Music of the “Cult of Whitman”: Charles Villiers Stanford's Elegiac Ode

Jacob Bird
bird76@marshall.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://mds.marshall.edu/etd

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons, History Commons, and the Music Commons

Recommended Citation
http://mds.marshall.edu/etd/1102

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Marshall Digital Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations and Capstones by an authorized administrator of Marshall Digital Scholar. For more information, please contact zhangj@marshall.edu, martij@marshall.edu.
MUSIC OF THE “CULT OF WHITMAN”:
CHARLES VILLIERS STANFORD’S ELEGIAC ODE

A thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts
In
Music History and Literature
by
Jacob Bird
Approved by
Dr. Vicki Stroeher, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Stephen Lawson
Dr. Terry Dean, Indiana State University

Marshall University
May 2017
We, the faculty supervising the work of Jacob Bird, affirm that the thesis, *Music of the "Cult of Whitman": Charles Villiers Stanford's Elegiac Ode* meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Masters of Arts and the College of Arts and Media. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

Dr. Vicki Stroehrer, Department of Music  
Committee Chairperson  
Marshall University  

Dr. Stephen Lawson, Department of Music  
Committee Member  
Marshall University  

Dr. Terry Dean, Department of Music  
Committee Member  
Indiana State University  

4 May 2017  
4 May 2017  
5/4/17
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express gratitude to Thomas Walker for his assistance, and to the faculty and staff of Marshall University’s School of Music for their continued support. In addition, I would like to thank my friends, family, and mentors for their support and help in pushing me to be both the best scholar and person I can be.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................................... v
List of Figures ........................................................................................................................................... vi
List of Examples ......................................................................................................................................... vii
Abstract ..................................................................................................................................................... viii
Introduction ................................................................................................................................................ 1

Chapter 1: Walt Whitman and British Intellectual Circles ...................................................................... 5

Chapter 2: The English Musical Climate of the Nineteenth Century .................................................. 32

Chapter 3: The First British Setting of Walt Whitman ........................................................................... 59

Bibliography .............................................................................................................................................. 78

Appendix A: Office of Research Integrity Approval Letter ................................................................. 86

Appendix B: Supplemental Information .................................................................................................. 87
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Settings of Walt Whitman in Britain, 1884-1914.......................................................... 60

Table 2: Textual Comparisons between Hölderlin and Whitman............................................. 68
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Form of Movement One ................................................................. 72
Figure 2. Form of Movement Two ................................................................. 74
Figure 3. Form of Movement Three .............................................................. 74
Figure 4. Form of Movement Four ................................................................ 75
LIST OF EXAMPLES

Example 1. Diminished Sequences........................................................................................................ 69

Example 2. Falling Sequence.................................................................................................................. 70
ABSTRACT

Between 1884 and 1914, English musical taste was completing a profound shift from the sentimentality of light drawing room ballads and popular songs toward more serious-minded works. Professionalized composers sought to express high moral and humanistic ideals—undoubtedly English—as opposed to continental values. One source for their works was the poetry of the American, Walt Whitman (1819-1892). Whitman had been one figure in the English-American cultural war which was waged since the early 19th century. Whitman was thought by most English as not a ‘proper poet’ because his works fall so far outside their tradition, thus making his poetry an odd choice for a musical setting in Britain. This thesis examines the reception of Whitman’s poetry in England, the late Victorian musical climate, and analyzes Charles Villiers Stanford’s musical setting *Elegiac Ode* with the goal of determining how Whitman’s poetry impacted the work.
INTRODUCTION

In the last few years of the nineteenth century through the onset of the First World War in 1914, British composers pushed for a national musical identity separate and distinct from their European counterparts. From 1884 to 1914, twelve British and one touring American composer published musical works in Britain that set words of the American poet Walt Whitman (1819-1892). He was well known in the United States by this time, but his reception in Britain was controversial for a variety of reasons. Whitman was known primarily for his eclectic and seemingly unpoetic approach to American subjects in an attempt to appeal to a lower-class audience. Furthermore, the sensuality and frankness with which he wrote were in contradiction to the sensibilities of his British audience. He remained undoubtedly an odd choice for these aristocratic composers to set for two primary reasons: his stark patriotism and his separation from British poetic norms.

Whitman considered himself a true American poet. From the first years after the American revolution, American poets and writers desired to create a unique literature, separate from a British tradition. The themes Whitman explored in his poetry include strong evocations of American scenery, ones that could not be found elsewhere. He wrote outside British poetic norms by writing free verse, sometimes with meter, sometimes without. His poetry reads like prose at times. Other American poets, such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), and John Whittier (1807-1892), utilized rigid rhyme and meter, consistent with a British, aristocratic, literary tradition. During the nineteenth century, Longfellow’s poetry was set several hundred times in Britain, the majority of them by amateur musicians. Whitman’s poetry, in contrast, saw few settings until the advent of World War I. Outside the United States, reception to Whitman and his work was radically different, often
dependent on the country. Lawrence Kramer, alongside John Picker, Byron Adams, Werner and Walter Grünzweig, David Metzer, Philip Coleman-Hull, Kim Kowalke, and Kathy Rugoff have done extraordinary work at detailing a variety of Whitman settings from various countries throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, collected into *Walt Whitman and Modern Music: War, Desire, and the Trials of Nationhood.* This book, however, contains a paltry 187 pages in length, and yet, represents one of the best resources at providing a breadth of knowledge to those interested in settings of Walt Whitman’s poetry.

In examinations of interconnected social networks and intellectual circles in Britain, a few revelations can be made about why composers chose to set Whitman despite his unusual nature and that of his works. Stephen Banfield’s *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century,* was a useful tool for tracking down precursory information about song settings of minor and major English composers. Those who set Whitman’s texts had numerous commonalities in their social and intellectual circles. Most of them also set Tennyson, Swinburne, John Addington Symonds, Dante and Christina Rossetti, George Eliot, and Robert Browning. Each of these figures were in contact with or actively discussed Walt Whitman’s poetry. It is likely, then, that this “cult of Whitman” was not exclusive of these composers as previously thought, but inclusive, despite no serious communication between the composers and Whitman.

It can be extraordinarily difficult to find credible research for composers outside the standard canon, and especially for works that are unpublished, or which saw a limited number of

---

performances. Many works that utilized Whitman’s texts are obscure and, due to their varied performing forces, often do not see performance, let alone study. In Great Britain, before the First World War, there were only twenty-eight settings of his poetry, including a setting by Philip Dalmas (1870-1925), an American living in England, and one by Frederick Delius (1862-1934), an Englishman living in Germany. Some of these composers, such as Vaughan Williams and Holst, continued utilizing Whitman after World War I, especially as materials for requiems. Ultimately, as the industrial revolution gave way to World War I, a new class of British poets emerged: lower-class war poets who had lived through the Boer war and/or World War I, effectively replacing Whitman as a war poet.

Chapter one of this thesis details the cultural climate of the United States with the goal of understanding who Whitman was and English reception to Whitman’s poetry. This examination reveals the “cult of Whitman,” Whitman’s radical followers in English society, some of whom operated within liminal groups, including queer societies, socialists, and literary academics. Harold Blodgett’s *Walt Whitman in England* (1929) presents a serious look at the social web surrounding Whitman, his agents in England, and their numerous connections. This social web of interconnected figures can be traced to some of the early composers who set Whitman’s poetry. This is not to say that the composers, themselves, were radicalized or operated within these liminal groups, but does open their social connections to those who were. The goal is to present contemporaneous criticisms of Britain’s intellectual elite as a means of understanding why Whitman’s poetry remained an interesting choice for composers. Chapter two navigates English music culture from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the turn of the century. England has, from both within and abroad, been known as a land without music. Rather than

---

critique or analyze the bulk of what is collectively known as the English musical renaissance, this thesis presents a catalogue of events and figures of importance in England’s musical climate. Furthermore, it dissect how culture and social status helped to define musical groups, and identifies what the standard of music was in order to position Stanford’s *Elegiac Ode* (1884) within it. In chapter three, I examine the first setting of a Whitman poem in Britain, Charles Villiers Stanford’s *Elegiac Ode* (1884). Through an analysis of the work, and an in depth focus of its reception, one should fully understand how Whitman’s text transformed the work, and the implications of using his text, musically.
CHAPTER ONE

WALT WHITMAN AND BRITISH INTELLECTUAL CIRCLES

Amidst the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, the United States and England both managed a sum of literary output; in fact, the two were almost identical in their form and techniques used. There existed a growing movement in the United States, however, to wholly abandon particularly European conventions, especially those maintained by England. In the years following the War of 1812, America had a newfound national consciousness which manifested in a variety of ways. With the United States firmly set as its own governing entity, many authors and poets attempted to find a uniquely American style. James Kirke Paulding’s *The Backwoodsman* (1818) urged that America shrug off the yoke of European literary colonialism:

> The Past, the Present, Future, all combine
> To waken inspiration in each line;
> And yet we turn to Europe’s old Rag-fair,
> To deck ourselves in cast-off finery there.

Many of William Cullen Bryant’s poems described American landscapes which the English could not understand. In “The Prairies,” he wrote about the boundless fields “for which the speech of England has no name,” and the “limpid brooks that from the fountains of Sonora glide into the calm Pacific.” In “Song of Marion’s Men” and “The Green Mountain Boys,” he furthers America’s landscape as an essential feature to winning the Revolutionary War, and made explicit features that were distinctly American, foreign to any British audience. Bryant, alongside Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), used America’s picturesque landscape as a starting point of division from Great Britain, while the want of disconnect from English literature persisted during their lives. The conversation of a new American literary culture was not restricted to any singular publication or faction and was spread
through early American intellectual circles. Other American poets and authors shared similar sentiments.

William Tudor declared in 1820, “The past and present of American literature […] you know have of late years been frequently discussed by those who felt an interest in the subject. The circumstances which have influenced it hitherto […] have been dwelt upon by many patriotic minds, who were anxious about the real and lasting glory of their country.” There were early conceptions of what constituted an American literature and what impact American poets and writers would have in an international appeal. In an 1839 address at Brown University, Orestes Brownson said, “We Americans, in literary matters, have no self-confidence […] Instead of studying man, we study English literature.” Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859), the French historian and chronicler of early America wrote in Democracy in America that the human mind – in the United States, more so than in Europe – relied upon practical instruction as opposed to “book-learning.” He continued, “America has hitherto produced very few writers of distinction; it possesses no great historians and not a single eminent poet… [They] look upon what are properly styled literary pursuits with a kind of disapprobation.” The language pervading the two volumes of Tocqueville’s Democracy in America is indicative of the literary atmosphere of America: The United States was considered a land of wild, uncultured

---

9 Ibid.
revolutionaries. Of American journalists, he wrote, “The characteristics of the American journalist consist in an open and coarse appeal to the passions of the populace; and he habitually abandons the principles of political science to assail the characters of individuals, to track them into private life, and disclose all their weaknesses and errors.”¹⁰ Even their journalists and reporters were unable to report factual information, he mused. Both foreigners and Americans pondered the state of American literature and poetry.

Americans lacked an aristocratic class capable of creating well-mannered poetry and literature. Tocqueville revealed that, “The germ of aristocracy was never planted in that part of the Union. The only influence which obtained there was that of intellect; the people were used to reverence certain names as the emblems of knowledge and virtue.”¹¹ He summed up the “ideal” poetic verse of England with the observation, “style will be thought of almost as much importance as thought; and the form will be no less considered than the matter: the diction will be polished, measured, and uniform.”¹² A work of George Gordon, Lord Byron (1788-1824), “She Walks in Beauty” (1813) is exemplary of these conventions:

She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that’s best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellowed to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.

Each line is an even eight syllables, with alternating rhyme schemes and a constant flow of stress. Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892), expands conceptions of British poetry but does not

---

¹⁰ Ibid., 210.
¹¹ Ibid., 65.
¹² Ibid., 537.
stray far. In “The May Queen,” (1833) for instance, he pushed the boundaries of syllabic stress away from Shakespearean conventions:

You must wake and call me early, call me early, mother dear;  
To-morrow 'll be the happiest time of all the glad new-year, — 
Of all the glad new-year, mother, the maddest, merriest day; 
For I 'm to be Queen o' the May, mother, I 'm to be Queen o' the May.

These traits were common with a few of the fledgling aristocratic poets in the United States as well.

Perhaps the first American poet recognized by British literary intellectuals to be of worth was that of the Bostonian, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882). Boston was the “most intellectually exciting part of the country” during the early nineteenth century while simultaneously contributing a Unitarian moral climate.13 This positioned Longfellow within an aristocratic, moralistic upbringing, in line with his English peers. Longfellow’s studies in language, both foreign and domestic, and his three years of study in Europe were enough education to allow him a space in positive literary criticism in England. He was hailed as a formalist with well-constructed poems. Certainly, these are true of the uniform syllable lengths of lines, and evenness of rhyme that pervades through Longfellow’s poems. He could find purchase in the shared literary lineage of the United States and Britain. Longfellow’s “The Song of Hiawatha” (1855) reads:

On the shores of Gitche Gumee,  
Of the shining Big-Sea-Water,  
Stood Nokomis, the old woman,  
Pointing with her finger westward,  
O'er the water pointing westward,

---

To the purple clouds of sunset.

Each line was written in roughly the same length, and each uses the same eight-syllable stress patterns. While it disregarded conventions of end-rhyme schemes, his poetry was well received, as evinced by a wealth of musical settings of his poetry both in the United States and in Britain. As Tocqueville explained, poets like Longfellow were close in literary heritage to Britain.

Walt Whitman as Literary Prophet

In contrast, Walt Whitman (1819-1892) lacked many of the traits deemed essential to a well-trained poet. For instance, the short poem, “America,” reads:

Centre of equal daughters, equal sons,
All, all alike endear’d, grown, ungrown, young or old,
Strong, ample, fair, enduring, capable, rich,
Perennial with the Earth, with Freedom, Law and Love,
A grand, sane, towering, seated Mother,
Chair’d in the adamant of Time.

There is a distinct lack of end rhyme and an unevenness of syllable length. Whitman also used internal repetitions and stresses far more freely than Longfellow or any British analogue.

Whitman’s poetry utilized unique organizational and thematic schemes that were hypothesized by Alexis Tocqueville. He believed that populist sentiments would skew a poet into creating a subpar work aimed at shock value rather than being tasteful, certainly never strong enough to persist in any great canon.

Democratic shuts the past against the poet, but opens the future before him […] literature in democratic ages can never present, as it does in the periods of aristocracy, an aspect of order regularity, science, and art; its form will, on the contrary, ordinarily be slighted, sometimes despised. Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overblundered, and loose – almost always vehement and bold.14

14 Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 539.
These were the same complaints in British criticism of Walt Whitman. Longfellow’s rhyme and form were agreeable, and well ordered, similar to the English aristocratic poetry traditions. Whitman’s were viewed as distasteful, disorganized, exotic and crude.

