

“THUS HE IS MINE”:
RECONCILING QUEERNESS AND ENGLISH MUSICAL TRADITION
IN BRITTEN’S CANTICLE I

by

Arthur Richard Scoleri

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Arts
degree in Music in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

August 2020

Thesis Committee: Nathan R. Platte, Thesis Supervisor
Marian Wilson Kimber
Robert C. Cook

ProQuest Number:28000550

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent on the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 28000550

Published by ProQuest LLC (2020). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All Rights Reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

Copyright by
ARTHUR RICHARD SCOLERI
2020
All Rights Reserved

In memory of Dr. Donna S. Parsons, whose unconditional kindness and imagination
infuse the most difficult passages of this thesis with optimism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deep gratitude goes first to Dr. Robert C. Cook, Dr. Nathan Platte, and Dr. Marian Wilson Kimber, whose encouragement and guidance have made this culmination of four years' work possible.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to my cohort in the musicology department. C.A. Norling's good humor and thoughtfulness as a colleague and friend have been a mainstay of my time in VOX 5240; it is by his example that I learned to balance "rigor with vigor." I am equally thankful for having had the opportunity to study alongside Lisa Pollock Mumme, whose honesty and willingness to play in the musicological sandbox have fundamentally changed me as a person and a scholar. I am further indebted to the gentleness and wisdom of the community of Britten scholars that welcomed me into the fold with open arms and minds in 2018, especially Imani Mosley, Trevor Nelson, and Justin Vickers, as well as the staff at the Britten-Pears Foundation in Aldeburgh.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family, both chosen and biological. First, I am grateful for the continued support and encouragement of my parents, who have finally managed to convince our extended family that musicology has very little to do with college marching band. My thanks go out to "the boys" for sticking with me through the ups and downs of this degree, and to Daisy the cat for her near-constant supervision over the course of last three months.

ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates that Britten's works were intended to arouse examination of the tension between queerness and tradition as a reflection on the cultural climate in postwar Britain. I address the enduring fixation with Britten's "symptoms" as they permeate existing scholarship and affect contemporary readings of his life and creative output. The fixation manifests most often through readings of his work that essentialize his homosexuality, thereby reducing the depth of interpretations possible. This thesis examines Britten's use of early English music to engage moral and ethical topics that were of concern to him, namely matters of innocence and social responsibility.

In his setting of Purcell's "Lord, what is Man?" (Z. 192), Britten adapts Purcell's form to implicate listeners in the contemplation of an ascent to divine ecstasy, a process classified by Glenn Bennett as a "cycle of experiences." In his first Canticale, Britten revisits the conflicting traditionalist and non-conformist leanings that inspired his earlier reconstruction of the Purcell. In both instances, the contemplation inspired by Britten's text (and text-painting) does not merely "out" the composer, but instead poses moral questions to the listener. Furthermore, the musical setting of the Canticale situates queerness within the landscape depicted in the text, thus affirming its presence without reducing the work to voyeuristic spectacle. These analyses in this thesis, which are reparative in nature, allow for Britten's queerness to exist within our perception of his works without overshadowing the other, often more pressing, complexities there.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates that Britten's works were intended to arouse examination of the tension between queerness and tradition as a reflection on the cultural climate in postwar Britain. I address the enduring fixation with Britten's "symptoms" as they permeate existing scholarship and affect contemporary readings of his life and creative output. The fixation manifests most often through readings of his work that essentialize his homosexuality, thereby reducing the depth of interpretations possible. This thesis examines Britten's use of early English music to engage moral and ethical topics that were of concern to him, namely matters of innocence and social responsibility.

In his setting of Purcell's "Lord, what is Man?" (Z. 192), Britten adapts Purcell's form to implicate listeners in the contemplation of an ascent to divine ecstasy, a process classified by Glenn Bennett as a "cycle of experiences." In his first Cantic, Britten revisits the conflicting traditionalist and non-conformist leanings that inspired his earlier reconstruction of the Purcell. In both instances, the contemplation inspired by Britten's text (and text-painting) does not merely "out" the composer, but instead poses moral questions to the listener. Furthermore, the musical setting of the Cantic situates queerness within the landscape depicted in the text, thus affirming its presence without reducing the work to voyeuristic spectacle. These analyses in this thesis, which are reparative in nature, allow for Britten's queerness to exist within our perception of his works without overshadowing the other, often more pressing, complexities there.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	vii
CHAPTER ONE: "LORD, WHAT IS MAN?": STYLISTIC OTHERNESS AND THE ENGLISH MUSICAL CONSCIENCE	1
CHAPTER TWO: CANTICLE I AND THE SELF-AFFIRMATION OF A NATIONAL COMPOSER.....	19
CODA.....	47
REFERENCES	51

INTRODUCTION

“Britten seems to me a particularly thematic composer. I am not thinking of the fertility of his melody or of the prominent role that themes and thematic organization play in his music, but of themes in a broader sense—concerns, commitments, attitudes and sources of stimulation which have been his long-standing preoccupations and which are variously reflected in his art.”

—Donald Mitchell,
The Britten Companion (1984)¹

“The pastoral for Britten was no diversion, but a genre that raised urgent questions about his own status and position as an artist, his relationship to the nation, to the region, and to his own identity and sexuality.”

—Timothy Barringer,
“‘I am a native, rooted here’:
Benjamin Britten, Samuel Palmer, and the Neo-Romantic Pastoral”²

Britten came of age and rose to prominence in a sociopolitical landscape that pathologized the more visible markers of his difference: political dissidence, homosexuality, and the “initially standoffish personality of a shy but altogether charming and brilliant man.”³ These differences have long been cast as the symptoms of disorder that are to be heard just below the surface of his music. Donald Mitchell’s implication in the quote above is that Britten’s works were indebted to prevailing musical-ideological

¹ These sentiments were originally published in the sleeve notes for *The Prodigal Son* (English Opera Group, Decca 438, 1970, LP).

² Timothy Barringer, “‘I am a native, rooted here’: Benjamin Britten, Samuel Palmer, and the Neo-Romantic Pastoral,” *Art History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 136.

³ Theresa Griffiths, dir., *The Hidden Heart: A Life of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears* (EMI Classics, 2001). The following quote is taken from a section of interview with the late Donald Mitchell. Here, Mitchell spoke of the tendency to reduce Britten to his appearance (“‘like prim schoolmasters,’ many said of Peter and him,”), as well as the public’s limited perception of his personality.

themes that, by bias and sublimation, undergirded the subsequent construction of the composer's biography, critical reception, and musicological interpretations of his work.⁴

In contrast, this thesis demonstrates that Britten's musical works generated ongoing discourse on these sociopolitical themes as a reflection on the cultural climate in postwar Britain. I first aim to address the enduring fixation with Britten's "symptoms" as they permeate existing scholarship and affect contemporary readings of his life and creative output. In order to address this fixation, I attempt to balance the implicit biases against Britten's position within the English musical and political establishment alongside his homosexuality, as they often jointly inform commonly accepted theories on musical expression of extramusical topics in his work.⁵

I mobilize these critical alterations in service of two analytical case studies that amend prevailing readings of Britten as the supposed ideological and musical adversary of postwar Englishness. The first of these examines the composer's 1947 setting of "Lord, what is Man?" (Purcell, Z. 192) in order to better understand Britten's musical adaptation of Purcell's formal framework, namely in service of the "cycle of experiences" intended to affectively implicate listeners in his answers to moral-ethical questions of power and innocence. Next, this framework is repurposed in Britten's first Canticale (1947), which

⁴ For more in-depth accounts of the shadow the Mitchellian view of Britten (as "thematic") casts upon the composer's life and the reception of his works, see Brett 1983 (187), Garvie 1983 (178), and Holloway 1984 (223). In addition to homosexuality, these essays acknowledge the tension present between Britten's desire to produce works (specifically operas, but also smaller-scale pieces) that evoke questions of a moral-ethical nature in audiences. Holloway's essay in Palmer's *Britten Companion* juxtaposes both sexuality and pacifism as operative components within Britten's artistic process.

⁵ Claire Seymour, "Death in Venice," in *The Operas of Benjamin Britten* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 207-9.

elevates the traditionalist and non-conformist leanings that inspired his reconstruction of the Purcell.⁶ Britten utilizes the works examined here to reconcile his identity and morals in service of musical “[cycles] of experience.”⁷ Furthermore, this conclusion is meant to generate a more a reparative understanding of the life of Britten through these works, in the hope that the same measure might be extended to the lives of composers and musicians whose inspirations have been erased in service of disciplinary respectability.

Chapter One:

“Lord, what is Man?”: Stylistic Otherness and the English Musical Conscience

Benjamin Britten felt “enormous kinship” with Henry Purcell. His fifty-six realizations of Purcell’s vocal songs were “thoughtful musical reactions to the work of a fellow great composer.” Britten’s realizations were written idiomatically for performance on modern piano, and dismissed the “dull reverence” of earlier editions in favor of improvisation and free use of musical language.⁸ According to Christopher Palmer,

⁶ It must be noted that I have arranged the analyses in this way for chronological reasons. Britten’s realization of “Lord, what is man?” was completed shortly before 21 November 1945, a couple of months after the fateful tour with Menuhin during which both were exposed to the horrors of concentration camps. Canticle I was composed less than two years later for its premiere at Dick Sheppard’s memorial concert on 1 November 1947.

⁷ Glenn Bennett, “A Performer’s Analysis and Discussion of the Five Canticles of Benjamin Britten” (DMA thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), 18-19.

⁸ Richard Walters, preface to *The Purcell Collection: Realizations by Benjamin Britten* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), iii. It is unclear which “previous editions” Walter is referring to, as Britten does not directly name them himself in the subsequent reprint of “On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell’s Songs,” (viii-x). In this essay, Britten attributes the need for his realizations to British musical culture, in which Purcell’s music and the techniques necessary to realize it had been forgotten. He writes, “If the tradition of improvisation from a figured bass were not lost, this would not be so serious, but to most

recomposing “ancient” works of Purcell and “modern” English folksong enabled Britten to produce rare musical acknowledgments of his own “belonging” that often remained suspiciously absent in his other works.⁹ This area of Britten’s output—the refreshment and cultural recollection of a great deal of Purcell’s music, or works otherwise inspired by the latter—constituted innovation in the name of musical tradition that the British desperately needed in the postwar period.¹⁰ More than that, these realizations—many of which were made with tenor Peter Pears in mind—remained a common feature of Britten and Pears’s recital programs throughout most of their joint career.¹¹ More than just a musical performance, the collaborations of Britten and Pears were by proxy a representation of what the confluence of queerness and “Englishry” could look and sound like. Although “the desire to explore all the possibilities that a [homosexual] kindred spirit could offer” would be obvious to anyone, “musical” or otherwise, Britten and Pears relied on their status and the principle of the “open secret” to conceal their relationship until England decriminalized homosexuality in 1967.¹²

people now, until a worked-out edition is available, these cold, unfilled-in lines mean nothing (...) and the infinite variety of these songs go undiscovered.”

⁹ Christopher Palmer, ed., “The Purcell Realizations,” in *The Britten Companion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 356-366.

¹⁰ According to Richard Walters, fifty-six of Britten’s various realizations (ranging from solo song to entire operas) are published to date. However, additional (usually fragmentary or unfinished) realizations of Purcell are held in the composer’s personal collection at the Britten-Pears Foundation, Aldeburgh.

¹¹ Britten, “On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell’s Songs,” in *The Purcell Collection: Realizations by Benjamin Britten* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), viii.

¹² Louis Niebur, “Britten’s (and Pears’s) Beloved: Sacred Parlour Song, Passion, and Control in Cantic I,” in *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on an Inexplicit Art* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), 204.

In his own essay, “On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell’s Songs,” Britten describes the manner in which he realizes and embellishes the accompanimental “musical pictures” provided by the existing melodic lines of the latter. These “pictures” materialize through the “firm, secure” structure of bass figures provided, upon which one “might hold together and make sense of one’s wildest fantasies.”¹³ Furthermore, Britten’s reliance on both the musical contour and textual implication of a given line in the instances mentioned above at least partially absolves him of the events taking place in performance. Given that Britten is widely believed to have remained actively distant from popular style, these engagements appoint English music as a site at which he openly establishes his position as that of a queer composer, paradoxically from within the stabilizing confines of tradition.¹⁴

Through an examination of musical text as well as Britten’s own writings on his engagement with Purcell, I demonstrate the way in which his realizations of the *Divine Hymns* (“Lord, what is man?,” “Evening Hymn,” and “We sing to Him”) inflect his later works and affirm his efforts as an arguably nationalist composer. Further, I ground this examination in relation to Britten’s future successes in setting single texts or works as self-reflexive cycles of experience, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which the

¹³ Britten, “On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell’s Songs,” viii-x.

