

# Aspects of Modernism in Elgar's Music

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For most of the time that people have been listening to his music, Strauss's 1902 insistence that Elgar was 'the first English progressivist' has seemed at best a little odd, at worst ludicrous after the advances in Vienna in the next decade, but it would be fair to say that a majority of musicologists writing on Elgar since the mid-to-late 1990s agree in some sense that he was indeed a modernist composer. This is a result of a more general move in musicological studies on the Western classical peripheries (principally Britain and Scandinavia), which have greatly expanded the possible extent of the technical features of modernism.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Among recent work in this area, particularly valuable contributions include those by Daniel M. Grimley on Nielsen, Elgar, and Vaughan Williams, James Hepokoski on Sibelius and Elgar, and Philip Rupprecht on Britten: see Daniel M. Grimley, 'Modernism and Closure: Nielsen's Fifth Symphony', *Musical Quarterly* 86, number 1 (2002): 149–73, doi:10.1093/musqtl/gdg004; '“Music in the Midst of Desolation”: Structures of Mourning in Elgar's *The Spirit of England*', in *Elgar Studies*, ed. J. P. E. Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 220–37; 'Music, Ice, and the “Geometry of Fear”: The Landscapes of Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia Antartica*', *Musical Quarterly* 91, nos. 1–2 (2008): 116–50, doi:10.1093/musqtl/gdno27; 'Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams, Modernism, and the Symphonic Pastoral', in *British Musical Modernism, 1890–1940*, ed. Matthew Riley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 147–174; *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010); James A. Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony No. 5*, Cambridge Music Handbooks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); 'Sibelius', in *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. D. Kern Holoman (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 417–49; 'Elgar', in *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. D. Kern Holoman (New York: Schirmer, 1997), 327–44; 'Rotations, Sketches, and the Sixth Symphony', in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 322–51; 'Finlandia Awakens', in *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, ed. Daniel M. Grimley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 61–94; 'Gaudery, Romance, and the “Welsh” Tune: *Introduction and Allegro*, Op. 47', in *Elgar Studies*, ed. J. P. E. Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 135–171; and Philip Rupprecht, *Britten's Musical Language*, volume 11, *Music in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). There are many other valuable contributions to questions of modernism in British music in J. P. E. Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton, editors, *Elgar Studies*, Cambridge Composer Studies (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Matthew Riley, editor, *British Music and Modernism, 1895–1960* (Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), and Byron Adams, ed., 'British

Most of these studies are analytical in nature: it seems to be generally agreed that however else he or anyone else may exhibit modernist credentials – through engagement with the tropes of broader artistic modernism at the level of overt narrative, say – it is in *the technical features of his music* that Elgar's modernism principally lies. We might contrast this often deeply submerged technical detail with what the listener experiences in the 'sounding surface' of his music, a sound world that most listeners would probably more closely associate with Brahms and Wagner (it used to be the habit to point also to Mendelssohn and Spohr, among others) more than Schoenberg, Bartók, Stravinsky, et al.

Critics of recent studies of British modernism<sup>2</sup> seize on this emphasis on the technical as a means of undermining the argument. Surely, the argument goes, this music is not modernist: scholars are merely stretching all useful definitions of modernism – emancipation of dissonance and so forth – beyond any sensible limit in order to include their own favourite repertoire in the modernist canon. This question can, I think, be answered, and the work done by recent scholars of British modernism integrated into a theory that resists the traditional binary whereby music is either modernist or not, replacing it with a dialectical model which relates all music to the Event of modernism in a radically different way.<sup>3</sup> The case of Elgar, a composer whose relation to modernity and modernism has a complex character, is as illuminating as any in this context.

## A political theory of modernism

Any attempt to clarify an ostensibly odd form of the phenomenon must sooner or later deal with the fundamental question: 'What is modernism?' For reas-

Modernism', special issue, *The Musical Quarterly* 91, nos. 1–2 (2008). My own contributions include J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, volume 14, Music in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), doi:10.2277/0521862000; 'Elgar's Deconstruction of the *Belle Époque*: Interlace Structures and the Second Symphony', in *Elgar Studies*, ed. J. P. E. Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 172–219; 'Vaughan Williams's Antic Symphony', in *British Musical Modernism, 1890–1940*, ed. Matthew Riley (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 175–96, and most recently *The Quilting Points of Musical Modernism: Revolution, Reaction, and William Walton*, Music in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> In my experience, which may or may not be representative, these tend more to be expressed in departmental mutterings than published opinions.

<sup>3</sup> This dialectical reformulation is the essential undertaking of Harper-Scott, *Quilting Points*. The following sections of the present chapter draw on the theory outlined in chapter 4 of *Quilting Points*.

ons that will become clear I would like to offer a definition seemingly at odds with all expectation. Modernism is the artistic configuration which forms part of the twentieth-century's resurrection of the truth claims of the French Revolution. Politically, the temporal frame in which modernism operates broadly coincides with what I shall call the truth-Event of communism.<sup>4</sup> I begin with this premiss since it creates the possibility of interrogating the *political* intelligibility of modernist music, specifically by using recent theoretical articulation of the idea of communism in the work of Alain Badiou.<sup>5</sup>

Badiou isolates two communist *sequences*.<sup>6</sup> The first sequence ran from the French Revolution to the Paris Commune (c.1792–1871). The second communist sequence is the one during which pre- and post-war modernism was at its height, running from the Russian Revolution in 1917 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in China in 1976. Between these sequences lies the *belle époque*, which Badiou describes as 'forty years of triumphant imperialism [. . .] the apogee of the bourgeoisie, which occupied the whole planet, laying waste and pillaging whole continents'.<sup>7</sup> In such intervals between communist sequences Badiou notes that the communist hypothesis is disparaged both in its last attempt at realization and at the roots of its claims to truth. We live in such an interval now, a period of a Fukuyaman 'end of history'.<sup>8</sup>

The formulation of a new theory of modernism I present here will interleave a simple introduction to Badiou's theory of truth with a musical application of the general theory.