In the mid-1850s, Whitman assembled notes on American English, its detraction from British English, and its unique characteristics which set it apart from other languages. These notes, alongside his other contemporaneous writings, have a decidedly pro-American tenor which would inform his larger body of work. His preface to the 1855 *Leaves of Grass* (See Appendix B.1) has such explicit prose as “America is the race of races” and “Never will I allude to the English Language or tongue without exultation.” Whitman’s “Poem of Many in One” contains several of the same themes (See Appendix B.2). Similarities include the lines, “Race of races, and bards to corroborate” and “Here is not merely a nation, but a teeming nation of nations” recalling his suggestion in the preface that “The American bard shall delineate no class of…and not be for the eastern states more than the western or the northern states more than the southern.” Walt Whitman’s preface echoed that of Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*; it addressed the immediate past, but looked towards the future, while providing a nationalistic tone such that no reader could be deceived of his intentions (See Appendix B.2 for examples). Whitman yearned to create a poetry that resonated with an American audience following the American Civil War; he wanted neither a Union nor Confederate literature, but an

---

15 Schmidgall, *Containing Multitudes*, 7.
16 Margaret Fuller explains that there was not a serious drive to create an American literature. She advised that, “When an immortal poet was secure only of a few copyists to circulate his works, there were princes and nobles to patronize literature and the arts. Here is only the public, and the public must learn how to cherish the nobler and rarer plants, and to plant the aloe, able to wait a hundred years for its bloom, or its garden will contain, presently, nothing but potatoes and pot-herbs.” This would later echo in Whitman’s preface to his *Leaves of Grass*. Margaret Fuller, “American Literature; Its Position in the Present Time, and Prospects for the Future” from *Papers on Literature and Art* (New York: Wiley, Putnam, 1846).
American one. Furthermore, Whitman believed this American poetry tradition should stand in direct opposition to outside traditions. He explicitly laid out his reasoning: “The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses [...] The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems or music or orations or recitations are not independent but dependent.”

His opinion was that poetry was a natural creation, and that rhyme, meter, and form were merely a facet of it. His goal was to explore other “sweeter” options. For indeed, if America is a poem as in “Many in One,” then rhyme and order cannot be distilled from its expanses.

In a review of Whitman’s 1855 *Leaves of Grass*, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), a friend and fair critic of Whitman explained, “It makes the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it.” Emerson, a Transcendentalist philosopher, recognized the importance of Whitman’s work, and its potential future impact. The friendship of Whitman and Emerson cannot be read as the joining of two Transcendentalist writers, nor his acquaintance with the progenitor of the Transcendental movement, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862).

Whitman had met Thoreau in 1856 but they had mixed feelings about each other and their poetry. Thoreau described Whitman as the greatest democrat the world has seen but felt unsure about the content of Whitman’s poems. Whitman found Thoreau to be particularly morbid, while Thoreau believed Whitman’s sensuality was disagreeable. Furthermore, the key message of Whitman, his democratic nature, simply did not come from Thoreau, “Thoreau's great fault was

17 Whitman’s time as a volunteer nurse at the Falmouth, Massachusetts home of Moncure Conway during the war provided him a close and personal interaction with the effects of the war.
18 Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Self-published, 1855), v
19 Ralph Waldo Emerson, review in Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn: printed by Andrew Rome, 1855), 4. This source, meant as a letter to Whitman, is from the digitized Walt Whitman archive, with the printed text originating from University of Iowa’s Special Collections. The review, much to his Emerson’s displeasure, was included in the printed edition.
disdain—disdain for men [...] inability to appreciate the average life—even the exceptional life: it seemed to me a want of imagination. He couldn't put his life into any other life—realize why one man was so and another man was not so: was impatient with other people on the street and so forth [...] it was a bitter difference."²⁰ As such, while much of modern scholarship has attempted to place Whitman’s work within the greater body of Transcendentalist poetry, much like historical critics, perhaps more appropriate would be to call him a nationalist poet who used much of the same source material, but arrived at different conclusions.

The transmission of Whitman’s poetry from America to England tells a story of cultural neglect and half-appreciations. Whitman advocated for himself fiercely in the United States, writing under numerous pseudonyms and rigorously defending his work from others.²¹ He had few major literary supporters in the States, yet among them were Ralph Waldo Emerson and Moncure Conway. Conway would be one important figure in the transmission of Whitman’s work in England. At a time when England rejected the majority of American literary output, Whitman nonetheless slowly gained purchase overseas, due, in part to a small cult of fanatical supporters. Whitman’s first, third, and fourth editions of Leaves of Grass, published in 1855, 1860, and 1867 respectively, were the first versions that enraptured his group of English supporters.²²

²⁰ Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1906), 1:212.
²² The first Leaves of Grass was printed in the shop of Andrew Rome, assisted by his younger brother Tom. A total of 795 copies were printed 599 of which were clothbound and gilded. During the printing, Whitman stopped the press to revise and edit the book. “Song of Myself” appeared in its most direct form in this version, with slang, curses, repugnancy, and elongated lanes, sans punctuation. The 1860 version, filled with 146 new poems, appeared in print in May 1860, published by Thayer and Eldrige of Boston. This was also the first time in the Leaves cycle where poems were placed in thematic titled groupings which Whitman called “clusters.” The 1860 version sold well, and had a wide readership. Of 32 contemporary reviews, only 8 were mostly negative. Gregory Eiselein explains, “Women readers and critics (such as Juliette H. Beach, Mary A. Chilton, and the renowned African-American actress and poet Adah Isaacs Menken) greeted this edition with exceptional enthusiasm, defending it against the hostile sometimes vicious judgments of male critics who disapproved of the candid, erotic passages in ‘Enfans d’Adam.’” J. R. LeMaster, Donald D. Kummers, ed., Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia (New York: Routledge,
Whitman’s target audience was working-class populations; his brand of democracy pointed towards those that served as the subject of his poems: the soldiers, the naturalists, and those who must subsist off their own work and desire. Unfortunately, few periodicals ever published his work for this audience in England, the *National Reformer, Notes and Queries*, and *Cope’s Tobacco Plant*, excepted. William Michael Rossetti, one of Whitman’s associates in London, wrote to both the *National Reformer* and *Notes and Queries*, disseminating both his and others’ reviews of Whitman’s work. *Cope’s* (1870-1881) published several of Whitman’s poems before they were bound into the *Leaves of Grass* as well as frequent reviews of his work.\(^{23}\) Nonetheless, the criticism Whitman received in England was almost exclusively from the aristocratic middle and upper classes and not from the populist working class. In some social circles, Whitman perpetuated as an almost religious figure, in others a liberator. In examining the criticism of Walt Whitman, neither the general population nor the aristocratic populations enjoyed his poetry, but it was elevated by a small collection of radical homosexual, feminist, and labor activists, as well as a class of literary scholars. Walt Whitman’s influence on the English poetry movement can be detailed from the new generation of poets who advanced the original impetus of *Leaves* as a language experiment. Harold Blodgett argues that attempting to trace his influence is difficult because it is both “pervasive and imponderable.”\(^{24}\) Those who read and understood its messages, then, carried the poetic message inside themselves. Even Lord

\(^{1998}\), 264. Unlike the 1855 and 1867 version, no preface adorned the 1860 version. The 1867 version was published in New York as the first of four different formats, printed by William E. Chapin. The book was originally published November 1866, but the final format of the text came published in 1867. The final format would be: a re-edited version of the 1860 *Leaves*, a reissue of *Drum-Taps* and *Sequel to Drum-Taps*, and a coda entitled *Songs Before Parting*. The word only contains six new poems, but the significance of the work is in its experimental design following the Civil War.\(^{23}\) This trade journal, edited by the secretary, John Fraser, is quite eclectic. Fraser was a collector of rare and unusual books, and maintained interests in philosophy, phrenology, beekeeping, smoking, and poetry. The audience of this journal were mostly male, lower and lower-middle class workers.\(^{24}\) Blodgett, *Walt Whitman*, 159.
Tennyson, who, though friendly towards Whitman, rarely commented on his work, even though he held many of the same positions as Whitman in his monodrama, “Maud.” The two approached the subjects of democracy, death, and humanness from different directions. The composers who chose to set texts by Whitman and his and other radical English poets were perhaps, in some small way, aligned with their ideologies. The following navigates a series of points along criticism of Whitman’s poetry, leading up to the first setting of his poetry to music in England. The intention is to provide sufficient depth to the “cult of Whitman” and the breadth of public opinion on the poet.

**George Eliot’s Criticism**

Mary Ann Evans (1819-1880), writing under the pseudonym of George Eliot, was an English novelist, poet, and journalist. She wrote the first named piece of criticism on Walt Whitman’s poetry in England for *The Westminster Review* (April 1856). The article covered a variety of works, including John Ruskin’s *Modern Painters* and a translation of Homer’s *Iliad*. On the last page of the article, she described the American production which would “initiate a new school of poetry.” She abstained from further comment, but provided the poem “Leaves of Grass” so that readers could judge for themselves the merits of Whitman’s poetic language. Interestingly, she suggested that it was, “typical in every respect, except that it contains none of the very bold expressions by which the author indicates his contempt for the ‘prejudices’ of

---


26 The first piece of criticism came two weeks earlier by an anonymous author for the *Saturday Review* (March 15, 1856). Inserted into the book the reviewer received, were numerous clippings from American newspapers, abuzz with their own criticisms of Whitman – every review in this author’s copy were in fact pseudonyms of Whitman himself. Beverly Park Rilett, “Victorian Sexual Politics and the Unsettling Case of George Eliot’s Response to Walt Whitman,” *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review* 31, no. 2 (2014).

decency.” Eliot deceived her readership with an innocuous poem by Whitman and attempted to pass it off as the standard of his oeuvre.

Two months later, she opened her next piece of criticism with an analysis of the “Latter-day poetry” of America and England. She portrayed contemporary interpretations of Whitman in America as a prophet and in England: a fool. She asserted, however, “Walt is one of the most amazing, one of the most startling, one of the most perplexing, creations of the modern American mind; but he is no fool, though abundantly eccentric, nor is his book mere food for laughter, though undoubtedly containing much that may most easily and fairly be turned into ridicule.”

Even with such praise, Eliot impartially reviewed the poetry as an object within English tastes:

The poem is written in wild, irregular, unrhymed, almost unmetrical “lengths,” like the measured prose of Mr. Martin Farquhar Tupper's Proverbial Philosophy, or of some of the Oriental writings. The external form, therefore, is startling, and by no means seductive, to English ears, accustomed to the sumptuous music of ordinary metres; and the central principle of the poem is equally staggering.

The comparisons to both Tupper and to Oriental writing became the standard of evaluating Whitman’s poetry in English criticism. She lamented the roughness of his poetry and prose, and the openness at which he wrote on his subjects, ending, “Walt [sic] reveals to us matters which ought to remain in a sacred silence […] it is also good, sometimes, to leave the veil across the Temple.”

George Eliot’s article offered a strong appraisal of Whitman’s poetry that provided several avenues for address in later criticisms of Whitman. Due to her interconnectedness within

28 Ibid.
literary circles and her relationship with George Henry Lewes, she eventually reversed her position on Whitman.  

**Lord Strangford’s Criticism**

Percy Smythe, 8th Viscount Strangford (1826-1869) was an eclectic writer; his works ranged from linguistics and philosophy to culture studies and literature. His four-page essay on Whitman’s poetry appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a rather conservative nightly newspaper, on February 16, 1866. It begins with harsh personal attacks of Whitman: “It seems to us somewhat absurd and out of place to use such a mere wine-and-watery term as ‘indecent’ to denote Walt Whitman's outbreaks. He is outrageously, purposely, and defiantly obscene. There is no possible comparison between his obscenity and that of classical authors by which it has been attempted to justify him.” It is not Whitman’s poetry that is critiqued – it is his character, his morality, and his sense of self. Curiously, Smythe suggests that Whitman subconsciously adopted the Persian poetry of revolt or *Usyan*. Smythe argues that this Western extremist literature is similar to Eastern extremist literature:

>There is a strong conscious tendency towards Pantheism among the American Transcendentalists, and a desire to become acquainted with the Persian masterpieces of Pantheistic poetry. When Emerson wishes to denounce the English trait of groveling unspirituality, he takes Hafiz as his standard of spirituality […] It is hardly possible that Walt Whitman […] could ever have had any access to the stores of Persian poetry. Yet he has somehow managed to imbue himself with not only the spirit but with the veriest mannerism, the most absolute trick and accent of Persian poetry.\(^3^4\)

With a paragraph, Smythe condemned Whitman to the group of Transcendentalists with whom he held no direct ties, other than friendship with Emerson, and a strong sense both of self and

---

32 Rilett explores the dichotomy between Eliot and those that controlled her career. John Lewes and John Blackwood her editor and publisher, constantly asked her for censorships and removal of overly flattering praise. It is likely that her reversal of position came from a desire to hold her career stable and appease her partner, rather than a personal belief. Rilett,”Victorian Sexual Politics,” 87-89.


34 Ibid., 298.
As such, the English critics describing Whitman as a Transcendentalist were unable to understand his body of works and improperly attached them to a literary movement from which Whitman was removed. The homogeneity of a nation that Whitman propagated followed the Civil War stood explicitly for a people who were struggling to find unity of spirit and national fervor, not a Transcendental spiritualism.

Smythe continued to pick apart Whitman’s obscenity on the last page of his article. To this point, he had still not engaged with Whitman’s poetry directly, but he described the poems as a literature that is almost impossible to condemn for its lack of morality or to take with any seriousness, similar to contemporaneous, frivolous novels. He lamented that the poems were perhaps a joke that ensnared any critic who looked upon them. It is in the last paragraph that Smythe addressed Whitman positively, but with distinct negative redress:

We do not in the least wish either to excuse or to overrate him, for his strange flights of fancy and picturesque outbursts of originality are in truth separated by the widest and dreariest intervals of commonplace and platitude, not to say nonsense […] But to call him a rowdy and obscene Tupper is as superficial and as beside the mark as to call him a rowdy and obscene Clarke’s Homer […] Walt Whitman has a very good ear; the Masnavi has to be translated sooner or later, and the sympathetic American would have been rescued from his sty of epicurean autolatry by devotion to the great master-work of mystic transcendentalism in the East.36

Smythe neglected to attend to Whitman’s work completely, instead, he spent his time writing about Whitman’s morality. He did not disregard Whitman’s skill, however; he acknowledged that Whitman had a talent for rhyme and meter that could have been pursued in translation of other, more talented poets.