¹⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, “Disidentifications,” in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (NYU Press, 1999), 4. José Esteban Muñoz establishes a methodology for translating the scrambled signals or missed connections that occur in the presence of camp. In Muñoz’s words, “disidentification is managing and negotiating historical trauma and systemic violence.” Furthermore, disidentifying subjects neither work for or against the ideological majorities that frequently eclipse them—rather, they attain respectability by “tactically and simultaneously [working] on, with, and against, a cultural form,” in Britten’s case his re-working of historically English works.

previous analysis might reorient the overarching mythology of Britten's stylistic and ideological otherness as it plays out publicly and in his music. These analyses examine the complicated affective process that emerges from the tangled and oft-contested intersection of "text" and musical "performance," and relies mainly on a comparison of the forms and extramusical motivation behind "Lord, what is Man."

Chapter Two: Canticle I and the Self-Affirmation of a National Composer

In a recollection of the days following Britten's death in 1976, Hans Keller writes:

When I came home from Lanzarote and talked about it all to a *highly musical* psychoanalyst friend who, meanwhile, had read all the obituaries, he said: "To Oscar Wilde they did it when he was alive. To Britten they do it after he's died: that's progress."¹⁵

Keller's friend was quite perceptive of the social climate following Britten's death: the open secret that had preserved Britten's respectability as an English citizen and composer in life was hardly liberatory, and would not protect him from speculation in death.¹⁶ The

¹⁵ Hans Keller, "Death of a Genius (1977)," in *Hans Keller: Britten: Essays, Letters and Opera Guides*, ed. Christopher Wintle, et al (London: Plumbago: 2013), 137. Keller's psychoanalyst was likely Anthony Storr, who has elsewhere inspired much speculation with regard to his own homosexuality.

¹⁶ John Gill, *Queer Noises: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth Century Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 16-21. Britten died in the wee hours of the morning on December 4, 1976 (a Saturday). His obituary therefore did not appear until Sunday morning. While the *Guardian* gave a favorable account of Britten's life and did well to imply the significance of Pears's presence, the *Sunday Telegraph* did not. Pears was entirely omitted from this obituary, which instead focused on the radical and unpleasant facets of Britten's life and career. Similarly, Pears played little role in the account of Britten's life that appeared in the *Times*; for as little role as Britten's sexuality may have played in this obit, its absence becomes perhaps unintentionally significant in

political institutions that damned homosexuals like Britten for “vanity, pride, and unrepentant self-justification” were the very same ones that fueled the ethical discontent behind the composer’s most successful works.¹⁷ There was much about Britten’s personality that rightly aroused suspicion within the sociocultural context in which he rose to prominence; these same factors are said to have prevented his progress within the English musical establishment, which he ultimately abandoned in service of more localized efforts in Suffolk.¹⁸ In addition to the unspoken fact of his homosexuality, the composer was widely known for his apprehension toward both God and Empire, as well as his pacifistic reaction toward the violent global activities of the latter. These spare facts of Britten’s private existence often colored the reception of his more socially charged works, taking for granted the complex layers of compositional and narrative structure that separated the critic’s likeness of Britten from the reality of the man himself.

Canticle I not only incorporates an uncharacteristic acknowledgement of identity on Britten’s part, but also features a degree of stylistic development. Here, the composer’s

the presence of the thousand-word opinion piece (“The Christian dilemma over homosexuality”) published directly beneath it.

¹⁷ Donald Mitchell, *Death in Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 21.

¹⁸ John Gill, *Queer Noises: Male and Female Homosexuality in Twentieth Century Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 15-18. Britten told then friend Michael Tippett, “with apparent dismay, that he could have been a Court composer ‘but for [his] pacifism and homosexuality.’” Prior to Britten’s death, it would seem little ‘smearing’ went on in public discourse regarding the composer’s lifestyle, but a great deal did privately occur in the company of English musical elites: “William Walton spoke bitterly about Britten being offered a job at the Royal Opera House, (...) saying there were enough *buggers* in the place, and (...) that there was a *homosexual mafia* at work in the music world, led by Britten and Pears.” Gill elsewhere (perhaps scathingly) recognizes Walton as “the lightweight responsible for *Façade*,” who was “motivated only by bitterness and envy.”

close relationship to the music and formal techniques of Purcell manifests itself. Long after the Canticle's completion, Britten remarked that Purcell's approach to accompanied songs had been the model for his own, but "few people knew their Purcell well enough to realize that."¹⁹ Peter Pears corroborates this, stating that Britten had "found in ["Lord, what is Man"] the ideal shape for an extended song, a sort of cantata."²⁰ Indeed, the form of Canticle I reflects the tripartite "Lord, what is Man," though dispensing with the added coda Purcell typically uses for an "alleluia" throughout his *Divine Hymns* and elsewhere.

However, there is something deeper than cosmetic resemblances in the relationship between these texts: resistance. In some sense, both works rely on concealment for their proper use or execution, and are drawn from texts which served as meditative exercises of faith in the formal context of the music that inspired this work (namely, the realizations of Purcell mentioned above). Louis Niebur suggests that Britten set Canticle I in such a way that musical transmission of text controls what is (and isn't) transmitted by performers in his more erotic works. I argue instead that Britten uses historical allegory within his settings so that he might let the acknowledgment of his (and Pears's) otherness rest purely in the abstract. Niebur *does* acknowledge Britten's reliance on sacred ecstasy as a form of camp, whose "coded accommodation" and "delicate excesses" mask very real affirmations of his and Pears's love for one another.²¹ By closeting musical enactments of their love mention of the literal British landscape in the text,

¹⁹ Paul Kildea, ed., *Britten on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 229.

²⁰ *The Vocal Music: 50 songs* (realizations by Benjamin Britten), ed. Peter Pears (Boosey & Hawkes: 2008), 71-72.

²¹ Niebur, "Britten (and Pears's) Beloved," 210.

Britten avoided negative speculation as a result of the piece while ensuring that his respectability remained intact.²²

Many scholars have inquired as to the nature of Britten's relationship with the closet. In his 2003 article "Britten's Dubious Trysts," Lloyd Whitesell engages with the dynamics of the closet with specific regard to Britten's treatment of love scenes. While the composer refrains from any explicit depictions of love, queer or otherwise, he takes great pains to obscure any traces of queer love from his work. The borrowed formal devices used in *Canticle I* are utilized by Britten throughout the operas viewed as his most controversial works, employed particularly in the reinforcement of an overarching sense of moral ambiguity.²³ Though Whitesell admits that composing from the closet inevitably results in "sonic ambiguities" due to its natural "obstructions," he holds that queer affects often go unnoticed due to willful deafness. But, by composing works in which characters are "[coaxed] from an innocent or straight perspective to a knowing or deviant one," Britten alters the status quo in creating opportunities for queer listening on the part of the audience.²⁴ While Whitesell's position makes a crucial move in claiming

²² Philip Brett, "Keeping the Straight Line Intact?: Britten's English Predecessors," in *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, ed. George Haggerty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 167. Britten's treatment of Purcell (on one or the other's terms) inevitably allowed him a great deal more musical freedom than he might have had access to otherwise. Brett refers to Britten's published realizations of Purcell as "the closest [Britten] gets to camp," in light of his frank and often "cheeky" engagement with the "stylistic premises" of the form.

²³ Lloyd Whitesell, "Britten's Dubious Trysts," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56, no. 3 (2003): 645.

²⁴ Whitesell, p. 682. Mounting themes of "realizing homosexuality" are present in *Grimes*, *Turn of the Screw*, and *Death in Venice*, typically with regard to the practice of outing individuals responsible for corrupting innocence.

that the ambiguity inherent in Britten's music allows for a battery of interpretations beyond the obvious, I would argue that the ambiguity is neither coaxing nor innocently deployed. Britten's narrative usage of open secrecy in his works was both intentional and deeply political. Although the composer indeed expressed concern for the homosexual other in his personal correspondence, his conception of the other was more broadly conceived and skewed toward the likeness of a character being a victim rather than merely a misunderstood gentleman of the English bourgeoisie.

While some scholars are thrilled by the possibility of such representation in canonical music, still others have made attempts to discount the queerness in Britten's music. Pushback against overly queer readings of Britten's compositions is often rooted in a fear that such interpretations will detract from purely musical performances, or that the readings themselves are somehow "biased" in a way that distorts the listener's perception of Britten.²⁵ While these are valid concerns under any other circumstances, it is worth stating that both objections constitute ignorance towards the queer subjectivities innate in Britten's body of works. Rather than situate the "outing" of these subjectivities as the sole objective of this thesis, this thesis examines the possibilities that arise when Britten's queerness is acknowledged as operative amongst his other motivations (namely, social responsibility).

²⁵ Mervyn Cooke, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 7.

CHAPTER ONE:
“LORD, WHAT IS MAN?”: STYLISTIC OTHERNESS
AND THE ENGLISH MUSICAL CONSCIENCE

Few studies of the musical life and work of Benjamin Britten are presented without some acknowledgment of Britten-the-man. His pacifism, homosexuality, and lifelong championing of a neo-romantic aesthetic in British music are never far from the edge of the various methodological frames that seek to capture his essence. Indeed, the musical manifestations of Britten’s otherness have long been a source of interest for numerous scholars, perhaps because they challenge us to look upon the relationship of text and music anew. The composer himself admitted his creative spirit was “fired by certain texts,” here and elsewhere indicating that his most meaningful works were those he’d created with honesty and sincerity toward his textual subjects.²⁶

To whatever extent Britten saw himself reflected in the various texts he set, it remains a tall order to suggest that the subjective relationship between musical and written texts in his works somehow produces a single ‘true’ interpretation. Although countless profiles of the composer succeed by casting Britten more broadly as Other, those methodologies that skew too far towards fully “queering” the composer could be dismissed on the grounds of essentialism or lack of substance in the musical score. Early attempts at analytical Easter egg hunts for “gay chords” or “lesbian intervals” hidden

²⁶ Christopher Palmer, ed., *The Britten Companion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 211.

²⁹ For a more immediate explanation of Britten’s attitudes toward textual inspiration and the compositional process, see Interview with Joseph Cooper (CBC, 1968).
<https://youtu.be/4iuBCBzs2U>.

somewhere on the staff led musicologist Philip Brett to rebuff the proponents of this early theoretical essentialism. Instead, Brett—an Englishman and homosexual himself—would make his life’s work advocating for the situation of musical meaning within larger “universes” of signification, with particular interest in the works of Britten.²⁷

For Brett, the manifestations of Britten’s otherness were never isolated or singular, and nearly always made themselves apparent at the intersection of text and music. While Britten’s operas are key sites of this subjectivity, their unsettling morals also reinforce a need to “understand” those characters coded and mobilized as villains. I have no interest in engaging with the musical or textual treatment of Grimes, Herring, or Budd here. Both Brett and Mitchell have already gone to great lengths to establish these “heroic anti-heroes” as sites of self-interrogation throughout Britten’s life.²⁸ In contrast, my work here is concerned with Benjamin Britten, particularly his tendency to approach English musical tradition from his own compositional angle, which operated on a desire to reconstruct an English musical history that, to Britten’s mind, had become virtually nonexistent.²⁹

²⁷ Susan McClary, Introduction to *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays*, edited by George Haggerty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 6-7.

²⁸ Philip Brett, “Britten and Grimes,” in *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays*, edited by George Haggerty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 13-15.

²⁹ This is not to say English music (e.g. that of Elgar, Walton, or Vaughan Williams) was not being composed or performed. On the contrary, the English pastoral repertoire gained wider popularity after the war because it evoked fondness for an idealized England, an Arcadian “civilization free from vice and conflict.” In addition to Britten’s stylistic objection to the music of this tradition, he found its idealism dishonest. Without deferring to Continental musical tradition, it would appear Britten desired a realistic pastoral that took into account the physical impact of war. While Saylor notes that literature and landscape painting successfully integrated reflections on mortality and memory into pastoralism, it would seem that music of this type did not comment so

Britten's compositional persona and tonal language maintained significance within the fraught reality of English attempts to reform the national approach to music education during the interwar period. Schoolchildren during this period were "indelibly marked" by their exposure to mandated classroom anthologies of music deemed worthy of preservation by the likes of Charles Stanford, Edmund Bairstow, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and the musical folklorist Cecil Sharp.³⁰ As imperiled as the cultural climate may have seemed to the figures that spearheaded this movement in the years following World War I, those most immediately caught up in their indoctrination efforts found them to be more punitive than rejuvenating. Philip Brett notes that these mandated classroom musical rituals became emptied of significance as the physical markers indelibly associated with the landscape were decimated in the event of firebombing.³¹

The three *Divine Hymns* provided the formal context in which Britten contended with personal and stylistic otherness. In particular, Britten's realization of "Lord, what is Man" characterizes both the composer's mode of self-reflection through text (re-)setting, as well as the 'short cantata' form which later served as the formal underpinning for his

directly. See Eric Saylor, "It's Not Lambkins Frisking At All": English Pastoral Music and the Great War," *The Musical Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2008): 41-46.