What Badiou calls 'truth' is simply the infinity not accounted for by the situation in which human beings currently exist and speak and think: that truth might even be explicitly discountenanced by the present situation. When a fragment of truth crosses over into the situation, an Event has occurred, and the new fragment of the truth has a revolutionary effect on the situation: it

<sup>4</sup> A sense of what I mean by this is indicated by Eric Hobsbawm's summary judgement of the century: 'With the significant exception of the years from 1933 to 1945 [. . .], the international politics of the entire Short Twentieth Century since the October revolution can best be understood as a secular struggle by the forces of the old order against social revolution, believed to be embodied in, allied with, or dependent on the fortunes of the Soviet Union and international communism.' Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (1994; repr., London: Michael Joseph, 1995), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Badiou's main contributions to the development of the idea, which features throughout his writing from the 1960s onwards in various guises, and was revolutionized by his set-theoretical turn in the late 1980s, are Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Verso, 2008) and *The Communist Hypothesis*, trans. David Macey and Steve Corcoran (London and New York: Verso, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy*, 105.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 111.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992; repr., New York: Free Press, 2006).

*must* be accounted for in some form or other.

Communism and modernism are Events in the sense that they bring something external to bear on their pre-existing political or artistic situation. Of course not every subjective response to a truth-Event such as communism or modernism is faithful to the Event in the sense that it accepts the universal validity of the claims to truth and works to bring them about in the situation or world. Faithfulness is only one response to an Event, and for Badiou, subjects can be *faithful*, *reactive*, or *obscure*.<sup>9</sup> But it is a central claim that after the articulation or rearticulation (an idea that will be complicated below) of a truth-Event, *all human subjectivity is conditioned by it* in one of these three forms.

Finally, in order to express the nature of these types of subject, Badiou uses three key terms. The *trace* of a truth is the mark that it leaves in a situation which indicates that a truth has been proposed. The *body* of a truth is the presentation of the truth in the world: for instance the presentation of the truth *emancipation of dissonance* is a certain collection of musical works. The *present* or 'Evental present' is the set of consequences of a truth having acted on a world.

## Faithful and reactive subjects

Badiou's first example of the faithful subject occurs in the Spartacus revolts of 73BC.<sup>10</sup> The Event in this instance is the initial slave revolt, and the trace of it could be expressed in the statement 'we slaves, we want to return home'. A group of slaves form a body, in this case an army, which operate in a new present in which they are no longer slaves. They create for a moment a situation in which the fate of the wretched of the world is revoked – there is a new present.

The subject produces the truth only by taking a series of decisions to treat some points, such as 'should we march south or attack Rome?' Some points are acted on, others not, so the body is never *wholly* in the present, and the body of the truth is therefore *divided*. We might say that the faithful body knows its limits, knows that it is not solely a guarantor of the efficacy of the revolution. In the same way, not all of Schoenberg's music equally presents the truth *emancipation of dissonance* and not all of Strauss's equally fails to.

<sup>9</sup> For reasons of brevity, I shall only discuss the first two in this essay. A fuller articulation can be found in *Quilting Points*.

<sup>10</sup> Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds: Being and Event*, 2, trans. Alberto Toscano (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), 51–4.

This means that, from the perspective of this theory, one cannot say 'Stravinsky is *tout court* a faithful modernist', but only that from time to time certain of his musical gestures respond faithfully to the modernism-Event.

When Badiou turns to the second subjective response to truth, the argument turns definitively towards an optimistic 'proof' of the universality of truth and the hope for revolutionary emancipatory change. The normal assumption is that what resists the new is the old. But this view underestimates *reactionary novelties*, which means forms of resistance that are appropriate to the novelty itself; with these goes the subjective form that produces reactionary novelties, the *reactive subject*.

Badiou insists that despite its refusal to be incorporated into the new present, the trace of the truth makes its mark on the reactive subject, the conservative refusal to accept a real change. In the Spartacus example, this negated trace takes the form 'a body of slaves cannot produce an effective rebellion': that is, the success of the faithful subject is denied as something that is not realistic, and therefore cannot be realized, in this world. But while the reactive subject negates the Evental trace, it nevertheless still *produces* something, 'a measured present, a negative present, a present "a little less worse" than the past, if only because it resisted the catastrophic temptation which the reactive subject declares is contained in the event'.<sup>11</sup> This present is an *extinguished present*. So, some slaves decide that if they do not rebel they may be rewarded by the Romans for their behaviour, and there may be certain improvements in their conditions, though not actual freedom.