36 Ibid., 300. Clarke refers to Samuel Clarke (1675-1729), who published a heavily annotated Latin translation of Homer’s Iliad, as well as numerous theological writings and lectures on the scriptures.
Moncure Conway’s Criticism

Moncure Daniel Conway (1832-1907) was Whitman’s contact in England after April 1863, when Conway travelled to London as a pro-abolitionist speaker to convince Great Britain to stop supporting the Confederacy. After an embarrassing debacle with the representative of the Confederacy, James Murray Mason, Conway decided to remain in England, rather than returning to a home to which he felt he no longer belonged. Here, he acted as an agent for Whitman’s early career. Conway wrote one of the most favorable critiques of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* in England, which appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* (15 October 1866). He defined American literature as “nothing distinctive […] except its tendency […] toward a reproduction of some of the characteristics hitherto peculiar to the earliest literature of the East.”37 This recalls both George Eliot’s and Percy Smythe’s analysis of Whitman’s poetry as “Oriental.” Conway furthered that Whitman’s poetry was not imitative in any way, but truly genuine and original. He then employed flowery language to label the “strange little book” and included anecdotes of clergymen who read the book aloud, surprising gentlemen and ladies who cried in shame afterwards. Conway advocated that the *Leaves of Grass* should be “studied quietly” and asserted that the poems are biblical in a sense: the plainness of speech had a “startling priapism running through it.”38 He suggested that the writer “does not hesitate to bring the slop-bucket into the drawing-room to show that the chemic laws work therein also; yet from its first sentence, ‘I celebrate myself’ there starts forth an endless procession of the forms and symbols of life […] a masquerade of nations, cities, epochs, or the elements, natural and human—fascinating the eye with wonder or dread.”39 Furthermore, Conway sought to distinguish Whitman from the

aristocrat-poets of which England was entirely familiar. He glorified Whitman as a working-class man in the essay, romanticizing that, “[Whitman] learned all that he knew from omnibus-drivers, ferryboat-pilots, fishermen, boatmen, and the men and women of the markets and wharves. These were all inarticulate poets, and he interpreted them.”\textsuperscript{40} To Conway, Whitman was not a man of high class; the poet earned a public education, entertained himself with working-class people, and told their stories. Conway used yet more extravagant language in the article to emphasize the drama of their first meeting. He had many sleepless nights that he spent thinking about Whitman and all of the beautiful scenes where the two relaxed in the beaches, cities, and woods. Conway attempted to make Whitman seem more and more personable, not a rude and rowdy American, but a rustic gentleman whose prose and poems were, perhaps, a lens with which to view America.

Conway provided three pages of examples from the 1860 \textit{Leaves} in his criticism proper, but neglected his earlier assertion that American literature is similar to Oriental literature, save for an excerpt he provided from Henry Thoreau: “Wonderfully like the Orientals, too,” with works of his styled as, “simply sensual…It is as if the beasts spoke.”\textsuperscript{41} Instead, Conway preferred Whitman’s character and personality; his essay contained several anecdotes related to Whitman’s personality and life. To this end, Conway strengthened his arguments that Whitman was a unique radical in American poetry, who stood out against the previous era of poets. Conway included in the review an excerpt of a letter between William D. O’Connor and Whitman:

\begin{quote}
I assume that poetry in America needs to be entirely recreated. On examining with anything like deep analysis what now prevails in the United States, the whole mass of poetical works, long and short, consists either of poetry of an elegantly weak sentimentalism, at bottom nothing but maudlin puerilities, or more or less musical verbiage, arising out of a life of depression and enervation, as their result; or else that class of poetry, plays, &c., of which the foundation is feudalism, with its ideas of lords
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 543.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 546.
and ladies, its imported standard of gentility, and the manners of European high-life—below-stairs in every line and verse…Instead of mighty and vital breezes, proportionate to our continent with its powerful races of men, its tremendous historic events, its great oceans, its mountains, and its illimitable prairies, I find a few little silly fans languidly moved by shrunken fingers.42

Whitman, then, could neither be an Orientalist nor a Transcendentalist as previous critics asserted. He was an Americanist, creating American poetry, a new art, separate in tradition from European poetry. Furthermore, the subjects upon which Whitman wrote deserved a finer treatment than what his predecessors could provide, only made possible by abandoning some of the conventions that they clung to: rhyme, meter, and form. Conway’s review of Whitman’s *Leaves* was not a critical analysis of the poetry per se; it reviewed the Whitman’s character, intent, and it tried to make the poetry appear an exotic literature to an audience which had become accustomed to a distanced “other.” Conway’s peers, however, did not approve of the tone in which he wrote. John Burroughs, an American conservationist and friend of Emerson and Whitman, called it “an eloquent article…but it told untruths about him. Walt said it did.”43

Whitman’s letter to his mother said the article was “a long and favorable piece about me & *Leaves of Grass*…one of the highest rank.”44 In a letter, just two weeks later, he wrote, “it was meant well, but a good deal of it is most ridiculous.”45 William O’Connor, another of Whitman’s advocates, wrote to Conway on December 5, 1866, “A great deal of it I liked very much, and I think the general effect of it was very good. In part of it, there was a tone I regretted. Pardon me. I think the time is past when this August man [Whitman] should be written off as a curiosity.”46

---

44 Walt Whitman, *The Correspondence*, 1:292.
45 Ibid., 1:293.
46 Ibid., 1:292-293. Sometime during 1866, O’Connor sent to Moncure D. Conway a “Memoranda” (Yale), in which he quoted from Whitman’s letter, and commented on the poet’s life and works. Conway used this material in his article "Walt Whitman," *The Fortnightly Review* 6 (1866), 538–548. Whitman undoubtedly wrote to O’Connor with publication in mind.

20
However, to John Townsend Trowbridge, an American novelist and author, O’Connor labeled the article, “a frightful mess of misstatement and fiction.”47 Whitman and his friends objected to two of Conway's anecdotes: Whitman’s lying on his back at Coney Island with the temperature at 100 degrees, and the description of his room in 1855. In 1888 Whitman observed, “I can't help feeling still a little suspicion of Conway's lack of historic veracity: he romances: he has romanced about me: William says lied: but romanced will do.”48 In his early criticism of Whitman’s poetry, Conway bent the truth to secure, what he imagined, a more favorable position for Whitman in the literary scene by expanding the Orientalist vs. Transcendentalist narrative to include Nationalism, but it left him at odds with his peers in a few instances. Moncure Conway was an asset in expanding the criticism of Whitman in England, but perhaps the largest influence was a member in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

**William Michael Rossetti’s Work and Influences**

Of Whitman’s English supporters, William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919) was one of his greatest. Rossetti’s friend William Bell Scott first introduced him to Whitman’s work via a mutual member in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. The founders, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Hunt, and John Millais were joined by William Michael Rossetti, James Collinson, Frederic Stephens, and Thomas Woolner. The group’s intention was to reform art by rejecting certain formalisms adopted by Mannerist artists, the influence of Sir Joshua Reynolds at the Royal Academy of Arts, and stylistic constraints.49 This group, however short lived, introduced W. M. Rossetti to a wide community of poetic and artistic criticism. It is curious to note that W. B. Scott and W. M. Rossetti were the only two members to show a distinct appreciation for

---

Whitman’s work, in a group founded on elements of radicalism. In a letter to W.B. Scott, Rossetti thanked him for the edition of *Leaves of Grass*, but had his suspicions of Whitman, “Woolner and others denounce the book in the savagest of terms; but I suspect I shall find a great deal to like, a great deal to be surprised and amused at, and not a little to approve—all mingled of course with a lot of worse than worthless eccentricity.”50 Rossetti expected Whitman’s work to be a joke, but instead found what would be a lifetime passion.

His short article “Walt Whitman’s Poems,” what he considered a fair and reasoned criticism of *Leaves of Grass* was for the July 6, 1867 *London Chronicle*. The article begins with a series of comments about the *Leaves* similar to his letters to W. B. Scott a year earlier. He analyzed Whitman’s poetry which, to him, included numerous flaws: “Gross or inappropriate words, obscurity, detached lists, boundless self-assertion (though intended as representative).”51 He balanced this argument though, detailing some of the incredible rhythmic sense within Whitman’s combination of poetry and prose. He then explained that one must read the book in its entirety, although he does not elaborate as to why. He ended by writing that personality and democracy are an “‘essentially modern poem,’ echoing the old Hebrew poetry…He is entirely original, with a certain influence on future poetry.”52 His critique attempted to open modernists to view the poems as forward reaching; Whitman was a radical, and possibly signaled the next epoch of poetry. The Hebrew qualities to which Rossetti referred are perhaps the unusual rhyme schemes or assonance/consonance more so than a rhyme, as well as the lack of any standardized form for psalms or verse. As in critiques by Strangford and Conway, W. M. Rossetti found Whitman’s work to be exotic in some fashion.

---

52 Ibid.
John Burroughs, in a letter to Conway, praised Rossetti’s essay:

[Whitman and I] were deeply impressed with Mr. Rossetti’s article…it is a grand and lofty piece of criticism. It was not till the third reading that I saw the full scope and significance of it. I am sure Walt feels very grateful to him and to yourself. The article had its effect here. The Round Table copied the conclusion of it, and completely reversed its verdict of a year ago. The Nation, Times, etc., copied also; and now The Citizen appears with the article entire…Our cause gains fast.\textsuperscript{53}

Following the letter, Moncure Conway suggested to Rossetti, with an invitation of the London publisher John Camden Hotten, that an English publication of *Leaves of Grass* might be made. Rossetti took this impetus to offer an explanation and edit the poems of the 1867 edition, combined with the preface to the 1855 *Leaves*. In the acknowledgements, Rossetti wrote, “At a time when few people on this side of the Atlantic had looked into the book, and still fewer had found in it anything save matter for ridicule, you [W. B. Scott] had appraised it, and seen that its value was real…Getting to know our friend [Charles] Swinburne, I found with much satisfaction that he also was an ardent (not of course a blind) admirer of Whitman.”\textsuperscript{54} At the time of his writing, only small literature circles read Whitman and fewer accepted him. Whitman’s desired audience, however, was the common, working class people of which he wrote about. Rossetti prepared his closing remarks with, “May we hope that now, twelve years after the first appearance of *Leaves of Grass*, the English reading public may be prepared for a selection of Whitman’s poems, and soon hereafter for a complete edition of them? I trust this may prove to be the case.”\textsuperscript{55} Rossetti’s goal was to disseminate an English edition of *Leaves* that was more accessible to the public, not just the aristocratic-poet class.

For his edition, he only used about half of the 1867 text, choosing to omit the more sensual-themed poems. The poems included were printed without emendations or censorship,

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., viii.
although changes were made to the titles and preface. Whitman called the ordeal “the horrible

Furthermore, he feared any expurgations from Rossetti, having seen what the Englishman had omitted. In letters between November and December of 1867, Rossetti wrote that many of the poems would not be suitable to an English audience, while others might be suitable with some minimal excision. In the postscript to his English edition, Rossetti believed that, “A new American edition will be dear to many: a complete English edition ought to be an early demand of English poetic readers, and would be the right and crowning result of the present Selection.”\footnote{Rossetti, ed., \textit{Poems}, 403.}

Nonetheless, the book would prove to be an outstanding boost to Whitman’s reputation in England, though, not quite as large as Rossetti or Whitman had hoped.\footnote{Blodgett, \textit{Walt Whitman}, 35-6.} It would not be until 1876, when Whitman’s health faltered, that he gained some measure of English popularity.

For the remainder of his life, Rossetti continued to promote Whitman, even complimenting him as the greatest American poet in his 1870 edition of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s poems. Further, Rossetti’s 1872 \textit{American Poems} was “dedicated with homage and love to Walt Whitman” and included thirty-two poems by Whitman.\footnote{J. R. LeMaster, \textit{Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia} (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 596.} When Whitman anonymously wrote an article for the \textit{West Jersey Press} about his neglect in the United States in 1876, Rossetti, in response, offered Whitman his full support and set out to create a “centennial edition” as a measure of charity. Because of Rossetti’s efforts, several influential people in the British arts and literature community purchased the 1876 Centennial edition of \textit{Leaves of Grass}.\footnote{This list included Algernon Swinburne, George Saintsbury, F. Madox Brown, John Addington Symonds, Edmund Gosse, Anne Gilchrist, E. T. Edward Dowden, W. B. Scott, Dante Rosetti, Lord Houghton, Roden Noel, George}

\begin{quote}
Whitman said Rossetti’s work, “pluck’d me like a brand from the burning, and gave me
\end{quote}
life again.” In April of 1876, Rossetti published “The Man-of-War Bird” in The Athenaeum, dedicated to Whitman. He also penned a letter to President Grover Cleveland suggesting that Whitman was worthy of a government pension. In 1886, he edited a new edition of Whitman’s Poems, published in London by Chatto and Windus.

John Addington Symonds’s Criticism

Another early supporter of Whitman, one who latched onto the subtext of much of Whitman’s poetry, was John Addington Symonds (1840-1893), an essayist, biographer, and poet. His most notable contribution to English criticism of Whitman was his Walt Whitman: A Study (1893), published by John Nimmo. Symonds first read Whitman’s collected poems in 1865, and was enthralled by the poet’s work. He initiated correspondence with Whitman in 1871, and though the two never met, he sent Whitman a poem based on the small collection “Calamus” with the message:

As I have put pen to paper I cannot refrain from saying that since the time when I first took up Leaves of Grass in a friend’s rooms at Trinity College Cambridge six years ago till now, your poems have been my constant companions…What one man can do by communicating to those he loves the treasure he has found, I have done among my friends.

Symonds’s fascination with Whitman’s poetry is evident in the Englishman’s criticism. He felt it absolutely necessary to begin with a thirty-five page biography and asserted the poet’s

---

Lewes, John Trivett Nettleship, Lord Tennyson, John Ruskin, Rev. Thomas Edward Brown, Vernon Lushington (A Cambridge Apostle) and Edward Carpenter.

61 Walt Whitman, Complete Prose Works (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1892), 516.

62 When John Camden Hotten, publisher of the earlier edition, died in 1873, his partner, Andrew Chatto took over and brought on W. E. Windus.

63 Symonds was also a member of the Uranian poets, a group of homosexual and pederastic people whose members included: William Johnson Cory, Lord Alfred Douglas, Edward Carpenter, Edmund John, and Baron Corvo (Frederick Rolfe).

64 Symonds is known most for his seven-volume set entitled Renaissance in Italy (1875–86) and his numerous studies into Greek Ethics.

international appeal, to both German and French scholars, whose critics “devoted serious studies to its literary qualities and philosophical teaching.” Symonds opened the criticism proper with a description of Whitman as both an occultist and a “prophet of a democratic religion,” before he detailed the intense, contradictory nature of Whitman’s poetic output.

Symonds evaluated contemporary criticism of the American’s output belonged to two camps: unfair persecution of his character and “sane criticism” that remained distant from emotion. He believed that Whitman did not care for such emotionless support; instead, he preferred his devoted friends. Symonds described the growing “cult of Whitman” in much the same romanticized language as Conway, “He had become a symbol…He owed the whole of himself to his own religion. He was like a god, who had to be his own high priest…born to remind the world of many important and neglected truths.” Whitman was a teacher of men, a “mass of contradictions,” and was someone who puts those qualities in others. For example, some of the contradictory criticism emerging from Algernon Swinburne who, in a seven-year period, managed to publish an ode that lauded Whitman and described *Leaves* as a “drunken apple-woman reeling in a gutter.” From there, Symonds described the ordering of Whitman’s poetic output: first religion, then self and sex, then love as both amative and comradery, and democracy or human equality.