³⁰ Philip Brett, "Keeping the Straight Line Intact?: Britten's English Predecessors," in *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, ed. George Haggerty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 154-6. Further adding to the injury of being brought up in a musico-nationalist setting such as the one Brett anecdotally describes was the "unbearably soppy" tradition of English country dance upheld in mandatory physical education courses.

³¹ Brett's "Keeping the Straight Line Intact?" likens Sharp & Co.'s attempts to universalize England's musical identity to the following memory: "... At my first school, deep in North Midlands countryside, the village children were unself-consciously engaged in traditional round games which they sang as they encircled the lofty oak on the village green: a suggestive ritual that came to an abrupt end when the Air Ministry felled the tree to clear the path to a temporary wartime airfield and thereby killed the spirit of the village" (155).

most expressive chamber pieces.³² These and Britten's other realizations drawn from the English Baroque idiom more readily exemplify the aesthetic divide between him and the "cowpat school" of English pastoralism which he so sharply dismissed early in his career. In this chapter, I situate Britten's realization of "Lord, what is Man" as an alternative form of vernacular music against the larger backdrop of England's search for its national musical identity. My analysis relies mainly on a comparison of the forms and compositional motivation behind "Lord, what is Man."

It would be all too easy to pan off this earliest revival of English folk music as odious, knowing full well that it was negatively received by the public. In their attempt to "re-inscribe" the cast of "hero-composers" responsible for the English musical renaissance, Stradling and Hughes go so far as to identify "undercurrents of fascism" in the increased ethnocentrism that characterized English music in the postwar period.³³ Britten himself might have agreed with this appraisal of the startling and almost militaristic nationalism that had begun to manifest in and through English music at this time. However, he was no stranger to the complexities of constructing an identity—national, or otherwise—while in the shadow of prevailing cultural attitudes.

Britten's affinity for the bardic tradition of England's musical past might at first appear perplexing in the face of his upbringing. His adolescent growth in general is almost always credited to his mother, Edith Britten. Britten's mother provided his earliest

³² Foremost among these being the first of his Canticles, as well as *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* ("O might those sighes and teares returne againe").

³³ Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes, eds., *The English Musical Renaissance 1860-1940: Construction and Deconstruction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 146.

instruction at the keyboard, and was also responsible for the cultivation of his formidable musical vocabulary, which is said to have spanned numerous genres and style periods before the composer even began attending day school at the age of eight. Though Mrs. Britten may have played a significant part in the elevation of her son to the status of “fourth B,” her heavy-handedness and control over Ben’s upbringing did have its effects; by the time the composer had reached adolescence, he recognized that he and his mother “hardly [saw] eye-to-eye” though his early life had all but revolved around her wishes for him.³⁴ Still, being raised in an environment that acknowledged the very immediate importance of England’s diverse musical history provided Britten with a necessary counterpoint to Sharp’s classroom regimen, which was in full swing by the time the composer began his early education.

Unlike his partner and collaborator, Peter Pears, Britten would never experience the stability or warmth that reportedly emanated from childhood experiences of communal music-making under the Church of England. Though Britten withdrew from regular churchgoing following formal recognition of his partnership with Pears (then agnostic) in 1939, the conservative manner in which he was raised remained apparent in both in his personality and music.³⁵ According to Pears, “The key to his music lies in his

³⁴ Humphrey Carpenter, *Benjamin Britten* (London: Faber, 1992), 60.

³⁵ The “conservative manner” here refer to the distinctly ‘Low Church’ practices of a particular subset of the Church of England, of which Edith Britten had been an active member. While the demarcations along the ‘High/Low Church’ spectrum are at times fuzzy at best, Graham Elliot’s work makes the case that Britten’s upbringing was so conservative that it was nearly Catholic in some respects. See Graham Elliot, *Benjamin Britten: The Spiritual Dimension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 8-9, 14-16; Donald Mitchell, Philip Reed, and Mervyn Cooke, eds., *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten, 1913-1976*,

moral point of view combined with his craving for lost innocence brought on by his increasing disillusionment with man.”³⁶ In so much as his relationship with Pears was certainly a redeeming aspect of their American exile, the burden of difference Britten had felt as a conscientious objector was ultimately worsened by his time under W.H. Auden’s domineering tutelage: the “almost painful youth and even more painful virginity” of the former were taken up as a “challenge” for Auden and his circle.³⁷ Furthermore, the aesthetic tug-of-war Britten observed between himself and the de facto figures behind England’s musical establishment affected the trajectory of his musical career following his return to the country in 1942.

As Cecil Sharp and others had offered up the revival of English vernacular music as a balm for the emotional and physical damages of World War I, so too did the Church of England alter the liturgical rhetoric surrounding death and bereavement. Where a “widespread general inhibition of all the simpler expansive developments of emotion”—stereotypically associated with the ‘stiff upper lip’ of all Englishry—had once characterized the Church of England’s approach to death, the years of the interwar period saw a shift in liturgical texts and music that sought to dull the moral ache that grew in the absence of soldiers fallen in foreign fields.³⁸ With no body to place in the casket, the extensive material scripts for nineteenth-century mourning fell into disarray alongside the other cultural rituals that had once formed the mainstays of life and death in England.

5 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991-2012), vol. I, 10.

³⁶ Alan Blyth (ed.), *Remembering Britten* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 23.

³⁷ Philip Brett, “Auden’s Britten,” 187-88.

³⁸ Alan Wilkinson, “Death, Bereavement, and the Supernatural,” in *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK, 1978), 172.

The solemnity of death—once too sacrosanct for “abstract words such as glory, honour, [or] courage”—had become utterly transformed in the absence of the dead in order to become a solace for the living.³⁹

Though Vera Lynn would sing that “there [would] always been an England” just months before the Battle of Britain began (1939), it was unclear just what that England would look or sound like once the fires were quenched. Ultimately, the ‘uprooting’ of the English social and spiritual environment further confused efforts to depict its landscape in music. The resulting tectonic shifts in moral attitude further encouraged Britten’s skepticism towards state-mandated patriotism (which replicated collective trauma through further “acts of destruction”) in a sacred setting.⁴⁰ Though church authorities were content to cast off the shackles of ancient tradition, Britten found that the path to salvation might instead be *realized* through the re-orientation of these same traditions. In particular, he held especially tight to the potential he saw in the unrealized lines left behind by Purcell, finding in them the clarity and direction that other constructions of English music had long lacked.

Efforts to re-instill England’s folk tradition through education had persisted with some success for nearly thirty years. However, Cecil Sharp’s legacy began to tarnish as critics recognized the frequency with which he was accused of bowdlerizing or misattributing tens (if not hundreds) of folk songs and broadsides. What’s more, the method by which Sharp claimed to realize his specimens was revealed to be inconsistent

³⁹ Wilkinson, 172.

⁴⁰ Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed, eds., *Letters from a Life*, vol. II (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1046.

with his aims of accuracy and authenticity. In a letter to Percy Grainger, Sharp wrote that “our aim should be to record the artistic effect [of a given song], not necessarily the means by which that effect was produced.”⁴¹

In the preface to *One Hundred English Folk-Songs*, Sharp denounces the decoration of folk-tunes “with the fashionable harmonies of the day,” and subsequently states that such liberties would detract from the applicability and relevance of the tunes themselves. The lack of attention Sharp pays to the origins of the genre further plays out quite obviously in his schoolroom songbooks, whose “turgid [piano] accompaniments” are composed as such in order to limit the improvisatory “artistic effects” that typically embellish folk song in communal performance.⁴²

Curiously, one finds that the aesthetic goals that governed Sharp’s attempts to notate both the text and performance of folk songs are similarly reflected in Britten’s own approach to his realizations of Purcell. Though Britten held his own biases about the then-acclimated notions of folk music, bemoaning its “provincialism & lack of vitality,” it was clear he held some deeper understanding of the importance of its context.⁴³ Sharp’s

⁴¹ Letter from 23 May 1908, in John Bird, *Percy Grainger* (London: P. Elek, 1976), 114. It is critical to mention that Sharp’s letter is grounded in disagreement with Grainger’s own transcriptions of folk-song. However, the irony here is that Sharp harshly critiques the dimensions of Grainger’s transcriptions without fully realizing that Grainger captures the performative aspect of folk-song more adequately due to his use of a gramophone to record them.

⁴² Graham Johnson, “Voice and Piano,” in *Britten Companion*, ed. Christopher Palmer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 304-6. Sharp’s arrangements of folk song strip away any sort of potential for a “realized” performance. Johnson makes the case that Sharp’s prescriptive accompaniment is for instructional purposes only.

⁴³ Arnold Whittall, “The Signs of Genre: Britten’s Version of the Pastoral,” in *Sundry Sorts of Music Books: Essays on the British Library Music Collections, presented to O.W. Neighbor on His 70th Birthday*, ed. Chris Banks, et al (London: British Library, 1993), 364.

“indefinable” artistic quality—that is, the exercise of creative license over a work—is disappointingly neglected in both his treatises and transcriptions.⁴⁴

Rather than neglect this component in his own realizations, Britten stresses it. In his essay, “On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell’s Songs,” Britten provides practical approaches to producing one’s own realizations according to Purcell’s own “musical pictures.” These “pictures” materialize through the “firm, secure” structure of bass figures provided, upon which one “might hold together and make sense of one’s wildest fantasies.”⁴⁵ For both Purcell and Britten, it might be said that these “fantasies” temporarily merged the composers in the event of realization. In the instance of “Lord, what is Man” (cited by name as formal exemplar by Brett, Johnson, and the composer himself), Britten’s realization presents a clear “picture” of the melodic profile of Purcell’s original line, while still leaving enough space for the former composer’s personality to embellish the texture. In Britten’s song realizations, Purcell’s ground bass lines are often retained to the letter. In contrast, the upper accompanimental voices possess the distinctive qualities of Britten’s own modernist tonal language. Similarly, Britten’s liberal

In this chapter, Whittall cites Britten’s realizations of folk music and Purcell alongside the likes of his *Serenade for Tenor, Horn, and Strings*. While Britten was not outwardly supportive of English ‘pastoral’ composers (see: “cowpat school”), the effects of the language and melodies of folk music (in their natural environment) was not lost on him. Brett, “Keeping the Straight Line Intact?,” 159-161.

⁴⁴ Though Sharp was a folklorist and collector, and decidedly *not* an ethnomusicologist, it is perhaps ironic that his insistence on recording the practice of “folk-singers” in the field ultimately limited his transcriptions to a melodic dimension only. It is doubly ironic, then, that Sharp should have berated Grainger’s reliance on the gramophone as an element of transcription; it is *only* through this medium that Grainger was able to tap into microscopic interpretive variations in melody which proved indispensable to his efforts in cataloging.

⁴⁵ Britten, “On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell’s Songs,” viii-x.

approach to vocal lines often manifests itself in passages that intentionally limited the performer's improvisatory potential, a liberal departure from Purcell's own part-writing. In the case of "Lord, what is Man?", the realized vocal line is an exact transposition of a fourth. While this may seem a natural symptom of Britten-realizing-Purcell, it also serves as the means by which Britten concealed himself within later works inspired by Purcell.

For both Britten and Purcell, the theme of concealment originates partially from within the context of this song's text. "Lord, what is Man" sets a poem by Dr. William Fuller, a Royalist schoolmaster turned celebrated clergyman. Unlike many of Fuller's texts, this one remains undated. However, it is printed among a number of Fuller's other religious poems in Nahum Tate's 1696 *Miscellanea Sacra*. These other texts provide a valuable point of comparison for "Lord, what is Man," with which it shares a number of affective and formal characteristics. Foremost among these is the overarching themes of humiliation and even self-harm, which would later become markers of the "redemption by fire" trope so common to metaphysical poetry during this period.

Fuller takes his inspiration for "Lord, what is Man" from Psalm 8:3-4, whose verses are paraphrased in the poem's first stanza (italicized for emphasis):

*Lord, what is man, lost man,
That Thou shouldst be so mindful of him?
That the Son of God forsook his glory, His abode,
To become a poor, tormented man!
The Deity was shrunk into a span,
And that for me, O wound'rous love, for me.
Reveal, ye glorious spirits, when ye knew
The way the Son of God took to renew lost man,
Your vacant places to supply;
Blest spirits tell,*

Which did excel,
Which was more prevalent,
Your joy or your astonishment,
That man should be assum'd into the Deity,
That for a worm a God should die.

Oh! for a quill, drawn from your wing
To write the praises of th'Eternal Love;
Oh! for a voice like yours to sing
That anthem here, which once you sung above.

