so that Paul Henry Lang, when Music critic of the *Herald Tribune*, 'used to fly into imposing rages every Eastertime when productions of *Parsifal* at the Met were greeted by the audience with reverential silence as though they were attending church services.' John Simon, 'The Boo Taboo', *New York* (24 June, 1968) p. 47

twentieth century and the more recent memory of later Nazi Wagnerians persists today. It is perhaps somewhat ironic that the most influential nineteenth century Wagnerites were Jewish and Wagner's relationship with many Jewish musicians has been well documented. Nineteenth century Wagnerians did not, on the whole, become Nazi Wagnerians, but their efforts have certainly been tainted by the later actions of others. Their racism, maniacal nationalism and worship of force and brutality mocked and subverted the traditional ideals of European civilisation. English Wagnerites in the nineteenth century did not, on the whole, share these Nazi attitudes.⁹ To be sure, they sometimes indulged in racist thinking. In 1900 for example, Jessie L. Weston wrote a study of the legends of Wagnerian drama in order to prove that they belonged not only to the Germans but also to the Anglo-Saxon nations by a 'hereditary right of possession.'¹⁰ In fact, such racist attitudes were common in the late nineteenth century in all western countries. It is often easier to find examples than exceptions. However, what is noteworthy is that the English Wagnerians tended to ignore racism. It is sometimes implied in their writings, but it is almost never stated outright. They made almost no original contributions in this area that either augmented or diminished the racism of their times or drove it in any particular direction.

On the contrary, from the documents of the period it appears that many Wagnerians were primarily concerned with the inadequacies of the reigning scientism as a metaphysic. Wagner has been accused of 'diverting Romanticist thought from vitalism to materialism,'¹¹ but among English Wagnerians the case was just the reverse. Instead, they enlisted Wagner as their guide to regions beyond mechanistic materialist philosophy, to the realm of spiritual truth. They believed that Wagner had successfully transformed medieval into modern religious myth, suitable to the modern temperament. They thought

⁹ The important exception is Houston Stewart Chamberlain. However, though born an Englishman, he received his education abroad, wrote his books in German or French, married Wagner's daughter and became a German citizen. The subject of his first book in 1892 was Wagner's *Lohengrin*. A study of Wagnerian drama appeared in 1892 and a biography of Wagner in 1895. His well-known and controversial work *The Foundations of Nineteenth Century* appeared in English in 1911, after the height of 'Wagnermania' had been reached. His anti-English war essays, entitled *The Ravings of Renegade Englishman*, were published in England in 1915. He joined the Nazi Party in his last years.

¹⁰ Jessie L. Weston, *The Legends of the Wagner Drama: Studies in Mythology and Romance* (London: Nutt, 1900) p.2

¹¹ Jacques Barzun, *Darwin, Marx and Wagner*, Second edition (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1958) p. 328

that his art was richer in live transcendental inspiration than was the moribund, elevating effect of his music.

The impact of Wagnerism on composers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has been immense. On one level, it can be detected in the rich harmonic language, unresolved dissonances, and sequences as exhibited by Elgar, Richard Strauss, Mahler and Berg, to name just a few. Interestingly, the use of leitmotifs and through-composed procedures in opera also became standard. On a more subtle level, it is possible also to trace Wagner's principles of 'music prose' through Schoenberg to later modernists such as Boulez in his use of linear, highly polyphonic melodic thinking and his use of an instrumental overlapping which creates an obviously continuity of melodic line; and too in the music of Peter Maxwell Davies through his use of one technical facility which governs all of his compositions, the fact that all of his large-scale music is governed by one tonal centre and his developmental and transformation processes which are firmly founded in a post-Wagnerian tradition. Therefore, the impact of Wagnerism upon music across the globe should not be underestimated.

Wagner went through a long, drawn-out acceptance in England, with his music being played sporadically between 1830 and 1870. As was common in English concerts, his works were heard mainly in excerpts (hardly surprising considering the length...) and initially, only instrumental sections of the operas were performed – for the orchestral music was deemed just about accessible to the concert-going public – any of Wagner's huge chorus numbers would have almost certainly crossed the line of civility!

Later in the century, more or less complete scenes with soloists and occasionally choruses were presented. In London, his operas were staged beginning with the *Flying Dutchman* in 1870, *Rienzi* in 1879 and the *Ring*, *Tristan and Meistersinger* all in 1882. In 1877, there was a Wagner Festival in London with the composer present, which was sold out, with many prominent English composers in attendance, Elgar being one of them. Hans Richter conducted all of these concerts. Further performances followed and Richter's conducting of Wagner became a fixture on the London scene.

Wagner's music was very popular amongst the musical elite in England from the 1860s onwards. Parry, Stanford and Mackenzie all had a dabble with Wagnerian methods of structure and scale, but the composer who assimilated Wagnerism most fully

was, surprisingly, Elgar. Elgar was certainly aware and perhaps even part of the Wagner 'mania' already described and this is reflected in a programme note that he wrote for a performance of Humperdinck's cantata *Die Wallfahrt nach Kevelaar* which he conducted with the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society on 7 May 1898:

In Hansel and Gretel...Humperdinck employed the 'representative theme' in quite as elaborate a way as Wagner, illustrating character and idea in as marked a manner. In the present work, the same intricacy is displayed; not, be it noted, the intricacy of the mere contrapuntist, but elaboration abounding in poetic and suggestive touches.¹²

For Elgar, it seems that Wagner was always to be found lurking in a dark corner, just out of sight, but crucially present nevertheless.

A Debate of Indifference

This project originally started at the premiere of Anthony Payne's elaborations of Elgar's Third Symphony, at the Barbican Hall on 15 February 1998 when I was an A level student. I remember sitting in the auditorium and being astounded by the sound that washed over me, for I knew that it was not entirely what I was expecting. I did not know Elgar's oeuvre as well as I do now, but I recall feeling surprised by the rich, romantic, surprising orchestral score and I wondered if that really was Elgar, or if it was Anthony Payne. From that point onwards, I made it my project to get to know Elgar's symphonies and larger choral works and it soon became apparent that 'that something' I could not place at the premiere was not Anthony Payne at all, but the influence of another composer lurking beneath the surface: Richard Wagner. I assumed 'that something' that seemed so obvious to my young ears must have been picked up on by others well before me, so I started accumulating all the books on Elgar I could get my hands on. These included all the core texts written by Michael Kenney, Jerrold Northrop Moore, Percy Young, Diana McVeagh and Elgar himself and I began to wade through them, expecting to find at least a chapter devoted to the influence of Wagner somewhere. I was

¹² Edward Elgar, *Concert Programme* for the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society (7 May 1898)

disappointed. The further I delved the more confused I became, because whilst there clearly was a debate about the influence of Wagner on Elgar taking place, it was a debate of indifference. There were two reasonably clear sides – on the one hand, there were those, like Kennedy and McVeagh who acknowledged the Wagner link but refused to say exactly how the music was post-Wagnerian; and on the other, those who simply refused to believe an Englishman like Elgar could have been led astray by such a nasty individual – after all, Elgar’s melodies came from the shape of the Malvern Hills, just like the composer told us. I simply could not understand that something so seemingly obvious was being so studiously ignored.

I found myself becoming increasingly frustrated by the situation and in some ways, I felt more frustration with those musicologists and biographers who had acknowledged Wagner’s presence but had done nothing with it. Instead of being able to learn about why a man who seemed to epitomise ‘Englishness’ in music at the turn of the century was actually as much a post-Wagnerian as say, Berg, I was only to be comforted by excerpts like this:

Wagner of course was an inescapable influence on every composer of the rising generation in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. Elgar spent his savings on seeing Wagner abroad; Vaughan Williams took his wife on honeymoon to Berlin in 1897 so that he could hear *The Ring* without cuts; Cecil Sharp and Gustav Holst were Wagner addicts and so were many more. That a *Parsifal* atmosphere can be breathed in *Gerontius* is hardly to be denied, but Gounod and Massenet are there too. Wagner’s influence on Elgar was attributed from *King Olaf* on wards to Elgar’s use of the system of leitmotifs, or leading (representative) themes, which dominates *The Ring*. But in the Musical Times of October 1900 he disposed of this theory: ‘I became acquainted with the representative-theme long before I had ever heard a note of Wagner, or seen one of his scores. My first acquaintance with the leitmotiv was derived (in my boyhood) from Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* and the system elaborated from that.’ He made a neat point to Jaeger who, at the beginning of their correspondence in 1897, was evidently talking in

Wagnerian similes: 'It is nice to be told I am a sheep', Elgar wrote, 'but after all a bell-wether is something.'¹³

Leaving Elgar's own comments to one side for now, this kind of explanation is totally unsatisfying. It is not fair to say that *Gerontius* is, naturally, influenced by *Parsifal*, without saying how it is, why it is and most importantly, where it is. This example from Michael Kennedy is just one in a very long list of such examples from authors on this side of the 'debate' and I do not blame him for being flippant about this point. Kennedy is not a musicologist and his biographies on Elgar are incredibly informative. However, I think it is a little misleading to write biography and hint towards the musical, for whilst this whets the appetite for a while, it leaves the musician feeling unsatisfied. Robert Anderson is slightly more informative but again, chooses not to pursue the Wagnerian question very far, choosing instead to pad his work out with biography and read that explicitly into Elgar's works instead,

Elgar's admiration for and debt to Wagner has been well documented. The two works for which his veneration seems never to have wavered were *Tristan* and *Die Meistersinger*, which happens to contain in Act 3 the most moving of all *Tristan* quotations, when Hans Sachs expresses no desire to share the fate of King Mark. Elgar first heard the *Tristan* prelude and 'Liebestod' at a Crystal Palace concert in memory of Wagner on 3 March 1883. Against the programme mention of the 'Liebestod' he wrote: 'This is the finest thing of W's that I have heard up to the present. I shall never forget this.'...In his letter to Littleton of 13 April 1911 Elgar wrote about the Second Symphony finale: 'the whole of the sorrow is smoothed out & ennobled in the last movement, which ends in a calm &, I hope & intend, elevated mood.' And he added: 'The last movement speaks for itself I think: a broad sonorous, rolling movement throughout.' As so often, though, Elgar did not give everything away. That last *crescendo* and *fp* at the end of the movement indicate two chords that, just for a moment, in the midst of radiant diatonics, conjure the world of Wagner's *Tristan*. It is indeed Elgar's heartfelt homage to all that Tintagel meant to him.

¹³ Kennedy (1982) p. 76

Diana McVeagh's study of Elgar is much more comprehensive on many counts, but falls surprisingly short when it comes to Wagner. McVeagh's sections on Wagner are tentative and far from comprehensive:

His orchestral sound is often compared with Wagner's. It is true that both composers indulged in large orchestras, but once the similarity is admitted the differences of detail are more strikingly apparent. For where Wagner's tone is fully saturated, Elgar's glints and glistens. Elgar himself said that he learnt more about orchestration from Delibes than Wagner, though few of Elgar's characteristics colour the music of *Sylvia* and *Coppelia*.¹⁴

McVeagh's observations are perceptive, but it is a pity that they are not pursued in a rigorous manner. McVeagh does devote a page to Wagnerian harmonic comparisons with Elgar, but they give the impression of being statements of fact, rather than following the line of argument – as if she is merely reiterating a point others have made beforehand.

To attempt to refute or to deny Elgar's harmonic indebtedness to Wagner would be simply perverse. Elgar inherited from Wagner the full evocative vocabulary of chromaticism, decorated by suspensions, appoggiaturas, altered notes, and passing-notes, often con-currently in several parts; of delayed, or eliminated resolutions, of free handling of high-powered chords, by which to express in dissonance from the most delicate to the most intense every degree of romantic emotion.¹⁵

All of these observations are true and interesting, but they are not developed in any way as McVeagh moves on to discuss moments in the cantatas and oratorios that are copied from Wagner. This point is reiterated in an article written much later, published in the recently published *Elgar Companion*. However, even at this stage, we do not get a sense that McVeagh finds the Wagnerian aspect of Elgar's works very interesting at all as she recycles her ideas, only developing them slightly,

¹⁴ Diana McVeagh, *Edward Elgar His Life and Music* (London: J. M Dent & Sons LTD, 1955) p. 158

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 197

In 1892 he resumed work on *The Black Knight*. When the sable Knight rides in to the fight, the King's castle begins to rock to a sequence of chromatic chords (four bars before K) markedly similar to the version of 'magic sleep' which destroys Valhalla in the final orchestral bars of *Götterdämmerung*. Later in 1892 Elgar had the chance to visit Bayreuth, where he heard *Tristan*, *Die Meistersinger* and (twice) *Parsifal*. In *The Light of Life* (1896) the orchestral interlude three bars after C, over which Elgar wrote the unsung words 'And he worshipped Him', is harmonically close to *Parsifal* Act 3 scene 2, where Kundry washes the redeemer's feet. The phrase became loaded with emotional significance for Elgar. Such similarities – and there are others – are almost certainly subconscious. His admiration for the *Meistersinger* quintet must have encouraged his arching melodies with their triplets toed over strong beats, their appoggiaturas, and sinuous inner parts.

This kind of observation is much more in line with the developments Peter Dennison discussed in his article written twenty years earlier, published in *Music and Letters*.¹⁶

The other side of this indifferent debate proves equally frustrating. For many years, Elgar scholarship, out of favour amongst the academic elite, has been pushed along by the enthusiastic efforts of Jerrold Northrop Moore and Percy Young, amongst others.¹⁷ Whilst there is undoubtedly a significant place for biographies and character testimonials, biography will only get you so far. There is always the danger that an author will fall into the trap of implying that biography can or has informed great art. Indeed, Northrop Moore does this on many occasions across the biographies he has written. In his most recent biography, *Elgar Child of Dreams*, Moore has written about an early work of Elgar's, 'Humoreske – a tune from Broadheath', composed in 1867:

The raw material of propulsion is repetition. Edward applies repetition not only to the tune's rhythm: he uses it again to shape the melody. The falling interval of a fifth, beginning in bar 2, repeats and repeats in downward steps. Repeating a single melodic shape in different positions is a sequence...So it is like the long profile of the Malvern Hills, rising

¹⁶ Peter Dennison, 'Elgar and Wagner', *Music and Letters*, Vol. 66 (April, 1985) pp. 93-109

¹⁷ See, Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar on Record*, (London: EMI/OUP, 1974); Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: a Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984); Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar Child of Dreams* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004); Percy M. Young, *Elgar O. M.: A Study of a Musician* (London, 1955; revised 1973)

suddenly from the Severn plain to dominate the prospect westward from Worcester, and from every direction. Elgar was to live most of the first half of his life within their sight, and would return there at the end. And sequence-writing would make the king-post of mature Elgarian melody: he would become perhaps the greatest composer of sequences since Bach.¹⁸

Until recently, Elgar studies seems to have fallen into two categories: biographies that encompass his life and works and testimonials of the composer's character and it is normally the 'life and works' texts that comment on Elgar's post-Wagnerian tendency, whilst the character testimonials just ignore it. As such, little space has been devoted to the close analysis of individual compositions. However, the tide has started to turn. In the last few years, academics have started finding Elgar's music interesting again and there has been a torrent of articles, conference papers and monographs published on Elgar's works, looking at them from fresh perspectives. Nevertheless, not one of these recent studies has provided anywhere near the comprehensive study of Wagnerian tendencies to satisfy my quest. Charles McGuire, in his excellent monograph, *Elgar's oratorios: The Creation of an Epic Narrative*, started down the difficult path of discussing the oratorios in relation to the complex and sometimes flawed narrative techniques Elgar chose.¹⁹ In his study, McGuire also dealt with some ideas of leitmotif development across the four oratorios and took the idea of Wagnerism to a previously unprecedented level.²⁰ However, as my thesis attests, leitmotif technique is just a small part of Elgar's post-Wagnerian methodology and McGuire had his own agenda: to put Elgar scholarship back on the map. Which he did. Since this monograph, many articles have been published in leading journals and edited collections that deal, in part, with Elgar's latent Wagnerism. Another excellent example is Byron Adams' article in *The Elgar Companion*, 'Elgar's Later Oratorios: Roman Catholicism, Decadence and the Wagnerian Dialectic of Shame and Grace'.²¹ Whilst being a highly provocative article, it deals eloquently with issues of Wagnerism in art at the end of nineteenth century in

¹⁸ Jerrold Northrop Moore (2004) p. 6

¹⁹ Charles Edward McGuire, *Elgar's Oratorios: The Creation of an Epic Narrative* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002)

²⁰ *Ibid.*, see pp. 64

²¹ See, Byron Adams, *Elgar's Later Oratorios: Roman Catholicism, Decadence and the Wagnerian Dialectic of Shame and Grace*, *The Elgar Companion*, edited by Daniel Grimley and Julian Rushton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) pp. 81-106

England: that to be Wagnerian was shameful, decadent and homosexual. Like McGuire, Adams has his own agenda and admirably promotes gender studies in a new and challenging manner. However, in some ways, the validity of the post-Wagnerian analysis in Adams' article seems to be a means to an end – a way of proving that gender bias was inherent in musical reception of post-Wagnerian works and he perhaps goes too far into the realms of biography when he suggest that Elgar had homosexual inklings.²²

Nevertheless, the Elgar-ball is now well and truly rolling. Academics are finally becoming interested in English music and in Elgar in particular, especially since we celebrate 150 years since Elgar's birth in 2007. Elgar's music is being given the academic consideration it so truly deserves and I hope that my study will find its place amongst this recent scholarship. I wish it to be seen as an extension to the work Peter Dennison started in 1985, in his excellent article in *Music and Letters*, 'Elgar and Wagner'. In this article, Dennison noted the astonishing similarities between some of the motifs found in Elgar's early choral works and Wagner's music dramas. He proposed that because of the amount of Wagner's music Elgar was playing, listening to and studying in score-form, it was all but inevitable that some of it would seep into his own composition. And his case is very convincing. Dennison finishes his article saying he has but scratched the surface of an area of Elgar scholarship that could potentially become a thesis in itself: and it is my hope that this thesis will be it.²³

Academic Breakdown

The present study will not attempt to fill in all of the scholarly gaps, but will frame Elgar's entire compositional output in terms of their long ignored, post-Wagnerian context. Only by isolating the influence Wagner's music exerted over Elgar and tracing exactly how it was digested and assimilated will it be finally possible to appreciate how truly revolutionary Elgar's methods were and still are. As this study will show, each of Elgar's compositional methods was gleaned from a number of sources of which the most important was Wagner's scores. By breaking down just three of these methods with post-Wagnerian analytic tools reveals that Elgar's orchestration, harmonic language and

²² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²³ Dennison (1985) p. 107

understanding of Leitmotif systems provided him with the necessary tools he needed to create musical epics of Wagnerian proportions. As he was attempting to create an English response to Wagner's music dramas, Elgar brought aspects of Wagner's language to each of his compositional genres, which in turn allowed him a greater degree of musical expression.

Given the complex and vast subject-matter, I will explore Wagner's influence over six chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of Wagner's influence and their context. The thesis is ultimately separated into two main sections: the first deals with the influence of Wagner in England at the end of the nineteenth century, whilst the second part is devoted to analytical studies of Elgar's most Wagnerian compositional methods.

Chapter I deals with Wagnerism in England and focuses on specific, important individuals who made Wagner's acceptance a little easier. The contributions of David Irvine, George Bernard Shaw, Rutland Boughton, Ernest Newman, William Ashton Ellis and Edward Dannreuther will be included in a larger discussion concerned with the changing political landscape in Britain, which allowed Wagnerism to rise to such prominence.

Chapter II focuses on Elgar's contact with Wagner's music and the way in which he was able to absorb Wagnerian methodologies and make them his own. This chapter demonstrates the importance of Elgar's early years in Hereford and Worcester and the type of music he was exposed to from an early age. By playing, listening to and studying Wagner's scores in concerts and performances in England and Germany, Elgar was able to educate himself (along with technique books he was given from his father's music shop) and the distillation of his experiences of Wagner's music during his long apprenticeship lay at the foundation of his own artistic growth in these years and remained a significant component of the mastery of his maturity.

In connection with this, Chapter III takes a closer look at several British composers, contemporary with Elgar, who all fell under the Wagnerian 'spell' and highlights the many ways in which their music imitated Wagner's. This chapter seeks to point out that

whilst Elgar was able to fully absorb Wagner's methods and use them to enhance his own musical voice, many of Elgar's contemporaries failed due to issues of plagiarism – Wagner's methods were never wholly absorbed so that the musical voice was personal and new. Works by Parry, Boughton, Mackenzie and Bantock will be used to illustrate this argument.

Moving into the second main part, the focus shifts from British contemporaries to Elgar's own music. Central to this section's discussion will be Wagner's effect on Elgar's music and Elgar's reaction to be labelled Wagnerian.

Chapter IV deals with that most crucial of Wagnerian methodologies: the leitmotif. Using the work recently done by Charles McGuire on *The Light of Life*, *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* as a starting point, the chapter traces the development of Wagner's leitmotif system across Elgar's four oratorios. It will initially highlight problems terminology can cause and then move on to trace thematic development in three oratorios. Whilst dealing critically with the claims McGuire makes regarding development across all of the oratorios, it will be argue that it is crucial to compare the earlier *Light of Life* with *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom* to fully trace the staggering amount of development that occurred over the course of the intervening years. It will be argued that in *The Light of Life*, Elgar was not able to manipulate leitmotifs across the musical texture and as a result, the motifs are much closer to reminiscence themes. However, by the time Elgar came to compose *The Apostles*, Elgar's understanding of how to command and extend leitmotifs had advanced so significantly that, like Wagner's leitmotifs, Elgar's greatly aid the communication of his plot and structural climaxes.

Chapter V turns to focus on Elgar's use of chromatic harmony. This chapter uses theories of chromatic harmony developed by Kurth, Schenker, Lorenz and Riemann to demonstrate the true extent of Elgar's rather extreme use of chromatic musical language. Despite Elgar being perceived as a primarily diatonic composer, this chapter looks at chromaticism on two levels: the first traces Elgar's use of the Tristan chord across his compositions, and concludes that although resolution is achieved in a different way to

Wagner, Elgar deliberately used the Tristan chord (or half-diminished seventh chord) to highlight moments of anguish, tension or despair, but also in situations where the chord itself is surrounded by such diatonic harmony that it can go undetected without close listening. This first level will draw primarily of the writings of Ernst Kurth. The second level of chromaticism looks at Elgar's interpretation of Wagner's patterning of keys across *The Apostles* and concludes that Elgar intentionally used certain chromatic key associations as a way of binding the tonal narrative together. Analytical works of this sort almost always combine associative keys with clear long-range tonal patterning and will draw on the work of Lorenz, Bailey and Lewin to show that Elgar achieved the same distinctions Wagner had in *The Ring* and *Parsifal*.

Chapter VI is chiefly concerned with Elgar's legendary method of orchestration. Elgar's orchestration techniques are openly acknowledged as being amongst the best the world has ever known and in this chapter, the idea is put forward that these skills were learnt from hearing, playing and studying Wagner. Focusing mainly on Elgar's techniques of dovetailing, development from small building blocks of sound and Klangfarbenmelodie in the symphonies, specific moments of brilliance are highlighted and compared directly with sections from *Tristan* and *Parsifal*. Elgar's mosaic-like methods are also dissected, showing a close affiliation to Wagner's own building-block style of creation.

Following these chapters of analysis, a concluding Finale will reflect on the main findings of each chapter, highlighting the focal issues discussed and drawing them together, so as to ultimately prove that Elgar's works can and should be viewed as Music Dramas for the English sensibility. Isolating Elgar's methods of composition in this way and examining them individually will allow a deeper, more measured understanding of the complexities, contradictions and subtleties of the melding of English music with post-Wagnerian methodologies in the late Victorian age, as well as highlight the clash of conservative musical genres with more modern musical methods. These investigations will show how Elgar transcended The English Musical Renaissance's limitations by combining the new and progressive with traditional forms in truly unique manner. Thus,

Elgar should be recognised as one of the most post-Wagnerian of all composers, certainly in Great Britain, perhaps even across Europe.

PART A: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

CHAPTER I: WAGNERISM IN ENGLAND

1.0: Introduction

When Richard Wagner's music first became known in Great Britain during the 1840s and 1850s, it was regarded as an intrusion upon the polite Mendelssohnian musical culture of the day.²⁴ Wagner's works were described as sinful, meretricious, unmelodious and insufferably long; at best, they were, in the words of Longfellow, 'strange, original and somewhat barbaric.'²⁵ While the difficulty of understanding this new music accounted for some of the initial resistance, Wagner's compositions were immediately suspect for non-aesthetic reasons as well: they were denounced as 'atheistic, sexually immoral and tending to further socialism and the throwing of bombs.'²⁶

Wagner's music dramas unceasingly celebrated spiritual awareness, the themes of redemption and love, and the possibility of improving humanity. Many British Wagnerians, faced with the intellectual confusion of nineteenth century theology and the prestige of positivist science, took Wagner's mythology, which needed no historical or scientific verification, as a basis for religious feeling and regarded this mythology either as compatible with Christianity or as essentially Christian. Other Wagnerians interpreted his musical symbols theosophically or were heartened by his vitalism. Wagner's works also denounced modern industrial society for its pursuit of purely utilitarian ends. British Wagnerians realised that they lived in an age of unprecedented prosperity that was unevenly distributed. They shared an apolitical concern for social ethics and valued the music dramas for their moral condemnation of greed, corruption, tyranny and materialism. Only a few, quite distinguished Wagnerians, chief among them Bernard Shaw and Rutland Boughton, were also attracted to political activism in a socialist vein.