Symonds was not just affected by Whitman’s poetry as a poet and scholar. He was also adamant about the impact of Whitman’s poetry to help explain his own homosexual urges. At the

---

69 *Ibid.*, 9. He also details some criticism from his friend, R.L. Stevenson who published the essays “The Books Which Have Influenced Me” (13 May 1887 in *The British Weekly*) and “The Essay on Walt Whitman.” In the first, there is a small section on *Leaves* wherein Stevenson described the poems as “a book for those who have the gift of reading” and attacked those which would call it blasphemous and indecent. In the second, he remarks about the good and negative criticism of Whitman, and about the vast divide between the two groups of criticism.
time in England, new literature emerged on sexuality. Poetry, novels, and psychological research provided an explanation to Symonds’s homosexual urges and alleviated much of his anxiety.\(^{70}\)

His contact with other Whitman supporters and homosexuals such as Edward Carpenter, Edmund Gosse, Roden Noel, and Oscar Wilde encouraged a growing queer theory for Whitman’s works.\(^{71}\) In a letter to Whitman, dated February 7, 1872, the Englishman questioned the nature of comradeship and athletic friendships in Whitman’s poems, “I conceived [it] as on a par with the sexual feeling for depth and strength and purity and capability of all good, was real—not a delusion of distorted passions, a dream of the past, [or] a scholar’s fancy—but a strong and vital bond of man to man.”\(^{72}\) Whitman denied the allegation, lying that he had six children and a grandson in hopes that it would deflect Symonds’s line of questioning.

Furthermore, Whitman cited his 1860 poem, “Starting from Paumonok,” calling the homoeroticism a display of “the spirit impulse” or poetic inspiration and nothing more.

Maneuvering through Victorian sensibilities and sexuality was a tricky endeavor, one shared by the more forward Symonds. With Symonds as a strong advocate, many English homosexuals found shelter in the “cult of Whitman.”

**Anne Gilchrist’s Criticism**

Another figure in Walt Whitman criticism who had complications navigating through Victorian standards was Anne Gilchrist. She fell in love with Walt Whitman after reading the


\(^{71}\) Each of these poets addressed the public’s opinion about homosexuality and maintained a steady stream of letters to Walt Whitman and each other. For a complete list of letters to Whitman, See *Walt Whitman, The Correspondence*, ed. Edwin Haviland Miller (New York: New York University Press, 1961–1977).

copy of *Leaves*, lent to her by W. M. Rossetti in 1869. Her publication, “An Englishwoman’s Estimate of Walt Whitman” (1869) was, as the scholar Marion Alcaro determined, a repackaging of her heartfelt letters to Rossetti, explicitly for Whitman. When they met, any amorous love Gilchrist had for Whitman left, and any tepidness he held for her vanished as the two quickly became friends. To the American, Gilchrist was a “true wife and mother,” and he greatly enjoyed spending time with her three children while they lived in Philadelphia. During her stay in America, Gilchrist was regarded by Whitman as “the gracious friend of the Carlyles, Tennysons, Rossettis, and the Pre-Raphaelites—with her ‘fine presence’ that Horace Scudder recalled with admiration.”

In her criticism of *Leaves of Grass*, Gilchrist identified the most important selections of his work: “Calamus,” “Songs of Parting,” “A Word out of the Sea,” and “Tears, Tears” were those most emotional and deserving of praise. “Calamus” was one of the overly sensual poems omitted in Rossetti’s *Poems*. She belittled those who antagonized Whitman’s poetry as formless, with an absence of meter, etc., as “quite as far from any genuine recognition of Walt Whitman as his bitter detractors.” To her, Whitman was an organic person, one whose poetry was grown, not synthesized. She asserted that syllable counting and an adherence to form did nothing to change the music he composed, the mysticism of his words, and the closeness of personhood. To the critics that attacked Whitman’s work as inappropriate, Gilchrist stated that no such poems disgusted her.

---

75 Anne Gilchrist, “A Woman’s Estimate of Walt Whitman,” in *The Radical*, July 11, 1869.
Conclusion

Such was the state of English criticism of Walt Whitman: a selective aristocracy envisioned Whitman as some pseudo-mystic figure, one whose skills were not realized in his time. The general population, aided by figures such as the Reverend Zachary Macaulay, Charles Kingsley, Alfred Astin, Theodore Watts-Dunton, St. John Tyrwhitt, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Peter Bayne, and later, Charles Swinburne, were the dominating voices in Walt Whitman criticism and dissent. As the scholar Harold Blodgett explained, in England, *Leaves of Grass* was adopted by the leaders of the English literary revolution in the 1890s; they regarded Whitman as their equal, but the public, who Whitman desperately wanted as consumers, never participated. Such literary figures include labor activists and socialists like Edward Carpenter, Matthew Arnold, Isabella Ford, and the Eagle Street Bolton College. Other radical figures included Algernon Swinburne – who, even after his reformation, still cherished Whitman – Oscar Wilde, Edmund Gosse, and Robert Buchanan, whose attacks on overt eroticism left him at odds with others in the group. Even between these groups are intersections with the queer community of Symonds, the Uranian poets, Carpenter, and their champion, Havelock Ellis. The composers setting Whitman’s text, then must be included in this forward-thinking class. They were not Whitman’s target audience, rather, they were members of the cultural and intellectual elite. The “cult of Whitman,” his British audience, was vast: it included members of the Uranian poets, the connections between George Eliot and George Henry Lewes, the Pre-Raphaelites, and the Eagle Street College. Robert Buchanan, Lord Alfred Tennyson, John Addington Symonds,

---

80 The Bolton College/Eagle Street College was an informal literary society established in 1885 under James Wallace, Dr. John Johnston, and Fred Wild. They were in contact with Whitman, visited him in Camden, and supported Whitman’s efforts in England. They continued to meet in Adlington at each other’s houses until the 1930s.
John Ruskin, Algernon Swinburne, William Rossetti, W. B. Scott, Henry Sidgwick, Oscar Browning, Frederick Myers, Richard Milness (Lord Houghton), Roden Noel, Moncure Conway, and Oscar Wilde disseminated Whitman’s poetry.

The composers who set Whitman’s text in Britain were not exclusive of this cult. Charles Villiers Stanford also set texts of George Eliot, Lord Tennyson, Christina Rossetti, Algernon Swinburne, Lord Houghton, and Oscar Wilde. Charles Wood also set Tennyson, Rossetti, and Swinburne, but lacked connections to the major figures in the “cult of Whitman.” Rutland Boughton set poems by Browning, Swinburne, Eliot, Carpenter. Havergal Brian set Browning, Swinburne, Carpenter, and Eliot. Cyril Scott used the poetry of Symonds. Ralph Vaughan Williams set numerous Tennyson and Rossetti poems, and only a single poem by Swinburne. Gustav Holst set two poems of Tennyson and one of Christina Rossetti. Almost every composer who set Walt Whitman’s poetry also set texts from Whitman’s disciples. Some of those within the cult held their appreciations in private, others publicly boasted their adoration of Whitman.

Much of current musicological scholarship incorrectly describes Whitman as a transcendentalist, and tries to relate these qualities in musical settings. Anthony Zoeller’s dissertation on twentieth century setting improperly identifies transcendentalism as a characteristic of Whitman. Chantel Carleton’s work on the poems of Whitman and Dickinson as sources for musical settings, too, employs a similar language when describing Whitman. Whitman saw himself as a man of the common man, a democratic and American poet, as evinced by his lectures and prose. Furthermore, his distaste with the works of Thoreau set him apart from the movement. Chapter two explores the music culture of Victorian England, in the context of building up to the first publications of Walt Whitman settings by English composers. Chapter
then examines the whole of musical settings before focusing on the first British setting of Walt Whitman’s poetry, Charles Villiers Stanford’s *Elegiac Ode* (1884).
Mid-century England had access to a growing number of musical philosophies and practices from both within and from outside its borders. A growing middle-class aided the expansion of commercial and domestic music; music was increasingly aimed at connecting with a wider audience. In addition, the growth of music publishing and journalism in the latter half of the century encouraged the development of English music. As the Victorian era moved away from eighteenth century moralistic views of music, the music climate continued to change and develop up until the last few decades of English Romanticism. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was a philosopher who helped shape moralistic beliefs in England during the nineteenth century. Mill’s brand of utilitarianism was a belief that concepts, such as morality, humanitarianism, even music, are an essential part of happiness, as usefulness and happiness are correlated. His first chapter of *Utilitarianism* (1863) outlined the foundations of moral functions, “When we engage in a pursuit, a clear and precise conception of what we are pursuing would seem to be the first thing we need […] A test of right and wrong must be the means, one would think, of ascertaining what is right or wrong, and not a consequence of having already ascertained it.” This moral belief was in contrast to the prevailing view that morality was an ability that could be trained as the result of actions. Mill places morality at the front end of actions, but also enveloped in the result. Utility is not a test of morality; morality was determined to be an object of pleasure, thus part of the utility or “Greatest Happiness Principle.” Furthermore, Mill determines the moral and intellectual requirements for happiness – that which was a means to the end became the end, something which Mill critiqued.

---

81 A number of specialist music journals were published during the 1800s, including *The Harmonicon* (1832-3), *The Musical World* (1836-91), and *The Musical Times and Singing-Class Circular* (1844-Current).
For something to provide happiness, then, it had to also be objectively useful to the person and society. The art critic John Ruskin (1818-1900) determined that, “Of all the arts, [music] is most ethical in origin […] the most direct in power of discipline: the first, the simplest, the most effective of all instruments of moral instruction; while in failure and betrayal of its functions, it becomes the subtlest aid of moral degradation.” Ruskin advocated that music had both an aesthetic and a moral function, and that they were interconnected. Music could train one’s moral compass, something that Mill never fully established. The scholar Henry Ladd critiqued Ruskin’s aesthetic and moralistic views as a type of inflation – the perpetuation and careful selection of Ruskin’s aims quickly outgrew the morality of the next generation and collapsed shortly after his death. John Caldwell asserts that Mill’s philosophy of “moral usefulness” began to die away in the middle Victorian period and fewer composers set texts aimed specifically at a moral view. Although the English were not at the forefront of European intellectualism, they were still receptive to it. Two such intellectual circles included the “Leipzig school” of Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847), and the writer Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904).

The Leipzig Conservatory ironically, became a place for English music-making. Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900), Ethel Smyth (1858-1944), and Frederick Delius (1862-1934) were the most notable of the Leipzig Conservatory’s English students, but from its founding in 1843 to 1868, the school received more than one hundred English students. The clear transmission of English composers into Germany, and later, the English’s positive reception to Mendelssohn,

---

84 John Ruskin, *Queen of the Air* (New York: Maynard, Merill, 1893), 68. On p. 144 Ruskin detailed the powers of the woman (not the man), with reference to music, politically feminizing it. A woman has the powers to alter morality via music, and it is men who are deceived by the “long-suffering of the laws of nature.”


87 Ibid., 243.

reveal a prevailing acceptance of German musical philosophies. Hanslick’s *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, published in 1854 and translated into English in 1891, perhaps gave English composers another philosophical background to write music purely for its own sake, and to not purposefully insert “expressive content.” This receptiveness to German music-making can also be gleaned from the positive reception of Felix Mendelssohn.

Because of the marketing of Mendelssohn’s *St. Paul* (1832, English premiere 1836) in the Novello-owned *Musical World* and the criticisms that appeared in *The Times, Morning Post*, and the *Athenaeum*, the English public quickly became exposed to Mendelssohn’s musical output. Henry Chorley (1808-1872), of the *Athenaeum*, wrote, “It is to Mendelssohn that we have to look for works, not merely of the subtletest intellectual refinement, but also of the brightest genius.” Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, commissioned for the Birmingham Festival in 1846, was the height of his influence on the English public. J.W. Davison, critic for *The Times*, described the night of its premiere as a great triumph for English music, hailing Mendelssohn’s work as “one of the most extraordinary achievements of human intelligence.” After Mendelssohn’s untimely death, many in the English public deemed him a martyr to their musical cause. This German music tradition has its roots in England even earlier than the inclusion of Mendelssohn.

Yet another aspect of this tradition has been the performance of the “Anglicized” George Frederic Handel (1685-1759). National institutions were built around his output, and his memory

---

89 See Rollo Myers, “Edmund Gurney’s ‘The Power of Sound,’” *Music & Letters* 53, no. 1 (January 1972): 36-43. Edmund Gurney (1847-1888), a devout follower of Hanslick, perhaps more famously, worked on psychical research, in particular, with the Society for Psychical Research. The members include the utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick, physicist William Barrett, Nobel laureate Charles Richet, and poet and philologist Frederic Myers, among others. Parts of the essay were included in the Fortnightly Review. The aim of the essay was to study the way people, without special technical knowledge, follow the general elements of music structure, sources, and musical effects, with a goal to be more moralistic and inclusive in creating music.


was both assimilated and appropriated into the national culture. For instance, the Handel Society was formed in 1843. George Grove summed up the English character of Handel, “There is something expressively English in Handel’s characteristics. His size, his appetite, his great writing, his domineering temper, his humour, his power of business, all are our own…In fact he pre-eminently belongs to England…Abroad, he is little known, and that mostly as a curiosity.”

Bach and Beethoven, too, became sufficiently studied and performed to be included in the English repertoire. William Sterndale Bennett (1816-1875) initiated a series of performances that, as Frank Howes wrote, “were the beginning of the Bach revival in England, which gathered momentum for three-quarters of a century until devotion to Bach was an axiom of English music and his music a standby of English choral societies.” Ergo, the precursors to what many describe as an English musical renaissance are deeply rooted in a German tradition. A later connection to German musical productions came with the rise of popularity of Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) and Richard Wagner (1813-1883) in Britain. Per Geoffrey Bush, as the middle of the century was the era of Mendelssohn, the end of the century was dominated by Brahms. This was especially apparent in the works of Hubert Parry (1848-1918) and Edward Elgar (1857-1934). Even Charles Villiers Stanford’s late chamber music didn’t escape the “ghost of Johannes Brahms.” The music of these German composers offered a constant inspiration in choral, orchestral, and chamber music for English composers.

**The English Renaissance**

---

95 Ibid., 396.
The second half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of a new “English Renaissance” as Joseph Bennett (1831-1911) detailed in his 1882 review of Hubert Parry’s (1848-1918) first symphony (1882) for London’s *Daily Telegraph*. He wrote that Parry’s work was, “capital proof that English music has arrived at a Renaissance period.” Even as he somewhat ironically advocated for the supremacy of German music at a time when it was customary for British intellectuals to hail the German “greats,” Bennett, alongside Francis Hueffer and J. A. Fuller-Maitland, two famous critics, advocated for the newfound successes of English composers, both at home and abroad in *The Musical Times*. Two years after Bennett’s original announcement, he elaborated, “The consequences will, in the nature of things, extend far beyond themselves…At home, the English composer is now no longer looked at coldly by *impressarii* and festival managers. He is run after and courted.” George Grove’s seminal work, the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, included biographies of numerous contemporary British composers to offer validity to the English musical tradition and legitimacy to their field.

Use of the phrase “English Renaissance” has been contested, even at its inception. Colin Eatock dissected the formation of the term and determined that it did not have a wide appeal at the time, though was not something to be completely rejected. Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924), for instance, makes several references to the “Renaissance of music” which began in the 1870s. Eatock calls attention to a humorous quote from the critic, George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), “Who am I that should be believe the disparagement of eminent musicians? If you doubt that *Eden* is a masterpiece, ask Dr. Parry and Dr. Mackenzie and they will applaud it to the skies.