Hallelujah!⁴⁶

Curiously, this verse comes from one of David's earliest psalm predictions about the eventual arrival of Christ on Earth. At the time Fuller likely wrote the poem, this inspiration may have been some of the only reassurance he could cling to. As an avowed Royalist, Fuller was stripped of his post as canon at Christ Church College, Oxford, when the parliamentary visitation of 1647 occurred. Though he remained solvent by keeping a school in Twickenham prior to the Restoration, Fuller grappled with his temporary alienation from God and country through his poetry.⁴⁷ Fuller would eventually be restored to prominence as a church official in England and Ireland in 1660, but it's clear that his fifteen year exile proved to be a sure test of faith.

⁴⁶ William Fuller, "Lord, what is man?," in Nahum Tate, ed., *Miscellanea Sacra* (London: Playford, 1696).

⁴⁷ The particular (nearly Catholic) stripe of Anglicanism to which Fuller ascribed to was under fire during this period due to its former alignment with the personal rule of Charles II of Scotland. In the decade following this "Eleven Years' Tyranny," conservative Anglicanism and Catholicism both fell out of popularity due its association with Charles' misappropriation of the divine right to rule. For more, see "William Fuller (1608-1675)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed June 5, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10240>.

Britten's rootedness in the 'ancient' music of England ought to be attributed to his far-reaching melodic memory, which came of age in a musical environment indelibly touched by Cecil Sharp's antiseptic approach to the country's musical traditions. Fortunately, Britten's treatment of Purcell (on one or the other's terms) inevitably allowed him a great deal more musical freedom than he might have had access to otherwise. Brett refers to Britten's published realizations of Purcell as "the closest [Britten] gets to camp," in light of his frank and often "cheeky" engagement with the "stylistic premises" of the form.⁴⁸

However, Britten's engagement with Purcell's music was hardly restrained to the act of composition. Pears and Britten performed, and in some cases featured, Purcell on numerous recitals.⁴⁹ In much the same way that Fuller had responded to the stresses of political exile while writing "Lord, what is Man," Britten's output of Purcell realizations spiked in 1943 upon his return to England. Though W.H. Auden would later accuse Britten of "playing at being Purcell," his realizations of the latter composer effectively modernize a particular style of text setting in order to make the musical content accessible to a contemporary audience.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Britten chose to dispense with period instruments in favor of piano, which he favored for its versatility and texture.

⁴⁸ Brett, "Keeping the Straight Line Intact?," 167.

⁴⁹ Richard Walters, preface to *Benjamin Britten: The Purcell Collection* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), iii.

⁵⁰ David Matthews, *Britten* (London: Haus Publishing, 2013), 34.

Finally, Britten's realizations of Purcell indicate an insistent retention of the ornamentation which had otherwise fallen out of fashion by this time.⁵¹

Of the numerous realizations of Purcell Britten produced in his lifetime, "Lord, what is Man" was perhaps nearer and dearer to his heart (and artistic mindset) than any of the others. The form of this work shares a number of structural characteristics with the other two songs in Purcell's *Harmonia Sacra* ("We sing to Him," "Evening Hymn"). Still, "Lord, what is Man" proved inspirational enough that its features map directly onto Britten's later Cantic I ("My beloved is mine, and I am His").⁵²

The tripartite form identifiable in Britten's Cantic I is also present in "Lord, what is Man."⁵³ However, the rolling gentleness which characterizes the first formal 'section' of the first Cantic is absent. Instead, an grace notes in the left hand initiate the vocalist's initial entrance in D minor, where they issue a lonesome query: "Lord, what is man, / Lost

⁵¹ Britten, "On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell's Songs," in *The Purcell Collection: Realizations by Benjamin Britten* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008): viii-x.

⁵² Kildea, ed., *Britten on Music*, 229. "Lord, what is Man?" very closely follows the formal "cycle of experiences" whose series of melodic and tonal transformations correlate with the ascent to unity of the sinner with the godhead. Typically, this ascent comes in the form of a meditation that opens on a reflection of the narrator's iniquity, usually set in a somber mode. These textures are often dispensed with in favor of free "counterpoint" in the inner section, which typically depicts the narrator's suffering and immolation. The final section often bears some resemblance to the first, and harmonically conflates unity with God or Christ with a resolution of initial material.

⁵³ Both pieces open with what might be called a semi-recitative in which the moral-ethical question central to each work is presented. In the following section, harmonic complications reflect the struggle towards attainment—in "Lord, what is man?," this middle section is not quite as severely demarcated in terms of harmonic change. Rather, this sensation is reinforced through the "drop" intervals described in the next footnote. The conclusion of the piece acts as a sort of fantasia, in which the resolution of the work—the moment of textual and musical "unity"—is extended to its conclusion.

man, / That Thou shouldst be so mindful of him?" The first statement of this question establishes the initial tone of the piece, where at first man (the singer) is "lost" at the lower end of his voice. The second issuance of "Lord, what is Man?" resounds with a heightened anxiety reinforced by the gradual de-stabilizing of the accompaniment beneath (mm. 12-14) as the singer recognizes the magnitude of Christ's sacrifice on their behalf.

The outline of the first question and the "semi-recitative" is a stark contrast to Purcell's in Britten's realization, especially in its use of the "drop" in range characteristic of both composers. According to Rebekah Scott, Britten's imitation of this compositional effect almost always relies on the musical suggestion of falling in order to mark a dramatic shift in the metaphysical action of a piece.⁵⁴ Fortunately for the singer, the answer appears momentarily: in m. 28, the thematic shift to the next formal section is "revealed" through an optimistic turn from an apparent G-sharp diminished seventh (mm. 30-31).⁵⁵ Just as soon, "lost man" is "assumed into the Deity" through the textual implication of transubstantiation. This shift in affect (beginning m. 39) carries through

⁵⁴ Rebekah Scott, "Britten's Drops: The Lyric into Song," in *Literary Britten: Words and Music in Britten's Vocal Works*, ed. Kate Kennedy (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018), 141-2. In this chapter, Scott documents numerous instances of Britten's use of the "drop" first originated by Purcell. In Purcell's case, the "drops" in question are a single technique among many the composer used in text-painting. Britten extends this technique—most often in the case of falling *water*, but not always—as a means of turning the narrative tables. Britten's realization of the humorous "Oliver Cromwell lay buried and dead" employs this device in service of dramatic irony ("a lowly gallows humor," if you will). In the case of "Lord, what is Man," Britten uses the "drop" to illustrate the closure of metaphysical gap between a lowly intercessor and the divine through word-painting.

⁵⁵ However, given the pedal A that persists from mm. 28-33, it would be more accurate to say that V of D is elaborating here on its own VII7.

the section, marked also by new melodic freedom in the vocal line until its conclusion at m. 45.

Here, the singer takes the opportunity to seize agency; they now grasp their own musical (or even spiritual) potential. Against the jaunty walking of the figured bass, the singer sweetly wishes for “a quill from your wing, to write the praises of eternal love” with a melodic line whose smooth texture contrasts with the angularity of the previous section (mm. 49-64).⁵⁶ But the appeals don’t stop there: the singer has become so conscious of their own voice (mm. 66-92) that they wish to sing divine praises.

The “writing of praises” implied in the section prior signals that the narrator has ascended from his lowly state and attained unity with Christ. Thus, the unfolding of these “hallelujahs” (mm. 92-119) might signify a deeper event implied not just by the music, but by the text as well.⁵⁷ The contract suggested by the writing of praises in the second verse/formal section is any indication, this piece has metaphorically served as the site of metaphysical transformation, both in music and writing. Where the singer—notably the only entity involved possessing a literal voice in this exchange—began as a “worm” in tonicized G minor (m. 41, IV of D), their being has been elevated and purified through the spiritual action of the piece.⁵⁸

The process of spiritual denigration and transfiguration is a frequent subject of both Purcell and Britten’s musical works. Furthermore, one might argue that Britten’s labor here and in the later Canticum I constitutes the successful translation of his own

⁵⁶ Benjamin Britten, *The Purcell Collection* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 2008), 36.

⁵⁷ Britten, *The Purcell Collection*, 38-41.

⁵⁸ Britten, *The Purcell Collection*, 35.

modern artistic impulses into a national idiom representative of an English public that had long sought a contemporary representation of their identity in music. Rather than suggest that Britten's catalogue is that of a 'folk' composer, I would argue that he frequently invokes references to England's forgotten vernacular alongside (not against) his own harmonic language as a means of respectful but assertive self-situation. Amidst the musical trappings of a distant historical moment that was all but unfamiliar to his audiences, Britten cast his intimate desires (and most radical ideals) as supporting actors in deeply personal re-enactments enabled by his own nostalgia.

Britten's realization of Purcell exploits religious motifs in order to mask contemplation of more explicit themes. Unlike the Canticle discussed in the following chapter, Britten did not have to mitigate overtly suggestive themes in the text of "Lord, what is Man." Taken literally and with knowledge of the kinship Britten felt with Purcell, one might still argue that this realization marks a similar "exploration of experience," one that likens it to camp. Here, I do not refer to camp in the sense that this realization is overtly gay or failed art, but rather "an assertion of self-integrity—a temporary means of accommodation with society in which art becomes (...) an intense mode of individualism and a form of spirited protest."⁵⁹ Similarly, one might claim this act of concealment on Britten's part as disidentification due to the appropriation of text and music that ties him to an establishment in which explicit expression of his sexuality would render him abject.

⁵⁹ Jack Babuscio, "Camp and the Gay Sensibility," in *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality*, ed. David Bergman (Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 19-38.

José Esteban Muñoz establishes a methodology for translating the scrambled signals or missed connections that occur in the presence of camp. In Muñoz's words, "disidentification is managing and negotiating historical trauma and systemic violence." Furthermore, disidentifying subjects neither work for or against the ideological majorities that frequently eclipse them—rather, they "tactically and simultaneously [work] on, with, and against, a cultural form."⁶⁰ Though Muñoz applies his theory of disidentification first and foremost to those queer bodies deemed too dirty for society—namely, the bodies of POC, the disabled, and (centrally) those infected by AIDS—this idea has since been applied to a number of minority subjects whose sexualities do not exist at an intersection with race or disability. Disidentification must first be considered in the context of its origin before it can be applied as a measure of successful self-communication elsewhere.

Britten—foremost as queer Other, but additionally as pacifist, socialist, and aesthetic contrarian—disidentifies most noticeably when he performs Englishness in the context of these realizations, thus concealing his queer Otherness from view. Furthermore, the composer's status as homosexual and conscientious objector (among other things) further brings his work into the realm of the transgressive. However, Britten chose his subject matter well: he tied his deepest desires to those forms in a manner which not only went unnoticed, but also entertained the promise of spiritual redemption as a rite of passage.

While Britten's work in this area went largely unrecognized until after his death in 1976, it is an area rich with untapped wisdom with regard to his career and personal

⁶⁰ Muñoz, "Disidentifications," 4.

tastes. Britten's resounding presence in the canon alongside this reading of his subtly transgressive contributions is no doubt a reassurance to those scholars which might see themselves as Others 'inexplicably' fascinated with Othered subjects; in finding an uninterrupted opportunity to bury oneself and one's aims within existing traditions and methodologies, one suddenly becomes aware of "those voices that will not be drowned."⁶¹

⁶¹ Benjamin Britten and Montagu Slater, *Peter Grimes* (II.2), 1945.

CHAPTER TWO: CANTICLE I AND THE SELF-AFFIRMATION OF A NATIONAL COMPOSER

On a broader scale, the contents of Benjamin Britten's catalogue complicate the already precarious task of exegesis for a scholar of a queerer musicology. From ostracized Peter Grimes to the desire-doomed Aschenbach (*Death in Venice*), Britten's penchant for appointing antagonistic others as protagonists has long inspired speculation about the nature of the underlying social themes in his works. Britten's use of metaphor as substance for his best-known works are frequently (mis)identified as sites of sublimation where his own personal evils—namely, homosexuality—become fused to musical content. As it happens, such an implication conveniently serves as the framework of a paranoid musicology that names subjectivity as a symptom of a queerness which evades classification by standard modes of analysis.⁶²

However, one finds that the usually “considerable contextualization” required to ‘out’ a composer through a careful synthesis of their biography and correspondences alongside musical works does little to expose any skeletons in Britten's closet. Given that these syntheses are engineered to dredge up the most sensational information in service of paranoid analytical conclusions, it is no surprise that the personal dysfunctions of an openly gay composer (which, at their most extreme, include purported ephebophilia and alleged death by tertiary syphilis) should overshadow the more positive facts of his life.⁶³

⁶² William Cheng, “How Hopeful the Queer,” *Just Vibrations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016). Accessed 10 February 2020. 10.3998/mpub.9293551.

⁶³ See Bridcut (2011) for a direct instance of scholarship that stakes its claims on Britten's pedophilia at length. For accounts of the rumors that occurred in the fallout of Britten's death, see Gill (1995).