Because the reactive subject specifically negates the faithful subject, *the faithful subject haunts the reactive subject*, and the reactive subject carries along within itself – unwittingly, as it were – the very revolutionary ideas that it is trying somehow to resist. This point will be seen to be crucial to a properly dialectical understanding of modernism, and the comprehension of all reactive music as being constituted essentially around the faithful subject of the trace *emancipation of dissonance*. The modernism, then, of a conservative modernist, is an unconscious subordination to the Cause.

## Faithful and reactive musical modernism

The faithful subject of musical modernism is instituted by the process whereby a body of works (*Moses und Aron*, *Lulu* . . . ) is subordinated to the trace of the Event, which by 1926 carried the name *emancipation of dissonance*. The

<sup>11</sup> Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, 55.

result is a present in which music is no longer understood in terms of the binary of consonance and dissonance – a mimesis of ideological binaries in whose confines the human subject 'must' constitute itself – but in terms of a radical communism of notes, guaranteed by more or less extreme intellectual rigidity.

As in the general form of the faithful subject, the body that subordinates itself to the trace is incomplete. That means that not all elements of a particular musical work are necessarily 'faithful', 'reactive', or indeed 'obscure' in their subjective forms. Yet individual moments are more clearly comprehensible in subject terms, and works such as *Moses und Aron* and *Lulu* of course do fit most requirements for a modernism whose trace is *emancipation of dissonance* for much of the time.

The reactive subject represents the majority response in music of the twentieth century, including the music of Elgar, and a new understanding of its relation to the Evental trace makes possible a progressive intellectual and political interpretation of its materials.<sup>12</sup> The reactive subject subordinates the faithful subject to the denial of the Evental trace. In musical terms the negation of the emancipated dissonance is the privileging of 'tonic' configurations, which is to say the reassertion, to a greater or lesser degree, of the 'centrality' of certain relatively 'stable' chords (or at least pitches that exert a tonic-like gravitational pull). These tonic configurations could be literal tonics, with more or less richly furnished supplementary functions (dominant, subdominant, etc.), or 'enriched' tonics, for instance with an added sixth or a simultaneity of I and V that is always present in cadential motions, or else the privileging of 'tonic' chords within a tonal space that is minimally de-centred (for instance, whole-tone music). The result of the subordination of the faithful subject is to take into the musical language some of its essential behaviours. So, rather than eradicating dissonance altogether from the final consonant configuration, the basic assertion of the trace is taken at face value. Yes, dissonance is emancipated – but not so that it can form an entirely new world in which the binary has been dispensed with. Music can be modern without being modernist and challenging the existing order.

It is a mistake to suppose that certain composers were always faithful or reactive. Billions of *human beings* or hundreds of *musical works* may respond to the Event of modernism, but there are only three *subjects* (faithful, reactive, and obscure). The word *subject* is therefore here used in a sense quite distinct from that of German Idealism, in which it is the individual thinking human

<sup>12</sup> Such a reinterpretation is without the bounds of the present essay, but is developed in Harper-Scott, *Quilting Points*, *passim*, and especially chapter 5.

being. So in musical modernism we find composers, and even works, which at different times fit different subjective forms.

## The unnaturalness of musical modernism

The simplest and most productive definition of the trace of the musical modernism Event, and the one I have been using so far without explanation, is a familiar one: *emancipation of dissonance*. Schoenberg coined the term in 1926,<sup>13</sup> but I differ from him in one crucial respect. Schoenberg's argument is essentially a defence of atonality from accusations that it presents an offence to the natural order. As he observes in an image that strikingly links his musical style with the age of modernity, the erroneous view that tonality is natural and atonality is unnatural depends on a privileging of one kind of natural feature over others.

There is no reason in physics or aesthetics that could force a musician to use tonality in order to represent his idea. [ . . . ] The appeal to its origin in nature can be refuted if one recalls that just as tones pull toward triads, and triads toward tonality, gravity pulls us down toward the earth; yet an airplane carries us up away from it. A product can be apparently artificial without being unnatural, for it is based on the laws of nature to just the same degree as those that seem primary.<sup>14</sup>

I think Schoenberg errs in arguing a 'natural' basis for atonality. What the emancipated dissonance contributes to music history is a direct rebuttal of the arguments from nature, and in attempting to find an accommodation of atonality within the existing narratives of 'natural' music, Schoenberg's defence of his position is in fact a *reactive* subjective response. The atonality argued for in 'Opinion or Insight?' is an atonality a little less 'bad' than it might at first appear, because it can be seen, like the aeroplane that continues to obey the natural laws in its defiance of the privileged force of gravity, to be as 'natural' as tonality – just from a different perspective.<sup>15</sup> What Schoenberg proposes, therefore, is a musical revolution that is assimilated within the conservative insistence that music be 'natural'.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, 'Opinion or Insight?', in *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (London: Faber, 1975), 258–64.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, 262.

<sup>15</sup> A flaw in Schoenberg's image is that in a sense aeroplanes, the archetypal machines of modernity, no more challenge the law of gravity than a creature does when it lifts its leg from the earth to walk. The ease with which natural entities can resist gravity's pull is an essential function of the force: without that lenience, we would be jelly on the surface of the earth.

We should take Schoenberg's emancipation of dissonance into a more properly revolutionary context and insist that atonality is, in fact, *unnatural*. It is so in a manner that helps to clarify musical modernism's challenge to a whole range of modern ideologies that depend for their function on the fiction of a 'natural' state that can resist all incursions of a dangerous new truth.