---

96 Joseph Bennett, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 September 1882.
97 Joseph Bennett, *Musical Times* 25 (1 June 1884), 326.
Surely Dr. Mackenzie’s opinion is conclusive, for is he not the composer of *Veni Creator*, guaranteed as excellent music by Professor Stanford and Dr. Parry?\(^{100}\) Though perhaps not as tautological or insular as Shaw would suggest, Shaw’s view was, as Eatock determined, probably supported by concertgoers at the time. The English Renaissance, then, could have been specifically manufactured as a propagandistic tool to elevate the composers who participated in the propagation of the term. If this is true, then George Bernard Shaw’s recognition is one of an artificial branding, and a synthetic canon of English composers, regardless of their actual prowess. According to George Bernard Shaw, the English devised a two-part litmus test when considering a musical work: its “timelessness” and “progress” or originality.\(^ {101}\) During a composer’s life, their ingenuity was fiercely debated. At their death, their merits were discussed as a matter of taste and appeal. If the fiercest advocates for one another were a tightly woven social network, then a constructed canon might appear. Siobhan McAndrew and Martin Everett investigated the numerous cross relationships and social networks of British composers and their students.\(^ {102}\) From this, they determined that those people who emphasized a renaissance were not, as Shaw posited, an insular, exclusionary group. Composers had expansive social networks that interconnected numerous critics, journalists, composers, and teachers. In contrast, scholars Meirion Hughes and Robert Stradling suggest that only a select, culturally elite perpetuated the term.\(^ {103}\)

Eatock defines the idea of a British Renaissance as one of “the promulgation of musical education and the dissemination of “art music” throughout the British Isles.”\(^ {104}\) Regardless of


\(^{103}\) Hughes and Stradling, *The English Musical Renaissance*, 284-286.

\(^{104}\) *Ibid.*, 90.
opinions, other researchers, including John Caldwell and Frank Howes agree that following the Victorian period, there was a substantial growth of music and that the general quality of music had improved in the decades leading up to the turn of the century. Caldwell and Howes believe that the folk-song movement, the revivals of Tudor music and the music of Bach, the legitimizing of music as a field of study as separate from the decorative arts, and the national development of amateur singing groups were the most effectual in the coming renaissance. One of the ways in which composers sought to create a cohesive style was to devise and uncover particularly English characteristics of music – folk music was perhaps the most effective at accomplishing this goal.

Development of the Folk Idiom

After the Crimean War in 1854, Britain underwent a period of relative stability. From 1877-1879, a few years into the economic depression from 1873-1896, members of the working class were advertised as useful and necessary to a total and complete England. In effect, the country attempted to unify and brand itself as a grand imperial power with a mission of civilizing the savage world. During this period, however, jingoist sentiments never took root in the working class, but it did in the “villa Toryism” of the middle and lower middle class. By the 1880s, much of the intellectual national opinions converted to a widespread imperialist sentiment under a “Great Britain.” This assertion was by no means completely accepted; the historian Edward Freeman wrote, “The soberest of us will be driven to turn Jingoes and sing ‘Rule Britannia’ if we are asked that Great Britain shall sink to become one canton or three cantons of

105 Derek B. Scott The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room and Parlour (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2001), 172.
106 Ibid., 173.
Greater Britain.”108 The novel, *After London* (1885) by the naturalist Richard Jefferies, too, explores an idealized, “merrie England” mythology rooted in moral criticism of industrialism by searching to a distant English past. Similarly, William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890) explored a mythical golden age of England’s future – portrayed as an idealized past, with highly progressive socialistic and sexual undertones. These seemingly disparate elements point towards a single conclusion: any narrative that puts Britain first, or glorifies distinctly English elements would never occur in the lowest class. The more educated, wealthier individuals, like Morris, would be the ones to idealize the folk, militaristic, pastoral, and antique.

The medieval mythologies of Jefferies and Morris were constructed in an era where older, rural populations were divided by 1) class lines, 2) insecurities in religious institutions, 3) the advent of Darwinism, and 4) massive population booms generated from the first industrial revolution.109 This medievalism focused on pastoral, agrarian feudalistic practices. The creation of a rural mythology, Rich argues, was a way to “anchor what was happening within some kind of historical tradition.”110 He continues, suggesting that with this new mythology came a type of mysticism. This religiosity was attractive for a select minority in British society, distilled down into numerous theosophical groups. People like Edward Carpenter (1844-1929), for instance, created communities aimed at reconnecting with nature like their ancestors.111 His naturalist brand of diminishing the role of capitalism by reinforcing a self-sufficient, agrarian lifestyle in the face of industrialism was futile. Carpenter’s dilemma was that by the 1880s, the English peasant class no longer existed as a singular and cohesive unit, instead, fragmented into the

---

108 Edward Freeman, quoted in Francis Peter de Labilliere, *Federal Britain; or, Unity and Federation of the Empire* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1894), 207.
109 The rise of socialism and communism as economic philosophies, and the spread of Marx and Engels through England could also help to reinforce these divisions.
111 Carpenter’s rural commune was established at Milthorpe, outside of Sheffield. He eventually retired from the labor movement and took up market gardening using what was left of his inheritance.
lower middle class, white collar workers, and skilled laborers.\textsuperscript{112} Whitman’s poetry resonated so well with these naturalist groups because it advocated the same pseudo-mystical, socialist brotherhood, and homosexual themes to which Carpenter and his allies were staunchly devoted. These different anachronistic, constructed British heritages tied into the folk-song movement. It aimed at capturing and presenting the same ideas in music: a happy laboring class, pastoral and naturalistic scenes, tales of mythology, and imperial power.

The Victorian and Edwardian collectors of folk music set out to preserve the so-called “peasant” music before industrialization of agriculture destroyed what was left of rural England. Cecil Sharp made their purpose explicit: they were saving the rural tradition preserved in “old singing men and women of our country villages.”\textsuperscript{113} Among the intellectuals who recorded the rural folk music, terms like “peasant” and “peasantry” were used frequently. The collection made by John Broadwood, for instance, was entitled, “Old English Songs, as now sung by the peasantry of the Weald of Surrey and Sussex and collected by one who has learnt them by hearing them sung every Christmas from early childhood by the country people […]” (1843). Here, Broadwood uses the “Weald” to describe the wild, uncultivated forests between Surrey and Sussex; this, alongside the term “peasant,” helps to alienate the rural populations geographically, economically, and culturally. Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924) said of his work, “It is easy for a critic to sneer at such work because he is himself wholly unacquainted with our English peasant class; but if this rapidly perishing music is to be saved, it must be done at once, and it must be done by someone with enthusiastic love for the old music, and who is familiar with the twists and turns of the mind of the agricultural labourers.”\textsuperscript{114} In contrast, William Barrett describes the

\textsuperscript{112} Rich, “Quest for Englishness,” 29.
\textsuperscript{113} Cecil J. Sharp, “Folk-Song Collecting,” \textit{Musical Times} 48 (January 1907): 16.
populations of his folk collection as “unsophisticated English folk.” These two narratives
perpetuated a false English past, and simultaneously proclaimed its impending destruction to the
forces of industrialization. The former idealizes the rural populations while the latter pushes
them to the periphery of cultural activity.

The only salvation for that culture, then, could come from the imperial forces of an
aristocratic, intellectual movement. In a letter to Mrs. Hobbs, one of Cecil Sharp’s supporters, he
lamented the state of the English rural culture:

One of the saddest pages in the history of the English country villages is that which
records the gradual but steady decadence of all native folk art…The Enclosure Acts not
only filched the land from the country people, but robbed them of their spiritual birthright
at the same time. Now, you may artificially, as we have been trying to do in recent years,
give back to the countryman his own art, but if you fail to restore to him his own land and
economic independence and he remains nothing more than a hired labourer. What you
give him may be a solace to lighten his misery, but can never be anything more vital.
Serfdom is not the soil in which art can flourish.

Cecil Sharp perfectly captures the imagination and actions of the upper classes to the peasant
music: the aristocracy must save peasant music by returning to a constructed past, willfully
ignoring the conditions they forced upon the lower classes. Rarely were agrarian workers ever
socially and economically free prior to the industrial revolution. Folklorists and music
collectors simultaneously exulted the rural musical craft and vilified them for gaining economic
freedom and upward mobility as a result of industrialism. The process of the movement of the

116 Cecil Sharp Correspondence, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London, SHA-07-0787-8. These views are
developed and echoed in Arthur Knevett and Vic Gammon, “English Folk Song Collectors and the Idea of the
Peasant,” *Folk Music Journal*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2016): 44-66. The Enclosure Acts took land that was designated for
common/collective use and redistributed it to wealthy farmers. Two main effects occurred. First, it consolidated land
to marginalize costs per farmer. Second, these landowners drastically increased the cost of living or developing their
land; as a result, many tenant farmers had to leave areas that were historically their family’s home in order to move
to the city.
117 The overthrow of feudal aristocracy in the mid 1600s only benefited the middle class and skilled workforce. In
turn, the gentry became the oppressors of the lower-classes. The economic space between the bourgeoisie and the
aristocracy filling in during the industrial revolution. See David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain*
rural agrarians to the city, suburbanization, in the late nineteenth century, then, was connected to the creation of an English rural mythology. Furthermore, when examined from the vantage of the folklorist, saving “peasant” music was a noble goal of preserving distinctly English music, in effect, a nationalist goal. The remainder of the population latched onto that imperialistic nationalism—both would show up in music, though its role is debated in the musicological community.

Composer Ernest Walker, for instance, credited folk music as being “curiously, but inevitably, [of] loose signification.” Despite composing a folksong himself, he considered them to not be nationally important. Instead, his output focused much more on poetic and religious texts. In contrast, the scholar Frank Howes wrote that the English folk song movement, alongside the renewed interest in Tudor music, were the two influences that created an English national identity. Richard Middleton chose to eschew the terms folk and popular music, in favor of the term “common music of the lower class,” though, he quickly revised it to include the lower middle class as well. John Caldwell suggests that folk music carries with it more “archaic and sentimental connotations of a kind beloved of Victorian and Edwardian social idealists.” Furthermore, this lower folk music would be misinterpreted by the upper classes, and a rural vs. urban proletariat interplay would factor in as well. Folk music would be the basis for these reinterpretations by art music composers in larger choral and orchestral works, not just solo song settings. The melodies could still be recognized as distinctly English, but with an aristocratic tempering.

---

121 Caldwell, *Oxford History of English Music*, 491
Growth of Musical Thought

George Grove, too, recognized the growth of amateur musicianship during his time: in the preface to *Beethoven and His Nine Symphonies*, he included, “This book is addressed to the amateurs of this country, who have so immensely increased during the last fifty years with the increase of good and cheap performances.” He specified that the book could not be for professionals, for they would already know more than the information contained within, and with a greater accuracy than he was capable of producing. Yet, the conductor Hans Richter lauded Grove to Charles L. Graves, “the services rendered by Grove …were of incalculable value in educating the public.” The scholar Michael Musgrave seems tentative to suggest that Grove’s efforts were to further the agenda of the English Renaissance. Grove attended numerous concerts laden with German repertoire and the Beethoven research Grove engaged with was some of his most important work. A comparison of the American encyclopedia *Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians* (1900) and *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1879), however, reveals the strong slant Grove gave to English composers. Stanford receives a half-page in *Baker’s* and almost seven pages in the Grove dictionary. However, for all of Grove’s authorial and editorial work on the dictionary, the greater musical moment in English history was be the creation of and effects following the Great Exhibition.

After the Great Exhibition of 1851, also known as the Crystal Palace Exhibition, Henry Cole (1808-1882) was instrumental in the founding of a music academy at the South Kensington site. Henry Cole had worked closely with Prince Albert on the Exhibition and two years later,
Prince Albert suggested making a permanent music school at the site.\textsuperscript{126} Cole, already the vice-president of the Society of Arts, set up a committee to “investigate the state of music education at home and abroad.”\textsuperscript{127} The findings culminated in a first report in 1867, but still operated within Victorian limitations. In an address delivered in the Liverpool Institute in 1875, Cole made clear the results of their research:

> You cannot go into any school in Germany, or into any institute resembling this, without finding that one of the things taught and taught most efficiently, is music. The same thing happens in Switzerland and in Holland; it happens somewhat less in France; it happens more or less in Italy; but undoubtedly you will find throughout the length and breadth of Europe that music forms part of education...if the directors would take up music as a science and art, they would greatly increase the numbers attending the school.\textsuperscript{128}

There was a growing movement in England to improve music education, and to provide the means to locate and aid gifted musicians to study. Furthermore, at an intersection of classism and morality, Cole believed that “drunkenness and the devil,” traits of the underclasses, could be combated with music and the church. He reminds his audience of the practicality of music and its moral function in society. His main goal was to create a national training school for music, one he was constantly trying to force onto William Sterndale Bennett, the principal of the Royal Academy of Music (RAM). Cole never managed the takeover of the RAM; however, he successfully lobbied for the Education Act of 1870, which provided special provisions for music

\textsuperscript{127} In the minutes of the December 12, 1865 meeting, Peter Le Neve Foster described the extent of teaching both Brussels and Liege, Belgium, including who was allowed to learn, teach, fees and fund procurement, classes taught, guidelines for instructions, admissions requirements, hierarchal structure of faculty, the state of the music library, and expenses. Other members spoke at length about the state of art education and science education. F.H.W. Sheppard, Meirion Hughes, Robert Stradling suggest that the interconnectedness of science and art education is yet another area of the English-German derivations, one based on the same treatment the fields receive in Munich. An excerpt from Henry Cole, \textit{Fifty Years of Public Work of Sir Henry Cole} (London: Bell and Sons, 1884), 2:344 helps to solidify this argument: “In my opinion, music unites in the highest degree both Science and Art.” Hughes and Stradling mistakenly cite from the same source upon review of their work. See Hughes and Stradling, \textit{The English Renaissance}, 20.
\textsuperscript{128} Cole, \textit{Fifty Years of Public Work}, 2:358.
education in elementary schools. Ultimately, the Royal Academy of Music rebounded under Bennett’s control.

The changing views on music education brought about by Cole’s committee, Bennett, and Grove contributed to the slowly changing public perceptions of music. This expansion, both of musical taste and activity, constitutes the first part of the English Renaissance. Because of these figures, the Royal Academy of Music, the music facilities at Oxford and Cambridge under Parry and Stanford, Cole’s National Training School for Music – later absorbed by the Royal College of Music, and the Royal Albert Hall functioned as educational institutions for the first few waves of renaissance composers. This first wave of composers, though, did not use distinctly English musical characteristics. Parry and Stanford, Caldwell explains:

made it their business to master the expanded techniques of the modern German music of their day – especially that of Brahms, though without prejudice against the Wagnerian element. In terms of attitude this scarcely differs from the earlier cult of Mendelssohn, which Parry at any rate was slow to shake off. 129

Arthur Sullivan, too, was well under the influence, having graduated from the Leipzig Conservatory. Stanford explicitly cited two of his predecessors as important: William Sterndale Bennett and Hugo Pierson: Bennett received the prestige of being the progenitor of the renaissance, whereas Pierson was swept up in the “German spirit” and fled. 130 Sullivan, Alexander Mackenzie (1847-1935), and Frederick Cowen (1857-1935), alongside Stanford and Parry, represent the first wave of serious British attempts at creating a national music tradition. According to Howes, the first three are steeped in failure specifically because of “their attempts to build an English music on the basis of a German training, amid the prevailing Mendelssohnian fashions, axioms and assumptions.” 131 Their apt training and presence on the continent did not

131 Ibid., 50.
carry meaningful longevity to the modern canon as, perhaps, their continental contemporaries. Even John Alexander Fuller-Maitland attacked Sullivan in the composer’s obituary: “How can the composer of ‘Onward, Christian Soldiers’ and ‘The Absent-Minded Beggar’ claim a place in the hierarchy of music among the men who would face death rather than smirch their singing- robes for the sake of a fleeting popularity?” Nevertheless, these composers each had moderate success at home and abroad and represent England’s best attempts at breaking into an increasingly standardized repertoire of works.

