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oliverlchandler@gmail.com**Edward Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*: the 'Welsh Tune' and the idea of utopia****ABSTRACT****Background**

For the analyst who seeks to come to terms with the structure of Edward Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro*, the formal ambiguity of its 'Welsh Tune' (WT) presents a potential stumbling block. In this essay, I pursue a number of readings in an attempt to explain the WT's local character, as well as its relationship to the piece as a whole, taking into account its initial presentation, as well as its subsequent variations. I then explore the ways in which this concert overture has been previously interpreted, with special attention being paid to accounts of the WT that paint it as a straightforwardly 'utopian' symbol. The analytical readings pursued in this essay work to problematize such simple characterisations and, in turn, shed light on the indeterminate nature of utopian thought in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century.

§1 Analysis

For James Hepokoski, the WT is a mercurial element, its rhetorical and formal function flitting between different sets of generic convention. In the Introduction, it alludes to sonata rhetoric, appearing to foreshadow the later consolidation of a potential secondary theme in the main body of the sonata (a moment that never actually arrives); after the onset of the Allegro, its intrusions serve the opposite function, clouding formal boundaries; and at the work's close, the theme occupies a liminal position, hovering somewhere between eleventh-hour-sonata function and alien, paragenic element, as it brings about an ambiguous structural and rhetorical denouement. Given its apparently indeterminate nature, the implication is that any attempt to pin the WT down in a fixed musical vocabulary would reify and distort it. As such, Hepokoski implies that we can skip over the surface of a number of different music-conceptual levels, without becoming ensnared by the demands of any one system of interpretation. Analytical pluralism such as this effectively masks the 'problem' of the work, however. Barriers exist between these music-conceptual levels, preventing an easy movement across and between them, and it is the difficulty one faces in reconciling these paradoxical interpretations (whether consciously or unconsciously perceived) that gives the piece its peculiar effect. The following analytical readings will attempt to clarify this idea. Expanding on, as well as adding to, the account given by Hepokoski, I believe that the WT might be defined alternately as: (1) a 'transplanted' secondary theme that has been cut away from its proper place in the Allegro's sonata form, and inserted into the Introduction; (2) as a quasi-Mahlerian agent of formal disruption, that works against the idea of a sonata template; and (3) as a middle-ground voice-leading 'link', which is structurally subser-

vient to the music that borders it. These accounts do not sit easily beside one another. A 'link' is fundamentally different to a secondary theme, as it cannot be a formal element in and of itself, its being a decoration of something else. Similarly, a link cannot really be disruptive, as it binds together what comes before and after it. Despite this, we can still say that the WT does sound like a secondary theme, in places, whereas its appearance at other times serves to make even a modified sonata language appear reductive.

Far from being a reification that robs the theme of its mystery, analysis which tries (but ultimately fails) to shoehorn the WT into various conceptual slots serves to highlight the theme's complex ontology, allowing its inherent paradoxes to be felt all the more intensely.

§2 Interpretation

Beyond adding another layer of analytical complexity to the existing literature on this piece, these alternative readings have interesting hermeneutic consequences, in light of the fact that the WT has become synonymous, in Elgar scholarship, with a number of tropes that might be considered broadly utopian.

I want to make a subtle modification to this hermeneutic framework, in light of the alternative analytical readings I have outlined above. *Introduction and Allegro* is not an example of utopian discourse, per se, but rather of discourse about the 'idea' of utopia. (That is to say: it might be said to take 'utopia' as its subject matter, but it is in no way limited to utopian conclusions.) As a mercurial, pluralistic element, the WT represents the ephemeral utopian wish that cannot be actualised in the present; as a transplanted secondary theme, it suggests that utopia (a real and substantial ideal) has been uprooted and replanted in infertile soil; as a 'disruptive' element, the theme appears to be a genuine vision of alterity — something which acts as an immanent critique of the music's formal logic; or, as a 'link', the WT can be considered a false glimmer of hope that mollifies the listener, and allows the present to rumble on in its moribund course. These possibilities are paradoxical, and yet exist immanently alongside one another. (They subsist ubiquitously behind most historical events, of course, but are felt with special force at points of momentous social, political, and technological change.) In order to think these possibilities, they must be separated out, and considered in isolation, but each one proves inadequate as a total representation of the situation, with each circularly collapsing into the next, ad infinitum. In a similar way, if we choose to read the WT, at any given moment, as methodologically consistent (i.e. as being definitively a sonata element, an 'alien' intrusion, or a link), we run up against problems and inconsistencies, with certain musical moments refusing to be chaperoned into a single, neat interpretation. If we were able to view the issue at hand synchronically, all the other readings would have to be simultaneously injected into the interpretative moment, in order to plug the conceptual gaps