²⁴ Anne Dzamba Sessa, *At Wagner's Shrine: British and American Wagnerians*, in *Wagnerism in European Culture*, edited by David C. Large and William Weber (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) p.

²⁵ James Taft Hatfield, *New Light on Longfellow, with Special Reference to His Relations with Germany* (Boston, 1993) p. 128

²⁶ Maddox Ford, *Memories and Impressions* (New York, 1979) p. 92

1.1: Wagner's Presence

The acceptance of Wagnerism in late nineteenth-century England occurred within both intellectual and musical arenas. In the former, it was brought about by Wagner apologists and interpreters, including George Bernard Shaw and William Ashton Ellis; in the latter, by the growing acceptance of his music into everyday English concert life. Each has some bearing on the other and each had an effect on composers in England at the time. Nevertheless, at the outset, Wagner's impact seems to have been felt more from a theological and philosophical point of view than a musical one:

What remains unusual and controversial is that the popularity of Wagner amounted to a 'mania' that exceeded the honour due his musicianship. It is impossible to explain on artistic grounds alone why Wagner was considered worthier than other great composers by so many nineteenth-century Englishmen. Why should there have been Wagnerism but not an 'ism' for Mozart or Beethoven? The fact is that Wagner was a cultural phenomenon; his music dramas seemed to offer a philosophic and psychic inspiration to late Victorians in a changing and challenging era.²⁷

The scale of Wagnerism in Continental Europe and Britain was such that, in the late 1880s and 1890s, it was identified in some German criticism as *the* representative characteristic of contemporary European culture.

Whilst George Bernard Shaw stressed the pertinence of Wagner's work to the political and economic conditions of the late nineteenth century, seen most obviously in his *The Perfect Wagnerite*, others perceived Wagnerism itself as a uniquely revealing cultural trend. Nietzsche termed Wagner the 'greatest name of European decadence', whilst the physician and journalist Max Nordau expostulated: 'As it is the most widely diffused, so is Wagnerism the most momentous aberration of the present time.'²⁸ To these, and to many commentators, Wagnerism was a phenomenon indicative of fundamental cultural conditions and values. Whether or not Wagner's works themselves

²⁷ Anne Dzamba Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (Rutherford: Fairleigh, Dickinson University Press, 1979) p. 20

²⁸ Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993) p. 38

were perceived as distanced from the 1890s by a temporal gap – for British commentators for example, by a national difference - Wagnerism became a medium through which to evaluate the contemporary cultural context as well as that of Wagner himself.

Wagnerism was examined as a force that had shaped the aesthetic theories, intellectual currents and material conditions of *fin-de-siecle* culture.

English Wagnerism made a much later start than Continental Wagnerism.

Despite suffering agonies in Paris, Wagner's visits there left the city a hive of busy

Wagnerites determined to promote both the man and his music on the one hand and anti-Wagnerites who kept the name alive in the press with their grumblings on the other.²⁹

From the time of the '*Tannhäuser* Scandal' of 1861, Wagnerism flourished in literary and intellectual, as well as purely musical, circles and became a topic of the day in the public life of the arts. However, Wagner's three visits to England made far less impression on the English mind and were less decisive for the success of his cause.³⁰ The first visit in 1839, made no impression whatever except perhaps on the official at the Houses of Parliament whom he bewildered by asking in voluble German to be directed to Lord Bulwer Lytton, the author of *Rienzi*. The second visit in 1855, two years before Elgar's birth, to conduct the Royal Philharmonic Society as a substitute for Berlioz, introduced him to English audiences and critics, who seem to have been divided in much the same proportions as their continental counterparts – the younger more receptive welcoming him, others not proving so generous.³¹ Among those favourably impressed were Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, who received and commended the composer even though he was still in political exile, wanted by the Saxon police.

By the time of Wagner's third visit in 1877, when Elgar was twenty, the critical battle had been fought and very largely won. The leader of the anti-Wagner opinion, J. W. Davison of *The Times*, had been to Bayreuth for the first *Ring Cycle* the previous year and had written the tired despatches of an ailing and defeated man. Accompanying him on his expedition had been his friend Francis Hueffer, soon to succeed him at *The Times*, who happened to be the leader of Wagnerite opinion. Hueffer had come to England from

²⁹ Sessa (1979) p. 64

³⁰ F Rowbotham, 'The Wagner Bubble', in *Nineteenth Century*, 24, p. 506

³¹ Recounted in G. B Shaw, *London Music in 1888-1890 as Heard by Corno di Bassetto* (London, 1937)

Germany with a doctorate in philosophy and an evangelical enthusiasm for Wagner and Schopenhauer. Wagner entered the wider world of English culture largely through Hueffer, so that when he returned for the last time to England, to raise money for Bayreuth, he found his public large and well informed, including such people as George Eliot and Edward Burne-Jones.

Fully staged productions of Wagnerian opera in London, which began with the *Flying Dutchman*, sung in Italian in 1870, reached a peak in 1888 with the initial performances of *Tristan and Isolde*, *The Meistersingers of Nuremberg* and *The Ring Cycle*, all sung in German. Charles Santley reminisced that in 1876 he sang the title roll of *Lohengrin* not only in the capital but also on a strenuous tour of fifty performances in the provinces.³² In the critical commentary on these productions, two features of Wagner's English reception stand out. Firstly, London audiences included a 'Teutonic element', Germans who by their example instructed astonished patrons that singers were secondary to the work they were interpreting and should be applauded only at the end of the performance.³³ Secondly, critics reported the rise of a more earnest and educated audience from the business classes who enjoyed opera in the original languages and gradually infiltrated the subscription lists.³⁴

By the 1880s, Wagner had become an 'ism' and Germans living abroad, the artistic avant-garde and the idealistic guardians of culture had all played a role in his rise to favour in the English-speaking world. Though Wagner's theories, music and personality would always remain repulsive to some and subjects for satire to others, by the last decades of the century the public on the whole heard his music frequently and with pleasure.³⁵ The acceptance of Wagner's musical style, however, was only the beginning: the popular enthusiasm for Wagner grew into a mania that had little to do with

³² Percy Scholes, *The Mirror of Music*, 2 vols. (London, 1947) I: 253

³³ William Ashton Ellis, 'Richard Wagner's Prose', in *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association*, 19 (1892-93) p. 232

³⁴ *Your Dear Letter: Private Correspondence of Queen Victoria and the Crown Princess of Prussia*. Edited by Roger Fulford (New York, 1971) p. 232

³⁵ For satire see Gustav Holst's score, *The Perfect Fool* (London, 1923); Kate Douglas Wiggin (1914) *Bluebeard: A Musical Fantasy* (New York, 1914) pp. vi-vii; R. C Trevelyan, *The New Parsifal* (London, 1914); Rupert Brookes, *Wagner* in *The New Oxford Book of Light Verse*, edited by Kingsley Amis (Oxford, 1978) p. 215; Anti-Wagnerian commentators included H. Hime, *Wagnerism: A Protest* (London, 1882); J. F Rowbotham, 'The Wagner Bubble', in *Nineteenth Century*, 24, pp. 501-12; H. Badger, *Wagner and His Work* in *Music* (Chicago, 1893) pp. 651-65; D. G Mason, *Music in My Time* (New York, 1893); R. W. S Mendl, *Confessions of an anti-Wagnerian* in *From a Music Lover's Armchair* (London, 1926) pp. 120-27

admiration for his musicianship and was more to do with the kind of aesthetics expounded by his music and writings. It is impossible to explain on aesthetic or formal grounds alone why so many nineteenth-century Britons should have considered Wagner to be worthier than other great composers. The explanation lies in his role as cultural critic and moralist. His passionate analysis of the weaknesses of nineteenth-century civilisation, buoyed by his own art, was certainly the source of his extraordinary appeal.

Debate on this larger significance of Wagnerian music dramas and moral thought rose to unprecedented heights in the 1880s and 1890s, leaving its imprint on the new generations. The London Wagner Society, formed in 1873 to support performances of Wagner's music, had well and truly served its purpose. In 1888 English Wagnerians formed a new Wagner Society and, inspired by the Parisian *Revue wagnérienne*, began to publish a quarterly journal called *The Meister*. The main thrust of *The Meister*'s message was that Wagner's significance was not just musical but also philosophical and its editor, William Ashton Ellis, believed that through his art, Wagner 'fought his way to social problems of the deepest interest and to the vital questions of religion and a higher world'. He continued that 'had he never composed one bar of music and never conceived one scene of drama, his prose works alone would have ranked him among the foremost thinkers of his day.'³⁶ Though in less extravagant terms than *The Meister*, other authors acknowledged Wagner's philosophical significance: Theadore Thomas agreed that Wagnerian music drama appealed to the modern spirit and attracted even the less musical to the opera and concert stage,³⁷ whilst Clare Benedict also observed that Wagner's following included many 'fine, unmusical souls who asked nothing better than to spend their strength and substance serving his ideas.'³⁸ Indeed, even Sir Thomas Beecham remarked upon the linking of Wagner with every 'recent 'ism' in philosophy, politics and even hygiene.'³⁹

The Meister's characterisation of Wagner's appeal suggests a dichotomy between two kinds of Wagnerians, some who emphasised the social implications of Wagner's works and others who stressed spiritual, esoteric, or 'inner' meanings. The former

³⁶ *The Meister*, I (1888) p. 3

³⁷ Joseph A. Mussulman (1971) p. 147

³⁸ Clare Benedict (1913) p. 8

³⁹ Thomas Beecham, *A Mingled Chime* (repr., Westport, Conn., 1976) p. 56

considered themselves practical, secular and rational; the latter were considered to be a traditionally pious, occultist and connoisseurs of emotion. Curiously, Wagnerians of both groups thought themselves progressive and modern-minded. In Britain, the most obvious representations of the first group were David Irvine, George Bernard Shaw, Rutland Boughton and, to a lesser degree, Ernest Newman. The second group mainly consisted of William Ashton-Ellis and Edward Dannreuther and it is to these individuals and their contributions we now turn.

1.2 David Irvine (1856-1930)

Scotsman David Irvine wrote six individual volumes on Wagner and his music dramas. As devoted a disciple of Bayreuth, Irvine interpreted Wagner to a different end. Irvine considered churches and conservative political regimes intellectually, morally and socially bankrupt. He saw himself as a proponent of liberalism, by which he meant 'a compound of radical politics, Protestantism and Rationalism.'⁴⁰ The liberalism of his day, however, lacked a firm basis in moral philosophy. It was more a creed that relieved mankind of its moral responsibility 'in the belief that things will come right of themselves.'⁴¹ Excessive individualism was its cardinal weakness. Believing that moral progress required a more secure foundation than that of biological evolution, Irvine devoted his energies to supplying the missing philosophy in two treatises, *Philosophy and Christianity* (1905) and *Metaphysical Rudiments of Liberalism* (1911), in addition to the six volumes on Wagner.⁴²

Irvine considered Schopenhauer and Wagner 'the leading geniuses of Liberalism.'⁴³ Like Wagner, Irvine believed that the essence of religion was revealed through art and Wagner's operas, he believed, were the artistic analogue of

⁴⁰ David Irvine, *Metaphysical Rudiments of Liberalism* (London, 1911) p. xiii. Irvine is mentioned in *Cosima Wagner's Diaries, 1869-1883*, 2 vols. (New York, 1978-1980) pp. 2:560, 616, 1100, as 'David Irvine', a monied Scot who made contributions to the Society of Patrons.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. xxvi

⁴² David Irvine, *Philosophy and Christianity* (1905); *A Wagnerian's Midsummer Madness* (London: H. Grevel, 1899); *The Badness of Wagner's Bad Luck* (London: Watts & Co., 1912); *Two Essays on Wagner* (London: Watts & Co., 1912); *Parsifal and Wagner's Christianity* (Re-printed by Best Books, 2001); *Wagner's Ring of the Nibelung and the Conditions of Ideal Manhood* (London: H. Grevel. 1897)

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 254

Schopenhauer's message. According to Irvine, in the *Ring Cycle* Wagner portrayed an unconscious struggle between partisans of power for its own sake and believers in life and love, whilst in *Parsifal* the struggle took place within the consciousness of the characters.⁴⁴ *Parsifal* was the greatest artistic embodiment of Schopenhauer's moral philosophy and as Irvine summarised it: 'To combat the egoistic sensual will, there is needed the compassionate and spiritual will. This entire battleground is on earth. Man is both God and Devil.'⁴⁵ For Irvine, the true site of Christianity lay not in the churches or in God, but in the heart of humanity. Irvine, unlike Wagner, had no specific political program; he wrote briefly of the need for socialistic government and democracy but spent much of his time criticising other viewpoints. His 'complete liberal' was not an elected official, or necessarily anyone in power, but an independent philosopher or artist. Nevertheless, he argued that the Schopenhaurian-Wagnerian philosophy he articulated 'was the only means of giving democracy the moral instruction necessary for its unalloyed welfare.'⁴⁶

1.3: George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)

The service of George Bernard Shaw to music criticism in general and to the understanding of Wagner's music in particular is well known and his plays, novels and prefaces are replete with Wagnerian allusions. In relation to his plays, many had Wagnerian overtones: in both *Widowers' Houses* and *Major Barbara*, Shaw offered Wagnerian variations on the themes of capitalism and social justice,⁴⁷ whilst his idea of the 'drama of impassioned thought' reflected his understanding of Wagner's notion of the theatre.⁴⁸ In particular, *Back to Methuselah* was a tribute to Wagner. This quintet of plays was an optimistic legend of evolution, a sort of moral and spiritual science fiction, beginning in the Garden of Eden and ending in the self-completion of human evolution

⁴⁴ Lucy Beckett, *Richard Wagner: Parsifal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

⁴⁵ David Irvine, 'Parsifal' and Wagner's Christianity (London, 1899) p. 351

⁴⁶ David Irvine, *Philosophy and Christianity* (London, 1905) p. 6

⁴⁷ See Anne Dzamba Sessa (1979) p. 59 and J. L. Wisenthal, 'The Underside of Undershaft: A Wagnerian Motif' in *Major Barbara* in *Shaw Review*, 15 (1972) pp. 56-64

⁴⁸ Martin Meisel, *Shaw and Nineteenth Century Theatre* (Princeton, 1963) p. 61

thirty thousand years later. In this respect, Shaw regarded both Wagner's *Ring* and his own *Back to Methuselah* as a reaching forward to a new vitalist art.

However, Shaw's most famous contribution to Wagnerism was *The Perfect Wagnerite*, which was first published in 1889 and had gone through four revised editions by 1923. It argues that blind devotion is 'no true Wagnerism'; the Wagnerite must always comprehend Wagner's ideas. Shaw saw in Wagner's *Ring* 'a poetic vision of unregulated capitalism as it was made known in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century by Engel's *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*.'⁴⁹ For Shaw, the *Ring* was a socialist allegory with 'a most urgent and searching philosophical and social significance.'⁵⁰ Though most other Fabians were unmoved by this interpretation, Shaw insisted that Wagner's Gods, dwarfs and dragons were not medieval but modern symbols.⁵¹ *Das Rheingold*, of course, opens with the theft of the gold by an ugly dwarf who renounced love for power. 'Such dwarves are quite common in London,' wrote Shaw; they had enslaved millions of workers.⁵²

The *Ring* satisfied Shaw up to the point where Siegfried shatters Wotan's world-governing spear. The rest of the tetralogy, as far as he was concerned, deteriorated into old-fashioned grand opera and romantic utopianism. By the time the third edition (1913) of *The Perfect Wagnerite* appeared in 1913, Shaw had come up with a new view of what constituted the *Ring*'s anticlimax.⁵³ Between 1850 and 1876, he wrote, that the 'Alberichs' had transformed themselves into the 'Carnegies'. The face of capitalism had changed, growing more complex and more capable of transforming itself. State socialism and welfare capitalism had been anticipated and this left *Siegfried* outdated. Shaken by World War I, his fourth preface from 1922, Shaw saw a new prophetic and pessimistic meaning in *Die Götterdämmerung*. The world war had not invalidated the *Ring*; it had only made the 'Alberichs' richer.

⁴⁹ G. B Shaw, *The Perfect Wagnerite: A Commentary on the 'Nibelung's Ring'* (New York, 1967) p. xvii

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24

⁵¹ According to Shaw, 'the Fabians were inveterate Philistines,' and the society would not publish Wagner's *Art and Revolution*. G. B Shaw in Edward R Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (London, 1963) app. I, pp. 278-79

⁵² G. B Shaw (1967) p. 9

⁵³ L. J Rathner, *The Dream of Self-Destruction: Wagner's 'Ring' and the Modern World* (Baton Rouge, 1979) chap. 4, esp. pp. 159-61, for a discussion of this point.

1.4: Rutland Boughton (1878-1960)

Bernard Shaw was already famous when a young man named Rutland Boughton publicly took him to task over his half-hearted socialist ideals. In Boughton's opinion, Shaw's socialism failed to live up to Wagner's communistic ideals.⁵⁴ There followed a bantering correspondence between the two men that in later years ripened into friendship. Best known today as the composer of the opera *The Immortal Hour*, Boughton worked for forty years on an Arthurian cycle - his version of the *Ring*, which he finally completed in 1945.⁵⁵ Boughton's politics and aesthetics were a rich nineteenth-century blend of the social ideals of Tolstoy, William Morris, Ruskin, Whitman, Edward Carpenter, Marx, Carlyle and Wagner. In 1907 Boughton composed a symphonic setting for 'Midnight', a poem from Carpenter's 'Toward Democracy'. This, according to Boughton's biographer, was the 'first unequivocal statement of his socialist beliefs.'⁵⁶ Poems by Morris and Whitman also received musical settings by Boughton. Some of Whitman's admirers had felt a strong connection between the works of Wagner and of Whitman and had regarded Wagner's operas as *Leaves of Grass* set to music.⁵⁷ Boughton seemed determined to create a 'Whitmanesque' democratic musical art for the English people.

In 1911, Boughton co-authored a Wagnerian tract, unsurprisingly entitled *Music Drama of the Future*. At that time he thought of composing an epic drama in the style of Wagner (which would have required fourteen days to perform) on the subject of the life of Jesus with a modern setting. However, after further reading on the theme of music and democracy, however, he decided that the greatest artists acquired their power not by using the 'alien' symbols of traditional church dramas but by giving expression to the 'oversoul' of their people. 'Then I understood why Wagner had chosen those folk subjects which had been produced by the oversoul.'⁵⁸ Thus, Boughton decided to abandon the Holy Scriptures for national scriptures – the Arthurian legends. At this juncture he was offered a set of original poems on that subject by Reginald Buckley (1882-1919), an eager young writer. Buckley explained that it was Wagner's *Tannhäuser*

⁵⁴ Michael Hurd, *The Immortal Hour* (London, 1962) p. 28

⁵⁵ See pages 82-89 for a study of Boughton's *The Immortal Hour*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25

⁵⁷ Robert D Faner, *Walt Whitman and Opera* (Carbondale, Ill, 1972) p. 116

⁵⁸ Rutland Boughton & Reginald Buckley, *Music Drama of the Future* (London, 1911) pp. 25-26

that first revealed to him a new world and had sent him to the study of Wagner's prose essays. He dreamed of using the English legends as

the quarry from which to hew a large music drama on the lines of Wagner's *Ring*, with Merlin as Britain's Isaiah, Galahad her Parsifal, Arthur her type of manhood. Amid all the talk of 'super-men', in an age of philosophical and artistic healers and quacks, I longed for a dramatic and poetic art, wherein the sane, healthy English might bathe, as in the pure rhythmic seas of Cornwall, loved by all flaming souls, from the Round Table till now.⁵⁹

Boughton and Buckley together proposed a scheme for a 'temple theatre' but this was not to be an English Bayreuth, as some Wagnerians suggested.⁶⁰ Rather it was to be a temple of English art, erected in the centre of an agricultural commune. Boughton and Buckley believed that 'real art can only grown out of real life.'⁶¹ It was their intention to join two honourable types of men: the workman and the artist.⁶² The workman would have room to develop his soul through art and the artist to develop his body in contact with the basic facts of existence. In 1914 they created the Glastonbury Festival with the sole purpose of celebrating opera and drama. Though Glastonbury, which flourished until 1926, was not

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 45

⁶⁰ In 1910 yet another London Wagner Society was founded. One of its objectives (never fulfilled) was to persuade Cosima to allow *Parsifal* to be performed in a London theatre devoted exclusively to Wagner. See *Wagner Association, Report of the Second Annual Meeting and Address of the President*. Edited by Louis N. Perker (London, 1912) Perker was the association's president.

⁶¹ Rutland Boughton & Reginald Buckley (1911) p. 39

⁶² Interestingly, this idea was prevalent throughout the UK at the turn of the century. In 1934, under the direction of an academic from Durham University names Robert Lyon, Ashington (a colliery village about eighteen miles north of Newcastle) formed a painting club called the Ashington Group. This group consisted almost exclusively of miners who had never painted – in many cases had never seen a real painting – before they started gathering in a small hut on Monday evenings. They showed an unexpected amount of talent and attracted a lot of attention to Ashington during the 1930s and 1940s, with frequent articles in national newspapers and magazines, as well as exhibitions in London and other leading cities.

Yet the Ashington painters represented only a small fragment of a greater hunger for betterment in places like Ashington, where most people were lucky to come away with more than a few years of primary education. It is quite astonishing to realise how rich life was and how enthusiastically opportunities were seized in the years before the Second World War. At one time, the town boasted a philosophical society with a busy year-round programme of lectures, concerts and evening classes; an operatic society; a dramatic society; a workers' educational association; a miner's welfare institute with workshops and more lecture rooms; and gardening clubs, cycling clubs, athletics clubs and many others. Even workingmen's clubs, of which Ashington boasted twenty-two at its peak, offered libraries and reading rooms for those who craved more than a pint. The town had a thriving theatre, a ballroom, five cinemas and a concert chamber called Harmonic Hall. When, in 1921, the Bach Choir from Newcastle performed on a Sunday afternoon at the Harmonic Hall, it drew an audience of 2000.

quite the utopian community Boughton had envisaged earlier, it did provide him with the opportunity to use local performers and to produce his own English music dramas.⁶³

Boughton also proposed reforming existing English music festivals along the lines of his Bayreuth ideal. Again his inspiration was Bayreuth. He complained that the typical triennial provincial festival consisted of 'gatherings of folks as are too kind, or too lazy to pot grouse' and offered very tame fare.⁶⁴ The newer festivals that stressed musical competition were apt to be boring as well, he thought. He proposed that competition be limited. Citing Bayreuth and the Ancient Greeks as examples, Boughton suggested that the festival be a public holiday for all. 'Fine art cannot be made or appreciated by toiltorn people.'⁶⁵ Finally, such festivities should be local: musicians should not be hired from other places but rather, as in Germany, local performers should be encouraged. By encouraging such music-making, Boughton believed that he was helping to create a new musical generation.

However, it should not be supposed that Boughton was completely uncritical of Wagner. As far as Boughton was concerned, Wagner's great flaw was his neglect of the chorus. Wagner, he thought, had used choral singing minimally; Wagner's Greek chorus was really his orchestra. In contrast to such a 'choral orchestra', Boughton promised an 'orchestral chorus':

The outstanding reason for this orchestral chorus is to give expression to that national mass feeling to which I have already alluded... The choral orchestra of Wagner has for its function the sense-expression of the primitive wonder [of Life]; but only our orchestral chorus can link-on the feeling and the action to the minds of the audience, and join them in the feeling that the drama is their own, both individually and as a joyously united body.⁶⁶

Wagner's orchestra might suggest character and mood but could not appeal to the higher centres of the mind or raise the level of consciousness from the personal to the universal,

⁶³ Again, see pages 82-89 for a detailed analysis.

⁶⁴ Rutland Boughton, *The Death and Resurrection of the Music Festival* (London, 1913) p. 2

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24

⁶⁶ Rutland Boughton & Reginald Buckley (1911) pp. 31-32

according to Boughton. Boughton never repudiated his youthful enthusiasms, but built on then and undeterred by Shaw's worry that he might produce a second-rate *Ring*, he continued to work on his Arthurian Cycle.⁶⁷ In the completed work, King Arthur has cemented an alliance between church and state. All are corrupt. The masses rebel and are defeated. Eventually, Christian civilisation is saved from the east in a vision of red stars and revolution.⁶⁸ It is ironic that the most popular of these music dramas was *The Lily Maid*: the music drama that focused on the romantic and personal, not political, despite Boughton's Lancelot having a fascist cast of mind.