The English Renaissance, then, can be defined by the sum shift of perceptions and practices in English musical life. These practices include the expansion of singing schools and professional music education, musicology and music philosophy, the role of German musical models, and the folk music revival. A problem derived from the inclusion of continental opinions on a growing nationalism occurs almost immediately, but persisted in scholarship until recently. Howes, for instance, cast aside certain figures in music, as for example when he suggested that the composer Frank Bridge had “ugly” music that was “not written well.” Percy Young and Peter Pirie have sought to counteract these preconceptions, and instead, attempted to place works within their national heritage and not subject them to continental developments and opinions. With the foundations of the English musical renaissance set, the specific interactions of each major genre, with relation to those covered in chapter three – larger orchestral works, choral, and solo songs – will flesh out a fuller identity for British music-making. The two genres are

connected to several different changes during the 19th century and are entwined into a popular music tradition that has yet to be considered.

**Orchestral Works**

As England transitioned from the mannerist period at the end of the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, there was a slight diminution of public interest for orchestral music. Caldwell argues that it was not until 1815-1870 that the average composer’s “aspirations” and “seriousness” grew.135 This revitalization coincided with Haydn’s departure after the 1795 concert season in the Hanover Square Rooms in London, conducted by Johann Salomon. Salomon’s concerts came back in 1796, 1801, and 1808; in addition, vocal concerts, resuscitated in 1801, attached symphonies and overtures in their programs to aid the popularity of the orchestral genres.136 Orchestral works also found their way provincial music festivals; Birmingham was perhaps the most successful. Two early composers of orchestral works, the Italian-born Muzio Clementi (1752-1832), and the native-born Philip Cipriani Potter (1792-1871), represent a division between the Classical and Romantic periods in London.

Clementi, whose students include John Field and Johann Cramer, helped found the Philharmonic Society of London in 1813. He was one of the six directors as well as a conductor from behind the keyboard until 1824. According to Leon Plantinga, “The aging composer’s persistent efforts to make his mark as a symphonist were hardly a success. For after 1824 his works disappeared from the concert stage in England and elsewhere, forced out this time, in large part, by Beethoven’s symphonies.”137 From 1813-1828, the Philharmonic Society

performed all of Beethoven’s symphonies and much of his chamber music. Mozart and Haydn received a slightly less prestigious performance record, yet only five of Clementi’s twenty symphonies were played – excluding Clementi, only three other British symphonies were performed.\textsuperscript{138} His works were popular and “given a variety of scientific treatments” but his symphonies were largely comprised of fragmented ideas and melodies.\textsuperscript{139}

Cipriani Potter struggled to make a name for himself early on in his career. He joined the Philharmonic society in 1815, was granted two commissions in 1816, and toured the continent from 1817-1819.\textsuperscript{140} During that time, he studied composition with Beethoven and Aloys Förster. Upon his return to Britain, he continued composing works until 1837, when his output withdrew substantially. He wrote nine symphonies, four overtures, and a concertante during his life, and his works were almost exclusively performed at his own concerts from 1828-1846. During this time, he insisted upon a “full band” with thicker brass and woodwind sections, and other provisions that set his performances above his peers.\textsuperscript{141} He was elected to the Royal Society of Musicians in 1817, and served as both a conductor and pianist; he was also a member of the Society of British Musicians after it was created in 1834. After conducting Potter’s G Minor Symphony in the summer of 1855, Richard Wagner described the Englishman as “an old-fashioned but very friendly composer, whose symphony entertained by its modest dimensions and its neat development of counterpoint.”\textsuperscript{142} An excerpt from \textit{The Musical Library} describes Potter in similar words: “suited to almost every taste, being no less pleasing than scientific.”\textsuperscript{143}

\textsuperscript{138} Clive Bennett, “Clementi as Symphonist,” \textit{The Musical Times} 120, no. 1633 (March 1979), 209.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 210.
\textsuperscript{140} In 1864, Potter also became committee chair to the Mendelssohn Scholarships.
\textsuperscript{143} Anonymous, \textit{Supplement to the Musical Library} (London: Charles Knight, 1834), 68.
Potter then, while appearing aged and pedantic to a continental criticism, was an important aspect of British musical at the turn of the century.

When the Philharmonic Society of London formed in 1813, therefore, it was not in the absence of orchestral music as George Hogarth determined. Britain had a preoccupation with “ancient music,” music by dead composers of more than 20 years. This establishment of a canon of works edged out new composers for the old. This view, copied later by other writers, perhaps emphasized the importance and necessity of such a society. Even so, the role of symphonic life in the first half of the century has been challenged by Temperley, Caldwell, and Walker who suggest that British orchestral works suffered a dearth during this time. The importance of a professional organization for musicians, independent of patronage, cannot be understated, however. Two orchestral composers, the Scottish George Macfarren (1813-1887) and William Sterndale Bennett, form the first accepted body of orchestral music during the early decades of the nineteenth century.

George Macfarren entered into the RAM in 1829, studying under Cipriani Potter. When he joined the faculty in 1837, his adherence to the radical harmonic practices of Alfred Day set him apart from the majority of the faculty, which led him to resign in 1847. In addition to teaching, he was also an editor, critic, and author of harmonic treatises. As for his musical output, he wrote an eclectic mix of compositions, dominating the stage and hall, including eight

---

146 Alfred Day (1810-1849) was one of the first theorists to attempt a universal theory of harmonies from an acoustical basis.
cantatas, three oratorios, nine symphonies, six overtures, and an idyll. His fervor, just as it agitated his peers, certainly did not endear him to either the public or critics. According to Temperley, “His views were one-sided and dogmatic, and his enthusiasms were largely negative…[George Bernard] Shaw ridiculed him for using the programme note of a [New] Philharmonic Society concert to denounce [Hermann] Goetz’s Frühlings-Ouvertüre because it contained ‘unlawful consecutive sevenths.’”147 Another student at the RAM who entered shortly after Macfarren was William Sterndale Bennett in 1832.

In his first years at the RAM, Bennett managed an impressive compositional output, attracting the praise of Robert Schumann. Schumann declared that, “Were there many artists like Sterndale Bennett, all fears for the future progress of our art would be silenced.”148 The two works critiqued by Schumann were praised for their “imaginativeness and their impassioned character.” Percy Young considers Bennett as a figure somewhere between Schumann and Edward Elgar, who frequently drew upon Mendelssohn and Beethoven for inspiration. Bennett made several trips to Germany: in 1833, he travelled there as a friend and young pupil of Mendelssohn and in 1837 as a touring pianist and conductor. Bennett completed more than twenty-four orchestral works, including six symphonies and ten overtures. As his compositional output waned from 1842-156, he supported himself by conducting, teaching, and performing; in 1849, he founded the Bach society. In 1855, he succeeded both the naturalized Michael Costa and the guest conductor Richard Wagner as conductor to the Philharmonic Society. Thus, Bennett squarely placed himself both as a promulgator of German romanticism and as a

foundation upon which composers in the later nineteenth century could rest. The next
generations of composers, including Hubert Parry (1848-1918) and Charles Villiers Stanford
(1852-1924), later Edward Elgar (1857-1934), Frederick Delius (1862-1934), Ralph Vaughan
Williams (1872-1958), and Gustav Holst (1874-1934) were the fruits of the newly expanded
British musical culture from the first half of the century.

Hubert Parry obtained a music degree from Eton, and studied composition under William
Bennett. After his plans to study under Brahms failed, he began training under Edward
Dannreuther, a German pianist and Wagnerian. By 1883, Parry was hired by Grove to be a music
historian at the Royal College of Music and to write articles for the Dictionary of Music and
Musicians, eventually totaling one hundred and twenty-three. His compositional output was
incredibly eclectic; besides the numerous choral works, he wrote twenty large instrumental
works including five symphonies. Hughes and Stradling describe Parry as, “an unusual
academic” and, alongside Ernest Walker, place him in a “mythical place” atop English music.149
Ironically, Parry never set Whitman’s text. He was an agnostic, but described by Charles Graves
as a “reverent man;” and, “in spite of his rejection of religious orthodoxy, he recognized that
ordered civilization was entirely dependent upon an ethical framework, [and] he recognized the
vital necessity for a spiritual dimension in the life of man.”150 Surely Parry recognized the
qualities of Whitman’s poetry that were consistent with his own ideologies. His children were
named after characters in George Eliot’s novels, she was the first person to provide positive
criticism of Whitman. It is unusual that Parry never set Whitman’s poems, even when Charles
Villiers Stanford chose to set them himself.

Stanford, born to a middle-class family in Ireland, was perhaps as eclectic and diverse a

---
149 Hughes and Stradling, The English Musical Renaissance, 32.
composer as Parry. Stanford’s output included a vigorous number of vocal works, both songs for the home and larger choral work. Like Parry, joined the RCM in 1883, serving as both a composition teacher and a conductor of the orchestra. Of Stanford’s symphonies, Caldwell wrote, “The overall impression created…is that we should be glad of them if it were not for those of Brahms or Dvorak; which prompts the further reflection that if it were not for those of Brahms and Dvorak we probably should not have Stanford’s either.”\footnote{Caldwell, \textit{Oxford History}, 287.} He argued that Dvorak could have modelled his seventh symphony on Stanford’s second symphony – the latter predated the former by three years, and was performed while Dvorak was in England in 1884. Caldwell lamented the “Brahmsian mould” of Stanford’s later orchestral writing, but asserted it was quite useful to the composer. Stanford was a well-respected figure in British music during this period. According to the musicologist Stephen Banfield, “Brahms is the chief frontier between [Alexander] Mackenzie and Stanford.”\footnote{Stephen Banfield, “British Chamber Music at the Turn of the Century: Parry, Stanford, Mackenzie,” \textit{Musical Times} 115, no. 1573 (March 1974): 212.} Stanford’s students and critics all recognized the formalisms of Stanford’s music. Even still, his students praised him considerably. Composer and recipient of the Mendelssohn scholarship S. P. Waddington described Stanford as “One of brilliance. His personality had a sort of splendor, as if the hero of a fairy-tale, incredibly gifted, miraculously omniscient, had strolled unconcernedly into a world of ordinary mortals…Gifted, confident, productive, already important in his sphere, gradually winning favour.”\footnote{S. P. Waddington “Stanford in the Early Days,” \textit{RCM Magazine} (May 1933), 15.}

Public opinions of composers were not the same as opinions about the art music culture. Nancy Riley further elucidates in her dissertation:

[From 1870-1890] various new social trends that increased inter-class hostility were to become apparent at all levels of society. The social shifts that occurred around this time of particular interest to us may be summarized under four connected headings: class issues of rootlessness and economic disparity attendant on unprecedented urbanization;
the shaping of a national culture that followed the shift in economic focus from industry to commerce and the centralization of commercial power in London; the pressures to institute major democratizing reforms; and the changes in middle-class attitudes towards self-sufficiency and leisure time that followed the move from an economy of production to an economy of consumption.154

The socioeconomic and political atmosphere surrounding music during this time was strained. If the folksong movement which produced both a fair number of orchestral and choral works was artificially manufactured by aristocratic or wealthy connoisseurs, and high-art venues were not held in high esteem by those outside the aristocratic and/or high-cultured minded individuals, then the societies to which these wealthy subscribers belonged were mostly exclusive of the lower classes. The scholar William Weber posits that it was through these societies that the distinctions between “popular” and “classical” music were differentiated in the 1840-1870s. 155

English Popular Song

As Derek B. Scott wrote in his introduction to The Singing Bourgeois: Songs of the Victorian Drawing Room, “Victorian parlour song is an incredibly rare term, mostly constructed by modern writers.”156 Terminology that has been suggested as an alternative include drawing-room ballad, bourgeois domestic song, and popular song. Drawing-room ballads did not have any overwhelming popularity, though considerable efforts were made to find music that would be inclusive of all social statuses and preserve familial elements in music-making.157 For this thesis, the author will assume the latter as the preferred nomenclature, both given its frequent use during the period, and for the assertion that it does not stress a class model, as all social groups had their own popular song. This further complicates the issue: popular music of each class had

156 Scott, Singing Bourgeois, viii.
157 Ibid.
different style characteristics. For this thesis, those associated with the drawing-room ballad will be most important. Class was a tightly controlled set of beliefs, organizations, and assumptions, in which music played a vital role; so, any discussions of music in England must come with an explanation of the role in which socioeconomics participate such that no group be left behind. Following Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* of 1776, “the effects of bourgeois democratic ideas were seen in a deliberate popularization and simplification of style...[Haydn’s] ‘My Mother Bids Me Bind My Hair’ became a firm favourite [*sic*] in the drawing-room repertoire.” As systems of patronage faltered, composers certainly looked to cultivate a wider audience.

By the turn of the century, popular culture emphasized and propagated a strident anti-labor message in England; rising labor movements created strong backlash, which inevitably aided the rising lower-middle and middle classes. Popular song settings utilized these same middle-class values as a way to market them to the lower classes, especially after mid-century. These values include the explicit prominence of patriotic/military, religious, and merchant figures. Following the expansion of elementary education in England, there was a greater movement of workers into white collar clerical and retail positions. In these areas with socioeconomic growth, there was a simultaneous draw away from radicalization and labor-movement involvement as the lower-middle class developed. These members of the emerging lower-middle class, just like those above them in status, formed the divisive boundary to those participating in amateur musicianship that would help shape the popularity of music. Composers

---

158 Ibid., 4.
160 Riley, “The Place of Art Music in Edwardian England,” 133. These identities were also enforced in seating arrangements and dress codes at regional concert halls.
161 Ibid., 18. Between 1851-1911, the average comparative growth of white collar employment grew from 2.5% to 7.1% on average. Edinburgh and London were the most concentrated growths of around 10.9% and 10.1% respectively. Some of the most industrialized cities—Oldham 3.8%, Sheffield 4.9%, Northampton 4.9%, Nottingham 5.3%, and Birmingham at 5.6%—were well below the average towards the end of the period.
like Henry Russell (1812–1900) began a tradition of socially/morally-aware sentimental song that thrived and become a new kind of entertainment in theaters.\textsuperscript{162} Russell wrote of his own music that, “The moral tone of a song depends upon the moral tone of the individual who writes it: by which, I mean, a healthy song comes from a healthy man and likewise produces healthy effects.”\textsuperscript{163} The morality of these songs became memetic and fed back into the morality and tastes of the class writing them. Other poets and composers like Thomas Moore (1779–1852) and George Macfarren tried hand at song settings at the same time as music educators like Henry Cole advocated the strong moral features of their craft.