What world did atonality disrupt? Emancipation of dissonance is constituted as an excess to tonality, the system of musical organization – the musical world, the *discourse* of that world – before the advent of modernism.<sup>16</sup> In its regulated control of tension and release it is manifest that tonality, more than any other structuring property of music (rhythm, timbre, etc.), has the effect of sanctioning within certain known boundaries *a fundamental antagonism in music*, which is taken to be 'natural'. The central assertion of tonality is that a musical configuration is either consonant or dissonant in one of an increasingly varied number of ways – but that ultimately the stable configuration, against which everything else will be judged more or less unstable, is the consonant configuration (essentially, between Bach and Wagner, the root-position tonic chord). In this sense, *tonality is an ideology of music*, which functions in a comparable fashion to ideologies of class, gender, economics, and so on.

Such ideologies clarify the relation of each part to the whole in terms of an officially sanctioned tension between two and only two positions. There is normality (good, sensible, realistic) and there are its opponents (wicked, irrational, or falsely, childishly idealistic). But that official antagonism mystifies the *true* antagonism, which is a suppressed third term: a radical redrawing of the current situation, *including its official antagonism*. In tonal music we might say that the official antagonism – between consonant and dissonant configurations, which must ultimately and reassuringly be resolved into the 'natural' state of the former – conceals the real antagonism identified by modernism, which is that ultimately in music of the tonal kind only one hegemonic order is deemed thinkable. Modernism creates a new possibility in overwriting the antagonism officially sanctioned by tonality. Such music cannot be habituated to the 'natural' order: it poses a revolutionary challenge to that ideologically delimited conception of nature.

<sup>16</sup> In an extended sense, pre-tonal music, with its careful if changing theorization of the relation between consonance and dissonance, forms part of a continuous development through all pre-modernist music. I say that without in any way wishing to draw parallels between tonal and pre-tonal music beyond the simple fact of their regulation of consonance and dissonance. But though that is only one connexion, it is a hugely significant one.



The idea of *emancipation of dissonance* radically redraws the space in which music can operate. Rather than a 'natural', 'stable' musical landscape in which tension between consonance and dissonance is productive but always resolved back into the 'proper', 'real', stabilized order of tonality (and pre-tonality, since the opposition is already in place by the time of Pythagoras), it proposes a space of no hegemonic order at all, an entirely *unnatural*<sup>17</sup> space of no tonic focus, insisted on with a force which, since it brooks no opposition and imposes its will with relentless force and scant regard for the views of the general population, even approximates in some ways the function of revolutionary terror. However an individual may respond to it, the rejection of a natural order to music makes the emancipation of dissonance part of the only significant revolution in musical history, and the defining Event of musical modernism.

## Elgar's modernity

In *Edward Elgar, Modernist* I suggested that Elgar's compositional development might be conventionally split into three periods, a neo-Romantic phase (which included *The Dream of Gerontius* and the *Variations*, Op. 36), an 'early modernist' one (roughly from *In the South* to *Falstaff*), and a third, which I then called 'second-stream mature modernist'.<sup>18</sup> Elgar is one of a number of composers to have reached compositional maturity before Schoenberg's radical experiments in the first decade of the twentieth century and consequently it is not immediately obvious how to situate him in respect of some kind of Event which, according to Badiou's theoretical framework, begins a reformulation of all subjective responses in a temporal 'afterwards'. Does the Event of modernism break into Elgar's life and compel him to become a new subject? Putting the question another way one might ask: 'What is the metaphysical-ontological effect on a human being of the rupture of an Event?' Fortunately I think that a relatively benign answer can be found.

The musical tools with which Elgar responded to the Event of the modernist musical revolution were being developed already in his neo-Romantic phase. What I would now prefer simply to call his modernist phase (the boundaries are fluid, but say: all the music from *In the South* onwards) was a period

<sup>17</sup> Here I accept Taruskin's unintended tribute to serialism and other music that emancipates the dissonance – the implication that it is unnatural in the normal, pejorative sense of that word (Richard Taruskin, 'Does Nature Call the Tune?', in *The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 46–50). When the 'natural' order is screwed, we need all the 'unnatural' intervention we can get.

<sup>18</sup> Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, 12–13.

during which Elgar fitted the tools of his reaction to the new musical realities of his post-Evental modernist world, to create 'reactionary novelties'. I have elsewhere given detailed analyses of both of his completed symphonies and the symphonic study *Falstaff*, which are some of his most significant contribution to a reactive-subject response to the modernist Event.<sup>19</sup> This Event, which only towards the end of Elgar's life was called *emancipation of dissonance*, was, as I have said, itself a resurrection of the nineteenth-century *emancipation of the dominant*, that century's response to the French Revolution. Consequently the musical language sits comfortably in two worlds traditionally, and I think falsely, separated by music history: the Romantic (first faithful response) and Modern (resurrection of the same). In the present essay, the tools that Elgar developed – sometimes 'Romantic', sometimes 'Modern' according to traditional music history, but always a reactive-subjective response to the modernism Event – are seen in the context of his 1904 overture, *In the South*.