Boughton was a member of the Communist Party in Britain between 1926 and 1929, and again between 1945 and 1956. The General Strike in Britain precipitated first enrolment in the Party and the Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolt ended his second try. Communism was hardly the orthodox Marxist-Leninist or Stalinist variety but rather it was more in keeping with the spirit of Marx and Wagner, the revolutionaries of 1848. According to his Michael Hurd, Boughton believed that communism was 'the natural goal of Christian civilisation and that peace and goodwill were only to be secured in a world where people live in conditions of approximate material equality'⁶⁹ and so in 1926, Boughton outlined his position on communism and art. As a musician, he was 'continually robbed of the real benefits' of his work and at the same time was the object of charity (sentiments that had been shared by Mozart and Liszt, as well as Wagner). Boughton further argued that the capitalist system permitted only a few artists to create 'artistic dope' for the consumption of the elite and that there would be no room for true appreciation of art 'until all human beings [including musicians] are properly fed, clothed, housed and educated.'⁷⁰ Whilst Boughton's Wagnerism was perhaps more political than musical, the contribution he made to spreading Wagner's ideas and music was wholly significant.

⁶⁷ G. B Shaw, *Collected Letters*, vol. 2, Dan Laurence, ed. (New York, 1972) p. 788

⁶⁸ Michael Hurd (1962) p. 161

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92

1.5: Ernest Newman (1868-1959)

Ernest Newman was perhaps the most important English music critic of the last century and he brought a well-needed coolness and detachment to English Wagnerism. Born William Roberts, he began his professional life in a Liverpool bank and gradually moved into journalism. In an early work, *Pseudo-Philosophy at the End of the Nineteenth Century*, written under the name Hugh Mortimer Cecil, he argued against 'modern forms of unreason'.⁷¹ Dedicated to Charles Darwin, the book was an attack on latter-day defenders of religion and Newman accepted no truce or compromise between the rationalist and the irrationalist. After writing this book and changing his name to Ernest Newman, he went on to apply the standards of scientific inquiry to the field of music criticism and to acquire a considerable reputation for meticulous scholarship combined with distaste for attaching metaphysical or other extraneous meanings to music.⁷² For example, in an article on music and race, Newman took Hubert Parry's study of music history to task for its illogical definition of such concepts as 'Teutonic', 'Gallic', 'Celtic' and 'Slavic'.⁷³ According to Parry, Newman was forced to conclude that Haydn was a Teuton and Mozart was not, 'the upshot of it all being that by 'Teutonic' Dr. Parry simply means earnestness and depth. If a composer has not the spirit, he is not a 'true Teuton.' The formula is utter chaos.'⁷⁴ Newman agreed with John Stuart Mill that racist explanations of national character were vulgar.

Though Newman's musical interests were very broad, he was best known for his studies of opera, and of Wagner in particular. His four-volume biography of Wagner, written between 1926 and 1947, is still the standard biography, despite the availability of new archival material. Newman argued:

⁷¹ Hugh Mortimer Cecil [Ernest Newman], *Pseudo-Philosophy at the End of the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1897) p. 2

⁷² See Ernest Newman, *A Music Critic's Holiday* (New York, 1925)

⁷³ See Ernest Newman, *Music and Race* in *Studies in Music*. Edited by Robin Grey (New York, 1901) p. 302

⁷⁴ Ernest Newman, (1901) p. 307

To appreciate a work of art it is not in the least necessary to subscribe to its author's philosophical or religious opinions; a rationalist can be as deeply thrilled by the *Matthew Passion* as any Christian can be. The "Thesis" of a work of art is the one thing in it that does not concern us as artists. Who is to decide between rival philosophies or sociologies? Personally, I believe that one philosophy is about as good as another, and worse, as the Irishman would say.⁷⁵

The theme of redemption in the operas did not impress Newman, who remarked that he did not understand redemption theologically but only as a feature of the pawn broking business.⁷⁶ As for *Tristan*, he observed that 'really musical people' never saw anything erotic in the music as 'half-musical people' generally did. Nor did half-musical people ever appreciate what to the musician was glorious in *Tristan*.⁷⁷ Newman argued that morals, whether Wagner's or his patrons', should have nothing to do with appreciation of his operas. He recalled, for instance, one critic who remarked, 'in awestricken tones,' that *Parsifal* was the favourite of a set of men who were mixed up in an unwholesome German scandal and 'obviously thought that this discredited Wagner's *Parsifal*'; 'whereas', Newman says, 'it struck me as being very like asking us to give up having breakfast because some horrible murderer or other liked bacon and eggs.'⁷⁸ Newman's scepticism was partly responsible for what one scholar has called the 'critical muddle' he created for himself by denying the conflict between his need to place Wagner within Europe's musical tradition and his desire to recognise the composer's uniqueness in surpassing that tradition.⁷⁹ Wagner's art was a hybrid of music, poetry and drama, often damned and certainly not easily accommodated by traditional music critics. In the end, Newman believed that Wagner would have been better served had he composed symphonic poems.

Newman was no Wagnerian at all in the theological sense of the term, because he did not see Wagnerian opera as the cultural accompaniment to political or social reform.

⁷⁵ Ernest Newman, *Wagner as Man and Artist* (New York, 1960) p. 377

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 378

⁷⁷ Ernest Newman, *Testament of Music*. Edited by Herbert Van Thal (New York, 1963) p. 274

⁷⁸ Ernest Newman (1960) p. 377

⁷⁹ Lucy Beckett, *Wagner and His Critics* in *The Wagner Companion*. Edited by Peter Burbidge & Richard Sutton (New York, 1979) p. 379

To his way of thinking, the rational, secular approach precluded partisanship. Thus he battled to focus criticism on Wagner's music, not his ideas, in order to save it from friends and foes alike. On the other hand, he sometimes seemed to protest too much. In Vera Newman's autobiography of her husband, she noted his emotional response to both the musical form and thematic development of the operas.⁸⁰ Like Shaw, Irvine and Boughton he despised churches, and it is not unlikely that like them, he was also moved by humanistic concerns. *Parsifal*, he said in a deceptively disarming way, was 'simply an artist's dream of an ideally innocent world, purged of the lust, the hatred, the cruelty that deface the world we live and groan in.'⁸¹ Moreover, it was in large part of Newman's intense devotion and steadfast industriousness that kept Wagner before the British public. Let us turn from those who, like Shaw, Boughton or MacKaye, were interested in how Wagner's ideas were applicable to the 'real,' everyday world to the many more British Wagnerians who interpreted the music-dramas to arcane, esoteric or psychological ends.

1.6: William Ashton Ellis (1852-1919)

William Ashton Ellis is a common name in Wagner circles as his translations of Wagner's writings are the standard version used worldwide. He originally trained as surgeon in London but became (in his own words) 'a devotee of Wagner's works and devoured most of the literature then available on the subject' in the mid 1870s.⁸² He resigned his post in 1887, devoting himself over the following twenty-eight years to the single-minded pursuit of Wagner studies. Ellis's first public contribution to Wagner studies was a paper read to the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts on February 3, 1887, and repeated before the London Branch of the 'United Richard Wagner Society' on 10 March. Due to his studies, Ellis was unable to attend the first Bayreuth and he does not mention attending any Wagner concerts before 1877 but his level of involvement in the Wagner craze had assuredly taken hold by the 1880s. In 1884, Dannreuther's original London Wagner Society was reconstituted as the London Branch

⁸⁰ Vera Newman, *Ernest Newman: A Memoir* (New York, 1964) pp. 7, 268-69

⁸¹ Newman (1960) p. 213

⁸² William Ashton Ellis, *Life of Richard Wagner*, v (London 1906), pp.376-7

of the Universal Wagner Society then based in Munich and Ellis joined it the following year.

Ellis had started to receive some notoriety in Wagner circles and this was increased when Ellis confronted the Musical Association on December 13, 1892 with a lecture on Wagner's prose, he declared that earlier translations of Wagner's prose, in particular the 1856 version of *Opera and Drama*, had been 'more-or-less deliberate travesties'; English versions of Wagner's libretti had been 'worthy alone of the immortal Fitzball' and a philosophical appreciation of Wagner had been altogether absent.⁸³ George Bernard Shaw was present and later recounted that he had

looked round for the old gang (if I may use that convenient political term without offence), and looked in vain. [...] [T]he enemy was chapfallen and speechless — that is, if the enemy was present; but I think he had stayed away. At any rate, Mr Ellis's party had the discussion all to themselves.⁸⁴

Shaw is referring, of course, to Ellis's affiliation to the Theosophical Society, of which he was a member. Shaw deeply disapproved of the stance taken of Wagner by Theosophists and as a result, tried to ridicule Ellis's understanding and awareness of the esoteric nature of some of Wagner's later work.

From 1888 to 1895 he edited the journal of the London Wagner Society, *The Meister*, founded primarily to publish English translations of Wagner's more substantial prose works. Throughout its eight years of publication, *The Meister* always bore a truly awful frontispiece attributed to 'Mr Percy Anderson, a well-known artist and steadfast admirer of Richard Wagner's dramas'. Bernard Shaw described it kindly as 'slapdash, and recommended the journal to look to Selwyn Image or Walter Crane for models of title-page designs. But to the end of its days, *The Meister* continued unabashed to carry Anderson's design — 'executed', or so it thought, 'in the style of the German art of the 15th and 16th centuries', as if the English nineteenth century Arts and Crafts movement had never existed. There was another defect Shaw wished to see improved: a complacent

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 380-81

⁸⁴ George Bernard Shaw, *Music in London 1890-94* (London: 1937) Vol. ii, pp.217-8

editorial tone and "an evident indisposition to provoke hostility."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, Shaw could not avoid crowning Ellis with the undisputed laurel: English Wagnerians 'already owe more to [Ellis] than to any other man, except perhaps Mr Dannreuther. And when Mr Ellis's translation of Wagner's prose works is complete, even Mr Dannreuther's claims must give way to those of the editor of *The Meister*.'⁸⁶

As a result of publishing and writing in *The Meister*, Ellis had the idea to translate all of Wagner's writings and it was to become one of his chief undertakings over the following seven years. His other major endeavour was the six-volume *Life of Richard Wagner*, which was initiated as 'an English revision' of the 'authorised' biography by C.F. Glasenapp, but which from the fourth volume omitted Glasenapp's name from the title-page, on the grounds that it had become Ellis's own work. The latter project – flawed, idiosyncratic, but containing a wealth of detail not available elsewhere – remained uncompleted: volume six takes the story only to 1859.

Recognition did not placate Ellis for he also had a vendetta against the late Ferdinand Praeger and he used *The Meister*, rather unprofessionally, to kick back. Praeger had published a biography of Wagner that tended to err on the side of fiction and Ellis strongly disapproved. Ellis decided 'to discard for the nonce the editorial 'we' and criticise *in propria persona*'⁸⁷ in *The Mesiter*, attacking Praeger's factual inaccuracies and also wrote scathing articles about it in the *Musical News*, the *Musical Standard*, and the *Bayreuther Blätter* (via Wolzogen and Chamberlain), throughout 1892, 1893 and 1894. In the end, Breitkopf und Härtel, the publishers of the German version of Praeger's book, withdrew it in March 1895. Even then Ellis was not satisfied. Most of the fifth volume of his *Life of Wagner* is a retelling in 1905 of the whole story. Ellis had failed to get the English version of Praeger's book withdrawn, and the continued availability of "such proved perversions of biography" obsessed him: 'I shall have to continue to expose

⁸⁵ *The Meister*, Vol. I, No. 1 (February 13, 1888), described in 'Our Frontispiece' below the Contents on the un-numbered reverse of the title-page. For Bernard Shaw's comment, see *London Music in 1888-89* (London 1937) p.49. Despite this inauspicious reference, the stage designer Percy Anderson (1851-1928) went on to become associated with Gilbert and Sullivan, Herbert Beerbohm Tree, Hugh Walpole and Elgar.

⁸⁶ Shaw (1937) p.147-8

⁸⁷ *The Meister*, Vol. V, Number 18 (May 22, 1892) p.61

Praeger's misstatements in detail whenever they are of sufficient moment to call for notice on my path, however little it may be to the 'taste' of a few recidivists.'⁸⁸

However, just as Ellis took issue with people with whom he disagreed, so people chose to take issue with Ellis, and Shaw was but one. Many music journalists at the time dislike Ellis's esoteric viewpoint of Wagner's writings and believed that he was misleading the public by printing his opinions as fact. In his notorious fifth volume of the *Life of Wagner* Ellis took sarcastic issue with 'a writer whose name I spare posterity in mercy to himself; as I trust he still is less than half-way through life's journey, I will merely style him "Mr Youngman".'⁸⁹ The substance of Ellis's quarrel with Ernest Newman boiled down to the latter's remark in an article on Berlioz that in the former's *Life of Wagner* ('now in the course of publication') Ellis's editorial style was such that 'The British public is apparently to be treated like a child, and told only so much of the truth about Wagner as is thought to be good for it — or at any rate good for Wagner.'⁹⁰ The offending essay by Newman was published in *The Speaker* for October 1904, though Ellis's rejoinder went to the length of suppressing that journal's name for a specious reason to deprive Newman of the publicity. Newman was to respond to Ellis's attack with disdain and a neat pun: 'Over Mr. Ellis's mixture of clumsy rudeness and heavy Teutonic facetiousness we need not linger; these things have no novelty for Wagner students who have sojourned long in the Ellisian fields of controversy.'⁹¹

Ellis did much to raise the profile of Wagner's music and writings in England during his lifetime and it is because of his passion that we have such detailed and accurate translations of Wagner's writings. His commentaries and articles provide an

⁸⁸ William Ashton Ellis, *Life of Richard Wagner*, V (1905) p.418

⁸⁹ *Life of Richard Wagner*, v (London: 1906), p.430. Ernest Newman's first book under that name was his *Gluck and the Opera* of 1895, and his *A Study of Wagner* of 1899 has already been mentioned (London, 1932). In coining "Mr. Youngman" Ellis would have been unaware that "Ernest Newman" was already a Bunyanesque cognomen adopted by William Roberts (1868-1959). Sessa in *Richard Wagner and the English* (Rutherford: Fairleigh, Dickenson University Press, 1979) p.82, says that William Roberts changed his name to Ernest Newman in 1905, but this is contradicted by Vera Newman's account of her wedding in 1919: 'As E.N. had not changed his name by deed poll I had to be married in both names. I had to say that I took Ernest Newman otherwise William Roberts for my husband, and I thought it sounded so funny that I had difficulty in suppressing a fit of the giggles.' See Vera Newman, *Ernest Newman: a Memoir by his Wife* (London 1963), pp.14-5

⁹⁰ As quoted by Ellis (1936) p.431

⁹¹ *Wagner, Berlioz, Liszt, and Mr. Ashton Ellis*, appendix to the 2nd edition of *Musical Studies*, (London: 1914) p.305. The collection reprints Newman's essay on Berlioz to which Ellis took exception. See also Ernest Newman, *Berlioz, Romantic and Classic*, ed. Peter Heyworth (London 1972), p.23

interesting insight into Wagnerism at the end of the nineteenth century if read alongside Shaw's commentaries. It is instructive, and entertaining, to have to hand Shaw's books *London Music 1888-89* and *Music in London 1890-94* when reading *The Meister*. They form a commentary on almost the exact period of *The Meister's* existence. The 'Notes' generally appearing at the back of each quarterly number of *The Meister* have the greatest interest for anyone curious about Wagner's reception in London. It can safely be said that Ellis contributed them all with the exception of those signed with other initials. On the one occasion when he rose to Shaw's taunt of failing to be provocative (when he first poured scorn on Ferdinand Praeger's *Wagner as I knew him* in May 1892⁹²) no-one took up his invitation to submit an alternative point of view in the next number. The 'Notes' are where reviews of performances in London and Bayreuth are to be found. These are of musical rather than of theoretical interest, and demonstrate that Ellis had a fair critical talent. He provided useful observations on first performances in London of Wagner's works, on singing and on staging. At the 1889 Bayreuth Festival, Ellis was received personally by Cosima Wagner, who apparently 'expressed her complete satisfaction with our London efforts to spread the knowledge of her late husband's many-sided genius'.⁹³

1.7: Edward Dannreuther

Perhaps one of the most remarkable things about Edward Dannreuther, is that his name is almost totally unknown, aptly reflecting the modesty of a man who shunned publicity, preferring to spend his life in semi-seclusion. However, during the late nineteenth century Dannreuther was one of London's, most respected and elevated musicians.

Dannreuther first saw Wagner conduct in Leipzig on 1 November 1862, when Wagner conducted his prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, along with the overture to *Tannhäuser*. His enthusiasm for contemporary music, and especially Wagner, gathered momentum after Dannreuther settled in London, thanks to his contact with like-minded musicians. One of these, Walter Bache, had been a fellow student in Leipzig before moving to Italy in 1861, eventually settling in Rome in 1862. There he had introduced

⁹² *The Meister*, Vol. V, Number 18 (May 22, 1892) pp.61-4

⁹³ *The Meister*, Vol. II, Number 8 (November 7, 1889), p.1

himself to Liszt and taken lessons from him for three years.⁹⁴ Bache returned to London in the spring of 1865 and set about promoting Liszt's music in London. Dannreuther and Bache rapidly renewed their friendship and became closely associated. In July 1865 they performed Liszt's *Les Preludes* in an arrangement for two pianos. A further important concert took place in May 1867, at Collard's rooms in Grosvenor Street, where Bache and his Danish friend Frits Hartvigson gave their first performance in England of Liszt's *Die Ideale*, again on two pianos. At about this time, Dannreuther and Bache decided to form a private association, which they dubbed somewhat ironically 'The Working Men's Society'. Its membership was exclusive. Besides Bache and Dannreuther, there were two other professional pianists, Hartvigson and Karl Klindworth, as well as Alfred Hipkins, a 'lay member', and the painter W. Kämpel, an amateur singer.⁹⁵

The 'elder statesman' of the Working Men's Society was Klindworth, a Liszt pupil who had settled in London in 1854, appearing in public at intervals as a pianist and conductor but, as Dannreuther was to put it, 'in the main living the quiet life of a student and teacher.'⁹⁶ In 1855 Klindworth met Wagner in London and a close friendship ensued. Though lambasted by London critics, among them J. W. Davison who was deeply suspicious of Klindworth's affiliation to the 'new school', Klindworth tirelessly stuck to the task of preparing vocal scores of the entire *Ring Cycle*, and did so in considerable artistic isolation. Dannreuther first met him in summer 1864, when Klindworth played through his arrangement of the first act of *Die Walküre*.⁹⁷ The impression made on the young visitor was indelible. Furthermore, Klindworth's demeanour, single-mindedness, clear vision, musical philosophy and his devotion to Bach, Chopin, Liszt and Wagner, chimed with Dannreuther's own outlook. They became lifelong friends and Dannreuther always considered Klindworth's piano arrangements as

⁹⁴ Jeremy Dibble, *Dannreuther and the Orme Square Phenomenon* in *Music and British Culture, 1785-1914: Essays in Honour of Cyril Ehrlich* (Bashford, C & Langley, L Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 282

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290

⁹⁶ John Warrack and Alan Walker, 'Karl Klindworth', *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 12 April 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

⁹⁷ Jeremy Dibble, *The Death of Culture: German and British Music Before 1914* in *Oh My Horses: Elgar and the Great War* edited by Lewis Foreman (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001) p. 79

the best among the *Clavierauszugler* of Wagner's music dramas; thus comparing them with Bülow's *Tristan*, Tausig's *Meistersinger* and Joseph Rubinstein's *Parsifal*.⁹⁸

The Working Men's Society met weekly to play and criticise individual performances by members. Works by Bach, Beethoven, Chopin, Berlioz, Schumann, Rubinstein and Bulow featured regularly and arrangements for multiple hands added to the entertainment. In December 1867 Dannreuther initiated the group's Wagner crusade with Liszt's *Spinnerlied* transcription from *Die fliegende Holländer*.⁹⁹ Momentum gathered rapidly in January 1868 when Klindworth introduced his arrangements (still in manuscript)¹⁰⁰, scene by scene of *Das Rheingold*. When this was complete, *Die Walküre* was played through in a similar manner.¹⁰¹ Klindworth left for Moscow later that year, but the group continued, Dannreuther playing through a large proportion of *Die Meistersinger* in July, and the following year the whole of *Tristan*. There were also numerous Liszt transcriptions, including the *Tannhäuser* march, and Liszt's E flat concerto.

Dannreuther's enthusiasm for Wagner moved into a new phase of intensity during the brief era of the Working Men's Society. In Munich he had met Hans von Bülow and Wagner, friendships that flourished thereafter,¹⁰² though he also found himself caught up in the web of Wagner's affair with Cosima, including Bülow's wretched position as cuckold and the need to maintain a charade of normality.¹⁰³ In spite of the personal difficulties of 1868, Dannreuther retained a close friendship with both men. After Wagner settled in Bayreuth in April 1872, Dannreuther travelled over to witness the laying of the foundation stone for the Festspielhaus and to hear Wagner conduct Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The occasion sealed his devotion: 'Altogether the impression of his greatness so overwhelmed me', he wrote to Chariclea, 'that I cried like

⁹⁸ Dibble (2000) p. 280

⁹⁹ Recounted in Brian Magee, *Aspects of Wagner* (Oxford: Oxford Paperbacks, 1988) p. 109

¹⁰⁰ It was not until Klindworth had moved to the Moscow Conservatoire that his arrangements of the *Ring* were published.

¹⁰¹ Dibble (2001) p. 86

¹⁰² Dannreuther's high regard for Bülow is evidenced by the presence of Bülow's edition of Beethoven, Bach, Handel, Liszt and Wagner, and full scores of Bülow's orchestral works.

¹⁰³ The awkwardness of Dannreuther's position when Bülow visited London is related by Stanford in his *Pages from an Unwritten Diary* (London; Edward Arnold, 1914), 264

a child.'¹⁰⁴ On returning home he inaugurated the London Wagner Society, which, in spite of its financial precariousness, put on a series of nine concerts in 1873 and 1874,¹⁰⁵ promoting Wagner's music with unprecedented vigour. All profits were sent to support the construction of the Bayreuth theatre. The first programme, given at the Hannover Square Rooms on 19 February 1873, speaks for itself:

<i>Tannhäuser</i>	Overture
<i>Lohengrin</i>	Prelude
	Lohengrin's Song to Elsa
	Introduction to Act III
<i>Die Meistersinger</i>	Prelude
	Introduction to Act III
<i>Die Walküre</i>	Siegmund's Liebeslied
<i>Kaisermarsch</i>	

Vocalist: Franz Diener

Conductor: Edward Dannreuther

Other performances of Wagner's music, notably the *Introduction* and *Liebestod* from *Tristan* and excerpts from *Die Meistersinger*, plus a further four Wagner concerts in the first half of 1874, meant that at last London was playing Wagner's works with an earnestness only previously seen in Continental Europe. In addition, Dannreuther exercised his literary skills with a translation of Wagner's seminal essay *Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft* (published in London in 1873) and a flurry of articles in the *Monthly Musical*

¹⁰⁴ Undated letter from Edward Dannreuther to Chariclea Dannreuther, privately held. See also Dannreuther's comments in his 'Wagner' article for *Grove I*, p. 364

¹⁰⁵ Five concerts were staged in 1873 (19 and 27 Feb., 9 May., 14 Nov., 12 Dec) and four in 1874 (23 Jan., 13 Feb., 13 Mar., 13 May).

Record,¹⁰⁶ which together formed the first serious theoretical assessment of Wagner's dramaturgical and musical ideas in English.¹⁰⁷ Hand in hand with the concert activities of the Wagner Society, Dannreuther's scholarly work was geared to the grand climax of Wagner's career – the first performances of *The Ring* at Bayreuth, then scheduled for 1874. As is well known, the complete performances of *The Ring* were postponed until 1876. During this time Dannreuther took an active interest in the development of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus. Acting as English agent, he arranged for the supply of the 'stage fauna' and the dragon, and was at Bayreuth for the ensemble rehearsals with full orchestra under Hans Richter in summer 1873. He attended the first *Ring* cycle between 13 and 17 August 1876, though was forced to return to London early on account of his health.¹⁰⁸

The heavy deficit incurred by the performances of *The Ring* (around £7500), and Wagner's inability to discharge the debt, led to the organisation of a concert series in London, partly at the Royal Albert Hall, which brought Wagner as Dannreuther's guest between 30 April and 4 June 1877. Dannreuther's home inevitably became the centre of social activity for all fervent Wagnerites, particularly those of the Wagner Society.¹⁰⁹ Orme Square was also an ideal base from which to attend the scheduled concerts at the Albert Hall. From Dannreuther's account of the concerts:

Wagner did not do himself justice. His strength was already on the wane. The rehearsals fatigued him, and he was frequently faint in the evening. His memory played him tricks, and his beat was nervous. Still there were moments when his great gifts appeared of old. Those who witnessed his conducting of the 'Kaisermarsch' at the first rehearsal he attended (May 5) will never forget the superb effect.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ See *Monthly Musical Record*, 2 (1872), 49-52, 66-9, 81-3, 93-6; 'Comments, I: Some remarks on Wagner's Orchestra', *Monthly Musical Record*, 3 (1873), 142-4; 'Comments, II: Alliterative Verse and Music', *Monthly Musical Record*, 4 (1874), 93-5. The articles were later published in book form in 1873 as *Richard Wagner: His Tendencies and Theories*.