By the 1830s, music-making had expanded to the middle class, which had begun to take a serious interest in cultivating a home practice and piano performance especially. The Reverend Hugh Haweis, author of \textit{Music and Morals} (1871), described the wholesomeness of music performance, particularly that on the piano: “a long-suffering instrument, the cottage piano, has probably done more to sweeten existence and bring peace and happiness to families in general, and to young women in particular, than all the homilies on the domestic virtues ever yet penned.”\textsuperscript{164} For women, especially, music-making was an essential aspect of domestic life. Voice was overwhelmingly the medium of choice, with piano one of the few acceptable alternatives. During the rise of the lower-middle class, music became bound into the social structure, just as it had for the higher social ranks. Saturday night was for the evening theater or music halls; Sunday was for music in the home.\textsuperscript{165} Religious boundaries in the class-structure shaped musical practice. High Anglicans, for instance, maintained an aristocratic air and went to the music halls,

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{162} Scott, \textit{The Singing Bourgeoisie}, 40.
\textsuperscript{163} Henry Russell, quoted in Scott \textit{The Singing Bourgeoisie}, 41.
\textsuperscript{164} H. R. Haweis, \textit{Music and Morals} (London: Strahan, 1871), 115. The book also examines the character, morality, appearance, and histories of many composers, including Handel, Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart, Schubert, and Schumann.
\textsuperscript{165} Crossick, \textit{Lower Middle Class}, 71.
but the conservative, lower middle class Methodists were readers of Dickens, the Brontës, and Tennyson. Because of the growth of amateur musicianship, many commercial centers organized music festivals. In the 1860s, the expansion of leisure time and growth of wages provided new money for these growing markets.

The lower-middle and middle class musical tastes still reflected their conservativism. Richard Church revealed in a series of anecdotes that his mother had a distaste for Schubert and could not accept the “youthfulness” of her children; she instead played the same Bach, Haydn, and Mozart pieces every Sunday evening, well into the twentieth century. Scheduling the programs for regional festivals had a similar canon to domestic music making for middle-class families. The foundation of England’s music life harkened back to the deep conservative mentality of the festival audiences. The Three Choirs’ Festival (1724), Birmingham (1768), Norfolk and Norwich (1824), Leeds (1858), and London’s Handel Festival (1859) were the top five triennial festivals. These charitable events were designed to create a profit generated from wealthy contributors. Because of how these festivals were organized, there was a constant reinforcement and need of a conservative program to attract those wealthy contributors. As the aristocratic class waned, the middle-class audiences filled in the gaps, hoping to gain social capital by adapting their tastes. By the mid-late 1800s, a selected canon of works became the standard in these festivals, supplemented by British composers. In more rural areas though, support for festivals usually come from local traders, businessmen, politicians, or landed gentry. The Worsley family, for example, sponsored the Hovingham festival (1887-1906) in

---

166 Ibid., 74.
167 Ibid., 69. Youthfulness, in this case, means their proclivities for music outside of the established canon of works.
168 Hughes and Stradling, English Musical Renaissance, 35.
Yorkshire. In other cases, morality would be the binding force for a festival. For instance, a group of temperance choirs organized the Harlech festival in 1867.

In the later nineteenth century, even patriotic songs found purchase in domestic life. In this sense, one can see many aspects of the folksong movement twisted to represent imperialistic sentiments. Many of the chivalric aspects of colonial adventure could be related back to Elizabethan adventures and army ballads became another aspect of Englishness. By the 1890s, bourgeois patriotic songs became standard as a national characteristic. For the songs of the era to achieve popularity and performance, then, they must have been one of three types: the sentimental, the moralistic, or patriotic. The standards at concert halls, home-life, and festivals all enforced this standardization of role.

Conclusion

Britain’s position in the whole of nineteenth century musical output was strong, yet a lasting impact on modern canon was never felt. Over the century, Britain imported great numbers of musicians, conductors, and composers as their own never managed to break through the boundaries to the continental canon with few exceptions. This is especially the case with the importation of Italian opera and German symphonies. Caldwell explained, “At the level of solo performance, English composers, with few exceptions, neither achieved the technical skill to rival the foreigners […] The insular nature of musical education had much to do with this.” English composers lacked training until well after the establishment of the Royal College of

---

169 Scott, Singing Bourgeois, 120.
170 Ibid.
171 Ibid., 178. Sir Walter Scott’s novels aided this cult of medieval and courtly romance too; Britain had developed a lineage of imperialist or colonial adventure. See also Mark Girouard, The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).
Music and the Royal Academy of Music, despite the efforts of George Macfarren and Cipriani Potter. While receptive to the Germanic musical ideals of Felix Mendelssohn, Johannes Brahms, and Richard Wagner, Britain’s national composers, especially Charles Villiers Stanford, ultimately lacked the ingenuity to progress their own ideals within the realm of nineteenth century Romanticism. The use of folk-idioms in inventive ways by composers including Hubert Parry, Charles Villiers Stanford, and Ralph Vaughan Williams developed too late to be a driving force in the nineteenth century.

If art music had a small recession during the earlier part of the century, popular music certainly did not. Music flourished in homes where songs were a tool of the lower-middle class and upper-class Victorians. Considering the value of poetry in these settings, then, Whitman seems a particularly strange choice. Of the twenty-eight English settings of Whitman’s poetry pre-1914, eleven of them appear in a drawing-room ballad of voice and piano scoring. English settings of two of Whitman’s peers, Edgar Allen Poe and Henry Longfellow, saw a far heavier slant towards drawing-room ballad settings, with Longfellow receiving hundreds more settings from amateur composers than from those affiliated with academic institutions. These settings of Longfellow came from a mostly amateur population because he represented a poetic tradition consistent with Victorian middle-class values. As Alexis de Tocqueville revealed, the poetry of Longfellow was consistent of these values: it was still metered, had a uniform rhyme scheme, and had a well-organized, and had a rigid. Whitman did not. His lack of rigidity, however, proved to be useful in music settings aimed at creating distance from the previous musical epoch.

CHAPTER 3
THE FIRST BRITISH SETTING OF WALT WHITMAN
British settings of Walt Whitman’s text are a diverse body, especially compared to settings of other American poets. Of the twenty-eight settings, eleven were set for orchestra and choir (two more were arranged by their composer) and seventeen were set for a small number of voices and piano (See Table 1). Compared to settings of Whitman, a precursory scan of settings of Longfellow uncovers several hundred settings for voice and piano, or for small choir, with only a scant few for orchestra and choir. While smaller in number, settings of Edgar Allan Poe and other American peers of Whitman are more often for voice and piano – drawing-room ballads meant for performance in the home, not the concert hall.

The poems used for the twenty-eight settings were quite varied as well. The most set poems with three uses each were, “O Captain my Captain,” “Ethiopia Saluting the Colors,” and “Darest Thou Now, O Soul.” For instances of purely orchestral works, or those that utilized multiple texts – Vaughan William’s Sea Drift or Havergal Brian’s Imperial Elegy – each influence is recorded separately. The clusters set were: Drum-Taps (9), Memories of President Lincoln (4), Whispers of Heavenly Death (4), Sea-Drift (4), From Noon to Starry Night (2), Twilight (1), Passage to India (1), Song of Exposition (1), Songs of Parting (1), Children of Adam (1), Autumn Rivulets (1), and Calamus (1).\(^{174}\)

As was the case with public and critical reactions to Whitman’s poetry, musical settings of Whitman’s works were quite eclectic. There are many possible reasons as the appeal of his poetry to a composer. Composers were possibly attracted to Whitman’s free verse which utilized non-rigid forms with internal repetitions.

\(^{174}\) These organizational systems were constantly revised in each edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The cluster nomenclature used is consistent with the final edition of *Leaves*, but was not in place for the earliest few settings, and certainly not for the 1867 edition.
### Table 1: Settings of Walt Whitman in Britain, 1884-1914.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stanford, Charles Villiers</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Elegiac Ode</td>
<td>S, bar, chorus, orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Charles</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Charles</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>O Captain! My Captain</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Charles</td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Ethiopia Saluting the Colours</td>
<td>V, piano; Orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holst, Gustav</td>
<td>1899, u.p.</td>
<td>Walt Whitman Overture</td>
<td>Orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell, William Henry</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Symphony no. 1 “Walt Whitman”</td>
<td>Orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Charles</td>
<td>1896-1901, pub. 1927</td>
<td>Darest Thou Now, O Soul</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood, Charles</td>
<td>1900-1</td>
<td>Dirge for Two Veterans</td>
<td>B, SATB, orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dalmas, Philip (American in Britain)</td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Four Songs from Whitman</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boughton, Rutland</td>
<td>1901-1902</td>
<td>Imperial Elegy: Into the Everlasting</td>
<td>Orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>Ethiopia Saluting the Colours</td>
<td>1-2 Piano; Orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>6 American Lyrics, no. 6</td>
<td>C. Alto, bar, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boughton, Rutland</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Six Songs of Manhood, no. 4</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian, Havergal</td>
<td>1904, revised 1906</td>
<td>For Valour</td>
<td>Orch, organ/piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delius, Frederick (Englishman in Germany)</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>Sea Drift</td>
<td>Bar, chorus, orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holst, Gustav</td>
<td>1904, revised 1912</td>
<td>The Mystic Trumpeter</td>
<td>S, orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Cyril</td>
<td>1904</td>
<td>My Captain; O Captain</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaughan Williams, Ralph</td>
<td>1904-6</td>
<td>Toward the Unknown Region</td>
<td>SSAATTBB, orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanford, Charles Villiers</td>
<td>1906, pub. 1908</td>
<td>Songs of Faith, nos. 4-6</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaughan Williams, Ralph</td>
<td>1908, u.p.</td>
<td>3 Nocturnes</td>
<td>Bar, semichorus, orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaughan Williams, Ralph</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Ethiopia Saluting the Colours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaughan Williams, Ralph</td>
<td>1903-9, last revised 1923</td>
<td>A Sea Symphony</td>
<td>S, bar, SATB, orch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butcher, Frank</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>O Captain! My Captain!</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harty, Hamilton</td>
<td>1912</td>
<td>By the Bivouac’s Fitful Flame</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harty, Hamilton</td>
<td>1913</td>
<td>The Mystic Trumpeter</td>
<td>Bar, SATB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott, Cyril</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>Lilac Time</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holst, Gustav</td>
<td>1914</td>
<td>A Dirge for Two Veterans</td>
<td>TTBB, Piano/tpt, tbn, perc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaughan Williams, Ralph</td>
<td>???, u.p.</td>
<td>Out of the Rolling Ocean</td>
<td>V, piano</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The literary scholar Gay Wilson Allen argued that Whitman’s reliance on literal repetition and parallelism mimics the process of musical composition, often referring to Whitman’s poetry as
“word-music.” He also addressed the use of Whitman’s Civil War poetry in compositions: “other Civil War poets sang this same theme of compassionate peace, but no one was better than Whitman in the two issues of Drum-Taps.” It could be that Whitman’s poems, were particularly folk-like in nature. Their crude construction, alongside natural symbols and imagery lent itself into those tapping into the folksong movement.

Hubert Parry, in an argument with some colleagues in 1883, declared that Walt Whitman, “belonged to a totally different order [than British poets], but I don’t give up my sympathy for him all the same. Possibly it is the democratic tinge that fetches me in him, and the way in which he faces our human problems and speaks ruggedly himself – and such a strange, wild, at the same time hopeful self.” The scholar Jack Sullivan explored many of the same questions in New World Songs: The Legacy of Whitman, “perhaps the draw has to do with the voice or theme. Is Whitman’s intimate, first-person voice inviting to composers because it imposes no masks or barriers? Or is it the expansiveness and universality of Whitman, celebrating everything from ‘lusts and appetites’ to visions of the Oversoul.”

What one would expect from middle class, academic composers, connected to the aristocracy at one end, and the public audiences at the other, then, would be a tasteful music that was Germanic in quality and character to sustain conservative audiences, but different enough to project forward the composer’s own intellectual ideals. Charles Villiers Stanford was not so forward reaching. The diatonic nature of Stanford's harmonic language, which he utilized in opposition to the “crushingly chromatic” idiom of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde, dominates his music. It is his opinion that:

176 Ibid., 88.
177 Charles Graves, Hubert Parry: His Life and Works (London: Macmillan, 1926), 1:244-245.
Chromatics, as their name implies, were the colour upon primary and simpler sounds; as such they were the only alternatives to diatonics. But if chromatics are made the basis where are we to turn for, shall I say, superchromatics […] When Wagner wants to accentuate his great moments he returns (chromatic though he is by nature) to diatonics […] They are useful as servants, but dangerous as masters.  

Stanford lamented the overuse of chromatic language and preferred simpler, diatonic melodies. His students frequently considered him to be regressive in terms of his musical language: Harold Samuel referred to him as “the last of the formalists.”

**Charles Villiers Stanford – *Elegiac Ode***

In Charles Villiers Stanford’s first setting of Walt Whitman’s text for solos, chorus, and orchestra, however, a few peculiarities arise. The text, for example, was an odd choice for a British audience. The text used was only a small part of Whitman’s poem “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d,” an elegy for President Lincoln, 206 lines long.

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais’d be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge marvelous,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unalteringly.

Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.

From me to thee glad serenades,

---


Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-veil’d death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairies wide,
Over the dense-pack’d cities all and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee.

This long-poem utilized numerous symbols, all absent from the selected passage, known as the
“Death Carol.” It is in these seven stanzas that the elegy shifts from grief to acceptance of
death. The poetry is in free verse – not rhymed, nor evenly metered. The closest form is its neat
organization into four-line stanzas, but Stanford gathered the lyrics into asymmetrically
measured stanzas. He further modified the text with a substitution in line 6 of “marvelous” for
the original “curious,” and an omission of “O Death!” after “thee” in the final line. Gay Wilson
Allen alleged that, “In some ways, this poem, too, is much nearer the poetic conventions of
Victorian literature than are Whitman’s earlier poems [...] it excels in its verbal music.”