A graph of *In the South* is given as Example 1, with a formal summary given in Table 1.<sup>20</sup>

### Formal considerations: sonata theory

The form of the piece is, in the language of James A. Hepokoski's and Warren Darcy's Sonata Theory,<sup>21</sup> a type 3 sonata form – i.e. with full exposition, development, and recapitulation – with deformations to the generic norm in the form of no clear medial caesura or essential expositional or structural closure, and with two episodes in the development. Although deformation of the five basic sonata types<sup>22</sup> is a feature of musical composition throughout the period of sonata-form composition, from the late eighteenth century onwards, according to Hepokoski the issue of deformation becomes a more central and vital concern in the modern period. It is, in other words, a matter of emphasis – of *maximalization* of musical ideas already established at least

<sup>19</sup> Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, chs 3–7, and 'Elgar's Deconstruction of the *Belle époque*'.

<sup>20</sup> Rehearsal figures are given in this table and the text in the form a:b, where a indicates the rehearsal figure in the score and b the number of bars after it (so, the bar marked by the rehearsal figure 6 is given in the form 6:1).

<sup>21</sup> See James A. Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-century Sonata* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Type 1 is a sonata without development; type 2 a sonata in which what sounds like a development is interpreted after the event as having been the beginning of recapitulation, when the listener finds themselves in the middle of the second subject, now in the tonic; type 3 is the 'normal' sonata form; type 4 is sonata rondo, and type 5 is the extended form found, for instance, in Mozart's piano concertos.

**Exposition                      Development                      Recapitulation**

<p>P1      P2 TR/S1 S2      S1      E1</p> <p>[5] [6] [8] [14] [17] [20] [26] [29:5] [30] [33] [34] [35] [40] [43] [46]</p> <p>5̂      4̂      3̂      3̂      4̂      3̂      2̂      1̂</p>	<p>E2      P1      S1      S2</p> <p>[33] [34] [35] [40] [43] [46]</p> <p>3̂      3̂      2̂      1̂</p>	<p>P2</p> <p>[58] [60:11] [61]</p> <p>4̂      3̂      2̂      1̂</p>
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Example 1: Elgar, *In the South*, analytical graph

Table 1: Elgar, *In the South*, formal table

Section	Theme	Rehearsal mark	Key
Exposition	P <sub>1</sub>	opening–5:9	I→II→I
	P <sub>2</sub>	6:1–8:13	IV
	TR	9:1–10:1	
	S <sub>1</sub>	10:2–12:20	vi
	S <sub>2</sub>	13:1–15:15	→II
	C	16:1–16:20	II
Development	S <sub>1</sub>	17:1–19:18	II→
	Episode 1 ('Romans')	20:1–25:16	iv
	S	26:1–29:10	vi
	development of Episode 1	30:1–14	iv
		31:1–33:20	→V/vi
Recapitulation	Episode 2 ('canto popolare')	34:1–39:20	VI (with T <sub>2</sub> cycle)
	P <sub>1</sub>	40:1–43:9	I→II
	S <sub>1</sub>	44:1–45:8	I
	S <sub>2</sub>	46:1–48:15	I
	C	49:1–50:14	
Coda	P <sub>2</sub>	51:1–52:24	I
	P/S combinations	53:1–57:20	I
	P <sub>2</sub> , then motives from P <sub>1</sub>	58:1–end	IV→V→I

as possibilities in the nineteenth century, as Taruskin would say.<sup>23</sup>

To perceive many modern works appropriately we should not try to take their measure with the obsolete 'sonata' gauge, as is often attempted, but rather to understand that they invoke familiar, 'post-sonata' generic subtypes that have undergone, in various combinations, the effects of difference deformational procedures. These structures cannot be said to 'be' sonatas in any strict sense: this would be grossly reductive, and in the consideration of any such work nuances are everything. Still, as part of the perceptual framework within which they ask to be understood, they do depend on the listener's prior knowledge of the *Formenlehre* 'sonata'. A significant part of their content, that is, is in dialogue with the generic expectations of the sonata, even when some of the most important features of those expectations are not realized.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For a full development of the meaning of the word *maximalization*, see the spectacularly tendentious interpretation of modernism in Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century*, volume 4 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (2005; repr., Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>24</sup> Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony No. 5*, 5.

The effect of the deformations in *In the South* is variable. The lack of a clearly articulated medial caesura means that the exposition does not have a strong sense of partition into first and second subject groups, which gives the work a relatively continuous, rhapsodic character.<sup>25</sup> Elgar makes use of the lack of a clear division into primary and secondary thematic areas both by opening his development with the first of the secondary materials, S1, and by recapitulating the second substantial theme from the primary thematic group, P2, much later in the recapitulation than might be expected, after the closing material, C. On its first appearance in the exposition, the lyrical P2 has already something of the quality of a 'secondary' theme, and its final return at the most significant structural juncture of the recapitulation is redolent of the broad, romantic climaxes at the end of many Romantic piano concertos (those by Grieg and Rachmaninov are classic examples), where, after a huge build up, the second subject returns in resplendent orchestration with heart-wrenching emotional force.