¹⁰⁷ Sessa (1979) p. 38

¹⁰⁸ Charles L. Graves, *Hubert Parry: His Life and Works*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1926), i. 168

¹⁰⁹ Sessa (1979) p. 271

¹¹⁰ 'Wagner, Wilhelm Richard', *Grove I*, p. 364

One of the most momentous events during Wagner's stay, and one Dannreuther clearly relished (since he assiduously drew attention to it in his 'Wagner' article for Grove Dictionary), was the composer's reading of the *Parsifal* poem on 17 May. Before the reading, George Eliot and G. H. Lewes came to dine, and Parry, Bache, Frederick Jameson and Alfred Foreman (who translated *The Ring* into English) joined them afterwards to hear Wagner's presentation. 'He read most beautifully', Chariclea confided in her memoirs; 'he had a wonderful, emotional voice which was most beautiful. His whole personality was most fascinating and dwarfed that of anyone else in the room with him. The reading lasted two hours.'¹¹¹ The *Parsifal* gathering had been, at Wagner's request, small and select, but a much larger party was arranged in the studio at Orme Square shortly before Wagner's departure. 'We invited one hundred people...at two days' notice, two hundred came!' Chariclea recalled. 'The crush was so great my husband nearly fainted, everyone had brought a friend.'¹¹²

However, Dannreuther did not always entertain such highbrow guests. One of the main reasons he had moved to Orme Square was due to the amount of space it provided for Dannreuther's amateur choir.¹¹³ The choir was originally established 'for the purpose of affording Amateurs the opportunity of practicing and performing modern choral works of the highest class, particularly such as are not yet universally known.'¹¹⁴ The aim of this organisation was as much educational as practical in that Dannreuther's sights were fixed firmly acquainting singers with new or unfamiliar works by, Schumann, Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner – works that must have seemed to those who signed up for the choir the very pinnacle of modern. The prospectus of 1874-5 proposed, among other works, Schumann's music to *Faust* and *Manfred*, Brahms's *Requiem*, *Triumphlied* motets and *Volkslieder*, Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ* and *La Damnation de Faust*, and Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *Meistersinger*. Most significantly, the choir gave

¹¹¹ Recounted in Sessa (1979) p. 56

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 58

¹¹³ Dibble (2000) p. 290

¹¹⁴ Preliminary Prospectus, 1874-5, for Edward Dannreuther's Choir. Information about Dannreuther's choir is scarce, but a letter to August Manns, dated 31 Oct. [?'873] (now in New York Public Library), shows that a group of eighty singers was envisaged: 'I have upwards of 60 already', he wrote to Manns, 'and only want 80 altogether! But as it is necessary to have more on the list so as to be sure of a fair attendance I shall still be very glad if you will send me...addresses of some of your people.'

Dannreuther the opportunity to disseminate Wagner's music as a complement to his work with the Wagner Society.

Examination of the concert programmes of Dannreuther's chamber choir and solo concerts from Orme Square reveals a striking boldness. In their aim to educate, and in seeking high standards of performance, the concerts continued the elite tradition of Ella's Musical Union. However, it also seems clear that Dannreuther looked on his concerts as more than an educative crusade. Other émigré practitioners, such as the young Dutch pianist William Coenen, and Hermann Franke, had taken up a similar torch in the mid-1870s, but none was so driven by a sense of personal ideology, one which was fuelled by a combination of iconoclasm, artistic isolation, and music's wider context in the world of literature, the visual arts and, most important for spreading the Wagnerian message: philosophy.¹¹⁵ Parry described Dannreuther as:

The most completely original, and independent minded man it is possible to find, and the most absolutely sincere...And this independence and native decisiveness of judgement is one of the things that makes his influence upon his fortunate pupils so great. By no means that alone. For he is one of the most sympathetic and kindly of human beings...; full of enjoyment and humour and bursting into veritable explosions of merriment or pleasure over anything really funny or essentially good and enjoyable. His wide sympathies welcome all imaginable subjects – literary, philosophical, and social, as well as artistic, and his pupils feel as if they expanded under the influence of something much more vital and inspiring than the utmost learning and wisdom of a mere specialist.¹¹⁶

The foundation of Dannreuther's *Weltanschauung* was defined by his imbibing of Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Comte, the humanitarianism of Rousseau, and the writings of Wagner. This is evident in his seminal article on Beethoven for Macmillan's Magazine, in which he sees Beethoven's music 'as powerful an auxiliary in the cause of culture as the study of classical philology',¹¹⁷ a view developed further in his translation of Wagner's Schopenhauer –influenced his essay on Beethoven and his article on Wagner

¹¹⁵ Magee (1988) pp. 12-13

¹¹⁶ Supplement to article on Edward Dannreuther, *Musical Times*, 39 (1898) pp. 724-5.

¹¹⁷ Edward Dannreuther, 'Beethoven and his Works: A Study', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 30 (1876), 194

for Grove's Dictionary. Such veneration inevitably led to the placing of Beethoven at the core of Dannreuther's concerts: rarely did one pass without the inclusion of a major work.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, built around this core were figures seen in direct relations: Bach, the 'eighteenth-century anticipation' of musical intellectualism; Brahms, the late nineteenth-century classical successor; and of course, Schumann, Chopin, Liszt and Wagner. But though Dannreuther evidently perceived these figures as the central canon in the repertoire, the clear message from the ninety concerts given between 1876 and 1893 is delight in the new and unusual: the emphasis is as much on performance of new works from Europe, published, or in some instances, still in manuscript, as on education or personal philosophy.

1.8: Conclusion

The political climate of England's institutions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were imperative when coming to a true understanding of how Wagnerism was able to take such a strong grip in such a relatively short space of time. This is because the political institutions in question were flexible enough to undergo substantial reform without falling victim to full-scale revolution.¹¹⁹ That is not to say that the political, social and cultural changes that affected England in the Victorian and Edwardian periods were insignificant. Of course the industrialisation of the country had long been a source of great social and cultural dislocation – so much so that by the mid-nineteenth century, when this process had reached its symbolic zenith in the Crystal Palace Exhibition, it had generated the beginnings of a countermovement dedicated to resisting the effects of industrial modernisation on English culture and society. In fact, the counter-revolution was present in the Crystal Palace itself, which housed not just the latest engineering and technological marvels but also Pugin's Medieval Court, whose neo-Gothic ethos challenged the prevailing notion that to be English was to be a devotee of steam engines, mills and Manchester liberalism.¹²⁰ As Martin Wiener has argued, this anti-industrial

¹¹⁸ Dibble (2001) p. 75

¹¹⁹ *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*. Edited by Robert Colls & Philip Dodd (Routledge: an imprint from Taylor and Francis books LTD, 1987) pp. 79-80

¹²⁰ Cecil Forsyth, *Music and Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1911) p. 112

challenge, motivated by nostalgia for an older, rural England of farms and cottages, intensified as the century wore on; eventually it was so successful in re-orientating the Englishman's sense of self that it contributed to that country's modern decline as an industrial nation.¹²¹ Wiener does not mention Wagner's English interpreters in connection with this process, but he might legitimately have done so. For Wagnerism took hold in England as part of that nation's ongoing reassessment of utilitarian values, technological 'progress' and conventional religious practices. William Ashton Ellis summed up this impulse and Wagner's importance to it when he asserted that the Master's music and ideas would help to liberate mankind 'from the tightening grip of crushing scientific materialism,' because 'at no time had there been such a widespread desire to search all things, and to wring forth some of the hidden secrets of that which is above and beyond matter.'¹²²

This particular interpretation of Wagner's meaning and significance was not uniquely English, as similar perspectives cropped up in all the European Wagnerian movements. Nor was England's 'decadent' Wagnerism *sui generis*: Wilde, Beardsley and Moore all came to Wagner through the back door of French aestheticism and the uses to which they put his legacy had much in common with the experimentalism of the *Revue wagnerienne* group. As for the other main direction in English Wagnerism – the social meliorist camp – here too we encounter a certain derivative quality: even Shaw's rather more idiosyncratic approach to the Master's work owed much to Nietzsche's pioneering interpretations, as well perhaps to Marx, whom Shaw was reading at the same time he was working on his famous analysis of the *Ring*.¹²³ Indeed, one of the more intriguing aspects of English Wagnerism is the extent to which it reflected a growing receptiveness to cultural stimuli from the Continent. Here again, the local Wagner movement played a small but significant role in the gradual reorientation of English culture at the end of the nineteenth century.

However, while noting the parallels between English and continental Wagnerism, we should also take care to see where the English experience might have diverged from

¹²¹ Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrialist Spirit, 1850-1980* (CUP, 1981)

¹²² William Ashton Ellis, 'Richard Wagner as Poet, Musician and Mystic,' a paper read at the Society for the Encouragement of the Fine Arts, 3 February 1887. Available at the British Museum.

¹²³ Martin Meisel, *Shaw and Nineteenth Century Theatre* (Princeton, 1963) p. 68

European models. One instance of this seems to have involved that curious need to make Wagner fit for Christianity (and Christianity fit for Wagner) that preoccupied so many English Wagnerians.¹²⁴ Of course one finds instances of this in Europe as well, but the accent on reconciling Wagner and Christianity was particularly strong in Anglo-Saxon countries. If we ask why this might have been so, the answer could well lie in the connection between Wagnerism and those cultural/moral doubts regarding industrialisation that were discussed above: Christian Wagnerians like Peter Forsyth and Washington Gladstone apparently hoped that a Christianity rejuvenated through Wagnerian spirituality might more effectively soften the sharp edges of capitalist-industrial society.

This attempt to reconcile Christianity with an influence that more conventional believers often saw as morally corrupting (if not satanic) reminds us a little of similar effort to Christianise Darwinism in the nineteenth century. Here too, liberal-minded Christians felt the attraction of an idea that if not somehow intellectually domesticated, could lead to ever more adventurous heresies. But if Darwin made things difficult for the Christians, Wagner (except for his scandalous lifestyle) generally did not. Indeed, the vague spiritualism of his later works harmonised well with a rejuvenated Christianity precisely because it was so heterodox, so independent of hidebound orthodoxies. The reconciliation process was not without its complexities and absurdities. Sometimes it failed entirely, the attempt to make Wagner a Christian yielding to ever more bizarre impulses to make him a theosophist, cabalist, Buddhist guru, or finally 'the New Age Messenger.'

As we have seen, the Germanic origins of many English immigrant groups also affected the character of Wagnerism. In England the local German émigré communities played an unusually decisive role in spreading Wagner's influence among the citizenry of their adopted lands. These transplanted Germans were often professional musicians themselves and they were prominent carriers of that 'musical idealism' that was transforming musical taste in the late nineteenth century.¹²⁵ Many were also dedicated

¹²⁴ Barry Millington, *The New Grove Wagner* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) p. 198

¹²⁵ As William Weber terms it. See *Wagnerism in European Culture and Politics*, ed. by David C. Large and William Weber, in collaboration with Anne Dzamba Sessa (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) pp. 134-41

enough in their reverence for Wagner to familiarise themselves with the Master's prose works and to translate these works for the edification (and often mystification) of their English-speaking audiences. As they gradually won over more people, the Wagnerian movement in England succeeded in shedding the exclusively Germanic image that had featured prominently in the polemics of the local anti-Wagnerians. But a certain Germanic, Bayreuth-like influence persisted. This can be seen in the England short-lived Wagner journal, *The Meister*, which was apparently inspired by the *Revue wagnerienne* but was in fact much closer in spirit and style to the *Bayreuther Blätter*. Like the latter journal, it presumed that Wagner's prose works were virtually as important as his music, and it sought to document this notion by publishing long excerpts from his writings. Also like the *Blätter*, *The Meister* did not succeed in attracting prominent writers to its pages. England's most famous Wagnerian, George Bernard Shaw, would have nothing to do with the journal because he found its blandness un-Wagnerian. *The Meister's* 'evident indisposition to provoke hostility,' he observed, 'was not an indisposition to which the Meister himself was at all subject.'¹²⁶

'No matter where one goes,' wrote Karl Marx in 1876, 'one is plagued with the question 'What do you think of Richard Wagner?'' Marx himself knew what to think – Wagner was a preposterous charlatan – and Marx was clearly alarmed by all the fuss surrounding what he called 'the Bayreuth fools' festival of *Staatsmusikant* Wagner.'¹²⁷ Marx had reason to be concerned. The radical principles inherent in Wagner's *Ring* poem may have been inspired by the Master's early encounters with Hegel and Feuerbach, but the final production premiered in Bayreuth in 1876 hardly impressed people as an exercise in 'scientific' socialism. Rather, it offered its largely bourgeois audiences a release or a haven from a world that had become all too 'demystified' through the pressures of industrial modernisation.¹²⁸ What Wagner achieved was a kind of re-mythification of quite 'real' social questions through his compelling use of myth, though of course he brought these myths to life by employing the latest stage of machinery and the most realistic dramaturgical techniques. His immense appeal lay in his unmatched

¹²⁶ G. B. Shaw, *London Music in 1888-1890 as Heard by Corno di Bassetto* (London, 1937) p. 37

¹²⁷ Quoted in Gordon Craig, *The Germans* (New York, 1982) p. 198

¹²⁸ See Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London : Routledge & K. Paul, 1967) p. 54

ability both to 'make the world of the dream and myth credible'¹²⁹ and, conversely, to dissolve the world of quotidian reality into all-powerful myth.

We have countless testimonials of Wagner's power to 'transport' his admirers from their pallid ordinary existences into a realm of power, vitality, mystery and love – a journey that at once reawakened the magic intuition of the inner life and promised the reconciliation of man and nature. Romain Rolland, describing his generation's obsession with Wagner, asserts that:

If we had need of that music, it was not because it was death to us, but life. Cramped by the artificiality of a town, far from action, or nature, or any strong or real life, we expanded under the influence of this noble music – music which flowed from a heart filled with understanding of the word and breath of nature. In *Die Meistersinger*, in *Tristan* and in *Siegfried*, we went to find the joy, the love and the vigour that we so lacked.¹³⁰

In Wagner's music, wrote the English novelist George Moore, 'art and nature abandoned their accustomed strife.'¹³¹ He and his fellow pilgrims of Bayreuth could therefore listen to those 'exalted melodies' and be released from the isolation imposed by the demands of conquering nature through artifice. It is probably safe to say that Moore and Rolland articulated the feelings that animated thousands of others who during the heyday of Wagner infatuation trooped to witness the Master's art at Bayreuth or at opera houses and concert halls throughout Europe. Perhaps it is also safe to say that these or very similar feelings continue to animate some of the Wagner enthusiasts of our own day – animate those, at least, who can still be transported, despite all the benumbing effects of our electronic civilisation.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57

¹³⁰ Rolland (1915)p. 67

¹³¹ George Moore, *Ave* (London, 1911) p. 209

CHAPTER II: ELGAR'S WAGNERIAN APPRENTICESHIP

2.0: Introduction

As Peter Dennison notes at the start of his article, when the University of Cambridge conferred an honorary doctorate of music on Elgar in 1900, the Public orator referred to him as 'autodidactos'.¹³² Elgar is often described as self-taught and became a point he was to refer back to again and again throughout his career:

When I resolved to become a composer and found that the exigencies of life would prevent me from getting any tuition, the only thing to do was to teach myself. I read everything, played everything, and heard everything I possibly could... I am self-taught in the matter of harmony, counterpoint, form, and, in short, the whole of the 'mystery' of music.¹³³

Some scholars believe that Elgar's music 'apprenticeship' had concluded by 1899, whilst Dennison argues his style remained susceptible to major external influences until about the end of 1902.¹³⁴ it is reasonable to see why Dennison would argue this: 1902 was an important year for Elgar in many different ways – it was the year he made his last visit to Bayreuth and also came to know Richard Strauss and a number of his major works most closely. It was also the year Strauss pronounced that Elgar was 'the first English progressive' and the year that *Gerontius* first received public acclaim (from a German audience).¹³⁵ Whilst some Elgar scholars believe that 1899 was the major turning point for Elgar because of the *Enigma Variations* premiere, I would argue that 1902 was the real turning point most crucially for Elgar's confidence. Throughout his life, Elgar hankered after public acclaim, needing the praise to believe that he was doing something right and being told by Strauss that his music was pre-eminent must have had a huge impact on Elgar's self-belief. The works that follow seem a testament to this statement.

¹³² Peter Dennison, 'Elgar and Wagner', *Music and Letters*, 66 (April, 1985) p. 93

¹³³ Rudolph De Cordova, 'Illustrated interviews: LXXXI – Dr. Edward Elgar', *Strand Magazine*, 27 (May 1904), pp. 538-9

¹³⁴ Peter Dennison (1985) pp. 97-98

¹³⁵ See Kennedy (1974) p. 37

However, it is the background years that tell us most about how Elgar achieved this pre-eminence. Despite not having the opportunities to study at university or music college, Elgar was an exceptionally pro-active student who went out of his way to discover new music, read treatises, study scores and play in many different orchestras and it should be this that marks him out as unusual. Unlike Parry, Stanford and Bantock, Elgar had to push himself to achieve the best he could, without having a composition teacher pressuring him to compose within a certain canon. It could be argued that it was this inner-drive and free-ranging interest to seek out the music he wished to emulate that helped Elgar make some sense of the musical line he chose to continue. It is an investigation into these musical experiences and their role in the making of his genius that forms the subject of this chapter.

2.1: Early music-making

In the second half of the nineteenth century, until the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, the predominant foreign influence in England ranging from royal connections to spheres of the arts came from Germany. In many respects, the English musical establishment was an outpost of the Leipzig school where the influences of Mendelssohn, Brahms, Joachim and Clara Schumann were dominant.¹³⁶ Prompted initially by this prevalent German bias, the young Elgar turned his attentions towards the most advanced music that was emanating from Germany. This bias was undoubtedly cultivated by Adolphe Pollitzer, with whom Elgar studied the violin in London in August 1877. Pollitzer encouraged his pupil to pursue composition and later observed that ‘although leaning towards the modern German school, [he] does not lose either love or respect for the composers of the past.’¹³⁷ However, besides the Germanic school there were the riches of the British choral tradition in which Elgar had had his earliest experiences.

The focal point of the musical year in the West of England in Elgar’s youth was the Three Choirs Festival. By the nineteenth century, this was taking place annually in early September and rotating between the cathedral cities of Worcester, Hereford and

¹³⁶ Anne Dzamba Sessa, *Richard Wagner and the English* (Rutherford: Fairleigh, Dickenson University Press, 1979) p. 21

¹³⁷ ‘Edward Elgar’, *The Musical Times*, 41 (October 1900), p. 643

Gloucester. On each of the four days of the Festival there was a morning concert of sacred works for chorus and orchestra held in the Cathedral, and in the evening a concert of orchestral works, selections from opera and miscellaneous vocal and instrumental items held in a prominent hall sometimes within the Cathedral precincts. The backbone of the festivals was the sacred choral and orchestral concert. In 1878 Elgar, then aged 21, joined his father and uncle in the Worcester Three Choirs Festival Orchestra, and was listed as 'Mr Elgar jun.' among the second violins.¹³⁸ At the next Worcester Festival in 1881, he was promoted to the firsts and remained there for the Festivals of 1884, 1887, 1890 and 1893.¹³⁹

The repertory of the Three Choirs Festivals in these years was dominated by the oratorio, those inherited from Handel and Haydn, those elicited from Mendelssohn and those expected from any aspiring English composer.¹⁴⁰ Handel was the cornerstone of the repertory and it was a performance of the *Messiah* in 1869 that precipitated Elgar towards a musical career. In his memoir of Elgar, W H Reed, a close friend and professional colleague for almost thirty years, recalled how, even in his latter years, Elgar's love of *Messiah* remained undiminished, and how he revelled in Handel's 'exquisite but audacious variations' of scoring.¹⁴¹ Handel's music left an indelible impression on Elgar and Herbert Howells remembered how as a young man he had heard 'the man of unsurpassed sonority in string writing himself declare the Georg Friederich Handel was the true source of all such opulence.'¹⁴² Elgar maintained a comparable enthusiasm for the other perennial of the repertory, *Elijah*, and W H Reed again remembered in particular his love of Mendelssohn's deft scoring in its fugal overture and the Quartet in Part 1.¹⁴³

As is well documented, a number of more modest musical enterprises in his local area gave Elgar opportunities to arrange and compose music for limited resources. For the ensembles with which he was associated, Elgar arranged light music by composers like Balfe, Bishop, Herold, Bellini and Rossini and he composed quadrilles, polkas and

¹³⁸ Kennedy (1974) p. 48

¹³⁹ Donald Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival* (Worcester: Osborne Books LTD, 1999) p. 61

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7

¹⁴¹ W H Reed, *Elgar as I Knew Him* (London: Gollancz, 1973), p. 85

¹⁴² BBC radio talk, August 1960.

¹⁴³ Reed (1973) p. 85. This point is explored in depth in chapter four and five.

minuets. Between 1878 and 1881, Elgar composed a more substantial body of music for a wind quintet in which he played bassoon. In 1877 Elgar was appointed Leader and instructor of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society which in the early 1880s gave some of his first orchestral pieces a performance. Elgar was much in demand as an orchestral violinist in the 1880s and he led a number of these orchestras and their programmes were often duplicated the repertory of the Three Choirs Festivals.¹⁴⁴ As early as 1872, the young Elgar played organ for Mass at St George's Roman Catholic Church in Worcester and in November 1885, he succeeded his father as organist of the church, a position he held until he moved to London in 1889.

2.2: Elgar's University Years

One of the most enterprising concert series in the Midlands outside of the Festival circuit were the regular orchestral concerts in the Birmingham Town Hall conducted by W C Stockley. In November 1882 Elgar joined the first violins of the orchestra and played regularly until November 1889. The repertory was more progressive than that of the Worcester Three Choirs Festivals, and here Elgar played works by Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schumann (a composer completely absent from the Three Choirs programmes), and Wagner. There were also works by Dvořák, Berlioz and other French composers, but almost none by Brahms. These performing experiences forced Elgar to confront composition from inside the music itself and it was from his violin desk that he learnt how to write for different sections of the orchestra.

However, from the late 1870s, Elgar broadened his experiences even further by attending concerts in London.¹⁴⁵ Many years later, when considering the advantages of the gramophone, Elgar recalled and perhaps exaggerated the comparative difficulties of gaining musical knowledge in those earlier years, but none the less confirmed the importance of those experiences in his own creative development:

¹⁴⁴ For more details of Elgar's early career, see Kennedy (1974) pp. 17-43

¹⁴⁵ Recounted in Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (New York: Schirmer books; Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993) pp. 27-28

If London in 1877-8-9 was scantily supplied with orchestral concerts, the provinces were in a worse plight.

The Crystal Palace Concerts, under the direction of August Manns, were undoubtedly the best, and many new works were produced and compositions of established repute were played which I wanted to know. I say 'know' and not 'hear'; it is possible to do either or both, but the scores were not easily obtainable; if they had been procurable a reading would have satisfied my immediate wants.

But the actual procedure was on many occasions as follows – I lived one hundred and twenty miles from London, I rose at six, - walked a mile to the railway station; - the train left at seven; - arrived at Paddington about eleven; - underground to Victoria; - on to the Palace, arriving in time for the last three quarters of an hour of the rehearsal; if fortune smiled, this piece of rehearsal included the work desired to be heard: but fortune rarely smiled and more often than not the principal item was over. Lunch, - Concert at three; - at five a rush for the train to Victoria; - then to Paddington; - on to Worcester arriving at ten-thirty. A strenuous day indeed; but the new work had been heard and another treasure added to the life's experience.¹⁴⁶

The earliest programmes of London orchestral concerts that survive in Elgar's collection date from 1881, and in addition to the Crystal Palace Saturday Concerts, Elgar regularly attended the St James's Hall Concerts conducted by Hans Richter. Both series were particularly enterprising in programming the most recent German and French music, and it was here that Elgar's extensive knowledge of Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, Dvořák, Berlioz, Saint-Saëns and Wagner had its source. Both series of concerts offered detailed programme notes with a generous number of musical examples to aid the enquiring concert-goer. Between November 1878 and March 1899, Elgar sporadically attended the St James's Hall Popular Concerts, which offered chamber music by the greatest classical and romantic German composers. In addition to this, after their move to London in 1899, Elgar and Alice periodically attended the opera, principally at Covent Garden.