Britten's position as stylistic outlier in the context of English culture during the early twentieth century—both musically and more broadly— suggests yet another reason for the conflation of his music and the less palatable aspects of his biography.⁶⁴ Inspired in part by the anti-essentialist bent of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's 1990 *Epistemology of the Closet*, the work of this chapter pushes back against the broader rhetorical tendency to essentialize the presence of corruption in subjects that possess homosexual "knowledge."⁶⁵

Additionally, I consider possibilities for the reparative in the historical time and place in which Canticle I was composed. From the beginning, this project has been governed by a desire to reconcile the use of a "reparative" lens with the tendency to invalidate the resulting conclusion on the basis of its sentimentality. This analysis maintains that Britten's juxtaposition of sentimental content alongside the self-aware in Canticle I permits a glimpse into an epistemic closet of sorts—though it might be said his compositional decisions actually reject containment (the metaphorical closet) in favor of possibility (coming out, or at the very least, being known). I examine the Canticle as a joint musical-textual presentation of this "knowledge" in a manner that challenges the dichotomies (e.g. private/public, secret/known, homo/hetero) that so often govern essentialist diagnoses of the homosexual that have become endemic to music analysis

⁶⁴ Given the analogies that could be easily drawn between the behaviors of his protagonists and the speculation surrounding Britten's personal life, critics and competitors often reduce interpretations of his works as "justification" for what was perceived by his peers to be a conflicted attitude towards his sexuality. See Gill, *Queer Noises*, 15-16.

⁶⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 34.

since the late twentieth century. Relying on conventions from the forms of both Purcellian songs and Victorian parlour music, Britten constructs this closet by grounding the Canticle's narrative of self-affirmation in against the musical backdrop of an implicitly British landscape. In doing so, it might be said that this musical occasion is both an instance of "coming out" and "calling in"; like so many of Britten's works, either large- or small-scale, the Canticle appears to comment simultaneously on the intentions of the composer and the position of its audience. Unlike Grimes or Aschenbach, however, the nameless soliloquist of Canticle *I* considers the possibility of queer consummation without subsequent damnation—not a happy ending, perhaps, but a defiantly optimistic one considering the sociocultural circumstances under which it was composed.

A contextualized approach to the content of Britten's first Canticle is essential to an understanding of "the music itself." In an earlier iteration of this analysis, I was eager to contain the piece within my own essentialist reading of content and circumstance. I in turn grounded this—in what I thought was a clever, campy move—within a metaphorical closet. While this first foray into exploring the music and text of Canticle *I* has matured and gained critical dimension, it has been necessary to reject any sort of methodological grounding in confinement. Since the fall of 2017, my understanding of Britten has grown and changed to accommodate the monumental complexities of the time and place that shape our collective perceptions of "Britten-the-man," for better or worse. The subjective potential inherent to the form and execution of Canticle *I* have been central to the development of my relationship to Britten's music. To this end, my originary closet was (and is) hardly up to the task of containing any sort of real

composerly intention. Still, this early concept still holds potential for a more balanced to the works of Britten, especially where collaboration with Pears is concerned. In this way, homosexuality can be acknowledged as a feature of the work on the page and in performance without fully reducing it to its queerness.

This early closet, both conceptually and historically rooted, found substance in accounts of Britten's faith, particularly the manner in which it was troubled by his homosexuality and pacifism. In particular, I identified the composer's personal conflicts with religion and politics to be the catalyst for his postwar aesthetic paradigm, which can be linked in turn to Britten's fascination with the parable as an artistic vehicle. With the supposition of Britten's internalized homophobia as a pillar for my arguments, I suggested that the compositional framework of the devotional closet—central to both the historical consumption of Purcell's Divine Hymns and the practices of Britten's low-church upbringing—might be a productive means for understanding the framing of Canticle I.

As essentialist as this argument was, it later permitted me to ask the questions that would eventually lead to understanding this work (and many others in Britten's catalogue) as inexplicit, where queerness and other social issues were concerned. In spite of its seemingly intentional containment, the concept of the devotional closet allowed me to consider the expansive possibilities of a musical work rooted in subjectivity. According to Claire Preston, the household fixture of the seventeenth century was a literal closet, a domestic space intended as a place of seclusion solely intended for eyes of God. Given the physical limits of closets, it was said that "eyes, being limited by the known walls, [called]

in the mind after a sort of wandering abroad.”⁶⁶ While the occupant was made to feel small and hyper-aware of their place within the closet, they ended up realizing their own similarly tiny role in the universe.

In a letter to Pears dated August 1, 1945, Britten reflected, “We stayed the night in Belsen, and saw over the hospital—and I needn’t describe that to you (...) I don’t know why we should be so lucky, in all this misery.”⁶⁷ Following the successful London premiere of *Peter Grimes* that June, Britten had embarked on a month-long tour of the newly liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camps alongside violinist Yehudi Menuhin. As a conscientious objector, Britten had largely avoided direct exposure to the atrocities of the war. The earliest visitors to these camps were rendered “inarticulate with shock for years after”; Britten himself reportedly spoke very little of these performances in the months immediately following but would later describe his tour with Menuhin as “a terrifying experience.”⁶⁸

Britten’s exposure to crimes of humanity in the wake of World War II “unlocked [his] righteous fury,” which in turn served as the creative inspiration for the musical works he composed immediately following his return from war-torn Germany.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Claire Preston, *The Poetics of Scientific Investigation in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 116-119.

⁶⁷ Britten and Pears, 1 August 1945, in *Letters* vol. II, 1272.

⁶⁸ Kennedy, “Requiems and Memorial Music,” 234-5. Very near the end of his life, Britten revealed “that the experience had coloured everything he had written subsequently,” which Pears would later relate to film producer Tony Palmer in the years immediately following the composer’s death. See Palmer, *A Time There Was*.

⁶⁹ Kennedy, 235.

According to Neil Powell, “the unclouded childlike optimism for which [Britten] had sometimes striven was no longer an option in his music (...) Creatively, a time when ‘all went well’ was from now on only available to him as a barely accessible memory.”⁷⁰

A mere eighteen days after the day his letter to Pears was postmarked, Britten would complete *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*. Emerging from a feverish haze, the composer attended to the pressing need to commemorate his brief but memorable contact with the horrors of the camps. David Fuller comments that “in other circumstances, [Britten] and Menuhin might both have been in the camps,” a fact which added to the emotional trauma resulting from their engagements there.⁷¹

It is no surprise, then, that Britten would have selected Donne’s poetry to express his own grief and dread in music. Donne’s poetry reflects the inconsolable conflict he felt between duty and devotion, rendering these texts suitable to the task of responding to the modern atrocities Britten had witnessed. Britten sets poems that reflect upon human suffering in the form of the innate wickedness that wears upon one’s purity and integrity.⁷² The realization that the poet is apart from God in physical death is a recurring theme in Britten’s selections, feeding the assumption that redemption awaits at the *Sonnets’* conclusion. But no such closure awaits. The inevitability of death—cited as the cycle’s underlying theme by both Britten and Pears on separate occasions—is welcomed

⁷⁰ Neil Powell, “Where I Belong,” in *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music* (New York: Henry Holt, 2013), 243-4.

⁷¹ David Fuller, “Sin, Death and Love,” *Literary Britten: Words and Music in Benjamin Britten’s Vocal Works*, ed. Kate Kennedy (Aldeburgh: Boydell Press, 2018), 243.

⁷² Justin Vickers, “Benjamin Britten’s Silent ‘Epilogue’ to *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*,” in *The Musical Times* 156, no. 1933 (Winter 2015), 20-22.

as a release from world-weariness, still a lesser evil than the horrors of mortal existence depicted throughout Donne's cycle.⁷³

Britten's setting of the *Sonnets* reflects his then-visceral reaction to the horrors of war, which he perceived to be a monumental failure of human and social responsibility. What's more, his choice to cast his musical response to the horrors of war adrift on Donne's poetry permitted him another form of escape: through cultural-historical displacement of a distinctly English stripe, Britten avoided aesthetic transaction with "collective memories of a Nazi past (...) too massive to be forgotten."⁷⁴ Still, what results from Britten's marriage of ancient text and modern musical treatment is not necessarily an attempt to reconcile the source of his individual grief and trauma alone. Rather, *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* observes a collective need to mourn in hopes that the postwar sorrow of the individual might become comprehensible in the context of Donne's universal 'wickedness-unto-death.'⁷⁵

The Holy Sonnets of John Donne is Britten's first musical project in cultural-historical displacement. It is not, however, the first instance in which he takes into consideration the stake of the individual within (and against) the grain of a collective

⁷³ Benjamin Britten, interviewed in 1963 in Kildea, ed., *Britten on Music*, 231; Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (London: Greenwood Publishing, 1952), 69.

⁷⁴ Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 2.

⁷⁵ For more on Britten's use of such "displacement" in his postwar musical works, see Kate Kennedy, "Requiems and Memorial Music," in *The Edinburgh Companion to the First World War and the Arts*, ed. Ann-Marie Einhaus (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 231, 235-240.

public. Though the *Sonnets* reflect a radical shift in Britten's postwar outlook, similar musical contemplations of belonging appear throughout his musical output both prior to and during the second World War. Chief among these is *Peter Grimes*. Together with Pears and librettist Montagu Slater, Britten re-fashioned the likeness of George Crabbe's killer fisherman to produce a misunderstood visionary doomed to suffer and die at the hands of a cruel society. Though *Grimes* is widely acknowledged (or perhaps essentialized) as "a powerful allegory of homosexual oppression," the characterization of its protagonist was not so clear-cut for Britten and Pears.⁷⁶ Britten himself identified the work as "a subject very close to my own heart—the struggle of the individual against the masses. The more vicious the society, the more vicious the individual."⁷⁷

Just as the *Sonnets* had been borne of Britten's trauma in the wake of his postwar exposure to Nazi death camps, so too had *Grimes* resulted from an earlier rupture in the composer's life. In search of his own belonging, Britten (accompanied by Pears) fled the U.K. in 1939 and set his sights on a future in the United States. Like their colleagues W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Britten and Pears readily chose exile: though motivated primarily by the looming threat of war on English soil, their emigration was driven by a desire for *social* acceptance as well. Philip Brett writes,

"Another fundamental impulse must also have been at work: namely that desire, so common in young gay men, to seek anonymity and freedom by going to the big city, the far-off country—any place, that is, away from the home where they feel at best half-accepted."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Brett, "Britten and Grimes," *Musical Times* 117 (1977), 995-1000.

⁷⁷ "Opera's New Face," *Time* (16 February 1948): 62-68.

⁷⁸ Brett, "Britten and Grimes," *Musical Times* 117 (1977): 1003.

When Britten and Pears arrived in the States, the composer described himself as “muddled” by his surroundings but nevertheless “longing to be used.”⁷⁹ Soon, both were overwhelmed by their utility as artists within communities that indeed had use for them, as well as their social mobility within an American culture that more readily allowed passage to queer men. Britten would compose a number of significant works on commission before gaining the recognition of Serge Koussevitsky, who would later commission *Peter Grimes*.

In spite of his eagerness to be used and recognized by American audiences, Britten eventually cut short his tenure in the States following a rash of shockingly poor reviews. Though Auden and Britten had both intended for their operetta *Paul Bunyan* to emerge from the collaborative process with the polish and popular appeal of a Broadway musical, such a fate was not to be. Throughout the formative stages of the creative process, Auden had only a “vague” notion of Paul Bunyan’s role as title character, and as a result, staging was delayed until six months prior to opening. Auden’s formerly “dazzled accomplice,” Britten, had far more to lose professionally from the stagnation and failure of this major endeavor.⁸⁰ *Bunyan* was formally withdrawn in the wake of a scathing review from “that old stinker” Virgil Thomson, a fact which gravely wounded the ego of the famously thin-skinned Britten.⁸¹ In addition to the tense creative impasse that necessitated the closure

⁷⁹ Benjamin Britten, *On Receiving the First Aspen Award; a Speech by Benjamin Britten* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), 21.

⁸⁰ Brett, “Auden’s Britten,” 195-6.

⁸¹ Thomson was the chief music critic of the *New York Herald Times* from 1940 to 1954, during which time he expressed distaste towards a number of Britten’s works, including *Grimes*. Of Britten’s settings for *Bunyan*, Thomson was quick to judge “its particular blend of melodic ‘appeal,’” which he perceived to be “easily recognizable as that considered by

of his American collaborations with Auden, Britten had begun to chafe under the louche conditions that marked daily life in the Brooklyn Heights villa he and Pears shared with the writer and many other famous figures. It comes as no surprise, then, that the two fled New York for California as soon as the advance performances of *Paul Bunyan* at Columbia University flopped.