To say that *In the South* lacks an essential expositional closure is to say that it has no moment of articulation in the secondary themes with a perfect authentic cadence – a close into a  $\hat{1}$  contrapuntal arrangement, with the local tonic chord in root position supporting a melodic line that has fallen to the first scale degree,  $\hat{1}$ . Again, the effect of this deformation, as with all of them, is to reduce the clarity of the presentation of the sonata structure, or in some cases to deny the utopian possibility – encoded as a persistent narrative in Romanticism by several of Beethoven's symphonies – of the Classical tonal resolution. Without extremely clearly articulated tonal cadences – the most definitive of which is the contrapuntal progression  $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ , with its 'three blind mice' melodic descent over a root-position tonic–dominant–tonic chord progression – the form has more of a tendency to feel open and unresolved. The longer the listener waits for resolution, the stronger the resolution has to be in order to satisfy.

### The treatment of tonality

The manner in which Elgar closes his tonal shapes is profoundly important for an understanding of his modernism. In Elgar's music, the original tonic of a piece – even one that is barely evident through the majority of the movement (as in the first movement of his First Symphony, for instance) – is ultimately restored in the final bars. Yet this establishment is so dubious as to

<sup>25</sup> On the medial caesura, see Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-century Sonata*, ch. 1.

be unsatisfactory – and I think deliberately so. Far from being a throwback to a historical moment before its own time, the concluding gestures of a piece like *In the South* evince striking dissimilarities to even the most advanced chromatic music of the nineteenth century.

*Tristan und Isolde*, which is often taken to be a totem of the 'disintegration of tonality' and an augury of Schoenberg's maturity, may fairly be considered the extremest point of tonal experimentation before the advent of twentieth-century modernism. Yet despite the extraordinary ends to which Wagner goes to delay tonal resolution, and so to embroil the listener in the hopeless longing of the protagonists and King Mark (whose tragedy is in some respects even greater than theirs), the conclusion eloquently ties up all the opera's tonal loose ends (see Example 2).

Isolde's ecstatic resolution into B major at the climax of the *Liebtestod* (the second bar of the example) is prepared by the subdominant. But the expectation built up in the Act II love duet had been for a *perfect authentic cadence*, with the powerful  $\frac{I}{I}$  configuration: the lovers sing of their erotic union over an intense twelve-bar dominant pedal, and their vocal lines resolve to the B keynote of their desired key, but King Mark enters with his henchman and the orchestra blasts away their tonal resolution with an agonizing dissonant chord. At the end of Act III, with Tristan dead by her side, there can be no resolution of the same kind, only an embrace of Will-defying oblivion. Hence, symbolically, the plagal cadence. Five times the plagal cadence is repeated in the next thirteen bars. On its own, this repetition, with the soaring soprano melody and euphoric string countermelody, might be sufficient to provide satisfactory tonal resolution at last, after four hours of music. But emotionally, logically, narratively, Wagner must pick up the *Tristan* chord itself, the musical encoding of the lovers' longing and the source of the musical language of the whole opera. So, five bars before the end of the work, the chord returns, at its original pitch, to be 'purged' of its original power to generate interminable longing. Its resolution, originally V/A, is now shaded to the minor to become iv/B and allow the most analysed chord in tonal music to resolve plagally, the sixth such resolution. Wagner thus achieves a resolution that is perfect for his ends: the work is genuinely ended both tonally and emotionally by the resolution into B and the neutering of the *Tristan* chord; but it is a plagal cadence, and therefore a weaker one (the 'amen' quality of the plagal cadence is appropriate to the sense of resignation here: it is not the ideal end for the lovers, but *so be it*). The final message of the opera is therefore that longing can be satisfied in a way that is 'satisfactory' according to the rules of the world in which the desire operates, but not in a totally fulfilling way.

The musical score is for the conclusion of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. It features a large orchestra and two vocal parts, Isolde and Voice. The instruments listed on the left are: Kl.Fl., Hr.Fl., Cl., El., (P), Hr., (Tr.), Tr., (E), B., Pos., Bb., Pk., (Fis. H.), Harp., Vl., Vr., Isolde, Vo., and Cb. The score is in 3/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including many triplets and sixteenth notes. The vocal parts have lyrics in German. The score is divided into four measures, with the final measure ending with a double bar line and a fermata over the final note.

Example 2: Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, conclusion

Elgar's typical solution to the problem of resolution no doubt derives from Wagner's but it is qualitatively different. The first movement of his First Symphony is, despite the score's title, 'Symphony in Ab', mostly in A minor. The ostensible tonic 'immures' this 'immured' A minor, but in an unsat-

Fl. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Fl. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Cl. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

B. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Hr. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Tr. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Tb. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Tu. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Sn. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Cy. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Tri. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

G. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Tam. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Ch. *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Isolde *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Tristan *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Chorus *dim.* *p* *pp* *piu p* *pp*

Lyrics: ertriu - ken, ver - sin - ken, un - ge - wusst, - hoch -

Example 2: Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, conclusion (continued)

isfying way. The symphony's grand, processional opening theme returns in the movement's closing pages, but at figure 55 (see Example 3) a theme associated with the immured A minor returns as a troubling reminder of that key and the challenge it poses to the hegemonic function of 'the tonic' Ab.