The importance of the music Elgar played and heard during these crucial years cannot be underestimated. Elgar's musical landscape and vocabulary were formed as a

¹⁴⁶ This manuscript is a draft for a speech made on 16 November 1927. It is headed 'H. M. V.', and is housed without classification at the Elgar birthplace Museum. See also Moore, Jerrold, Northrop, *Elgar on record*, (London: EMI/OUP, 1974), p. 78

result of what he heard and it is therefore crucial to a study such as this to detail them. The programmes listed here are all housed at The Elgar Birthplace Museum Archive. Some of these programme dates were detailed by Peter Dennison in his article in *Music and Letters*, but further research has extended the list.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ In the following table, I have maintained Dennison's layout. 05/85 means May 1885. Entries in **bold** type signify that Elgar was a performer, whilst entries in normal type indicate that he attended a concert. All entries underlined are listed here in addition to those found by Peter Dennison in his article in *Music and Letters* and it is thanks to a private collector (who prefers to remain anonymous) and the Elgar Birthplace Museum Archive that I have had access to all of these programmes. It is important to have a comprehensive list of everything Elgar heard and played in one source, which is why Dennison's listings are found here too. I make no attempt to claim that his research is my own! All bold entries before 1897 indicate that Elgar played the violin at the performance and after this date, that he conducted the work in question. All of the information below has been compiled using all of the programmes stored at the Elgar Birthplace Museum Archive, with the assistance of their archivist.

Fig 1: What Elgar Played and Heard 1878 – 1911

ARMES, PHILIP

Hezekiah 09/78

BACH, J. S

Christmas oratorio, parts 1 and 2 09/96; 09/98

Pastoral Symphony 09/90; 03/97

God goeth up, Cantata 43 09/00

God so loved the world, Cantata 68 09/84

God's time is best, Cantata 106 09/99

Mass in B 09/93; 03/95; 05/02

St Matthew Passion 03/95

A stronghold sure, Cantata 80 09/90; 09/97

BARNETT, JOHN FRANCIS

The Building of the Ship, cantata 09/81

BEETHOVEN

Ah! Perfido op 65 11/83; 04/94

Choral Fantasia 12/92

Christ on the Mount of olives 09/81; 09/90

The Consecration of the House, overture 12/85

Coiolan, Overture 10/89; 10/01; 12/02; 06/11; 2/12

Egmont, incidental music 03/87

Egmont Overture 09/78; 11/83; 05/84; 11/89; 04/93; 04/96; 05/98; 02/01

Leonore, overture no 2 03/97

Leonore, overture no 3 01/83; 04/90; 04/97; 01/98; 09/00; 10/13

Mass in C 05/86

Missa Solemnis 09/97

Namensfeier 06/88

Piano concerto no 3 12/83

Piano concerto no 4 02/98; 05/00

Piano concerto no 5 10/85; 03/99; 05/99; 05/02; 02/12

Piano Sonata in D op 28 02/79

Prometheus, overture 09/87; 12/94; 01/98

Romance in F op 50 01/83; 09/00; 10/01

Septet op 20 02/88

String quartet op 18 no 1 02/79

String quartet op 18 no 3 11/78

String quartet op 18 no 4 09/00

String quartet op 59 no 3 03/01

String quartet op 74 04/02

String quartet op 130 03/03

String quartet op 131 03/99

String Quartet op 135 12/87

String trio op 9 no 1 01/83

Symphony no 2 03/90; 04/94

Symphony no 3 12/83; 04/84; 09/98; 10/98; 02/00; 05/01; 05/02; 12/02

Symphony no 4 06/88; 02/90; 11/93; 11/96

Symphony no 5 09/81; 04/87; 10/89; 09/90; 09/97; 03/99; 10/01

Symphony no 6 11/83; 04/90; 04/91; 02/98; 04/99; 04/99

Symphony no 7 12/85; 11/89; 09/93; 04/94; 02/00; 11/01; 10/02; 11/11

Symphony no 8 04/85; 07/89

Symphony no 9 10/81; 12/95; 10/96; 06/98; 09/00; 09/11

Violin Concerto 09/78 (i); 09/84 (i); 06/11

Violin Sonatas, complete 12/92

BELLINI

Norma, overture and selections 02/77; 05/86

Act I, 'Haste ye Druids', cavatina with men's chorus 05/00

BENNETT, STERNDALE

Caprice in E pf and orch, op 22 04/83

The May Queen, pastoral, op 39 09/78; 02/86

The Naiads, overture 04/87; 05/87; 02/98

Paradise and the Peri, overture 04/83; 04/03

Parisina, overture, op 3 11/89

Piano Concerto no 4 in F 09/78; 05/87

Symphony in G op 43 04/93 (iii)

The Wood-nymphs, overture 10/89; 11/91

BERGER, WILLIAM

Der totentanz op 86 04/04 (Elgar rehearsed the work but did not conduct the performance)

BERLIOZ, HECTOR

Carnival romain 02/90

The Childhood of Christ 12/99

The Shepherd's Farewell 12/02

Le corsaire 06/11

The Damnation of Faust 07/89

Danse des Sylphes, Marche Hongroise 09/84; 05/86 (ii); 04/97 (ii); 09/97; 09/00

Les francs-juges, overture 02/81

Grande messe des morts 05/83; 10/02

Invitation to the Dance (Weber) 09/84

Lelio 10/81

Les nuits d'ete 10/81; 09/84 (iv)

Rob Roy 02/00; 04/02

Roi King 10/97; 11/11

Symphonie fantastique 10/81 (v); 08/83 (ii, iv, v); 11/02

Symphony Romeo and Juliet 04/04 (Rehearsed but not conducted by Elgar)

Zaide, bolero op 19 no 1 09/84; 09/87

BIZET

Carmen 07/89

BLAIR, HUGH

Blessed are they who watch 12/94; 09/96
 Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in B 09/87
 Ode on Death 01/89

BRAHMS

Academic Festival, overture 05/87
 Alto Rhapsody 06/90; 10/13
 Clarinet Quintet 01/99; 02/00
 Double Concerto op 102 03/90
 A German Requiem 09/93; 09/99
 Die Mainacht op 43 no 2 06/89; 01/99; 12/99
 Partsongs, three from op 44 01/99; 05/00
 Piano Concerto no 2 11/11
 Schicksalslied op 54 05/00
 String Quartet in C op 51 no 1 01/81; 04/02
 String Quartet in B flat op 67 03/99
 String Quintet in F op 88 01/83; 04/87
 String quintet in G op 111 03/91
 Symphony no 1 09/01
 Symphony no 2 10/89; 10/89; 02/98; 11/99;
 09/00; 10/01
 Symphony no 3 05/84; 06/89; 10/01; 11/02;
 11/05; 05/11; 10/11; 10/13
 Symphony no 4 12/04
 Tragic Overture 12/11; 02/12
 Variations on a Theme by Haydn 09/98; 05/01;
 06/11
 Violin Concerto 10/04
 Violin sonata in A op 100 04/92
 Violin sonata in D op 108 04/92
 Violin sonata in G op 78 02/81
 Von ewige liebe op 43 no 1 09/00

BREWER, HERBERT

Emmaus (scored by Elgar) 09/01
 O sing unto the Lord 09/98

BRIDGE, FREDERICK

The Repentance of Ninevah 09/90
 Rock of Ages 10/85

BRUCH

Lay of the Bell, cantata op 45 12/03
 Violin concerto no 1 in G op 26 06/88; 10/98
 Violin concerto no 3 in D op 58 01/98

BRUCKNER

Symphony no 7 05/87

CHERUBINI

Abencerages, overture 10/80; 11/91
 Anacreon, overture 10/87; 02/00
 Les deux journees, overture 02/87
 Mass in D 09/81; 09/84

CHOPIN

Piano concerto no 2 05/99

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR, SAMUEL

Ballade in A op 33 09/98
 Solemn Prelude op 40 09/99

CORNELIUS

Die Vaterguft 09/99

COWEN, FREDERIC

The Rose Maiden, cantata 02/78
 Ruth 09/87
 The Sleeping Beauty, cantata, selections 12/85
 Symphony no 3 in C 04/83; 09/87
 Symphony no 6 in E 01/01

DELIBES

LE Roi s'amuse, suite 11/81; 05/02
 Sylvia, suite 11/82; 08/83; 12/85; 02/98; 05/99

DVOŘÁK

Andante for string orchestra 12/98
 Carnival Overture op 92 06/99
 Cello concerto 11/12
 Husitska, overture op 67 11/11
 In Nature's Realm, overture op 91 04/94
 Nocturne for strings op 40 03/90
 Piano Quintet in A op 81 09/97
 Slavonic Dances op 46 01/99 (ii, viii); 10/00
 (iv); 11/05 (ii, v); 12/11 (i, ii)
 Slavonic Dances, unspecified 07/91; 09/93;
 06/94; 07/97
 The Spectre's Bride op 69 01/96
 Stabat Mater 09/94; 09/98
 Symphonic Variations op 78 06/89; 10/97
 Symphony no 6 op 60 09/84; 10/86
 Symphony no 8 op 88 07/90
 Te Deum op 103 09/99

FRANCK

Symphony 11/12

GADE

Christmas Eve op 40 11/83
 Spring's Message op 35 04/85; 04/96
 Symphony no 1 11/91

GLAZUNOV

Symphony no 5 01/00

GLUCK

Orfeo 11/90; 12/91

GOUNOD

Faust 11/90; 05/94; 01/98
 Funeral march of a marionette 02/85

Gallia 05/98

Hymne a Saint-Cecile 04/97

Marche militaire 08/83

Mireille, overture 02/89; 04/91

Redemption 09/84; 09/87; 01/94; 09/97

La reine de Saba, pageant march 10/85

Roméo et Juliette 06/89

GRIEG

Länderkennung 01/01; 05/02

Piano concerto 03/90; 09/97; 09/00; 11/02

Peer Gynt, suite no 1 09/90; 09/00

GUILMANT

Symphony in D with organ 05/86; 04/96

HANDEL

Concerto Grosso in D op 6 no 5 06/11

Esther, overture 09/84

Israel in Egypt 04/92; 09/93

Jephtha (edited by Sullivan) 09/81

Judas Maccabaeus (abridged version) 02/85;

02/86; 03/87; 09/98

Messiah (scoring by Mozart) 09/78; 9/81; 09/84;

09/87; 09/90; 09/93; 09/96; 09/97; 09/98; 09/99;

09/00

Occasional Oratorio, overture 04/93

O praise the Lord with one consent 11/90

Samson (abridged by Prout) 09/96; 11/97

Serse, Largo (Ombra mai fu) 05/86

Zadok the Priest 05/87; 09/97

HAYDN

Creation 04/92

Part 1 09/78; 04/91; 09/97; 09/98; 09/00

Parts 1 and 2 09/81; 12/86; 09/90; 09/99

Mass in C, Paukenmesse 06/89

String quartet op 20 no 4 04/02

String quartet op 54 no 2 03/99

String quartet op 71 no 3 02/88

String quartet op 76 no 2 03/79; 92/81

Symphony no 92 11/11

Symphony no 94 01/83

Symphony no 96 04/89

Symphony no 97 06/88

Symphony no 99 03/90

Symphony no 102 01/98; 05/11

HEROLD

Zampa, overture 05/78

HUMMEL

Mass in B flat op 77 12/91

HUMPERDINCK

Das Gluck von Edenhall 04/03

Hansel und Gretel 03/95

Die Wallfahrt nach Kevelaar 05/98

LEONCAVALLO

I Pagliacci, Prologue 05/97

LISZT

A Faust Symphony 05/02

Festklänge 11/89

Hungarian Rhapsody no 1 in F 04/84; 02/00;
11/01

Hungarian Rhapsody no 2 on G 09/00

Hungarian Rhapsody no 4 in D 04/86

Die Ideale 10/11

Mazeppa 04/86

Orpheus 04/03

Piano concerto no 1 04/86; 07/90; 12/11

Piano concerto no 2 11/99

Les Preludes 04/86; 06/98

Rakocy March 08/83; 04/86

Totentanz 02/90

LLOYD, CHARLES H.

Festival Overture 09/98

Hero and Leander, cantata 09/84; 11/87; 12/92

Hymn of Thanksgiving, cantata 09/97

MACFARREN, GEORGE

Hero and Leander, overture 09/81

Violin Concerto in G 12/85

MACCUNN, HAMISH

Bonny Kilmeny, cantata op 2 03/90

Land of the Mountain and the Flood, overture op
3 03/90

Lord Ullin's Daughter, cantata op 4 04/93

The Ship o'the fiend, orchestral ballade op 5
11/89

MACKENZIE, ALEXANDER

La belle dame sans merci, orchestral ballad op 29
05/84

The Bride, cantata op 25 09/81

Britannia, overture op 52 04/95; 09/99

Colomba, ballet music op 28 10/85

The dream of Jubal, cantata op 41 01/98; 05/99

Rhapsodie Ecossaise op 21 11/83

Scottish Rhapsody no 3 op 74 12/11

Twelfth Night, overture op 40 06/88

MANCINELLI

Ero e leandro 06/99

MASCAGNI

Cavalleria rusticana 12/91; 12/92

Intermezzo 11/92

MASSENET

Le Cid, March 04/97; 05/98; 09/00
 Esclarmonde, Interlude 10/89
 Scenes-pittoresques 01/83; 10/86; 12/86; 11/91

MENDELSSOHN

Athalie, overture 01/83
 War march of the Priests 11/86
 Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage 10/89
 Capriccio brilliant op 22 04/93
 Come let us sing 04/93
 Elijah 05/76; 09/78; 09/81; 10/82; 09/84; 01/87;
 09/87; 09/90; 09/93; 09/96; 09/97; 09/98; 09/99;
 09/00
 Fair Melusine 04/88; 01/98
 The First Walpurgis Night 04/85; 04/95
 Hear my Prayer 09/78; 09/87
 Hebrides Overture 02/81; 02/84; 05/86; 02/89
 Hymn of Praise 09/78; 09/81; 10/82; 02/87;
 09/87; 09/93; 05/95; 09/97; 09/98; 09/99; 09/00
 A Midsummer Night's dream, overture 09/81
 Overture and incidental music 10/81; 18/84
 Praise Jehovah (Lauda Sion) 04/82; 12/88
 Ruy Blas, overture 01/83; 02/85; 12/85; 10/87;
 05/99; 10/11
 Son and Stranger, overture 03/94
 St Paul 09/84; 12/87; 09/90; 09/96
 String Quartet in E op 44 no 2 02/81
 Symphony no 1 10/80
 Symphony no 3 11/81; 11/83; 10/85; 02/90;
 11/02
 Symphony no 4 01/83; 05/86; 04/88; 12/93;
 10/97
 Violin concerto 02/84; 11/89; 04/93; 10/01;
 12/10
 When Israel came out 11/90

MEYERBEER

Festmarsch, 'Schiller' 11/89
 La prophete 01/83; 06/90
 Coronation march 04/85

MOZART

Don Giovanni 06/89; 09/97; 07/02
 Overture 11/96; 01/99
 Idomeneo, overture 03/90; 05/02
 King thamos, selections 04/94
 Eine kleine Nachtmusik 12/88
 The Magic Flute, overture 09/81; 09/84; 04/93;
 09/00
 The Marriage of Figaro, overture 10/84; 09/93;
 11/05
 Piano concerto K 482 10/84
 Requiem 09/78; 09/90
 Sinfonia concertante K 364 03/03

String quartet in C K 465 01/94; 09/97
 Symphony in D K 385 06/98; 02/99
 Symphony in C K 425 06/90
 Symphony in D K 504 06/99
 Symphony in G K 550 09/78; 09/87; 09/98;
 10/11; 01/12; 10/13
 Symphony in C K 551 04/82; 04/88; 12/91
 Wind Quintet in E flat K 452 01/83

NICOLAI

The Merry Wives of Windsor, overture 05/78;
 09/78; 11/82; 04/88

PARRY, HUBERT

Blesed Pair of Sirens, cantata 12/94; 09/99
 Job, oratorio 09/93
 Judith, oratorio 12/88; 04/91
 The Locus Eaters, cantata 05/02
 Magnificat in F 09/97; 04/99
 Ode to Music 10/13
 A Song of Darkness and Light, cantata 09/98
 St Cecilia's Day 09/90
 Symphonic Variations 01/00
 Symphony no 4 in E 07/89
 Thanksgiving Te Deum 09/00

PONCHIELLI

La Gioconda, Dance of the hours 08/83; 11/83;
 05/00

PROUT, EBENEZER

Organ concerto in E 07/90; 09/98
 Symphony no 4 in D, first and fourth movements
 05/87
 Symphony in F 02/86

RAFF

Italian Suite, 'In the South' 02/85; 02/86; 02/89
 Symphony no 5, second and third movements
 12/94

RIMSKY-KORSAKOV

Fantasia on Serbian Themes op 6 01/99
 The Snowmaiden, suite 06/99

ROSSINI

The Barber of Seville, overture 04/95
 Otello, overture 02/77; 11/89
 Semiramide, overture 05/78; 12/83; 11/86
 The Thieving Magpie, overture 11/93
 William Tell 06/89
 Overture 02/77; 05/78; 09/78; 09/81; 04/82;
 04/88; 02/90; 11/94

RUBINSTEIN, ANTON

Feramors, ballet music 02/87; 04/93
 Die Makkabaer 01/83

Piano concerto no 4 in D 02/00
Symphony no 2, 'The ocean' 01/83

SAINT-SAËNS

Cello concerto no 1 in A 11/11
Danse macabre 01/98; 09/00
Fantasia Africa op 89 04/94
The heavens declare 09/97
Introduction and Rondo capriccioso op 28 10/98;
02/01; 12/10; 06/11
Jota aragonesa op 64 03/90
Pinao concerto no 2 in G 10/89; 06/11; 11/11;
02/12
Piano concerto no 4 in C 04/90
Le rouet d'Omphale op 31 02/85; 06/88; 04/97;
12/11
Suite algerienne, Marche militaire francaise
03/90; 01/99
Violin concerto no 1 in A 11/89
Violin concerto no 3 in B 10/97

SCHUBERT

Alfonso und Estrella, overture 01/83
Great is Jehova 09/96
Mass in E flat D 950 09/87
Mass in G D 167 05/88
Overture in C in the Italian style D 591 04/88
Rosamund, overture 09/87
Incidental music 06/80; 04/90
Song of Miriam D 942 09/84
String quartet in D, Death and the Maiden D 810
02/79; 03/01
String quintet in C D 956 03/95
Symphony no 4 02/81; 04/92; 11/92
Symphony no 5 05/02
Symphony no 8 11/86; 03/90; 04/93; 09/93;
01/96; 09/97; 05/99; 05/02
Symphony no 9 06/89; 10/97

SCHUMANN

Die braut von Messina, overture 02/98
Etudes symphoniques op 13 02/81
Fantasy in C for piano op 17 11/78
Genoveva, overture 03/94; 01/00
Gipsy Life, chorus and orchestra 04/82; 04/93
Manfred, overture 06/89
Overture, Scherzo and Finale 01/83
Piano concerto 01/83; 10/86; 10/89; 04/90; 01/00
Piano quintet in E flat op 44 12/87; 03/91; 09/00
Piano sonata no 2 in G op 22 02/88
Song for the New Year op 144 11/93
String quartet in A op 41 no 1 03/79
Symphony no 1 01/83; 11/89; 01/98; 11/99
Symphony 2 02/84; 02/90; 03/05; 11/05; 02/12
Symphony no 3 05/84; 09/96
Symphony no 4 06/88; 04/93

SPOHR

Christians Prayer 09/84
God art thou great 09/90; 04/94; 09/96
How lovely are thy dwellings 04/88
Jessonda, overture 09/87; 10/87; 04/90; 04/92
The Last Judgement 09/78; 09/87; 09/93; 09/97;
09/99
Symphony no 4 op 86 11/82; 11/86; 12/87
Violin concerto no 8 in A op 47 02/85; 02/90;
04/94

STAINER, JOHN

The Daughter of Jairus 09/78; 04/89

STANFORD, CHARLES

The Battle of the Baltic, ballad op 41 11/91
By the waters of Babylon 10/87
The Last Post, cantata op 75 09/00; 01/01
The Revenge, cantata op 24 09/87
Shamus O'Brien 11/97
Symphony no 2 in D, the Elegiac 02/87
Symphony no 3 in F op 28 10/87; 05/88
Symphony no 5 in D op 56, Adagio and Finale
09/98
The Three Holy Children, cantata op 22 10/85;
12/94

STRAUSS, RICHARD

Also sprach Zarathustra 02/12
Don Juan 05/02; 06/02 21/04
Don Quixote 06/03
Elektra 03/10
Feuersnot Love scene 11/02
Ein Heldenleben 12/02; 12/04
Till Eulenspiegel 06/02; 11/02
Tod und Verklarung 06/02; 09/02 10/02; 09/03
12/04; 12/11
Violin concerto in D op 8 12/04

SULLIVAN, ARTHUR

The Golden Legend, cantata 05/87; 09/87;
11/92; 09/98
Henry VIII, incidental music 04/83 (i); 09/96
In memorium, overture 04/85; 04/95
Iolanthe 02/02
The Light of the World, oratorio 10/86
Overture di ballo 10/85; 02/89; 02/90
The Prodigal Son, oratorio 03/94
The Sorcerer 10/98
The tempest, incidental music op 1 02/84; 09/93;
03/94; 04/95
Trial by Jury 10/98
Yeoman of the Guard 05/89

TCHAIKOVSKY

Capriccio italien 03/90; 01/98

1812 Overture 09/00
 Elergy for Strings in G **05/98**
 Nutcracker, suite 09/00
 Piano concerto no 1 05/01; 12/02
 Piano concerto no 04/90
 Romeo and Juliet 01/98; **01/12**
 Serenade for strings op 48, waltz 01/98
 Symphony no 4 02/00; 06/00; **11/11**
 Symphony no 5 01/98; 09/11; 08/03
 Symphony no 6 09/97; 06/98; 10/99; 09/00;
11/11
 Variations on a rococo theme 01/98; 09/00
 Violin concerto 01/98

THOMAS

Hamlet 07/90
 Mignon 05/02

VERDI

Aida 06/01
 Four Sacred Pieces, Stabat Mater and Te Deum
 09/98
 Otello, Act 1 and 2 07/89
 Canzone ed Ave Maria 02/00
 Requiem **02/87**; 09/96; 09/00
 Rigoletto, cara nome **11/89**
 La Traviata, Ah fors'e lui 04/97
 Il Trovatore, Tacea la notte **11/82**

WAGNER

Faust Overture 04/84; 11/01
 Die Feen 08/93
 Die fliegende Holländer (Complete):
 10/95; 10/97; 07/02
 Overture **10/76**; **11/89**; 09/97; 10/97; 02/00; 10/00
 Götterdämmerung (Complete) 08/93; 10/94
 06/00
 Act I Siegfried's Journey to the Rhine: 11/99
 Siegfried's Journey to Brunnhilde's Rock & Day
 Greeting 06/88; **06/98**; 07/90; 11/01
 Act II scene 3 06/90
 Act III scene 3 conclusion from 'Schweight
 eures Jammers' 05/88; 07/89; 06/99; 10/99
 Siegfried's Funeral March: **03/83**; 03/95
 Huldigungsmarsch 04/84; **11/11**
 Kaisermarsch 03/83; **04/86**; 06/89; **02/01**
 Lohengrin (Complete) 01/83; 04/91; 05/02
 Act I Prelude 08/83; **04/86**; 03/95; 10/01
 Act III 03/83; **04/87**; 04/97; **09/90**
 In fernem Land 06/89
 Die Meistersinger (Complete) 07/89 (three
 times); 06/90; 07/90; 07/92; 10/93; 09/94; 07/96;
 0602
 Act 1: Prelude 10/81; 05/84; **04/86**; **11/92**;
 03/95; 09/96; 03/99; 10/99; 06/00; 05/01; **05/01**;
 11/01; 10/02; **10/11**; **11/11**

Trial Song 'Am stillen Herd' 05/84; 06/88
 Act II: 'Was duftet doch' 06/89; 07/90; 06/88
 Act III: Prelude 06/88; 10/97
 Prelude, Dance of the Apprentices and
 Procession 03/83; 11/89; 05/94; 10/99
 'Wahn, Wahn' 06/89; 10/01
 Prize Song **01/83**; 06/88; **09/93**; 10/00
 Sachs's final address and chorus 06/89; 03/90
 Parsifal (Complete) 07/92; 08/92; 07/02; 03/07
 Act I Prelude 01/83; **02/84**; 04/84; 06/88; 04/91;
 03/95
 Transformation and Grail-Feier 06/89; 09/97
 Act III Good Friday Music 03/83; **01/84**; **06/94**;
 09/97; 10/01; 11/01
 Das Rheingold (Complete) 08/93; 07/02; 01/09
 Rienzi Overture 06/89; 03/95; **05/00**; 09/00;
 10/01
 Act V 'O Heavenly Father' **11/83**; 10/89
 Siegfried (Complete) 08/93; 0702
 Act I Forging Song 07/89
 Act III scene 1 **06/90**; 11/02
 Siegfried's Journey and Day Greeting 06/88;
 06/89; 07/90; 11/01
 Siegfried Idyll 03/83; 06/00; 10/00
 Tannhäuser (Complete) 01/83; 09/93
 Act I Overture 03/83; 08/83; **02/86**; 06/89;
 10/89; 04/93; 06/98; 09/99; 09/00; **11/11**
 Overture & Venusberg Music 04/99; 06/00;
 10/01
 Act II: March and Chorus 'Hail bright abode'
09/81; **10/86**; **09/90**
 Act II Elizabeth's Greeting 03/95
 Act III Introduction 03/95; 01/98
 Elizabeth's Prayer 03/83
 'O du mein holder Abendstern' 09/97; **01/99**;
 09/99
 Tristan und Isolde (Complete) 07/92; 06/93;
 08/93; 08/97; 06/98
 Prelude and Liebestod 03/83; 05/88; 03/95;
 03/97; 09/97; 06/98; 06/00; 10/01 (twice)
 Die Walküre (Complete) 08/93; 07/02
 Act I Love duet 'Ein Schwert' 05/87; **09/00**
 Act III Ride of the Valkyries 03/83; 05/87;
 05/88; 03/95; 04/97; 09/97; 04/99; 10/01
 Wotan's Farewell and Magic Fire 06/89; 10/98;
 10/01
 Wesendonck Lieder
 No. 4: **11/11**
 No. 5: **11/89**; **11/11**

From the programmes gathered together by Peter Dennison and the additional programmes discovered while researching this thesis, our understanding of the depth of Elgar's musical influences begins to deepen. The sheer amount of what Elgar heard during these crucial years is beguiling and it is starkly obvious as to what he liked most: Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Mozart, Schumann and of course: Wagner. The vast amount of Wagner's music heard by Elgar is staggering, not least because at the start of his career, listening to Wagner in this country was not an easy task.¹⁴⁸ Elgar's contact with Wagner's music vastly out-weighs all other composers and for this reason alone, a study of Wagnerian influence on Elgar is overdue. I am not claiming that the music of Wagner was the only influence on Elgar's music, but I am claiming that it was the most significant.