Fortunately, inspiration for Britten's next project presented itself not long after the pair arrived in Escondido. Pears stumbled across a transcript of E.M. Forster's radio talk on the life and works of George Crabbe in *The Listener*, which in turn found its way into Britten's hands. Forster's account begins with a curious aphorism, which no doubt caught the attention of a Britten already deeply dissatisfied with the trappings of American life: "To talk about Crabbe is to talk about England." Like Britten, Crabbe was a native of Suffolk whose failure to escape the insular marshes of East Anglia Forster describes as inspirational, "the very making of him as a poet."⁸² Curiously, it was not only the "depopulated [...] yet idyllic" physical qualities of these landscapes alone that beckoned to Britten: he longed for the cultural-historical aura of his boyhood home, as well. As early as 1940, he wrote of the United States, "This country is dead, because it hasn't been lived in, because it hasn't been worked on."⁸³ Driven now by the possibilities that awaited him in more familiar landscapes, Britten sought out Crabbe's anthology *The Borough*, a

the British Broadcasting Corporation to be at once modernistic and safe." This appraisal is typical of Thomson's reviews of Britten, whose chief failure in the eyes of the former consistently seems to be his provinciality.

⁸² E.M. Forster, "George Crabbe: The Poet and the Man," *The Listener* (29 May 1941), in Philip Brett, ed., *Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes*, 3.

⁸³ Letter from April 1940, *Letters from a Life*, vol. II, 800.

decision which would lead him to *Grimes*—and eventually, across the ocean and back to his native Aldeburgh.

Many of Britten's personal achievements as composer and community organizer were made possible by his return to England in 1942. Britten's return and subsequent contributions as native composer had literally groundbreaking effects on the musical culture of East Anglia. Settling in this region had a profound effect on his inspiration and day-to-day productivity; numerous scholars have likened Britten's intentional creative entrenchment in the life of Aldeburgh to that of his protagonist Grimes, whose refusal to seek hospitable shores (even unto death) is famously justified by the phrase, "I am a native, rooted here."⁸⁴ Britten willingly departed England in 1939 in order to escape a pre-war reality where he was doomed to be "essentially lonely, twisted in dying roots," yet it would appear that his pre-war anxieties were tempered in the pervasive atmosphere of bohemianism that enveloped Auden and his circle wherever they went.⁸⁵

For this very reason, the event of Britten's return serves as a site of curiosity for those attempting to justify the motives of 'Britten-the-man' within the various historical and textual contexts of his works. Although Britten's successes can in many cases be attributed to his return to Suffolk, there were extramusical consequences to his decision that were ingrained in the very landscape by virtue of its reigning social order. In addition

⁸⁴ Benjamin Britten and Montagu Slater, *Peter Grimes* (I.1), 1945.

⁸⁵ John Warrack, "Benjamin Britten: Musician of the Year in Conversation with John Warrack," *Musical America* 84 (Dec. 1964), reprinted in Kildea, ed., *Britten On Music*, 73-75. Interestingly, the anecdote above opens the interview. Warrack attributes it to Louis MacNeice, a co-collaborator of both Britten and Auden. While Britten was in the process of editing *Grimes*, he also set the music for MacNeice's *Dark Tower*. These two pieces are perceived to share many of the same subjectivities—for more on this, see Brooks (2017).

to Britten's prior history of personal and stylistic conflict with the then-figureheads of the British musical tradition, the establishment at large posed a far greater threat to him and Pears. While socialized homophobia had nearly been as rampant in the United States as it was in Britain, the latter country took a far greater interest in the surveillance and arrest of known homosexual men. Until 1967, the Sexual Offences Act criminalized any behavior that could be reasonably perceived as homosexual.

Under these circumstances, it was of the utmost importance that Britten and Pears rigorously maintain an outward appearance of respectability. Gordon Westwood correlates the development of the "respectable homosexual" with the wider acceptance of the pathological model of homosexuality observed in Britain.⁸⁶ This model classified homosexuality as a congenital defect, and therefore could not be helped—only managed, restrained. Richard Hornsey casts the conditions for respectability as opposites to the "disordered performances and mercantile encounters (...) endemic to (...) more manifest forms of queerness." Instead, the respectable homosexual set himself apart from unruly 'queers' through well-intentioned displays of discretion, propriety, and monogamy.⁸⁷ Britten and Pears were undoubtedly exemplars of this archetype. Yet the Britten reportedly suffered from the underlying knowledge that the tendencies of the

⁸⁶ Gordon Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1952). Westwood's approach to understanding the homosexual departed from a pathological, quantitative model in its use of anecdotal and sociological evidence. Edward Glover describes Westwood's account as one in which "the homosexual emerges as a man amounts men struggling in his own way to deal with the problems and difficulties that arise from a combination of innate factors (...) thrown into relief by [his] social milieu."

⁸⁷ Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010), 8-9.

homosexual “are all against the law of the country and the moral code of society.” This in turn necessitated a “fearful tenacity” to safeguard his identity and relationship.⁸⁸

Auden had been fully aware of the climate that awaited Britten and Pears in the event of their return. The letter Auden wrote to Britten in the wake of his departure served as the parting shot for their collaborations, generating tension in their friendship that remained largely unresolved even after Auden’s death in 1973. According to Brett, this letter served as a bruising lesson about “the dangers that beset him as a man and an artist.” Auden criticized Britten’s love of “Bourgeois Convention” and its “large unfeeling corpses,” as well as his tendency to “build himself a warm nest of love (...) by playing the lovable talented little boy.”⁸⁹ Auden’s appraisal of Britten’s modus was spot-on and sufficient enough to wound the composer’s ego more deeply than any performance review could have. However, Brett is quick to balance the situation, and suggests that Auden’s letter was merely a sour reaction to Britten’s successful escape from the ‘nest’ of his domineering charms.⁹⁰

Much could be said about the incompatibilities in the relationship between Auden and Britten, but for the purposes of this work, one must attempt to balance each artist’s ‘management’ of his homosexuality as Brett suggests. Even with his frank and reparative

⁸⁸ Westwood, *Society and the Homosexual*, 20-21.

⁸⁹ Letter from Wystan Auden to Benjamin Britten, 31 January 1942, in *Letters from a Life* (v. 2), Mitchell and Reed, eds., 1015-16. Auden cites Bourgeois Convention by name in the aforementioned letter to Britten. It is reasonable to assume that he is citing the phenomenon of the same name that serves as an underlying theme of his then very recent (1941) essay “Eros and Agape.” The latter essay alleges that erotic love permits a glimpse of that which agape (here, unconditional and culturally marital love) seeks—ecstasy.

⁹⁰ Brett, “Auden’s Britten,” 200.

approach to this task, Brett cannot escape the language of pathology as it becomes entangled in discourses on homosexuality; in effect, he casts Auden's search for "healing" opposite Britten's daily regimen of "repression and self-control." Auden's self-imposed prescription for excesses of the flesh "allowed, nay commanded, him to act out the desires his religion named sinful," while Britten's penchant for conviction and justice was the only tool he had to quell the discomfort of his difference. Though the materials of this pair's parting have been all but "exhausted of significance" in service of interpretation of their work, the unresolved conflict that remains present can be mobilized to a slightly different end.⁹¹ On the basis of their individual performances of homosexual identity, Britten and Auden could be said to occupy opposite ends of a spectrum of homosocial behavior. Auden's bohemianism and expressionist excesses—perhaps but one degree away from unruly, urban queerness described in Hornsey's account—skew far and away from Britten's conservatism and precautionary posturing.

Of course, it is impossible to know for certain the impact of Britten's return on the composer's health and productivity. It would appear, however, that the composer sacrificed some degree of peace and sanity to plant roots in a place where adversity hovered in the periphery of both his musical and personal life. Britten nevertheless emerged from his American exile mature, "no longer prepared to be bullied" by Auden—or anyone else, for that matter. Though the tumult of his time in the United States had not facilitated the meteoric rise to international recognition that Britten had hoped for, he did not arrive empty-handed: in three years abroad, he had established a lifelong

⁹¹ Brett, "Auden's Britten," 193; 201.

romantic relationship, which was due in no small part to this formative foray into homosocial milieu. Even if the newfound ability to acknowledge the nature of his own sexuality often left Britten paralyzed by “guilty innocence,” these developments manifested a change in the craftsmanship of his music.⁹² Indeed, it seems he had finally accessed the creative raw materials to produce the “personal, more *interesting* idiom” his American peers had previously found lacking in his work.⁹³

The composer orchestrated his return with a calculated approach to each faction within the British musical establishment, with image-boosting outreach to localized audiences at its core. By the time *Peter Grimes* reached the stage, Britten’s name had emerged as a formidable alternative to established figures in the British pastoral tradition, as well as its historical and choral traditions. These initial successes were driven by Britten’s tendency to set familiar or historically-removed texts, which permitted him some degree of freedom in the composition of his settings. Given this tendency, his choice of an established or recognizable text for the first Canticle should come as no surprise. Canticle I gains immediate significance when one recognizes that Britten edited and set this text with Pears—as both partner and performer—in mind. Furthermore, this piece was premiered by the pair at a memorial concert for Dick Sheppard held at Central Hall, London, in 1947, which was well-attended enough to make this particular dedication

⁹² Stephen Arthur Allen, “Benjamin Britten and Christianity” (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 2002), 17-23.

⁹³ Letter from Colin McPhee to Benjamin Britten, 1 October 1942, in *Letters from a Life*, vol. II, Mitchell and Reed, eds., 907-8.

a potentially bold move in its execution. Though Britten had merely set the text of the Canticle, its use of religious eroticism might be misunderstood literally in light of the performers' relationship to one another off the stage.

Perhaps fortunately, initial reviews of the performance rendered only a "facile reading" to the surface of the Canticle, the potential for double entendre was momentarily forgotten due to the perceived limitations of Britten's musical setting. The sectional structure of the piece, as well as its "startling" moments of sudden emphasis on text, impede any sort of formal continuity that could be felt at its conclusion.⁹⁴ It would seem, then, that Britten's historicized approach to both music and text had been effective, thus removing himself and Pears from the weight of suspicions that may have arisen in the moment of performance. At this moment, Britten's affinity for tradition permitted the utterance of his desire—or at the very least, the implication of it. A shared performance of "My beloved is mine" enabled Britten and Pears to covertly express their desires for one another within the confines of a distantly familiar landscape implied by the text, in which a musical consummation of their love might be presently mistaken as yearning for unity with Christ, not each other.

Long after his completion of the Canticle, Britten recalled that he modeled the first song after one of Henry Purcell's *Divine Hymns*, but that "few people knew their Purcell well enough to realize that."⁹⁵ Additionally, Pears pointed to Britten's later realizations of Purcell's music, specifically the *Hymns* and a handful of other secular and dramatic songs.

⁹⁴ David Brown, "Canticle I," *Monthly Musical Record* 80 (December 1950), 272.

⁹⁵ Britten, "On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell's Songs," in *The Purcell Collection: Realizations by Benjamin Britten* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008): viii-x.

He notes that Britten was particularly fascinated by the form of Purcell's "Lord, what is man?" and "found in it the ideal shape for an extended song, a sort of cantata."⁹⁶

Britten would eventually set the text of seventeenth-century poet Francis Quarles within Purcell's framework. He found the text for his first Canticle in a copy of *The Triumph of Life: Poems of Consolation for the English-speaking World* lent to him by Eric Crozier.⁹⁷ "Ev'n like two little bank-divided brooks" was originally published as a part of Quarles's 1780 *Emblems*, a collection of the author's poetic meditations on scripture. Britten's selection was taken from the Song of Solomon, a book of the Hebrew Bible that consists of erotic poetry.

The various and often abrupt stylistic shifts throughout the piece do indeed simulate the pacing of a multi-movement cantata. According to Glenn Bennett, this may have been due to Britten's desire to create more "cumulative" musical settings for poetry, which he had previously believed were best executed in multiple movements. In Canticle I, Britten positions both vocalist and accompanist as discrete personae within a through-composed "cycle of experiences."⁹⁸ In his analysis, Bennett indicates that this "cycle of experiences" is a phenomenon reflected in both the form and expressive shifts that demarcate the three sections of the piece. In my own analysis of the Canticle, I recognize that these same shifts in musical texture and character almost directly correspond with

⁹⁶ Benjamin Britten, *The Vocal Music: 50 songs (realizations by Benjamin Britten)*, ed. Peter Pears (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 71-72.

⁹⁷ Letter from Britten to Pears, 4 September 1947, in *Letters from a Life*, vol. III, Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed, eds. (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), 319.

⁹⁸ Glenn Bennett, "A Performer's Analysis and Discussion of the Five Canticles of Benjamin Britten," 18-19.

the ascent to divine unity. Britten's setting of each section relies on text-painting in such a way that the metaphors in Quarles's poem are made audible. Furthermore, Britten's scoring of accompaniment and voice in this piece frequently features exchanges of control between the two parts at points of literal intersection in the text, further reinforcing the tension that leads to musical consummation at the conclusion of the Canticle.