Example 2: Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, conclusion (concluded)

It lingers for only four bars but it is an arresting effect. Unlike the problematic *Tristan* chord, this A minor is not brought within the space of the tonic, and the three brief bars of 'tonic' at the end of the movement do not purge the problem in the same way. The middle movements maintain the tension

between immuring and immured tonics in various ways,<sup>26</sup> and while the finale provides a more satisfactory tonal resolution, its twitchy rhetorical gestures present enough emotional uncertainty for the 'success' of the form, in a pre-modernist sense, to be accepted at face value.<sup>27</sup>

In *In the South*, the tonal resolution is unusually strong for Elgar. At figure 58 the P2 theme returns on the subdominant; eight bars later it has moved to a dominant 6/4 chord, which after thirty-four bars has passed through the dominant 5/3 onto a root-position perfect cadence with five clear closing bars of the tonic. Beethoven or Brahms might do likewise. Yet as I noted earlier, this resolution is not in its orthodox position, during the S themes in the recapitulation, unless P2 here is function as a kind of S, which I have suggested that it does, in some sense. But it is in the articulation of its tonal structure as revealed by Schenkerian analysis that the movement demonstrates its reactive modernist qualities.

### The interaction of tonality and form

Schenker opens his 'General observations on sonata form' in *Free Composition* with the following dictum. 'Only the prolongation of a division (interruption) gives rise to sonata form. Herein lies the difference between sonata form and song form: the latter can also result from a mixture or a neighboring tone.'<sup>28</sup> Yet a glance at Example 1 reveals that the twenty-minute sonata form of *In the South* not only unfolds a one-part *Ursatz*, but also generates the majority of its form from a neighbouring motion, Eb–F–Eb in the bass, with the F rooting the immured tonic. According to Schenker's definition, this is not sonata form at all. While we should not grant Schenker sole authority in judging what is or is not sonata form, what this means is that while ostensibly laying out a sonata structure, with a satisfactory tonal closure at the end, *In the South* manages both at the level of its form (as articulated by Sonata-Theory analysis) and of its structure (as articulated by a Schenkerian reading) to subvert the musical processes it is ostensibly applying. *In the South* does not function in the old world of tonally governed sonata form, but nor does it generate a new form

<sup>26</sup> See Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, ch. 3, for an analysis of this.

<sup>27</sup> The final presentation of the tonic C major in Elgar's 'symphonic study' *Falstaff* is even more radical: the single final bar of tonic is utterly divorced from any tonal context that would support it. Consequently it not only fails to restore to centre stage the protagonist it represents: it makes a cruel mockery of the very hope for redemption. See J. P. E. Harper-Scott, 'Elgar's Invention of the Human: *Falstaff*, Op. 68', *19th-Century Music* 28, number 3 (2005): 230–253, doi:10.1525/ncm.2005.28.3.230.

<sup>28</sup> Heinrich Schenker, *Free Composition*, trans. Ernst Oster, volume III, *New Musical Theories and Fantasies* (New York: Longman, 1979), 134.

[illegible]

Example 3: Elgar, Symphony No. 1, close of first movement

or a new harmonic language (even if it gestures towards the possibility of one). It is, in short, a typical reactive response to the propositions of musical modernism, generating 'reactionary novelties' appropriate to the new post-

Evental situation.

After a descending third-progression through the two P themes and the transition (TR), the exposition moves to a provisional new  $\hat{5}$ -line in F during the S materials. Again, Schenker would balk at this avoidance of  $\hat{\frac{2}{V}}$  in the immuring tonic: 'The primary tone  $\hat{3}$  can be prolonged by means of a third-progression [ . . . ] However, [ . . . ] in sonata form it is imperative that the third-progression be followed by  $\hat{\frac{2}{V}}$ ',<sup>29</sup> i.e. the dividing dominant before the interruption in the structure.<sup>30</sup> The establishment of the immured tonic prevents this happening.

The immured tonic itself is prolonged much more impressively through the entirety of the development than the immuring tonic had been at the opening. The 'Romans' episode, starting at fig. 20, and the 'canto popolare' episode, starting at fig. 34, provide chords III and V in a bass arpeggiation in the immured tonic. Within each of the episodes, the tonicization of first Ab ('Romans') and then C ('canto popolare') is accompanied by hexatonic cycling (Ab, C, and E in 'Romans' between figs 20 and 26; C and E in the 'canto popolare') that achieves the Schubertian effect of emancipating the immuring dominant, C, and weakening its functional force. That is to say that the introduction of the immuring tonic first destabilizes the tonic focus on Eb, and then its own dominant is weakened – decentred – by hexatonic coloration. The strong  $\hat{\frac{2}{V}}$  configuration at fig. 33, which the immuring tonic had avoided, is counteracted by the skip to a melodic B $\sharp$  and bass E $\sharp$  at fig. 35.

This weakening of the immured tonic is necessary to allow a return to the immuring tonic to close the piece. The recapitulation resumes the immuring *Ursatz*, picking up the *Kopftön* which was left behind before fig. 5, and begins a descent to the final, orthodox cadential resolution during the P2 theme at fig. 58. The conclusion is gesturally satisfactory – it puts a brave reactive face on the extinguished present it produces – but this is not a major-mode sonata form whose support by conventional tonal structure reaches back beyond the Event to a pre-modernist musical situation. This is a work which therefore carries within its outward conservatism the marker of a musical revolution.<sup>31</sup>

I suggested, a moment ago, that the work gestures towards a new harmonic language. This is seen most obviously in the 'Romans' episode of the development. While the mildly dissonant language of this section does not

<sup>29</sup> Schenker, *Free Composition*, 134.