2.3: Elgar's Passion for Wagner

It is argued throughout this thesis that the single most influential composer on Elgar's formative years and maturity was Wagner. Elgar inherited from him some of the most significant innovations made in musical language in the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁹

As I have previously suggested in chapter one, for any composer coming to maturity in the 1890s he would have needed to compose works that fitted into the set British musical canon but at the same time retain an individual voice. For most composers, and Elgar was by no means the exception, Wagner was impossible to ignore. There were two reactions to Wagner: composers like Debussy protested violently (but ended up absorbing and learning from Wagner in the end anyway¹⁵⁰); whereas others like Strauss accepted Wagner more willingly. Elgar, unlike his British contemporaries, actively studied Wagner's style but absorbed it to that his musical voice was entirely unique.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter I: 'Wagnerism in England' for further details.

¹⁴⁹ See also Peter Dennison, 'Elgar and Wagner', *Music and Letters*, 66 (April, 1985) pp. 93-109

¹⁵⁰ Robin Holloway, *Debussy and Wagner* (London: Eulenberg, 1979)

¹⁵¹ See Chapter III for a detailed discussion of this point.

Elgar's earliest association with the music of Wagner is well documented by his many biographers: it was at a concert of the Worcester Glee Club on 23 October 1876 for which he made an arrangement from the overture to *The Flying Dutchman* and Herbert Leicester remembered that around the same time, Elgar played some of the overture to *Tannhäuser* on the organ for him. Elgar's first involvement with Wagner's music on a grander scale was at the Three Choirs Festival on 6 September 1881 when he played in the march and chorus 'Hail bright abode' from Act II of *Tannhäuser*. During his visit to Leipzig in January 1883, Elgar saw productions of *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser*, and at a concert he heard the Prelude to Act I of *Parsifal*. Around this time, he also made a transcription in short score of the thirty-bar 'Entry of the Minstrel' from Act II of *Tannhäuser*.¹⁵²

Elgar played some of the more popular orchestral excerpts from Wagner in Stockley's Birmingham orchestra, but during the 1880s his knowledge of Wagner grew most fully through the London concerts he attended conducted by August Manns and Hans Richter. On 3 March 1883 Manns conducted a memorial concert for Wagner who had died in Venice on 13 February. Elgar was present and annotated his programme with comments intended perhaps for a companion, but they afforded his earliest specific reactions to the music of Wagner. He pencilled expression marks on the Siegfried motive in the Funeral March from *Götterdämmerung*, and 'beautiful' against the *Siegfried Idyll*. Beside the Prelude and *Liebestod* Elgar wrote 'this is the thing!'; and against the text of the *Liebestod*, he continued 'This is the finest thing of W's I have heard up the present. I shall never forget this.'¹⁵³ The spell that *Tristan und Isolde* continued to exert over him is confirmed by a note that he wrote on the blank page facing the Prelude in his vocal score of the opera acquired on 1 June 1893.

This Book contains the height – the Depth, -
The Breadth, - the Sweetness, - the Sorrow, -
The Best and the whole of the Best of
This world and the Next.

Edward Elgar¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² GB-Lbl Add. 49973A, f.67v. Elgar later headed this manuscript 'Memento May 1879-83'.

¹⁵³ These comments are well-documented in most of the Elgar biographies. For example, see Kennedy (1974) p. 82 and McVeagh (1955) p. 29

¹⁵⁴ Date confirmed by Alice Elgar's diary, 2 June 1893.

The music of Wagner was played frequently at the St James's Hall Richter concerts and Richter included Wagner's concert pieces and orchestral extracts as well as whole operatic scenes. On 23 May 1887 Elgar attended a Richter concert which included *The Ride of the Valkyries*, and the love scene from Act I of *Walküre*. Elgar put three ticks beside the former on his programme and wrote, 'Brass telling through all the strings – most weird & witchlike hurry and scurrying through the air and the battle in the rushing wind embodied.'¹⁵⁵ Against the text of the love duet he noted striking characteristics of scoring, and pencilled a vertical line beside the fourteen lines where Siegmund draws the sword from the tree. This was to prove a decisive point for Elgar's own method of orchestration, which will be explored in Chapter VI. From 1889, the year in which Elgar and Alice moved to London, productions of Wagner's music dramas became more frequent in the capital and Elgar saw a number of these. In July 1889, soon after the move, Elgar saw *Die Meistersinger* at Covent Garden three times.

It is evident that during the vital years of Elgar's early musical development, concert-going fulfilled an important role: whilst orchestral concerts were given in Hereford and Worcester throughout Elgar's youth, Elgar's move to London enabled the composer to sit back and listen to some of the finest modern music performed by the world's greatest interpreters. Flicking throughout the reams of programmes Elgar kept for these years, it is clear that any opportunity to hear Wagner was taken up. Indeed, just glancing at the proportions of Wagner's music heard or performed by Elgar measured against, say, Brahms, in Fig. 3 clearly demonstrates this point. Whether it was trips to hear Richter at St. James Hall, or Manns at Crystal Palace, Elgar went to all lengths to ensure he could attend and this played a decisive role is what flowed from his own compositional pen in the consequent years.

¹⁵⁵ Moore (1984) p. 267

2.4: Elgar's 'Postgraduate' Years

Elgar's knowledge and understanding of Wagner deepened during the crucial decade 1892-1902 when he was able to travel to Germany six times and on each occasion saw productions by Wagner.¹⁵⁶ In July 1892, the Elgars visited Bayreuth where they saw *Parsifal* twice, *Die Meistersinger* and *Tristan und Isolde*; the last Alice Elgar noted in her diary as TRISTAN. Before setting off, Elgar acquired analyses of the three operas and made a detailed collation of the motives included in his vocal scores of each opera.¹⁵⁷ On subsequent visits to Germany in August and September 1893, 1894, 1895 and 1897 they saw productions of Wagner's music dramas in Munich.

In 1893 the Elgars were joined by Rosa Burley, who later wrote an account of the pilgrimage. The main purpose of the holiday was the Wagner Festival and, on the evening of their arrival in Munich on 17 August, they all went to a performance of *Die Meistersinger* at what Rosa Burley calls the Vast Hoftheatre.¹⁵⁸ At the time when he was planning the trip to Munich in 1893, Elgar explained the basic principles of Wagner's music dramas to Rosa Burley who later remembered how he:

Plunged...into an exciting lecture on the theories behind the new music-drama, its divergence from the older Italian opera, its use of leading-themes – which he illustrated on the piano with the 'gaze' motive from *Tristan* – and the welding which was attempted of musical, plastic and dramatic elements into one art-form.¹⁵⁹

During a two-week stay, they saw the following programme of Wagnerian music drama:

Thursday 17 August – *Die Meistersinger* at 6pm

Saturday 20 August – *Rheingold* at 7pm

Monday 21 August – *Die Walküre* at 7pm

¹⁵⁶ Dennison (1985) p. 97

¹⁵⁷ Elgar was grateful to receive from Schott & Co on 26 April 1902 an orchestral score of *Götterdämmerung* to complete his set of *The Ring*, and on 30 December 1902 an orchestral score of *Parsifal*. That December he also received, as a Christmas present from Mr and Mrs Edward Speyer, the eight volumes of Wagner's complete prose works translated by William Ashton Ellis.

¹⁵⁸ Correspondence (30 October 2004) from the Bavarian State Opera

¹⁵⁹ Burley and Carruthers (1972) p. 56

Wednesday 23 August – *Siegfried* at 6pm
 Thursday 24 August – *Tännhäuser* parody
 Friday 25 August – *Gotterdammerung* at 6pm
 Sunday 27 August – *Die Feen* at 7pm
 Tuesday 29 August – *Tristan* at 6pm
 Friday 1 September – *Tännhäuser* at 7pm

This programme was mostly conducted by Hermann Levi, who was then approaching the end of his illustrious and long career as a conductor. Rosa Burley tells us that Elgar had an immense admiration for the part writing in the second act of *Die Meistersinger*, so much so that a few years later, she heard an unmistakeable reference to it in the first movement of the Second Symphony.¹⁶⁰ She was also later reminded of that evening, as Elgar chose the 'Wach Auf' chorus for the signature tune of the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society who sang it as a prelude to most of their meetings.

Rosa Burley was generally unimpressed by *The Ring*, primarily because of what she called 'it's interminable length'.¹⁶¹ and she could not understand why Elgar liked it so much. She remembered that Elgar made extensive notes on what he heard, and that they had detailed discussions about the performances and Wagner's technical means of achieving his dramatic effect.¹⁶² *Tristan* was a 'shattering' experience and Alice was most affected by the 'erotic music', even allowing for her somewhat superficial appreciation of King Mark's character – she called him 'a thoroughly nice man.' Yet all were emotionally affected by the music to the extent that 'sleep was impossible for the whole night!'¹⁶³

The performances had their lighter side and Elgar's amusement at the absurd aspects of the music dramas were great. Rosa mentions his schoolboy-ish sense of fun when he 'was immensely tickled by the all-too-generous proportions of the Rhine maidens, and ...always hoped that the ropes which supported them would give way.'¹⁶⁴ The un-athletic gods, with the terrible clubs with which they clumped on to the stage,

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 69

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 67-70

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 69

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 70

also pleased him, as did the final moment when Levi tottered on to the stage, a small, stiff figure leading a vastly-proportioned Brünhilde to take her bow.¹⁶⁵ On another occasion, 24 August, Rosa, Alice Davey and Elgar attended a parody of *Tännhäuser* at another theatre in Munich to provide an evening of light relief. 'The humour – provided in the main by a Venus bigger than a Wagner soprano – was not very subtle and perhaps our imperfect knowledge of German saved us a certain amount of embarrassment, but we laughed so immoderately.'¹⁶⁶

Further visits to Munich took place in 1894 when the Elgars arrived on 2 August. Alice reported in her diary that Elgar bought a straw hat and cloak. 'He looks like a magician', she wrote. On their return from Garmisch on 13 September, they saw *Götterdämmerung* on 14 September and *Die Meistersinger* on 15 September. In 1895, arriving in Garmisch at 1.30pm on 4 September, the Elgars attended *Die Fliegende Holländer* on the same evening, but it was not produced well. The following day Elgar complained about a headache and sore throat and ended up leaving Munich two days later. The 1897 visit did not start too well either, as after travelling overnight from Cologne, they arrived in Munich at 8am. Elgar had such a terrible headache that Alice had to go to the opera to buy tickets on her own. However, by the evening Elgar had recovered well enough to attend a performance of *Tristan und Isolde* conducted by the 33-year old Richard Strauss. Elgar met Strauss after the performance and was to become a highly important friendship – especially considering Strauss's praise of *Gerontius* a few years later. The Elgars left Garmisch the following days but returned to Munich on 1 September and went to a performance of *Don Giovanni* at the Curvillies residency theatre. Afterwards, they again met Richard Strauss who had conducted the opera. The next evening the opera seen was *Die Fliegende Holländer* and on 3 September, the Elgars attended a concert of Wagner excerpts in the evening before leaving Munich the next day for Cologne. So concluded the intense experiences of Wagnerian music dramas during the visits on the 1890s. If, as had been suggested, for a self-taught composer the London years were Elgar's university, then Munich seemed to provide Elgar with his

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 68

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70

postgraduate learning curve, and it most telling that he chose to pursue Wagner all the way to Germany to gain further knowledge and experience.

2.5: Conclusion

Throughout the course of this chapter it has been shown that at all of the crucial junctures of Elgar's musical life, he sought out Wagner's music and prose and more often than any other composer. As a young organist, Elgar arranged Wagner; as a youthful composer, Elgar veraciously studied Wagner's scores and attended as many concerts promoting his music as possible; and as if to complete his education, Elgar travelled to Germany specifically to hear complete performances of the music dramas. Elgar's passion for Wagner's music in his formative years certainly cannot be denied, but remains an interesting curiosity is the fact that Elgar refused to acknowledge Wagner's shadow over his musical output throughout his life.

As we have seen, he was more than happy to say how much he liked the music and prose works, but when it came to speaking publicly about any influence Wagner's music exerted over his own music, Elgar always retreated. Many contemporary music critics drew musical comparisons between the two composers almost straight away, but when questioned about it, Elgar always preferred to point the press in Mendelssohn's direction, not Wagner's. For example, for an interview with *The Musical Times* in 1900, Elgar was still singing from his 'anti-Wagner' hymn sheet:

I became acquainted with the representative theme long before I had even heard a note of Wagner, or even seen one of his scores. My first acquaintance with the *Leitmotiv* was derived (in my boyhood) from Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and the system elaborated from that, as my early unpublished things show.¹⁶⁷

By placing distance between his own music and Wagner's, Elgar was actually playing a very clever and tactical game: he was not really distancing himself from Wagner, but rather all the other British composers who had all jumped on the 'Wagnerian bandwagon' more overtly. Many British composers were affected by the Wagner craze

¹⁶⁷ *The Musical Times*, 41 (October 1900) p. 647

of the first years of the twentieth century - Parry, Stanford, Bantock, Holbrooke and Brian all tried to emulate Wagnerian scale, models and harmonic vocabulary. So, by claiming to be the heir that other Great Brit, Mendelssohn, Elgar managed to forge himself an independent pathway – away from the academic elitism of Oxbridge and the RCM, whom he felt had snubbed him because of his background. Elgar's comment in a letter to Jaeger is particularly telling on this matter, 'I forgot if I told you I am appreciating your Wagner letters very much: go on. It is nice to be told I am a sheep.'¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Percy M Young, (ed) *Letters to Nimrod* (London: Dobson, 1965) p. 4

CHAPTER III: THE INFLUENCE OF WAGNER ON ELGAR'S CONTEMPORARIES

3.0: Introduction

Finding him thus dissatisfied with his idol, I am not surprised to find him [Stanford] equally dissatisfied with the present condition and future prospects of Wagnerism. While candidly admitting that the whole thing is a bubble, he tells me I am wrong in saying it has burst yet, and grumbles that it still exists to his cost. 'To say that the bubble has burst already,' he says, 'is to state what men's eyes, ears and pockets know to be absolutely false.' According to this, the keeping up of the bubble must be a very expensive affair; and I should strongly advise my opponent to have nothing more to do with it. Let it burst and never mind.¹⁶⁹

The development of British music in the twentieth century has rightly been called a Renaissance. The variety of native composers and their achievements could not have been predicted from the tastes and style prevailing around 1900. Britain had followed the main figures of nineteenth-century music with interest, commissioning works from outstanding composers such as Mendelssohn and Dvořák – to mention but two – and invited celebrated performers and conductors in a steady stream from 1815 onwards. So much British music was written but most of it sounds pale today beside the music it imitated. Individuality scarcely reappeared before 1900, though there are a few striking exceptions, among whom may be numbered Parry and Stanford. Yet, valuable work was done and it is now starting to be recognised as having affected a revival of a truly native approach.

At the beginning of the twentieth century many composers were still more attracted to Continental models than to developing individual style. Imitation of leading composers has of course always featured in music development but where Britain was concerned, such imitation delayed the return to a native tradition. Holbrooke, for example, attempted a Wagnerian operatic cycle in his *Children of Don* but the work was

¹⁶⁹ J. F. Rowbottom responding to Dr. C. Villiers Stanford in, 'The Wagner Bubble', *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, Vol. 29, no. 550 (1 December, 1888) p. 748

still-born; Rutland Boughton's scheme to establish Glastonbury as an English operatic centre after the model of Bayreuth also failed. As the century progressed, Continental fashions were imitated but none in British hands produced music that could stand by its models without denigration – as do the English sixteenth and seventeenth century madrigals.

Five British composers were affected by the Wagner craze of the first years of the twentieth century: Holbrooke, Brian, Bantock, Mackenzie and Boughton composed music that was Wagnerian and lacked both the catholic elements of Elgar and the self-conscious nationalism of Vaughan Williams, Holst and the folksong school. The Wagner spell tended to affect composers in one of two ways: they followed either the eroticism of *Tristan* or the clever primitivism and latent gigantism of *The Ring*. English composers influenced by Wagner mainly belonged to the latter school, *Tristan* having been implicated in the Wilde scandal. It is the general atmosphere and orchestral technique of *The Ring* (its subtle harmonic innovations were another matter) and later-nineteenth-century music generally, and their development in the early works of Richard Strauss, that provided the basis for the music of our quintet.

It was the colossal nature of Wagner that attracted all five men. The scale of Brian's *Gothic Symphony* rings with Wagner, Holbrooke wrote an English *Ring* on Welsh subjects, Boughton coined 'choral dramas' (a mixture of oratorio and music drama) and set up an English Bayreuth, Mackenzie saturated his works with representative themes, while Bantock from his student days favoured subjects that were cosmic in scale, huge in conception, Babylonian in orchestration and catastrophic in economic effect. As others wrote cycles of songs, Bantock wrote cycles of symphonic poems. Musical lineage is a curious thing: Bantock and Holbrooke both studied music with Frederick Corder at the Royal Academy of Music rather than with Stanford at the Royal College (Brian was self-taught). It was partly luck that brought Stanford Vaughan Williams, Ireland, Holst and Frank Bridge, but there is no doubt that his list of distinguished pupils is impressive. He represented the Brahms faction, Corder that of Liszt and Wagner.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ *The English Music Renaissance 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music*. Edited by Merion Hughes and Robert Stradling (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press) p. 63

The overwhelming weight of talent lay with the conservative teacher and Corder's one major talent was Arnold Bax. Corder's methods were progressive but too easygoing, and all his pupils, even the devastatingly gifted Bax, suffered from it. Stanford was perhaps the better teacher, but he was also cruelly repressive, reactionary and insensitive – almost all of his pupils put on record some story of his crushing dismissal of their work.¹⁷¹ All his pupils took years to live down the chronic sense of inferiority he imparted: Vaughan Williams was perhaps the toughest of them, but needed Ravel to restore his balance; Ireland may have been permanently crippled (his pessimism and self-mistrust were almost pathological); and Bridge may well have been a true progressive who only found himself in his last years.¹⁷² Stanford did give his pupils a disciplined approach that stood them in good stead; but he overdid it. Bantock, Holbrooke and Bax suffered from a lack of self-discipline. In Bax's case his musical imagination was so lavish and original that the damage was less; besides, Bax never took the German school of his day seriously, learning instead from composers like Liszt, Borodin and others outside the mainstream of Teutonic music and this was his salvation. It is notable that Bax's one Wagnerian influence was that of *Tristan*, and in this he was unique among English composers of his generation.¹⁷³ English academic life had little unified direction at the time, and autocrats like Stanford and good-intentioned men like Corder had no firm tradition in which to work: and something big was happening in English music around them, and surprisingly, some of those changes were wrought by Elgar.

Each British composer influenced by Wagner had a different Wagnerian approach to composing and this is partly reflected in the way this chapter itself has been composed. This chapter will focus on Parry, Boughton, Bantock and Mackenzie because each had a passion for Wagner that manifested itself in a different way. Parry was a scholarly Wagnerian and this came out sporadically in his music; Mackenzie and Bantock were post-Wagnerian composers who tried to copy the scale, harmony, structure (as far as possible) and leitmotif system, and finally, Rutland Boughton was a militant Wagnerian: a political activist who dreamt of an English Bayreuth.

¹⁷¹ Counted in Lewis Foreman, *Bax: A Composer and his Times* (Aldershot: Scholar P, 1988) p. 163

¹⁷² Anthony Payne, *Frank Bridge: Radical and Conservative* (London: Thames Publishing, 1984) p. 81

¹⁷³ Foreman (1988) pp. 179-80

3.1: Wagner and Sir Hubert Parry (1848 - 1918)

Scenes from Prometheus Unbound [...] was not a success, but it was none the less interesting on that account; it undoubtedly marks an epoch in the history of English music, and the type of composition of which it was the first specimen has had great consequences in the development of our national art.¹⁷⁴

Parry's musical style was a complex aggregate reflecting his assimilation of indigenous as well as continental traditions. Trained in the organ loft during his schooldays and educated at Cambridge, he had fully imbibed the aesthetics of Anglican church music and the oratorio-centred repertory of the provincial music festivals by the age of 18. His early works, sacred and secular, betray the influences of Sterndale Bennett, Stainer and, most of all, Mendelssohn, whose stylistic paradigms are clearly emulated in his Oxford exercise 'O Lord, Thou hast cast us out' (1866). However, his study with Pierson exorcised him of Mendelssohn, but the years spent working with Dannreuther during the 1870s were crucial in awakening him to the music of Brahms and Wagner. Parry believed that the true inner life of man's emotions could be equated with notions of organic coherence - the fusing of older methods with new formal involution through intellectual application. This naturally led towards the German triumvirate of J. S. Bach, Beethoven and Brahms for whom his criticism is almost always conspicuously positive, not to say reverential. However, it is important to recognise that Parry also maintained a tempered admiration for Wagner. As a composer, Parry's interest in Wagner was considerable in the 1870s and early 1880s, but it is clear that his prejudice against opera in later years, strengthened by the failure of his one operatic venture for Carl Rosa, *Guenever* (1886) did much to moderate his enthusiasm. His writings on Wagner in *The Art of Music* are nevertheless highly engaging, particularly with regard to his insights into Wagner's formal and harmonic experiments seen as descending directly from Bach and Beethoven. Parry's admiration for Wagner was principally owing to his acceptance of Wagner's artistic descent from Beethoven as he expounded in *Studies*:

¹⁷⁴ Fuller Maitland, entry on Sir C. H. H. Parry in *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Second Edition, Vol. iii (London: Macmillan, 1979-1889) pp. 624-7

As he [Wagner] himself said, even before he wrote *Tristan and Isolde*, 'It seemed feasible to realize my idea by leading the whole rich stream into which German music had swollen under Beethoven into the channel of the music drama.' It was the general development of the language of music and its instrumental resources, in symphonies, overtures, sonatas and quartets and so forth, that made his attempt possible. The infinite variety of melody, and the gradual expansion of forms, enabled him to wed music to words without sacrificing sense or dramatic propriety; and the development of the dramatic story enabled him to dispense with the regular systematic outlines, which are necessary in pure instrumental music, and in their place admitted a freer emotional form, depending on a balance of emotional crises – moments of passion alternating with moments of comparative quiet in infinite graduations.¹⁷⁵

In his first period of maturity as a composer, Parry gave much time to the study of Wagner's music dramas. We know this not only from his diaries but also from his sessions with his teacher and mentor Edward Dannreuther. It was Dannreuther, the principal champion of Wagner in London during the 1870s, who had produced some of the most important elucidations of Wagner's operatic ideology in *Richard Wagner: His Tendencies and Theories* and *Richard Wagner and the Reform of the Opera* and several articles and writings that Parry keenly imbibed.¹⁷⁶

Parry began to study with Dannreuther in 1873. It is clear from his diaries and letters that discussion on the philosophy of history and culture took place between them, but the influences that were brought to bear on Dannreuther's own historical writings appear to be German (reflecting his Leipzig education and Teutonic background) such as Schopenhauer and Comte (who is openly quoted on the title-page of his book *Wagner and the Reform of the Opera*).¹⁷⁷ Given his background, it is hardly surprising that

¹⁷⁵ Hubert Parry, *Studies of Great Composers* (London, 1866) p. 72

¹⁷⁶ See Dannreuther's two seminal articles on Wagner: 'The opera: its growth and decay', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 32, (May 1875) pp. 64-72; and, 'The Musical Drama', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 33 (November 1875) pp. 80-85

¹⁷⁷ Edward Dannreuther, *Wagner and the Reform of the Opera* (London: Augener, 1904)

Parry's rise to the mastership of the Musical Renaissance was a problematic affair, and one which was largely determined by the reception of his music. During the 1880s, music critics were largely divided in their reception of new works and while almost all actively supported and promoted native talent, there was a bitter disagreement about the future course of national music. Older conservative critics were resolved that Wagner would not provide the model for the nation's musical future, while the younger more progressive critics were equally determined that the future should be guided by progressive ideas.