in our understanding of it. As the piece has to be read or listened to in time, however, one is left to move between these readings, with each necessarily collapsing into the next. There is a parallelism, here: namely, the active movement involved in thinking a situation (or a musical theme) through, and moving, in circular fashion, through a number of different interpretative possibilities. Analysts cannot decide definitively what the WT is; Elgar's epoch could not imagine what the future would hold (which is to say, whether utopia was actually realisable, or whether the concept was destined for irrelevance, or perhaps even extinction). Both scenarios manifest an anxiety that is at once exciting, infuriating, and perturbing, and yet somehow separate (or at least qualitatively distinct) from the objects and ideas with which it is concerned. For this to have any historical traction, one might argue that we need to find a number of isomorphic examples from the other arts, or from history more generally, of these different forms of utopian possibility at work. The problem with this, however, is that it not only entails taking a single artistic text as being representative of another object, event, or even 'spirit of the age', but that it also implies that music might only have meaning by mimicking the gestures of another literary or historical form. How might we move past such vulgar reductionism, without suggesting that music constitutes a free-floating metaphysical object, impervious to history? One way in which to do this, I suggest, is to concentrate on the *feeling* held in common between historical and musical discourses about the idea of utopia, rather than comparing concrete examples of these particular phenomena. (In this way, we do not have to square the circle, and force *Introduction and Allegro* into a one-to-one relationship with another historical or literary text.) This might sound nebulous, perhaps, but it is an idea familiar enough to translators.

True translation is not a binary affair between two languages, but a triangular affair, the third point of the triangle being what lay behind the words of the original text before it was written. True translation demands a return to the pre-verbal. We read and reread the words of the original text in order to penetrate through them, to reach, to touch the vision or experience which prompted them. We then gather up what we have found there and take this quivering almost wordless 'thing' and place it behind the language into which it needs to be translated. And now the principal task is to persuade the host language to take in and welcome the 'thing' which is waiting to be articulated (Berger, 2016: 4).

I believe the paradoxical nature of *Introduction and Allegro* (as both an object for music analysis and an example of historical discourse about utopia) might be described in terms of a 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1977: 128—136). I am not concerned with the details of its relationship to any particular historical event, but rather with the experience or 'feeling', which lies behind the language in which such things are crystallised, even if that fleeting, affective instant is now itself in the past, its potency diminished, and having the capacity for re-embodiment in only the frailest of senses. Rather than re-presenting history, *Introduction and Allegro* works to re-embodiment the affective state associated with it: an active yet historical presence that is not reducible to a fixed form, or to a habitual past tense. This is replicated in the interpretative spiral from which we cannot escape, as we move, in circular fashion, from one consideration of utopia to another, and from one

account of the WT to the next. In pursuing this parallelism, I hope to have connected music up with society, whilst avoiding the inference that art is merely a reflection of history.

Aims and repertoire studied

To posit a link between Elgar's music and utopian thought, through close analysis of his *Introduction and Allegro*.

Methods

Schenkerian analysis, sonata theory, literary hermeneutics, structure of feeling (Williams).

Implications

The introduction of Elgar into the canon of *fin-de-siècle* utopian art.

Keywords

Utopianism, Schenker, paradox, structure of feeling.

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