<sup>30</sup> With a  $\hat{5}$ -line the situation is slightly different for Schenker, but not substantially so. 'A linear progression can also depart from  $\hat{5}$  [ . . . ] but only a continuation to  $\hat{\frac{3}{III}}$  or  $\hat{\frac{2}{V}}$  fulfills the basic requirement of a first section of a sonata form' (ibid, 135).

<sup>31</sup> In different ways, both of Elgar's symphonies operate in the same way.

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Example 4: Elgar, *In the South*, ‘Romans’ episode, opening

bear comparison to post-Second String Quartet Schoenberg, the context is still 1904. A better comparison can be found: four weeks or so before the 22

Fl. I.

Fl. II.

Fl. III.

e Picc.

Ob.

Cl. in Bb

Cl. in C

Bsn.

Cor.

Tr.

Trb. I, II

Trb. III

e Tb.

Timp.

Gr. C.

e Plat.

Arpe.

Viol.

Viola

Vcl.

Cb.

11890

21

21

dim.

p

arzo

div.

un.

Example 4: Elgar, *In the South*, 'Romans' episode, opening (continued)

November 1904 premiere of *In the South*, Mahler's Fifth Symphony was itself premiered (18 October). The opening shrieks of Mahler's second movement

36

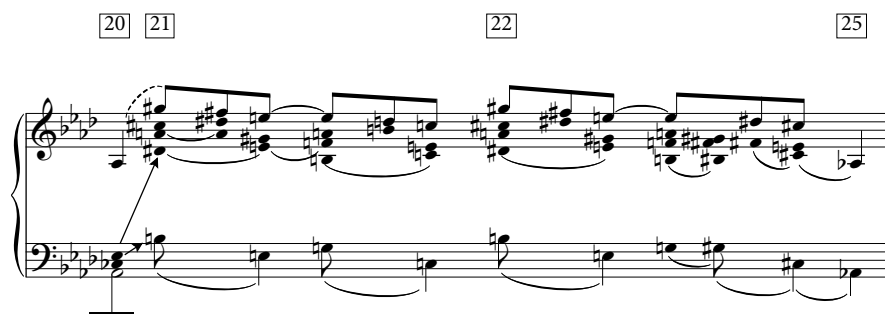
Fl. I.  
Fl. II.  
Fl. III.  
e Picc.  
Ob.  
C. Angl.  
Cl.  
Cl. B.  
Fag.  
C. Fag.  
Cor.  
Tr.  
Trb. I. II.  
Trb. III.  
e Tb.  
Timp.  
Gr. C.  
e Plat.  
Arp.  
Vio.  
Viola.  
Vcl.  
C. B.

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Example 4: Elgar, *In the South*, 'Romans' episode, opening (concluded.)

are much more like Elgar's episode here (see Example 4).<sup>32</sup> But the 'new'

<sup>32</sup> A more familiar comparison is to Strauss's *Don Juan*, whose massive opening upward thrusts



Example 5: Elgar, *In the South*, analysis of part of the 'Romans' episode

musical sound-world alluded to here is brought quite tidily into a tonal ambit (see Example 5).

From fig. 21, the arresting dissonances that are built up from the top of the texture down, throughout the orchestra, strike the piece's most obviously 'modern' note. The chord that is eventually built up here, B $\flat$ -D $\sharp$ -A $\flat$ -C $\sharp$ -G $\sharp$ , is a dominant thirteenth of E, one of the hexatonically related keys to the A $\flat$  of the 'Romans' episode. This highest-powered dominant is never far from a tonal centre, though it is presented sonically not simply as an upbeat to a perfect cadence but as pure, blistering, *fortissimo*, modernist noise. Yet it dissolves into a dominant seventh and resolves (with root-position bass motion) onto its tonic, E. The same happens with the second phrase, 21:9-16, now in C major (another T<sub>2</sub> motion around hexatonic space, and a further T<sub>2</sub> step away from the episode's tonic). A repeat of the motion from fig. 21 is lightly tweaked so that the final descending third-progression now tonicizes C $\sharp$  (i.e. D $\flat$ ) instead of C $\flat$ , and thus prepares a plagal cadence for a return of the main 'Romans' motif at fig. 25. Since this A $\flat$  functions as a part of the firm bass arpeggiation of the immured tonic F (see again Example 1), both the hexatonic motions that colour the A $\flat$  and the 'modernist' gestures of its timbral presentation are drawn comfortably within the ambit of this 'reactionary novelty'.

The essential proposition of modernism is, as it was for Romanticism, but in a new sense, the idea that the drive for emancipation can be embodied musically. The essential form this took in musical modernism was the emancipation of dissonance, a revolution which affected both the sounding surface of the music and also the formal functions which, by drawing the boundaries of the music, make a piece emerge as a distinct object within the world. Too little

Elgar's score mirrors.



scholarly attention has been paid to the manner in which 'conservative' music rejects the propositions of 'progressive' music. In reactive modernist music such as Elgar's, emancipation is presented, weighed, entertained as a possibility, but ultimately somehow reconciled with an 'extinguished present', a musical present 'a little less worse' than the modes of expression that increasingly became the avant-garde norm in the twentieth century. Yet in the emergence and taming of surface gestures and deep structural motions, the music reveals the nigh-irresistible productive power of modernism's emancipatory claims, a promise which even its conservative opponents cannot help but bring into the wide open spaces of a new, putatively utopian world.

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