It was during the late 1860s and early 1870s that a new wider world opened up for Parry as he resolved to make his way as a disciple of Bayreuth. A juvenile Wagnerian influence is perceptible in the early *Third String Quartet* (composed in 1878-1880) and the *Nonet for Wind* (1877). Wagner is a source of strength, not weakness, for Parry at this stage in his compositional life and Wagner's Teutonic massiveness suits Parry's temperament far better than it does Stanford's, helping him to develop an idiomatic style and considerable ability to construct broad climaxes. The best of these climaxes occur in slow movements, where Parry is inevitably at his most profound. Their magnificence is due to the fact that, being a lyrical composer, his sense of flow is best when he can forget the thematic development demanded of sonata form and expanded at leisure. In the *Andante* of the *Piano Quartet*, Parry begins with a wonderfully intimate theme which has a touch of Valhalla about it – he had seen the complete *Ring* cycle at the first Bayreuth festival, three years earlier in 1876.

Ex.1.0: Hubert Parry, Andante from Piano Quartet

The image displays the first seven measures of the 'Andante' movement from Hubert Parry's Piano Quartet. The score is written for Piano, Viola, and Violoncello. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The Piano part begins with a fortissimo (*sfp*) dynamic, featuring a complex texture of chords and moving lines. The Viola and Violoncello parts enter in measure 7, with the Violoncello playing a more active role than the Viola. The dynamics shift to mezzo-piano (*mp*) in measure 7. The notation includes various musical symbols such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Parry's refusal to submit to a full close is equally Wagnerian: after forty bars in which the theme is expanded in luxuriant counterpoint to a fine fortissimo climax, an interrupted cadence on to an A major chord marks the start of a new build up, thematically unrelated. There is an invigorating freedom of rhythm and of dissonance, very similar to the idiom Ivor Guerneu employed with equal poignancy in his songs forty years later. This second climax is sustained over twenty-two bars until, still without reaching a perfect cadence, the first theme returns and the whole process begins again, with far-reaching differences.

Parry's ability to fashion an intensely personal style out of a narrow range of Teutonic influence makes him, in his best moments, a finer composer than Stanford. Parry's passion for Wagner seems to be summed up by these journal entries from May 1877:

Wagner's conducting is quite marvellous; he seems to transform all he touches; he knows precisely what he wants and does it to a certainty. The *Kaisermarsch* became quite new under his influence, and supremely magnificent. I was so wild with excitement after it that I did not recover all the afternoon. The concert in the evening was very successful and the Meister was received with prolonged applause, but many people found the *Rheingold* selection too hard for them.¹⁷⁸

And, concerning a visit from the 23-year-old Ethel Smyth,

She is the most extreme anti-Wagnerite I have yet come across. Every touch of him she feels with equal aversion; she is contemptuous both of his poetry, charm and music. We played the Brahms variations on the Schumann theme in E flat and when we go to the last one she said 'I can't bear this; it's like Wagner.' 'There, that ninth, it's *Lohengrin*. I have got to detest the very sound of a ninth from him.' After she said, 'it is impossible for anyone to like Brahms and Wagner.' I demurred.¹⁷⁹

Parry's first major premiere - that of the overture *Guillem de Cabestanh* in 1879 - was an occasion that probably resulted from Grove's influence. Parry's *Guillem*, inspired by a tale found in Hueffer's *The Troubadors*, was overtly Wagnerian in its subject-matter and considering the conservatism of several of the major critics, it is unsurprising that its reception was rather cool. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Morning Post* ignored the occasion all together, while the *Athenaeum* recommended that *Guillem* should be heard 'as abstract and not programme music at some future point.'¹⁸⁰ Hueffer in *The Times* blew hot and cold, commenting that while parts of the work revealed the influence of Wagner's *Tristan*, Parry's 'invention' was where 'the chief weakness of the composition seems to lie.'¹⁸¹ Only *The Musical Times* was complementary, commenting that *Guillem* was 'very clever and well-scored.'¹⁸² Parry's correspondence offers a revealing insight into the difficulties facing the 'music of the future' - as when Hugh Montgomery one of

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in: Trevor Hold, 'Tales of Mr. Toad. The Secret Life of Hubert Parry', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 133, No. 1798 (December, 1992) pp. 625-627

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 628

¹⁸⁰ *The Athenaeum*, 22 March, 1879

¹⁸¹ *The Times*, 18 March, 1879

¹⁸² *The Musical Times*, 1 April, 1879

the composer's closest friends, expressed his outrage and disgust at what *Guillem* represented to him,

[...There is] that quality in your work which makes Wagner so unsatisfactory to me and immoral in the effect he produces on my emotional condition. A tendency to promiscuous intercourse with all sorts of loose keys instead of faithful cleaving to one only [...] to which one is accustomed in the respectable masters.¹⁸³

For Montgomery, 'Wagner' clearly meant sex; to love *der Meister's* music was to embrace the temptations of the flesh. He, like many others, believed Wagnerism to be a moral danger, a debasing and corrupting tendency comparable to the enjoyment of prostitutes. Parry however, was not to be moved and replied to Montgomery stating how strongly he still felt the 'impress' of Wagner's 'warmth and genius'.¹⁸⁴

After the *Guillem* setback, Parry turned to the concerto form, a move that effectively signaled a change in the direction of Brahms. In the event, the *Piano Concerto in F sharp*, first performed at the Crystal Palace under Manns, polarized the critics. Whereas the premiere was again conspicuously ignored by the *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post* and *Musical Times*, *The Times* had no reservations. Hueffer, writing that the concerto marked a new beginning for the English music – which had for so long been crippled by 'Mendelssohnian sentiment clad in Mendelssohnian form' – praised Parry for being,

All but entirely free from such a tendency, [with his] taste leading unmistakably in the direction of the latest phase of German music [...] we cannot but look upon this deviation from the well-beaten track as a hopeful sign.¹⁸⁵

In the same vein, Prout in the *Athenaeum* declared that,

¹⁸³ Letter from Hugh Montgomery (20 March, 1879) quoted in Jeremy Dibble, *C. Hubert. H. Parry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,) p. 172

¹⁸⁴ Letter from Parry to Montgomery (15 September, 1879) quoted in Dibble, *Ibid.*, p. 175

¹⁸⁵ *The Times*, 6 April, 1880

Mr Parry decidedly belongs to the advanced school of musical thought; his style has, perhaps, more affinity with that of Brahms than any other modern composer. His music is pre-eminently intellectual [...] and what he has to say is always his own, and further, it is never trivial or commonplace.¹⁸⁶

However, Davison in the *Musical World*, inimitably mocked the concerto with a cartoon and the observation that, although 'very clever', the piece seemed to be in the 'wrong key'.¹⁸⁷ Once again, the battle lines for the future of English music were drawn for all to see and hear.

The critics did not have to wait very long for Parry's next premiere, *Scenes from Shelley's Prometheus Unbound*. Yet, with this work, Parry gave his heart to the Meister and *Prometheus* was more 'undone' than 'unbound' at the first performance. The conservative critics were predictably disappointed and gave the composer and *Prometheus* short shrift. Bennett in the *Daily Telegraph* led the way condemning the composer for trying 'to out-Wagner Wagner', asserting that only when he had abjured this infatuation would he be capable of 'greater work'.¹⁸⁸ The *Morning Post* also took a hard line in the work, castigating its creator for choosing to 'disdain the Mendelssohnian model in favour of the 'mannerism' of Wagner and 'the expression of aesthetic emotion'; Barrett even went onto compare Parry with Shakespeare's *Macbeth*,

It may therefore be hoped that in his next attempt he may be induced to abandon a barrowed garb which sits badly upon him and only too clearly betrays the shape of the former wearer.¹⁸⁹

The Musical Times could not have been more dismissive of *Prometheus*, commenting that, although it had its moments of real beauty, 'the dullness which gradually spread itself over the large audience was made even more apparent by the transient gleams of light.' The journal went on to doubt whether the composer was a 'real creator' or simply

¹⁸⁶ *The Atheneum*, 10 April, 1880

¹⁸⁷ *The Musical World*, 10 April, 1880

¹⁸⁸ *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 September 1880. The *Musical World* carried the same review *verbatim* on 11 September, 1880.

¹⁸⁹ *The Musical Post*, 9 September, 1880

another deluded 'admirer of the 'music of the future'.¹⁹⁰ Even Hueffer in *The Times* found little to enthuse about in the new work, confining himself to such generalities as the music was 'very difficult'.¹⁹¹ Only the *Athenaeum* had a good word for *Prometheus*, judging it as having 'much real poetic feeling' and 'much really original and beautiful thought'.¹⁹² As far as the critics were concerned, Parry's *Prometheus* was clearly fated to remain bound to his rock for quite some time. It was to be two years before the composer ventured forth with a major new work. In the event, the critics, it seems, had their way, as Parry (temporarily at least) abjured Bayreuth and turned back towards Brahmsian classicism.

So, whilst the influence of Wagner is conspicuous in the overture *Guillem de Cabestanh* (1878) and altogether more prominent in his first major choral commission, *Scenes from Prometheus Unbound* (1880) (a work hailed by some as the beginning of the so-called English Musical Renaissance) it was in Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* that his earlier Wagnerian enthusiasms finally found a more completely digested post-Wagnerian sound (as in the paraphrase of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* in the introduction, see below) within a muscular language of greater diatonic dissonance - a stylistic attribute linking him with his English predecessors such as Stainer, S.S. Wesley, Ouseley and Walmisley.

¹⁹⁰ *The Musical Times*, 1 October, 1880

¹⁹¹ *The Times*, 8 September, 1880

¹⁹² *The Atheneum*, 11 September, 1880

Ex. 1.1: Prelude to *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg*, bars 1-14

Sehr Maessig bewegt

f sehr kraetig und gehalten.

6 *sempre f*

11 *cresc.* *ff*

Ex. 1.2: Opening of *Blest Pair of Sirens*, bars 1-14

Allegro moderato, ma energico

dim.

7 *dim.* *p*

11 *poco cresc.* *ff*

This diatonic tendency remained a pronounced feature of Parry's music and was used to great effect, be it lyrically in *L'Allegro*, the *Invocation to Music* and *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, grandiosely in the *Te Deum* (1873), the coronation anthem *I was glad* and the *Ode to Music*, or polyphonically in *De profundis* (a tour de force for 12-part chorus), the *Ode on the Nativity* and the *Songs of Farewell*.

It seems remarkable that these vital productive years in Parry's career should have been so totally neglected. Even *Prometheus Unbound*, an acknowledged milestone in English musical history, and one which would sound as fresh and original today as it did in 1880, has not been performed since 1927. Parry's name should therefore be added to the already lengthy list of composers waiting for a reappraisal.

3.2: Wagner and Mackenzie (1847 – 1935)

Alexander Campbell Mackenzie was a prodigiously gifted musician of great versatility and he, along with Parry and Stanford, did much to forge the new standards of the so-called 'Renaissance' in British music at the end of the 19th century. Like Elgar, Mackenzie learnt his trade from playing the violin in orchestras: He played second violin in the Ducal Orchestra, performing in many premières of works by Liszt, Wagner and Berlioz. These years proved formative in the young musician's practical attitudes to music and knowledge of orchestral repertory, just in the same way as they did for Elgar. Mackenzie began life in Edinburgh, studied in Germany and lived for a decade in Italy before settling down to serve as principal of the Royal Academy of Music for thirty-six years. *The Rose of Sharon* (1884) is the third choral work and first oratorio written by Mackenzie. The oratorio was produced during the composer's 'Tuscan' period, nestling between his work on the two lyrical dramas commissioned by the Carl Rosa Opera Company, *Columba* (1883) and *The Troubadour* (1886). The new work gave Mackenzie the opportunity to realise his plans for a large-scale choral work and also to instigate a new collaborative partnership with the librettist and music critic Joseph Bennett (1831-1911) which would last for well over a decade and result in the completion of five choral

works during this period.¹⁹³ Although the majority of Mackenzie's choral scores were written to librettos with secular subjects, it was in his treatment of the sacred, biblical subject of *The Rose of Sharon* that he first found a suitable stylistic medium for the composition of choral music. As will be shown in the following discussion, a great deal of the music in *The Rose* was filtered through Mackenzie's operatic training and experience of Teutonic composers on the Continent, (Wagner, most significantly), in a style that was often at odds with the presentation of sacred subject in a British oratorio.

In his adaptation of the Biblical poetry for the Libretto of *The Rose*, Bennett combined eight chapters of the original to produce a drama split into four parts – Separation, Temptation, Victory and Reunion¹⁹⁴ – following the then current operatic fashion for four acts, as noted by Mackenzie in an interview for *The Musical Times* on the subject.¹⁹⁵ Mackenzie responded to the sensuality of the text with skill and sensitivity. Except for the fact that the solos are often too extended to carry any true theatrical momentum, the work could almost be staged as an opera: both music and libretto are dramatic enough to place it well above the regular provincial music festival offerings.¹⁹⁶

Bennett's drama is predominantly based around the character of the Sulamite and she is at the very centre of almost every scene save those led by the chorus and it was in the creation of the solo part of the Sulamite that Mackenzie adopted his operatic methods of composition. Following the structure of Bennett's libretto, the music of *The Rose* was arranged into scenes within the four parts analogous to operatic acts. Eschewing the construction of his choral work from separate numbers as in the scores of *The Bride* and

¹⁹³ Mackenzie and Bennett ceased to work together regularly after the difficulties they experienced over their second oratorio, *Bethlehem* in the 1890s. See D. J. Barker, PhD Dissertation, University of Durham, 1999, pp. 114-118. However, they did collaborate once more on *The Sun-god's Return* in 1911.

¹⁹⁴ Although *The Rose* has a Prologue and an Epilogue they do not enter into the dramatic flow of the oratorio and are therefore not included in the synopsis.

¹⁹⁵ 'Musical Times Interviews. No. 1: Dr Mackenzie on Opera', *The Musical Times* (1 January 1894) pp. 11-13. For a fuller discussion of Mackenzie's views on operatic composition see Barker, chapter 3: The Lyrical Dramas. Although *The Rose* has a Prologue and an Epilogue, they do not enter into the dramatic flow of the oratorio and are therefore not included in the chapter.

¹⁹⁶ Although the operatic nature of the music in *The Rose* did not escape contemporary commentators, they would have proved difficult to bring to the dramatic stage. Some years after the Norwich premiere of his first oratorio, Mackenzie was approached by an enterprising American who, having seen the score of the work, was interested in staging a production of *The Rose*. Having been approached with the project, the composer told Bennett that 'even with the help of many cuts, the choristers will find great difficulty in committing that sort of music to memory and I pity the chorusmaster who has the job of drilling it into them.' (Letter to Joseph Bennett, 26 September 1887, Bennett Collection MFCM156)

Jason, Mackenzie chose to blur the distinctions between various musical sections in the manner of opera and, more particularly, his first lyrical drama *Columba*. Whereas the earlier and less operatic *Jason* suffered from the stiltedness of sharp physical divisions between aria and chorus, scena and ensemble, the music of *The Rose* is relatively continuous and this promotes a greater sense of dramatic progression in performance. Although, as with the lyrical dramas, the staple formal structures of mid-century Italian and French opera and oratorio are audible in *The Rose*, these are linked together musically within the score – an attempt by Mackenzie to incorporate Wagner's method of continuous dramatic action and combine the genres as one. In general, such musical structures come to the fore in the choral portions of the oratorio and otherwise the solo passages are written in a predominantly operatic style.

Perhaps the most overtly Wagnerian aspect of *The Rose* is that sections of soliloquy and dialogue are saturated with representative themes, some of which are employed on a local level and others which permeate the work from beginning to end. This influence came directly from Wagner-imitation, although these do not undergo compositional transformation in the same way as those of Wagner. It seems appropriate at this stage to draw the comparison with Elgar: the thematic development of reminiscence themes Mackenzie uses in *The Rose* is much more along the lines of the thematic development Elgar adopted in *The Light of Life*. For Elgar, this was a primitive version of a technique that he would develop over about twenty years, whilst for Mackenzie, it was the apogee of his post-Wagnerian experiments. Mackenzie did not employ such representative themes to the same extent in his earlier works; *The Bride* is given some semblance of cyclic continuity over the span of its four solo and choruses by the sharing of thematic material between the Prelude and the final chorus, and the music of *Jason* makes further and more developed use of reminiscence motifs though it does not attain the thematic integration apparent in the score of *The Rose*. This musical coherence and the opportunities for the use of representative themes are partly explained by the significant structure of Bennett's libretto. Being based on pre-existent poetry, Bennett's arrangement of Biblical verse follows the example of the original eight chapters of the *Song of Solomon* necessitating the repetition of a certain number of key phrases and lines of text. Most notably these included the phrases, 'My Beloved is mine and I am his' and

'My love is strong as death, and unconquerable as the grave', both expressing sentiments central to the interpretation Bennett placed on the narrative. Such repetitions of text provided Mackenzie with ideal opportunities for the use of recurrent thematic ideas in his music, much in the same way that parallel dramatic incidents in *Columba* and *The Troubadour* were highlighted through thematic reminiscence in either vocal line or orchestral accompaniment.

One of the most fertile portions of *The Rose* in terms of representative themes is the first scene of the first part of 'Separation'. After the initial chorus, 'Come, let us go forth',¹⁹⁷, the Beloved sings a section of accompanied recitative followed by the aria, 'For Lo! The winter is past'. He soon wakes the Sulamite who, having recognized his voice calling her from sleep, sings part of a vineyard song, 'We will take the foxes'.¹⁹⁸ They join together in the luxurious duet, 'Come, Beloved into the garden of nuts', before a recapitulation of the initial chorus. It is in this section of linked recitative, aria and duet that Mackenzie first employs the more important representative themes used during the course of the oratorio. Even before the initial chorus, the orchestra introduces the unison vineyard theme in order to set the morning scene in the village of Sulam.

¹⁹⁷ *The Rose of Sharon* (1884) pp. 6-17. There were two versions of the vocal score printed by Novello in 1884. Unless stated, all page numbers refer to the version which has a total of 238 pages (i.e. shorter version).

¹⁹⁸ *The Rose of Sharon* (1884) p. 23

Ex.1.3: Alexander Mackenzie, *The Rose of Sharon*, The Vineyard Theme in its later transformations



In this example, the different permutations of the theme have been placed together, so that the similar contours of each motif can be identified. They are, of course, not intended to be performed together! This theme is used later on as the melody of the Sulamite's vineyard song, 'We will take the foxes', mentioned earlier, and it also appears in rhythmically transformed versions in the later orchestral Intermezzo, 'Spring Morning on Lebanon', and as an accompaniment figure to the questions of Solomon's Princes and Nobles in the following scene.

A decade later, Mackenzie tried to recreate a similar set of relationships in his oratorio *Bethlehem*. However, the music lacked the conviction of such episodes in *The Rose* previously described. One of the reasons for the comparative failure of representative themes in *Bethlehem* was the structure of the libretto provided by Bennett. Having presented the composer with a libretto comprising a series of animated tableaux instead of developing drama, the resultant linear narrative could not support the use of representative themes nearly so well as the repetitive poetic text of *The Rose*. Indeed, it is interesting to note that Elgar suffered from the same musical conundrum when

composing *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*: Elgar had difficulty constructing his Leitmotifs so that they spanned the entire work because the music is sectioned off into tableaux, which did not cause a problem during the composition of *The Dream of Gerontius*, which is through-composed.¹⁹⁹ Mackenzie overloaded the libretto of *Bethlehem* with musical dramatic devices to which it was not suited, whereas *The Rose* and the dramatic cantata *The Story of Sayid* of 1886 were perfect for such dramatic operatic treatment.

3.3: Wagner and Rutland Boughton (1878 - 1960)

Of the many English composers whose careers overlapped those of Elgar and Vaughan Williams, none enjoyed greater success during his lifetime, nor a more total subsequent eclipse, than Rutland Boughton. His career fell roughly into three parts. Study at the Royal College of Music, followed by a period of intense hardship, which led to a congenial post at Birmingham's Midland Institute of Music, offered to him by Granville Bantock in 1911. There he formulated the theories and ideals that became the basis of his mature work, and won a fair degree of public recognition as a composer of choral music. Socialism, of the William Morris variety, and the principles of Wagnerian music drama combined to play a crucial part in his development. Together with the poet Reginald Buckley, Boughton declared his aims in a booklet entitled *Music Drama of the Future* (1911). He left Birmingham in the same year, driven out by the gossip surrounding his relationship with the artist Christina Walshe. After a further period of hack-work in London, Boughton and his two collaborators (Buckley and Walshe) announced plans for a festival, to take place at Glastonbury in 1913. His aims were to create a commune of artists, living and working together; to compose music drama along Wagnerian lines, but with a specifically English choral bias (he coined the term 'choral drama'); and to centre his work on a cycle of Arthurian dramas, of which the first, *The Birth of Arthur*, had already been written.

¹⁹⁹ For details on Elgar's musical tableaux in *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*, see Charles Edward McGuire, *Elgar's Oratorios: The Creation of an Epic Narrative* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) Chapters

The second and most important period began in 1912 when he took the first steps towards creating the centre for operatic experiment which eventually crystallised in the Glastonbury Festivals. These ran until 1927, the first performance taking place in 1914. It had as its main event the first performance of Boughton's own *The Immortal Hour*. The practical difficulties of financing and operating a series of festivals soon modified Boughton's schemes. Wagnerian grandeur gave way to something much simpler, more practical and individual (folksong being the purifying musical influence). The Glastonbury Assembly Rooms doubled as a theatre, with a grand piano for orchestra. Friends and pupils, local and imported, amateur and professional, did everything else. Miraculously the venture prospered, and, save for a brief interruption during Boughton's military service, festivals were given several times each year until 1926. The festivals included some 350 staged performances (including productions of six full-scale operas by Boughton himself and the revival of relatively unknown works by Gluck, Purcell, Blow, Matthew Locke and others), together with more than 100 chamber concerts. From 1920 the Glastonbury Players made regular tours, and in 1924 the Glastonbury Festival Players introduced Laurence Housman and his cycle of *Little Plays of St Francis*. The entire venture was concluded in July 1927, partly as a result of Boughton's extra-marital adventures (he was now married to his third and last wife) and partly because he had involved the company in active political support of the 1926 General Strike. However, by this time he was famous. Barry Jackson staged *The Immortal Hour* at his Birmingham Repertory Theatre in 1921, and in London in the following year. The work received 216 consecutive performances, a revival of 160 performances in 1923, and further successful revivals in 1926 and 1932. In 1924 *Alkestis* was produced at Covent Garden.

The third period began in January 1927 when the Glastonbury Festival Players went into voluntary liquidation. Boughton moved to Gloucestershire, where he attempted to found festivals at Stroud in 1934 and Bath in 1935, endured considerable privation, but managed to complete the cycle of five Arthurian music dramas. He remained politically active, as a member of the Communist Party (1926–9, 1945–56), and often incorporated his ideas in books on music and the many articles he contributed to *The Sackbut*.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Boughton's books on music include *Bach*, 1930 and *The Reality of Music*, 1934

Glastonbury was Boughton's effort at creating an English Bayreuth and ended up being an extremely practical and fruitful undertaking. 'My business in life', he wrote in 1913, 'is to help with a few thoughts and actions towards a time when the arts are not the privilege of a minority and the boredom of the artists themselves, but the flower of life for everybody's achievement.'²⁰¹ Wagner's influence over Boughton was so strong that it influenced every aspect of his musical life. On the one hand there was Glastonbury: a commune-style musical centre where new dramatic musical works could be performed and appreciated by a receptive audience; and on the other was the post-Wagnerian nature of the music itself. Only Boughton's early music can be called Wagnerian, but it clearly demonstrates that despite the influence being pervasive, it never permeated all aspects of the score. It seems obvious that whilst Boughton liked the ideals expounded by Wagner, he took and adopted as many of them as possible but did not have the technical brilliance to assimilate them as fully as other composers, like Elgar, managed. Boughton's post-Wagnerian music sounds like someone who had consciously tried to compose in the style of Wagner, rather than a composer who has studied Wagner and assimilated the techniques into his own style.