In light of Britten's treatment of the text, one can and should consider the voice and piano to act upon one another as personae within the context of the work. According to Fred Maus, it is possible to reconcile structure and expression as jointly operative in the context of the work without producing an overly subjective reading. Features of a work that present themselves in an emotive fashion can be acknowledged as such so long as the language describing it does not veer away from the musical. By Maus's account, analysis conducted in this fashion "*explains* events by regarding them as *actions* and suggesting *motivation*, *reasons* why those actions are performed."⁹⁹ In the case of Britten's account, instances of emotive gesture can therefore be attributed to the mechanism of the piece, not directly to a choice on Britten's part. Therefore, I suggest that the queer double meaning of the piece is reinforced by these gestures, and not by the contextual presence of Britten's homosexuality alone.

An essentialist reading of Canticle I would likely stop here: having deemed the conditions set by the score to be 'queered,' one might turn away with the satisfaction that the basic intent of the musical work has been sufficiently outed. Essentialism traditionally

⁹⁹ Fred Everet Maus, "Music as Drama," *Music Theory Spectrum* 10 (Spring 1988): 66-67.

presumes an omniscience that precludes the artist's own designs, no matter how clever (or paranoid). In the case of Canticle I, a presumption such as this mistakes one seemingly straightforward aspect of the work to represent its totality, thus missing an opportunity to appreciate its polyvalent meanings. Too often, queerness is conflated with shameless displays of camp. However, Wayne Koestenbaum warns that the appearance of queerness in music is not so easily exposed, nor understood:

Historically, music has been defined as mystery and miasma, as implicitness rather than explicitness, and so we have hid inside music. In music, we can come out without coming out, we can reveal without saying a word.¹⁰⁰

While it would be tempting to suggest that Britten has hidden some indication of his and Pears's relationship in the Canticle, I would like gently to overturn this premise. Britten's setting of Quarles's text makes little attempt to hide anything, let alone the potential for homosexual subjectivity. Rather, his recreation of this text imagines its landscape as one of possibility for growth and ecstatic union. Whether or not this possibility is distinctly queer (or anything else) remains entirely up to the individual listener in their own context. According to Louis Niebur, to reimagine Canticle I as anything other than autonomous in the modernist sense of the word (that is, "music-as-itself") permits open-ended interpretations that might extend interpretation of the work beyond a reading of it which is only queer.

In his own analysis of Canticle I, Niebur examines its similarities to the sacred parlor song, which acted as "a viable way to simulate the joys of passion without actually

¹⁰⁰ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire* (New York: Poseidon, 1993), 189-90.

committing the stigmatized sins themselves.” Furthermore, this hybrid genre permitted another subaltern group—in this case, the Victorian housewife—to express a depth of feeling otherwise forbidden to them in public life through works composed for use in intimate settings.¹⁰¹ In a similar fashion to the Canticle, sacred parlor songs evaded scrutiny by grounding sensuousness in praise of God, with ecstasy being representative of transformative unity with Christ:

It was (...) a paradoxically optimistic metaphor for its profoundly religious implications (...) The wounds would, or could, be healed when the king (or King Jesus) returned, or conversion was finally effected, or love was returned with a kiss.¹⁰²

This same premise takes on productive potential when considering the Canticle in the context of the Purcell hymn which served as its inspiration. “Lord, what is Man?” resolves the burden of earthly suffering through unity with Christ. This arduous process is depicted through a series of musical shifts that gradually blur the boundary between sinner and Savior until the songs of penitent narrator are elevated to the level of audibility in the concluding section of the piece. Similarly, awe at the beauty of God acts as the unifying premise of the Canticle. However, Britten’s choice of text lends yet another dimension of context: although Quarles’s poetry was a meditation on the Song of Solomon, its textual elements suggest that its events take place in an English landscape. Quarles’s poem (“E’en like two little bank-divided brooks”) is an emblem, a metaphysical poetic form traditionally intended to inspire contemplation of the world as depicted in

¹⁰¹ Louis Niebur, “Britten (and Pears’s) Beloved,” 197-198.

¹⁰² Sarah Covington, *Wounds, Flesh, and Metaphor in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2014), 175, quoted in Niebur, “Britten (and Pears’s) Beloved,” 202.

the verse. According to Quarles, the verses contained in his *Emblems* are “silent parables” that encourage communion with Christ in the enjoyment of every facet of creation.¹⁰³

“E’en like two little bank-divided brooks” is printed beside a woodcut of a clothed cherub supporting a sacred heart with a single arrow protruding from it. The text is as follows, though I have omitted the fourth stanza as Britten elected to do in his setting:

EV’N like two little bank-dividing brooks,
That wash the pebbles with their wanton streams,
And having rang’d and search’d a thousand nooks,
Meet both at length in silver-breasted Thames,
Where in a greater current they conjoyn:
So I my best-beloved’s am; so he is mine.

Ev’n so we met; and after long pursuit,
Ev’n so we joyn’d; we both became entire;
No need for either to renew a suit,
For I was flax and he was flames of fire:
Our firm-united souls did more than twine;
So I my best-beloved’s am; so he is mine.

If all those glitt’ring Monarchs that command
The servile quarters of this earthly ball,
Should tender, in exchange, their shares of land,
I would not change my fortunes for them all:
Their wealth is but a counter to my coin:
The world’s but theirs; but my beloved’s mine.

(...)

Nor Time, nor Place, nor Chance, nor Death can bow
My least desires unto the least remove;
He’s firmly mine by oath; I his by vow;
He’s mine by faith; and I am his by love;
He’s mine by water; I am his by wine;
Thus I my best-beloved’s am; thus he is mine.

¹⁰³ Francis Quarles, *Emblems* (London: Nisbet, 1635), ix.

He is my Altar; I his Holy Place,
I am his guest; and he, my living food;
I'm his by penitence; he mine by grace;
I'm his by purchase; he is mine by blood;
He's my supporting elm; and I his vine:
Thus I my best-beloved's am; thus he is mine.

He gives me wealth, I give him all my vows:
I give him songs; he gives me length of dayes.
With wreaths of grace he crowns my conqu'ring brows:
And I his Temples with a crown of Praise,
Which he accepts as an ev'rlasting signe,
That I my best-beloved's am; that he is mine.¹⁰⁴

The ascent to godliness depicted in the formal structure of both the Purcellian hymn and the sacred parlor song is also apparent in the form of Britten's first Canticle. Purcell's "Lord, what is Man?" tracks roughly the same form as the Canticle does. Both pieces are tripartite in form, and open with a section that is texturally distinct from the remainder of each work, which in both cases is more through-composed in nature. In the case of "Lord, what is Man?," the opening of the realization shares few similarities with the original. In contrast, the first section of the Canticle is a gentle barcarolle that elides smoothly into the next section, which resembles a scherzo in 2/4. Both pieces possess this characteristic; in "Lord, what is Man?," the section that begins with "O, for a quill" carries out this same function. The consummation sought after in the text of both pieces is depicted in their concluding sections, which are fantasias on a single word or, in the case of the Canticle, a short idea: "So he is mine."

¹⁰⁴ Francis Quarles, "My beloved is mine, and I am his; He feedeth among the lilies," *Emblems* (London: Nisbet, 1635), 267-268.

Indeed, the steps toward consummation in the first Canticle even conclude with a metaphorical procession into sacred space. Curiously, the musical emphases David Brown found so alarming in his review of the Canticle's first publication speak directly to the impact of Britten's choice of form as it functioned at major points of joint arrival. In contrast, moments of parting are musically illustrated by figures that seem to evoke a disappearance into the landscape, an event often implied by the keyboard.¹⁰⁵ This disappearance is established in the opening section of the Canticle, while subsequent sections serve to complicate the narrator's place within the landscape. By Niebur's account, it remains uncertain whether the accompaniment (in its original performance, played by Britten) or the soloist (Pears) occupies the role of narrator.¹⁰⁶

The first formal section of Canticle I (encompassing mm. 1-58) is a barcarolle. A three-measure introduction ripples across the keyboard, with right hand meandering independently of its rhythmically slower counterpart in the left. These two entities represent the separate (but eventually constituent) "two little bank divided brooks" named in the tenor's initial entrance. The "wanton" courses of these brooks takes them through a variety of seemingly inconsequential tonal "nooks" before they inevitably conjoin in modal D (mm. 18-19).

¹⁰⁵ This figure first appears in the right hand of the keyboard in mm. 6-8, and is subsequently extended in the following iteration (mm. 10-13). As the two parts drift around each other prior to "conjoining" in m. 21, this figure appears in three successive fragments (mm. 14-17) before being entirely dismantled in the event of the unity of both parts.

¹⁰⁶ Niebur, "Britten (and Pears's Beloved)," 202-203.

The bass and treble parts wander independently of each other until both “meet at length in silver-breasted Thames,” at which time the tenor retrospectively assents to the melodic encouragement of the piano, in turn providing their own commentary on pre-existing accompanimental figures. This suggestion of the erotic in measures 18-21 is quashed by a diminuendo. Though momentarily suppressed by delicate dynamics, there is nothing to stop the soloist from emerging triumphantly in G-flat major in m. 27: “So he is mine!” The freshness of this arrival is achieved by way of a modulation from D major.

In the subsequent passage, Britten uses another fragment of the introduction (mm. 27-29) as a segue for a duple-triple chase that tightens the registral distance between the two voices, emphasizing the tension naturally caused by the vocalist’s ascent into a higher register. This dramatic expansion of register resolves on the tenor’s arrival in m. 33, which also serves as the implied moment of narrative consummation. Here, the soloist assumes full dominance for what is perhaps the first time in the piece, issuing forth a revelatory melisma as the piano outlines the heights and depths of their joint arrival in E-flat major.

Niebur suggests that the music of the first section alone could be read as lovers, given the subtraction of verbal text. Their “[gradual] advancing, (...) to some common understanding” is played out between the voice and piano over the course of the piece, during which the active keyboard symbolically acquiesces to the ministrations of the tenor.¹⁰⁷ That the Canticle evades a queer reading after this section alone is remarkable.

¹⁰⁷ Niebur, “Britten (and Pears’s) Beloved,” 207-210.

However, another review of the piece suggests its success in this area is achieved by Britten's figural "obfuscations" and proclivity for the baroque style.¹⁰⁸

In addition, a final turn to a distinctly religious tone further obscures the queer potential of the Canticale. The tenor-as-narrator positions himself both as supplicant and recipient ("he is my altar, I his holy place"), as well as the body of his partner as the eucharistic host. Britten's accompaniment proceeds cautiously as the soloist extends the more explicitly biblical references in the text in a return to the slow, placid textures of the first section. In this manner, the narrator and his beloved are made whole, their partnership elevated to the level of nature within the physical setting of the piece.

Still, it bears repeating that queerness or eroticism should not be taken as the sole moral or motivation of this piece. On the contrary, if one is to assume that Britten set Quarles's text with the shared motivations of contemplation and reverence in mind, the piece could hardly be composed with a singular intention in mind. Quarles himself writes, "Toyish airs please trivial ears," and encourages his reader to look past the obvious facts of life to see "the allusion to our Blessed Savior" in all things. Driven by a similar ideal, Britten approached metaphysical poetry of this nature with the desire to normalize his expressive intent within the context of the song. Through his adaptation of the cycle of experiences he derived from Purcell's hymns, Britten composed scenarios in which he and Pears might express desire. In the context of the Canticale, the desire expressed by the

¹⁰⁸ "Britten's Canticles: A Masterly Evocation," *American Record Guide* 29 (January 1963), 362.

vocalist is universalized within physical landscape imposed by the text, in keeping with the stereotypical features of metaphysical poetry. Canticale I is not a performance of queerness, but rather the execution of fantasy in music that invites the listener to engage with its spectacle. In this fantasy, “excitement is heightened by the knowledge that such a love is possible.”¹⁰⁹

Thanks to the queer subjectivity of Canticale I and other works, the analysis of music might be broadened to consider the uncertainty of possibility. That said, Canticale I is not a response to guilt felt for the “pride” and “unrepentant self-justification” ascribed to homosexuals like Britten.¹¹⁰ Instead, a non-autonomous reading of this work is one of possibility, perhaps even hope. In spite of the tireless work of scholars and biographers on this subject, one cannot know whether or not Britten ever reconciled the moral weight of his homosexuality. He did, however, come to accept that he possessed a difference that set him apart from his peers and public. Through recognition of this difference, Britten recognized the “consciousness-raising” power of music, particularly within those works that challenged collective consciousness to stretch past the conventional boundaries of what can acceptably be seen—and in this case, heard.¹¹¹

This thesis has examined the way in which two of Britten’s works challenge this acceptability. Given the musical and social circumstances under which Britten conducted his career and personal life, the tendency to essentialize him through his music should be avoided at all costs. Though a drive to “out” Britten through his works characterized their

¹⁰⁹Niebur, “Britten (and Pears’s) Beloved,” 213.

¹¹⁰ Donald Mitchell, *Death in Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 21.

¹¹¹ Brett, “Auden’s Britten,” 201.

early analysis and posthumous constructions of his biography by various scholars, such as was not my aim over the course of this project. Conversely, I argue that such aims not only reduce them to the essence of queerness as their lowest common denominator, and in doing so further erases the broader spectrum of sociocultural experiences that motivated Britten's compositions.

Although Britten set a number of texts written specifically for his compositions, I assert that his desire to engage his audience in the moral questions that drove him was best employed through his use of historical texts. Specifically, the forms and text-painting deployed in the vocal songs of Henry Purcell were of particular use to Britten in masking these concerns. The "cycle of experiences" that occurs in Purcell's "Lord, what is man?" poignantly illustrates the ascent from earthly sin to divine ecstasy in a way that was relatable to Britten, who frequently wrote music that was a reaction to worldly atrocity and failure in human responsibility. Though Britten's realization of "Lord, what is man?" was composed with the intent to address the stylistic failures he perceived in the English musical establishment, it also served as the foundation for his later Canticale I.

The Canticale certainly bears obvious suggestions of Britten's queerness for the modern listener. However, it initially evaded recognition during Britten's lifetime by virtue of the historical characteristics that govern its form and treatment of emotive gesture. Furthermore, it bears repeating that Britten composed such works with the intention of provoking response on the part of the audience. Though the Canticale risks of "outing" its composer, Britten was hardly concerned with coming out in life or through the score. His deft manipulation of text and historical form allowed for the momentary

re-imagination of familiar landscapes that included the possibility of queerness without fear of punishment and in turn absolved both him and Peter Pears from any suspicions that might have arisen in the event of the Canticale's performance.

Knee-jerk reactions to such a conclusion—a reparative one, perhaps—might assume that I merely intended to generate inclusion or visibility, but this is not the case. Instead, this project has always been driven by a somewhat personal desire to see the content of implicitly queer musical works as by-products of their environments, which are all too-often assumed to be sexualized or corrupted in nature. However, in Britten's case, sexuality must be understood as but a single motivating factor among many that drove him to pose difficult questions to his audience through music.

CODA

“Nor ask what doubtful act allows
Our freedom in this English house,
Our picnics in the sun.”
--W.H. Auden,
“A Summer Night” (1933)

In modern Aldeburgh, proof of Benjamin Britten’s presence dots the physical landscape in his absence. About a mile outside of Aldeburgh proper, the home of Britten and Pears—known as Red House—is tucked away at the end of a gravel-paved road overlooking the distant bunkers of a golf course. The distinctive brick façade of the house and outbuildings largely obscures the low, sweeping silhouette of the Britten-Pears Library behind. Meticulous curation of the house maintains the eerie sensation of an inviting home whose occupants have only just stepped out to go to the shops; across the sweeping back lawn, the Library shelters thousands of physical sources, each catalogued with exhaustive precision. Six miles inland from the Anglian coastline, the concert hall at Snape Maltings remains a center for musical collaboration alongside the appreciation of local culture. Each June, the Aldeburgh Festival draws international audiences to Suffolk for performances both grand and intimate in scale. In commemoration of his lifelong work with and for the people of Suffolk and East Anglia, Britten was named Baron of Aldeburgh in the months preceding his death. Although he is now buried beside Pears in the courtyard of Aldeburgh Parish Church, the living presence of the composer seems at times eerily caught in place despite having passed in 1976.

Former Britten-Pears Library research officer Lucy Walker echoes these sentiments in the chapter entitled “The Man Himself,” which documents her own archival (and existential) search for traces of the men to whom the contents of the library once belonged. It is natural, Walker says, that house museums such as Red House “invite” visitors’ desire for participation with the humanness of its former occupants. This reflects a modern biographical tendency that attempts to reconcile the “unique, if still stereotypical” talents of our heroes with the rest of the “stuff”—that is, the rest of the human—that falls out of the frame of standard canonical biographies.¹¹² In Britten’s case, such a tendency has liberated not only the contents of his home and library, but the content of his musical catalogue as well. A great many sources are said to be missing from the Britten-Pears Library, rendering it incomplete. Still, the perceptible wholeness of what remains of Britten’s life gives the modern visitor a feverish sense of possibility; Walker attributes this to a desire not merely to know the entire contents of the archive, but to derive the nature of its very essence from this knowing. What leaves Britten’s essence hanging in the balance, then, is his very absence: with the loss of Britten-the-man is lost the total sum of his humanity, particularly the wealth of secrets he left unspoken.¹¹³

These are merely the existential facts of death and of the residual material that remain. The remaining archival and musical material of Britten’s has little to do with making his secrets nonsecret. Such a task is impossible, despite the palpable

¹¹² Lucy Walker, “The Man Himself,” in *The Britten Studies Manual: Essays on an Inexplicit Art* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017), 438-440.

¹¹³ Carolyn Steedman, “Something She Called a Fever’: Michelet, Derrida, and Dust, (Or, in the Archives with Michelet and Derrida),” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory*, 4-19, quoted in Walker.

everythingness that characterizes a visit to Red House and the Britten-Pears Library. In Britten's absence, there was never any chance of recovering "his" truth—but that was never the point. Rather, seeking Britten through research and performance is precisely what produces an interrelated truth. Although there is no way to know every nuance of Britten's story, Walker contends that the completion of the story is through interrelatedness:

Any representation of a man through the materiality left behind him can be complete (although it can never really be complete) *only* through the interaction of others: the relational act of interrogator, the visitor, the researcher, the curator, the archivist.¹¹⁴

Even in Britten's absence, those mentioned above participate in his history because we belong to its continuity, no matter how removed we may be. Although we are tasked to attend to the facts of Britten's existence, what remains is great possibility: though we can never divine the meanings of his actions or of his music, to return to these things is to produce an interrelated meaning.

Tendencies to seek more 'human' representation of historical figures permits a visitor to the Britten-Pears Foundation to consider what has been made possible through what remains. For Britten, a modern approach permits us to balance the conflicting halves of his public and private persona. Because we now possess a removed understanding of the larger context in which Britten conducted his career and relationships, we might begin to unearth those truths in his music which resonate with us. A modern recognition of the language which limits our understanding of Britten

¹¹⁴ Walker, "The Man Himself," 458.

permits a momentary rejection of it, in which we might imagine our perception of Britten-the-man in that moment to be but one culmination of his story. Even so, it remains critical to avoid essentialism in all its forms—whether in the process of pathological diagnosis or turning out the contents of an epistemological closet.

As is sometimes the case, the conclusion of these analyses is open-ended. However, this is not defeat, it is by design. If Britten’s works are considered here to be reconfigurations of familiar musical landscapes that conceal a yearning for possible futures, it might be said that positive interpretations result because we observe them from a future where those possibilities have been made real. A turn toward the reparative not only liberates the contents of Britten’s personal collection for assessment by the public, but makes it possible to look upon what resides there with hope. Drawing a reparative conclusion rooted in hope might easily be dismissed as sentimental. However, that these musical possibilities might be allowed to unfold at all is proof that such a conclusion is simply a realistic one among many others.

REFERENCES

- Adams, Byron. "Save Me From Those Suffering Boys': Britten, John Ireland, and the Venerable Tradition of Uranian Boy-Worship in England." From *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on an Inexplicit Art*, edited by Vicki P. Stroehrer and Justin Vickers, 178-191. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017.
- Allen, Stephen Arthur. "Benjamin Britten and Christianity." Ph.D. diss., Oxford University. 2002.
- Bennett, Glenn. "A Performer's Analysis and Discussion of the Five Canticles of Benjamin Britten." DMA thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988.
- Blyth, Alan. "Britten, Benjamin Edward." *Who's Who in Contemporary Gay and Lesbian History*, edited by Robert Aldrich, 23. London: Psychology Press, 2002.
- Blyth Alan, ed. *Remembering Britten*. London: Hutchinson, 1981.
- Brett, Philip. "Britten and Grimes," *Musical Times* 117 (1977): 995-1000.
- Bridcut, John. *Britten's Children*. London: Faber & Faber, 2011.
- Britten, Benjamin. *The Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*. London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1942.
- _____. "On Realizing the Continuo in Purcell's Songs." *Henry Purcell 1659-1695: Essays on His Music*, edited by Imogen Holst, 7-13. London: Oxford University Press, 1959.
- _____. *The Prodigal Son*, English Opera Group, Decca 438, 1970, LP.
- _____. *Henry Purcell. The Vocal Music: 50 Songs (realizations by Benjamin Britten)*, edited by Peter Pears. London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008.
- Brown, David. "Canticle I." *Monthly Musical Record* 80 (1950): 272.
- Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten*. London: Faber, 1992.
- Cheng, William. "How Hopeful The Queer." In *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good*, 54-70. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.
- Cooke, Mervyn. *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

- Elliot, Graham. *Benjamin Britten: The Spiritual Dimension*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Friedlander, Saul. *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Haggerty, George, ed. *Music and Sexuality in Britten*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Higgins, Patrick. *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Postwar Britain*. Notting Hill: Fourth Estate, 1996.
- Hoekema, David. "Spiritual Realities Made Audible." *Christian Scholar's Review* 44 (2015): 237-262.
- Hornsey, Richard. *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.
- Johnson, Graham. "Voice and Piano." From *The Britten Companion*, edited by Christopher Palmer, 304-306. London: Faber & Faber, 1984.
- Kildea, Paul. "Britten, Auden, and 'Otherness.'" *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, edited by Mervyn Cooke, 36-53. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- _____. *Britten on Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- _____. "On Ambiguity in Britten." In *Rethinking Britten*, edited by Philip Rupprecht, 3-19. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Koestenbaum, Wayne. *The Queen's Throat: Opera, Homosexuality, and the Mystery of Desire*. New York: Poseidon, 1993.
- LeGrove, Judith. *A Musical Eye: the Visual World of Britten and Pears*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2013.
- Martin, David. *Ruin and Restoration: On Violence, Liturgy, and Reconciliation*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Matthews, David. *Britten*. London: Haus Publishing, 2013.
- McClary, Susan. Introduction to *Music and Sexuality in Britten*, edited by George Haggerty, 6-7. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006.

- McKeon, Michael. *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- Mitchell, Donald. *Britten and Auden in the Thirties*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1981.
- Mitchell, Donald and Philip Reed, eds. *Letters From a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten*. 5 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Muñoz, José Esteban. "Disidentifications." From *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. New York: NYU Press, 1999.
- Niebur, Louis. "Britten's (and Pears's) Beloved: Sacred Parlour Song, Passion, and Control in Cantic I." In *Benjamin Britten Studies: Essays on an Inexplicit Art*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017.
- Palmer, Christopher. "The Ceremony of Innocence." In *The Britten Companion*, edited by Christopher Palmer, 68-83. London: Faber & Faber, 1984.
- Powell, Neil. "Where I Belong." In *Benjamin Britten: A Life for Music*, 243-244. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2013).
- Preston, Claire. *The Poetics of Scientific Investigation in Seventeenth-Century England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Ross, Alex. "Opera in England: Vigorous but Spiky." *The New York Times*, 24 June 1996.
- Seymour, Claire "Death in Venice." In *The Operas of Benjamin Britten*, 207-209. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004.
- Scott, Rebekah. "Britten's Drops: The Lyric into Song." In *Literary Britten: Words and Music in Britten's Vocal Works*, edited by Kate Kennedy, 141-142. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2018.
- Sharp, Cecil. *English Folk-Song: Some Conclusions*. London: Novello, 1907.
- Stradling, Robert and Meirion Hughes. *The English Musical Renaissance 1860-1940: Construction and Deconstruction*. Manchester University Press, 1993.
- Walden, Price. "Thus he is mine." *Price Walden*. Last modified September 19, 2017. <http://www.pricewalden.com/thus-he-is-mine/>.
- Walters, Richard. Preface to *Benjamin Britten: The Purcell Collection*. Milwaukee: Boosey & Hawkes, 2008.

- Walker, Lucy. "The Man Himself." In *The Britten Studies Manual: Essays on an Inexplicit Art*, edited by Vicki P. Stroeher and Justin Vickers, 430-458. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2017.
- Warrack, Jack. "Benjamin Britten: Musician of the Year in Conversation with Jack Warrack," *Musical America* 80 (1964): 73-75.
- Westrup, Jack. "The Virtuosity of Benjamin Britten." *Listener* (16 July 1942): 93.
- Westwood, Gordon. *Society and the Homosexual*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1952.
- Whitesell, Lloyd. "Love Knots: Britten, Pears, and the sonnet." In *Rethinking Britten*, edited by Philip Rupprecht, 40-62. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- _____. "Compromising Positions." *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 66 (October 2013): 835-839.
- Whittall, Arnold. "The Signs of Genre: Britten's Version of the Pastoral." From *Sundry Sorts of Music Books: Essays on the British Library Music Collections, Presented to O.W. Neighbor on His 70th Birthday*, edited by Chris Banks, 364. London: British Library, 1993.
- Wiebé, Heather. *Britten's Unquiet Pasts: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Wilkinson, Alan. "Death, Bereavement, and the Supernatural." From *The Church of England and the First World War*, 172. London: SPCK, 1978.