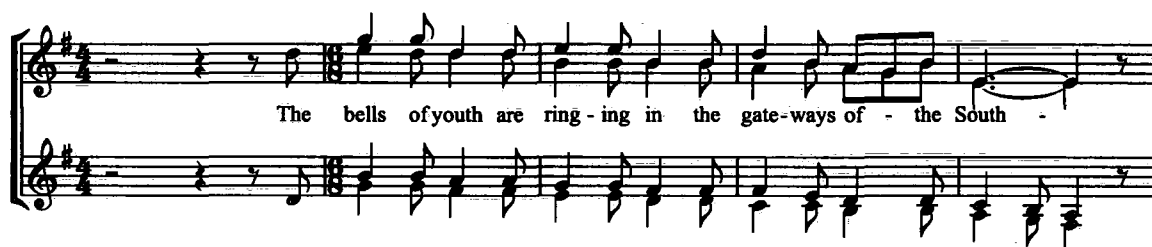
Boughton's musical ideal was based on a mixture of Wagnerian music drama and Handelian oratorio. Experience as a choral composer and conductor had led him to believe that a truly English type of opera should involve the chorus in a fundamental way and it was in this vein that he coined a new term for his operatic music - 'choral drama'. The first fruits of this amalgam can be seen in the opening drama of the Arthurian cycle (an English *Ring Cycle*), *The Birth of Arthur*. Here, Boughton adapted a lengthy poetic drama by Buckley, which gave a vital role to the chorus, both in commenting on the action and in setting an appropriately descriptive atmosphere. However, the result was not wholly successful, either as music or as drama. The music produced was Wagnerian copy-cat music in the extreme: the harmonic language is rich and overtly chromatic, whilst the texture is dominated by a somewhat primitive leitmotif plan, which pervades the entire score.

²⁰¹ Michael Hurd, 'Rutland Boughton, 1878-1960', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 119, No. 1619 (January, 1978) pp. 31

Signs of a significant development appeared in his next opera of the cycle, *The Immortal Hour*. Based on an existing play by Fiona Macleod (William Sharp), it was viable as drama and proved to be a subject with which he could identify so strongly as to create a musico-dramatic world that was both original and convincing. Chromaticism remained at the centre of the harmonic language, whilst leitmotifs were used too, but this time in the manner of a musical mosaic: short pregnant themes dovetailing each other, rather than being deployed symphonically, as in *The Birth of Arthur*. Indeed, a critic for *The Musical Times* proclaimed upon its first performance that, 'Rutland Boughton's 'Immortal Hour' is perhaps the most significant musico-dramatic work produced anywhere since *Parsifal*, and in England for over two hundred years'.²⁰² Rutland Boughton calls his work a Music Drama, which apart from the obvious comparisons of leitmotivic texture and chromatic harmony, seems to be a complete misnomer: Boughton's absorption of Wagner is only skin-deep. Music drama, as Wagner coined the term, was used to distinguish his mighty synthetic dramatic music from other peoples' operas and conveys to most minds the picture of a huge stage, huge singers, a huge orchestra and a huge conductor. From the beginning to the end of *The Immortal Hour* there is much that is strong, nothing that is huge. In fact, it is the few attempts Boughton makes at Wagnerian scale and scope that form the failures of the score.

The music itself manages to sound quintessentially English and it seems impossible to imagine the work being performed in any country except England or one rich in Anglo-Saxon traditions. The rhythmic motion and movement in thirds all lend themselves to something that sounds like folksong, not rich post-Wagnerian harmony.

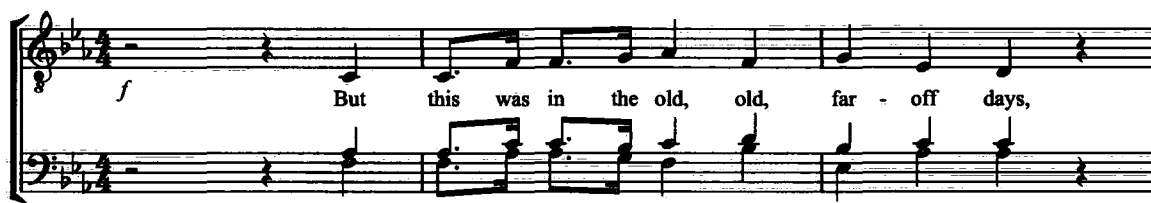
Ex. 1.4: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, 'The bells of youth are ringing'



This kind of simple harmony is heard throughout a good deal of the score:

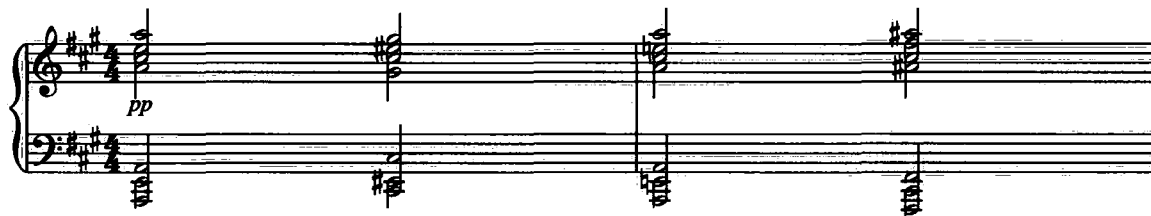
²⁰² Robert Lorenz, 'Rutland Boughton's 'The Immortal Hour'', *The Musical Times*, Vol. 64, No. 940 (June, 1921) pp. 414

Ex. 1.5: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, 'The old, old, far-off days'



These examples clearly demonstrate the folk element of the music, which is occasionally juxtaposed against touches of music that do sound post-Wagnerian. However, these chromatic interjections are few and far between so when they do appear, they sound out of context and rather clumsy. For example, the highly chromatic Wagnerian moment depicting the fairy-god, Midir, is surrounded by diatonic folk-like music:

Ex. 1.6: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, Midir's Motif



Midir's leitmotif has a distinctly Wagnerian sound and bears some resemblance to Wagner's music from *Die Meistersinger*.

1.7: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, Midir Leitmotif



1.8: Richard Wagner, *Die Meistersinger*, Old Nürnberg Motif



However, despite these occasional Wagnerian moments and the pretense that the work is a 'music drama', the things that make the piece work are the very things that make it

impossible to be classified as a music drama. Its supreme technical achievement is the belated restoration of a genuine vocal line and the attainment in the best parts of the music of an almost perfect balance between vocal and orchestral portions. Except where the composer has resorted to frank, straightforward tunes – set pieces certainly, but melodies that are pure songs and part-songs instead of staged arias and choruses – there are only a few pages where it can be said that the focus is either on the stage or in the orchestra. There is, of course, a certain amount of running orchestral commentary, but it is usually of a very discrete order, and though there are some orchestral themes that must be dubbed ‘motives’, these are as a rule vocal rather than orchestral. Unlike Wagner who tended not to concentrate on one motive, in *The Immortal Hour*, there is one particular motive that weaves its way throughout the entire work and depends entirely on diatonic harmony.

1.9: Rutland Boughton, *The Immortal Hour*, Prelude



The merits of Boughton’s most important choral dramas are that they are rich in a type of melody that is both memorable and dramatically apt; that his harmonic vocabulary is always appropriate to the needs of the drama; that his orchestration is always effective and often subtle; that the dramas themselves concern characters and situations of genuine human interest; and that his use of chorus is often telling and sometimes startlingly original. But it must be admitted that the chorus can be a halter on dramatic development and that it imposes great problems of production; that his reliance on strophic song forms can be inhibiting and dramatically naïve; and that the almost complete absence of concerted passages for the soloists is a severe musico-dramatic limitation. On balance, however, Boughton’s finest stage works have a unique quality that requires only sympathetic and truly professional production to make clear. Yet, herein lies a problem that arises with nearly all the most interesting and original English

dramatic works (Britten excepted): they belong to a class that seems almost deliberately to go against the style and manner of the existing opera house. From Purcell's *Dido* to Tippett's *Midsummer Marriage*, they have about them an element of 'oratorio' – of wanting to reveal a profound spiritual truth through a moral or symbolic drama. It may even be that their true originality, and viability, will not become apparent until we have created, as Boughton believed we must, a new type of opera house and a new type of operatic audience.

Boughton's operatic shortcomings are most apparent where he wrote his own texts (as in the Arthurian cycle). Passages of effective theatre are nullified by passages that are irredeemably static, and made to appear all the more inadequate by painful lapses of literary taste. The Arthurian cycle has never been performed as a whole. Composed between 1908 and 1945 it is not surprising that it fails to hang together as a unified whole. The largely irrelevant central episode, *The Lily Maid*, stands out as a moving story clothed in exceptionally fine music. Paradoxically, for all his political didacticism, it was only when Boughton was concerned with a human drama with which he could identify personally that his considerable, and highly individual, operatic skills sprang to life. The formation of the Rutland Boughton Music Trust in 1977 has led to a series of recordings on Hyperion, including *The Immortal Hour*, *Bethlehem*, the *Third Symphony*, Oboe Concerto no.1, Flute Concerto, Concerto for String Orchestra and string quartets nos.1 and 2. These have radically changed the received image of his music and relative importance to English music for the better.

3.4: Wagner and Sir Granville Bantock (1868 – 1946)

The second piece was Mr. Granville Bantock's 'Caedmar', in one act. The libretto, by the composer, tells how a lady loves a knight, and how the latter slays her husband. The music at every step reminds one of Wagner, but it is cleverly written and one day, when Mr. Bantock has escaped from the influence of the Bayreuth master, he will probably distinguish himself.²⁰³

²⁰³ Review of *Caedmar* in, *The Musical Times*, Vol. 33, No. 597 (1 November, 1892) p. 666

Neglect and chronology play strange games with minor figures in British music: Granville Bantock was well-known throughout his lifetime but faded into obscurity after his death. Bantock probably has the unenviable distinction of being the most unreasonably neglected composer in the history of neglected British music. He is the supreme musical Ichabod of the British Isles and the almost complete disappearance of his works from the repertoire is one of the saddest and perhaps most doleful musical biographies of recent times. With the passing of the years, cultural opiniatry and critical mythologising have dammed him to a limbo of ingloriousness and he is now left as nothing much more than a footnote in the chronicles of British music. His critical marginalisation and obscurity are now all too easily transfigured into musical fault in the shallow doctrines of accepted musical historiography: his gifts are minimised and misjudged; his foibles pre-condemned and his idiosyncrasies exaggerated.

But how did Bantock fall from such a lofty position to obscurity? This question is, in part, answered by the inclusion of Bantock in this thesis. To say that Bantock was strongly influenced by Wagner's music in every facet is an understatement: the scale of his orchestral compositions, his romantic and idiosyncratic harmony, the size of his orchestra and the leitmotifs that permeate his textures are all overtly Wagnerian. The distillation of Bantock's experiences of Wagner's music lay the foundation for his artistic growth and remained a significant component of the mastery of his maturity: but they were always to be found just under the surface of the music, not penetrating to its very core. The great symphonies and orchestral song cycles were incredibly popular with contemporary audiences and Bantock received more commissions and performances than almost all of his British contemporaries. However, Bantock's biggest problem lay in the fact that he did not have the time to fully develop his own musical voice, after his 'Wagner Period' had passed by. Bantock's works fell dramatically out of favour once the 'Wagner craze' had subsided after the First World War. Music critics began to despise the very thing that had made him so well-respected: Bantock's overt Wagnerism was his downfall. Even though some of his later works show a distinct change in style (moving more towards that of Vaughan Williams), his name was blackened and no concert hall or programmer was prepared to give a new work by Bantock a performance for fear of making a loss when the audience did not come. The temporary collapse of German

influences in 1914 closed the primary episode of Wagnerism in England. Only toward the end of 1919 did 'enemy music' return to the programs, 'two enthusiastically received performances of Schoenberg's String Sextet, at the end of December, being considered to mark the turning point.'²⁰⁴ Schoenberg may have appeared slightly less of an enemy than Wagner, partly because he was Austrian, but most importantly, his mature style represented a decisive departure from Wagnerian music. Thus, the blackout of Wagner during the Great War for reasons of patriotism only made what was already a partial eclipse of Wagner brought about by a growing popularity of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Bartók and Satie - all youthful composers competing for the limelight before the war. And so, because of the blackout of all things Wagnerian, Bantock's music suffered too. Only his music depicting scenes from his native Scotland were performed with any success after the First World War and much of his 'Eastern' influenced music disappeared from programmes because it used too much post-Wagnerian harmony. It is the 'Eastern' aspects of the music that form the basis for discussion in this section.

As a composer, Bantock went through several creative periods – Scottish, Celtic, pagan and Roman – but it is the Orient that stands out as the most significant, the longest lasting and the most embedded in knowledge and experience. Bantock's own brand of musical Orientalism was embodied in an output rich with exotic associations through the titles of his works, the use of words with Eastern flavours and an amalgam of what Bantock perceived to be Oriental melodies paired with rich, post-Wagnerian chromatic harmony.

Born in London in 1868, Bantock initially studied for entry to the Indian Civil Service, but abandoned this in favour of studies at the Royal Academy of Music in 1888. His family already had connections with the East, his father having had contacts with India. As a music student Bantock retained his interest in the Orient and looked outside Britain for influences on his music voice. It was at this point that Wagner's music ideas of Orientalism seemed to sediment in Bantock's mind. The influence of Alexander Mackenzie, principle at RAM, was paramount here, for as we have seen earlier in this chapter, Mackenzie was also an ardent Wagnerite with an interest in Oriental themes,

²⁰⁴ Percy A. Scholes, *The Mirror of Music, 1844-1944*, 2 vols. (London: Novello, 1947) Volume 2: p. 892

both of which came to the fore in his two cantatas, *The Story of Sayid* (1886) and *The Dream of Jubal* (1889).

While Bantock's love of the Orient might have begun as an imagined vision, later it was based on a more personal knowledge closely linked to his studies of Oriental languages and texts. His Oriental works were focused essentially during his time in Birmingham, and were produced mainly before 1910, after which all things Celtic replaced all things Eastern. Throughout Bantock's composing career the influence of the late Romantic Austro-Germanic tradition is paramount, and the impact of Wagner can be seen clearly in many works. The early one-act opera, *Caedmar* (1893) for example, 'shows the influence of Wagner throughout, more especially perhaps, that of the Siegmund-Sieglinde portion of *The Ring*...but the whole conception, texture and phraseology of the work reek of Wagner.'²⁰⁵

Bantock produced many works on Oriental themes in the period leading up to his move to Birmingham. On 11 May, 1897, a Steinway Hall concert featured his *Songs of Japan*, a follow-up to his *Songs of Arabia* and the second set of what became an extensive set of *Songs of the East*. All the songs were settings of words by Bantock's wife, Helen, and according to Bantock's friend, H. O. Anderton, 'there had been no previous attempt on anything like this scale to bring the mental outlook and feeling of the East into European music...'²⁰⁶ The *Songs of Persia* includes a reference to the ancient fire-worshippers, as well as a song named after Simurgh, a fabled ancient bird of wisdom and might. This set of six songs displays a curious amalgam of influences, exemplified in the first number, 'Drinking Song', with its tonal Schubertian chordal opening and the fourth song, 'In the Harem', with its much more exotic swooping melodic lines, arpeggiated piano chords and lush, Wagnerian harmony.

Ex. 2.0: Granville Bantock, *Songs of Persia*, 'Drinking Song', bars 5-8



²⁰⁵ H. O. Anderton, *Granville Bantock* (London: John Lane, 1915) pp. 3-4

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 34

Ex. 2.1: Granville Bantock, *Songs of Persia*, 'In the Harem', bars 1-3

Ah! - the life, the light, the jew - el, Nour- ma - ha!

The *Songs of India* embody Bantock's approach to the East. The first song, 'The Nautch Girl', makes reference to a dancing girl, with great play on the word 'droning', accompanied by an oriental drone and sinuously winding melody. The second song, 'Prayer to Vishnu', bears the performance instruction 'With great solemnity' and is essentially a modal invocation declaimed over tremolo piano chords, with the fourth song, 'Dirge' in similar vein. The final song, 'The Fakir's Song', deploys highly chromatic scales and harmony and unceasingly piano semiquavers below another declamatory vocal line.

Ex. 2.2: Granville Bantock, *Songs of India*, 'The Fakir's Song', bars 1-5

On for ev - er and
aye, The soul must wend its way

The 'distinct vein of Oriental imagination'²⁰⁷ in this group is one of the snake charmers and the streets of India. Although it is clear that Bantock has attempted to think himself into India, as a whole the Oriental atmosphere is not specific to that country but is a rather general notion of what makes music 'Eastern', with much use of Wagnerian harmony.

In 1906 Bantock published a single song, 'Song of the Genie', with words again by his wife, Helen. The influence of Wagner on Bantock is to the fore, with the imprisoned genie's declaration that he 'whirl like the storm' declaimed over a decidedly Walkurian storm figuration in the piano part.

Ex. 2.3: Granville Bantock, 'Song of the Genie', right hand of piano part, bars 9-10



In was in this year that Bantock's Oriental obsession reached its peak, when the first part of *Omar Khayyám* was premiered at the Birmingham Triennial Festival, followed by Part II in 1907 in Cardiff, and Part III in Birmingham in 1909. *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyám*, in its English version as produced by Edward [Fitzgerald (1809-93)], was immensely popular at the time – the writer Saki (1879-1916) even drew his pen name from the name of the cupbearer in the poem. Bantock retained a love of this book throughout his life, collecting many different editions of Fitzgerald's work. Ernest Newman described Bantock's *Omar Khayyám* as coming from someone with an 'architectonic mind', the work having 'sustained splendour of imagination.'²⁰⁸ This work had a powerful impact at its time of writing and it was performed a number of times in its colossal tripartite form, as well as travelling to Vienna in 1912. In 1910 it was given by the New Choral Society, Birmingham, in its three-part format, conducted by Rutland Boughton.²⁰⁹

Bantock's setting divides the work into three parts with three main characters, the Poet representing the core of Omar, The Philosopher representing the intellectual ad

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36

²⁰⁸ Ernest Newman, Review of *Omar Khayyám*, *The Birmingham Post* (10 August, 1909)

²⁰⁹ Anon., 'Music in the Provinces: Birmingham', *Musical Times*, Vol. 51/812 (1 October, 1910) p. 660

sceptical side of Omar, and the Beloved. While others before him had set sections of Fitzgerald, Bantock was the first to comprehend setting the whole text, a fair undertaking given the poem's 'stream of melancholy and pessimistic verses, always of a meditative cast...' ²¹⁰ As a true homage to Wagner, the work uses two complete string orchestras to create timbral and spatial effects, for example when one side is muted while the other is not. In addition, Bantock used four wind, six horns, three trumpets, three trombones, bass tuba and a large percussion battery that included camel bells to mark the procession of camels across the desert. Given these resources, the double string orchestra and the unwieldy nature of the text, it is hardly surprising that it is seldom performed today and hardly surprising that it fell out of favour after the war.

3.5: Conclusion

The problems faced by Parry, Bantock, Holbrooke, Boughton, Mackenzie and others was essentially that of English music as a whole. It would be easy to say that they were minor musical figures in England and have been forgotten because their music was not very good. This has been said many times and is partly true in some cases. But we must take the English temperament into account here too. We have always been technically behind the times, but we are not unadventurous in performing foreign music; between the First and Second World Wars, there were performances of Schoenberg, Berg and Webern in England when there were not so many in Europe. ²¹¹ Our provinciality is a myth. We play the music of all times and all countries, with our own at the end of the queue. Other nations put their own music first. But the English are peculiarly aware that they are not the most prominent nation in the musical world and this, coupled with the fact that art takes less of a place in public life than it does in other countries, and even today is less heavily subsidised, has resulted in a situation in which it is almost impossible for an Englishman to assess English music with any accuracy – and other nations simply do not assess it to begin with. The situation is now slowly changing, but only to the extent that we are now proud of the fact that we play much foreign music and that our young

²¹⁰ Anderton (1915) p. 93

²¹¹ The first Webern recording, of the String Trio, was issued by an English company, Decca.

composers use the latest foreign models. Elgar, in his Birmingham lectures, said very honestly that we should try to create an English tradition and yet one hundred years later and after five hundred and fifty years of English music, there is still no such thing. Our major composers – Elgar, Holst, Delius, Britten, Parry etc – have less in common than Bruckner, Wagner and Mahler. They are individualists. The weakness of the English composers was that they followed too sedulously the fashionable continental models of Wagner and instead of absorbing and digesting it, they copied and rewrote it. Elgar had something personal to say because he managed to achieve where the others had failed – he studied Wagner, took it on board and allowed it to become part of his musical makeup, not plagiarizing along the way. There may be a lesson there for contemporary English composers.

But their so-called failure was not only brought about by their Wagner-imitation (as opposed to absorption), much of it had to do with timing. In England, the Great War brought a pause to cosmopolitanism as far as Germany was concerned. The Saxe-Coburgs became the Windsors and many lesser persons also repudiated their Germanic ties.²¹² Ford Madox Hueffer, for example, became Ford Madox Ford. Likewise, in musical circles, empathy with German culture received a severe shock. For years, foreigners, many of them German, had dominated English music. This was true not only of composers but also performers, conductors and teachers. ‘Right up to the outbreak of the First World War liberal opinion was biased in favour of the large number of Germans who had settled in England and made positive contributions to English cultural life.’²¹³ Some of these included Carl Engel, music historian; Joseph Mainzer, music publisher, August Jaeger, Elgar’s publisher at Novello; piano teachers Ernest Pauer, Wilhelm Ganz and Wilhelm Kuhe; conductors Franz Rodewald, August Manns and Charles Halle; and Carl Rosa, opera impresario. Even in the provinces, effective control of musical affairs ‘often passed into the cousinly hands of the expatriate *Kapell* – or *Konzert-meister*.’²¹⁴

At the outset of the war many orchestral and choral societies had difficulty deciding the propriety of continuing performances of any music at all during the national

²¹² Gordon Craig, *The Germans* (New York, 1982) pp. 78-9

²¹³ E. D. Mackerness, *A Social History of English Music* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964) p. 220

²¹⁴ Percy M. Young, *A History of British Music* (New York: Benn, 1967) p. 419

emergency. However, in keeping with policy adopted in other areas of national life, most music societies soon agreed to resume 'business as usual', although on a limited scale.²¹⁵ Thus, eleven days after the declaration of war, the Promenade Concerts opened the season in London. Unfortunately for Wagnerians but positively for Elgarians, the main enthusiasm was for patriotic selections. Among these was 'Land of Hope and Glory' which, Lady Elgar recalled, received a standing ovation.²¹⁶ The usual weekly Wagner nights were now superseded by a night given to French and Russian music.²¹⁷ For the duration of the war and even afterwards a controversy raged over the question of whether to employ 'enemy' performers. A 'Music in Wartime' committee was set up to consider the problem of enemy people in the music profession.²¹⁸ Soon the *Internationale Musikgesellschaft*, of which the Royal Music Association had been a member, became defunct. Articles in the newspapers urged the exclusion of German music from all concert programs. To be sure, Ernest Newman in the *Musical Times* doubted the sanity of prohibiting German music and the directors of the Promenade Concerts later rescinded their decision.²¹⁹ They agreed that a complete boycott of music originating in Germany would be impossible. Nevertheless, as the organisation for war gradually became 'total', popular attitudes hardened.

Although C. Villiers Stanford argued in the *Musical Standard* during 1917 for the retention of Wagner and Brahms on the grounds that these composers had always been opposed to the spirit of Prussianism, choral conductor Henry Coward vehemently rejected any music written in Germany after 1870. The enmity was, of course, reciprocal. Eugene d'Albert had repudiated his British citizenship in 1882, renounced his repudiation after a successful concert tour in 1902, and repudiated it again during the war. He became a German subject. Houston Stewart Chamberlain, the son of a British admiral and the son-in-law of Wagner, also became a German in a public ceremony. In England he was denounced as a raving renegade.²²⁰ The conductor Hans Richter, who had resided

²¹⁵ Dibble (2001) p. 76

²¹⁶ Percy M. Young, *Elgar, O. M* (London: Collins, 1955) p. 172

²¹⁷ Dibble (2001) p. 79

²¹⁸ Mackerness (1964) p. 237

²¹⁹ Merion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press 1850-1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) p. 187

²²⁰ Lewis Melville, Introduction to *The Ravings of a renegade Englishman: War Essays by Houston Stewart Chamberlain*, trans. Charles H. Clarke (London: Jarrold & Sons, 1915)

in England from 1897 to 1911, repudiated his honorary doctorates from Manchester and Oxford Universities.²²¹ By 1914 Wagner had become his own Wotan: a god in music whose genius had to be reckoned with even if it were now to be superseded, and for all those who had fallen under the Wagnerian spell, their music fell from grace as a punishment for composing works that buckled under the weight of post-Wagnerian trimmings.

²²¹ Such gestures may have been largely for public consumption. Richter had a son-in-law in London, Sydney Loeb, to whom he wrote on several occasions during the war. In these private letters he continued to show his admiration for Elgar and his own devotion to the encouragement of music in England. See Young (1955) pp. 176-77