Ideas for the Elegiac Ode occurred as early as 1873, with preliminary sketches for the
first chorus completed in 1881. The scholar Jeremy Dibble asserts that Stanford likely found
Whitman’s poems through William Michael Rossetti’s Poems of 1868. Stephen Town argues
instead that Stanford had probably come into contact with Whitman through his parents’ open
house, through which numerous “academics, ecclesiastical, judicial, and medical notables” had

---

181 The Death Carol is lines 136-163 in the poem.
travelled.\textsuperscript{184} At the time, Edward Dowden was Whitman’s chief associate in Ireland; he had published articles and reviews of Whitman in \textit{The Westminster}, and two in \textit{The Academy}. Town likens him to Rossetti, preaching the gospel of Whitman in Ireland.\textsuperscript{185} Otherwise, Stanford’s friendships with (John Richard) Raoul Couturier de Versan and Hallam Tennyson perhaps introduced him to Whitman’s poems while the three of them stayed at the Tennyson household.\textsuperscript{186} Interestingly, Anne Gilchrist had to aid Walt Whitman in uncovering just who Stanford was. As the two never met, it is likely that Whitman did not know the magnitude of the composer. Gilchrist wrote in a letter from Wolverhampton, Oct 26, 1884, “I don't suppose the enclosed will give you nearly so much pleasure as it gives me. But Villiers Stanford is, I think, the best composer England has produced since the days of Purcell & [and] Blow, and your words will be sent home to hundreds & [and] thousands who had not before seen them. How lovely the words read as themes for great music!”\textsuperscript{187}

The work was first commissioned for the twenty-third triennial Norfolk and Norwich music festival in St. Andrew’s Hall (14-17 October 1884). The soprano soloist for the work was Anna Williams and the baritone was Herbert Thorndike.\textsuperscript{188} Mendelssohn’s oratorio, \textit{Elijah} opened the events of the week on Tuesday, with Charles Gounod’s oratorio, \textit{The Redemption} on Wednesday morning, Alexander Mackenzie’s oratorio, \textit{The Rose of Sharon} on Thursday.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{184} Stephen Town, \textit{An Imperishable Heritage: British Choral Music from Parry to Dyson} (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 89.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{187} The Charles E. Feinberg Collection of the Papers of Walt Whitman, 1839–1919, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C LOC. 05769. It is unknown if she saw the premiere of the work, but her husband was having difficulties starting his steelworks, so the Gilchrist family may have had financial troubles, enough to not be able to see the festival.
\textsuperscript{188} The performing forces for the festival are as follow: the choir consisted of 254 voices: 72 sopranis, 45 contaltis, 9 alti, 67 tenori, and 61 bassi. The orchestra consisted of 13 1st violins, 10 2nd violins, 8 violas, 8 cellos, 8 double basses, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 1 contra fagotto, 4 horns, 2 trumpets/cornets, 3 trombones, 1 euphonium, 1 harp, 3 percussionists, and 1 organist. Stanford conducted his work. The \textit{Norwich Mercury} also recorded each performer’s name, excepting for the chorus.
\end{flushleft}

64
morning, and Handel’s *Messiah* on Friday morning. Stanford’s ode saw performance in the “grand miscellaneous concerts” on Friday evening alongside Frederick Cowen’s *Scandinavian Symphony*, Mendelssohn’s *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, Mozart’s *Symphony no. 41*, Beethoven’s *Leonora Overture no. 3*, Berlioz’s *Danse de Sylphes* and *Hungarian March*, and the prelude to Wagner’s *Lohengrin*. The price to a patron’s stall in the morning was one guinea, but the general area was ten shillings and six pence. The price for patrons dropped down to fifteen shillings in the evening. The pricing shows a clear importance of the morning entertainment as opposed to evening entertainment, and reports made were that the morning concerts were sold out.

A witness to the Tuesday morning rehearsal, a journalist for the *Norwich Mercury*, criticized the performance:

> That a composer should feel himself inspired by the nonsensical poem of Walt Whitman is extraordinary, but beyond all question it has enabled Dr. Stanford to write a very fine work, superior to anything he has previously done, not only in regard to breadth and originality, but in taking qualities. In one or two passages certain chromatic progressions troubled the chorus a little, but everything was put right, and a performance, worthy of the work, may be anticipated.\(^{189}\)

In the 1880s, the general English public did not accept Whitman’s poetry, but commended Stanford’s miraculous treatment of it. The *Cork Constitution* reported after the festival that, “The ode, which is written to a poem by Walt Whitman…is certainly a most curious choice to make in the way of a libretto…Mr. Stanford has, however, caught the poet’s humour, and reproduced it in his music with excellent effect, and has in this, his latest work, added other laurels to his steadily rising fame.”\(^{190}\) Included in the article were excerpts of Whitman’s text, organized to highlight two qualities of it. First, the critic made an effort to showcase the differing lengths of line, and the parallel use of Death at the end of the line. The second excerpt the critic provided clarified

---

\(^{190}\) Anonymous, “Norwich Musical Festival,” *Cork Constitution* (October 18, 1884).
the parallel use of the word “over,” and, given the restricted column width, presented the stanza as if it were prose, cementing in the reader’s mind that the words were clearly not ordered, rhymed, and formulaic.

A more descriptive critique of the work was provided by the *Illustrated London News*:

> Although the prevailing tone is, necessarily, somber, there is yet much contrast of style, and a sustaining interest that precludes any feeling of weariness, the work not being unduly prolonged. The vocal writing is highly effective, both in its solo and its choral details, and the orchestral accompaniments are rich in contrast and colour.\(^{191}\)

The work was enthusiastically praised, and the author wished that it would soon see performance in London. The endorsement of Stanford, whose other works would see continual performance, and his numerous accolades, aided the growing “cult of Whitman.”

An author for *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, for instance, wrote that:

> There are some who look upon Whitman as a poet of genius, while others regard him as a little better than a lunatic. It is not our duty now to discuss this question, but we must say that it is long since we met with anything more eccentric than the words which Dr. Stanford has selected for treatment in his Ode…This may be poetry, but to ourselves we confess it is more like incoherent maundering. Leaving on one side the question of its poetical merit, we are bound to allow that the words are well suited for musical illustration, and to add that the composer has taken full advantage of the opportunity they offered him.\(^{192}\)

There should be no doubt that Stanford’s compositional prowess overshadowed the gruesomeness of Whitman’s text. Following the performance of the ode in the 184\(^{th}\) concert of the Cambridge Music Society on March 13\(^{th}\), 1885, a review in the *Athenaeum* did not have much to comment on that had not already been said in reviews of its performance at Norwich. Again though, the author makes note of the strangeness of the text choice.

> The composer, strange though it may seem, has evidently been inspired by Walt Whitman’s curious rhapsody, the setting of which is, we are inclined to think, the best thing that has hitherto come from his pen…the whole work is singularly interesting, alike

---

from its spontaneous freshness of melody and the masterly manner in which the details are executed.\textsuperscript{193}

At the turn of the century, however, the “cult of Whitman” would prove to be at the forefront of new musical ideas in England. Because Stanford was rapidly becoming a cultural authority in composition, and oversaw an important teaching position, his students eventually set Whitman as well.

\textbf{Analysis}

Stanford’s ode, coming out of the fledgling English musical tradition steeped in a strong declaration to create a decidedly original, national music by searching back to Tudor-era counterpoint, religious music, and folk music and in a heavily Germanic tradition, should then show some of these characteristics in his music. One point of comparison for Stanford’s \textit{Elegiac Ode} could be the textual themes. Dibble notes “Stanford’s attraction to Whitman’s poem was unquestionably encouraged by the free nature and sweep of the author’s prose…one suspects that the visionary tenor of the text had much in common with the \textit{ewiger Klarheit} [eternal clarity] of Hölderlin’s verse used by Brahms in \textit{Das Schicksalslied}…a work Stanford greatly admired.”\textsuperscript{194} Hölderlin’s text was far more explicit in its appeal to religious constructs, but Whitman’s was far more subdued, hidden by symbols (See table 2 for textual comparison).

The text for the “Death Carol” abandons much of its overt religiosity. Rather than using specific descriptions of heaven, Whitman’s verse centered on animating death and appealing to a naturalistic view of death, surrounding her with images of nature, contemporaneous life, and the whole of the universe. The Death Carol, contained within section fourteen of the poem, is

\textsuperscript{193} W. B. S. “Cambridge University Musical Society,” \textit{The Athenaeum}, no. 2993 (Mar. 21, 1885), 385.
\textsuperscript{194} Dibble, \textit{Charles Villiers Stanford}, 159.
### TABLE 2: TEXTUAL COMPARISONS BETWEEN HÖDERLIN AND WHITMAN.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friedrich Hölderlin – trans. Edwin Evans</th>
<th>Walt Whitman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ye wander gladly in light</td>
<td>Come, lovely and soothing Death,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the day, in the night, to all, to each,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sooner or later, delicate Death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through goodly mansions, dwellers in Spiritland!</td>
<td>Prais’d be the fathomless universe,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luminous heaven-breezes</td>
<td>For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touching you soft,</td>
<td>curious;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like as fingers when skillfully</td>
<td>And for love, sweet love—But praise! praise! praise!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakening harp-strings.</td>
<td>For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearlessly, like the slumbering</td>
<td>Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant, abide the Beatified;</td>
<td>Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pure retained,</td>
<td>Then I chant it for thee—I glorify thee above all;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like unopened blossoms,</td>
<td>I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>come unalteringly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flowering ever,</td>
<td>Approach, strong Deliveress!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyful their soul</td>
<td>When it is so—when thou hast taken them, I joyously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And their heavenly vision</td>
<td>sing the dead,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted with placid</td>
<td>Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never-ceasing clearness.</td>
<td>Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To us is allotted</td>
<td>From me to thee glad serenades,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No restful haven to find;</td>
<td>Dances for thee I propose, saluting thee—adornments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and feastings for thee;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And the sights of the open landscape, and the high-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>spread sky, are fitting,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>night.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They falter, they perish,</td>
<td>The night, in silence, under many a star;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor suffering mortals</td>
<td>The ocean shore, and the husky whispering wave,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blindly as moment</td>
<td>whose voice I know;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows to moment,</td>
<td>And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veil’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Death,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like water from mountain to mountain impelled,</td>
<td>Over the tree-tops I float thee a song!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destined to disappearance below.</td>
<td>Over the rising and sinking waves—over the myriad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fields, and the prairies wide;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Over the dense-pack’d cities all, and the teeming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wharves and ways,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee, O Death!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

precluded by the tangible knowledge of death on one side of the poet, and the thought of death on the other. The three hold hands as they walk down away from the “the cloud […] the long
black trail” to the shores to hear the “gray-brown bird” sing the carol. Literary scholar James E. Miller Jr. analyzed the symbolism within this passage: the bird represents the Sancta Spirita (Soul), the cloud symbolizes Satan and defiance, comrade represents the thought of death, thought/insight represent the knowledge of death, and love: the remembrance of the dead. In the passage before the carol, then, the poet leaves the cloud with all his thoughts and feelings about the dead, and the three of them flee from hell towards the Holy Spirit. The joining of hands with the two companions symbolizes the truth and reconciliation of death, explicit in the second stanza of the carol. The bird presents death paradoxically as a “dark mother […] strong deliveress,” bestowing a spiritual life to the dead. By section 15, the thrush’s song gives the poet “long panoramas of visions,” in which he sees that the dead are at peace, but the living are restless. The poet loosens his grip on the hands of his comrades in section 16 as the poet accepts death.

Town associates Whitman’s text to Tennyson’s In Memoriam. The powerful symbolism found in both texts could have been yet another point comparison. Since Stanford’s Symphony No. 2 “Elegiac” (1882) was dedicated to his late father, it is likely, then, that the Elegiac Ode is another musical offering to his father’s memory. If the ode is another offering, then the differences between the two works must be called into question. The use of Walt Whitman’s mournful poetry, combined with a pronounced use of chromatic ornaments offers a strikingly different take than his second symphony. The musicologist Byron Adams lamented the sterile setting of Stanford’s “genteel post-Mendelssohnian choral composition,” noting, “the effect of Stanford’s technical assurance is to expurgate all the life and urgency from the poetry with music

196 Ibid., 116.
197 Ibid., 117.
198 Town, An Imperishable Heritage, 93.
just as Rossetti’s bowdlerized editions of *Leaves of Grass* vitiated Whitman’s verbal power."\(^{199}\)

It is true that Stanford likely drew inspiration from Mendelssohn and Brahms, but the work is far removed from any of Stanford’s technical, diatonic writing. Consider the opening sixteen measures of the ode: mm. 3-7 (Example 1) contain a sequence involving diminished triads and diminished sevenths, interjected by powerful, open octaves.


![Example 1: Diminished Sequences](image)

The sequential motion of harsh dissonances offers no respite for the listener. Mm. 9-13 presents a new sequence, rescored in mm. 14-18 (Example 2). Similar dissonances are missing from the introduction of Stanford’s symphony no. 2 (1882).


The ode is in four-movements: 1) chorus, 2) baritone solo, 3) soprano solo with chorus, and 4) a final chorus. The work begins in D minor, hammering out a hollow octave-A which sticks out from the texture in every measure to emphasize the dominant. The pedal tone (A1 and A2) underpins the remaining harmonic and melodic motion, resounding no less than two measures apart from each other. Dibble describes the opening orchestral prelude before the chorus as “a microcosm of the main tonal events of the larger structure with its references to the submediant (B♭), the subdominant (G), and the Neapolitan (Eb).”

Stanford purposely evaded any cadence on D during this instrumental introduction. It is not until the end of the instrumental introduction that the music arrives at a strong D minor harmony. Furthermore, Dibble identifies the horn theme found in mm. 21-24 as particular of “the most Brahmsian of instruments […] was

---

200 Ibid.
transformed by the glowing sonority of the opening chorus in the tonic major and given meaning by the first line of Whitman’s text.”

By m.45, the horn melody is passed into the strings and woodwinds in its newly developed formed, providing a tumultuous motion underneath the chorus. Fuller Maitland believed that this theme, found in both the first and last movements, as well as the coda, was unknowingly quoted from Brahms’s Violin Concerto. This is incorrect on several accounts. First, Fuller Maitland believed both the ode and concerto both premiered in Cambridge, on March 13, 1885; on the program was Joachim’s Violin Concerto No. 2 that was featured. Brahms’s concerto was first heard in Cambridge in 1882, and Stanford’s ode was first heard in 1884. Dibbèle argues that the first movement can be heard in terms of an overarching ternary structure, informed by the horn melody’s closing of the first and third parts. A more accurate portrayal, perhaps, can be seen below.

Figure 1. Form of Movement One.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental Intro</th>
<th>Verse 1</th>
<th>Verse 2 (maestoso)</th>
<th>Verse 2 (lento)</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-44</td>
<td>45-95</td>
<td>96-192</td>
<td>193-222</td>
<td>223-228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dibbèle believes still more connections between Stanford and Brahms can be made: “The two choral movements draw much in terms of their organic cohesion, baroque austerity, and harmonic richness from the examples of Brahms’s Requiem, *Das Schicksalslied*, and *Der Gesang der Parzen*. Not only is there a similarity between Stanford’s choice of poetry, there are also parallels to melodic and harmonic character, as well as the overall mood. The two rhythms prevalent throughout the first movement are the quarter-note triplets found in every

---

201 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
section except the *maestoso* and coda, and the dotted-eighth and sixteenth note rhythm found only in the *maestoso*. Town, however, compares the *maestoso* section to Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang* with its constantly looping rhythms.\(^{205}\) The *maestoso* section is in the key of B♭ major resonating with each entrance of the text “Praised.” As it moves into line seven of the text, “And for love, sweet love—But Praise! Praise! Praise!” Stanford stitches together differing combinations of words, keeping it far more static than Whitman originally wrote. The effect enhances the parallelism in the poem, reiterating the words life, love, joy, and praise, until the harmonies move back around to D major at *lento* with the text “For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.” This also marks the return of the triplet rhythms so prevalent in the introduction and first verse.

In contrast to the lush, sweeping melodies and background, with the declarative voices of the first movement, the baritone solo in the second movement is far more sweeping, cast against a tumultuous undercurrent. The movement begins in B♭ major, as anticipated by the introduction. In this movement, Dibble believes that the “6/4 chord in restoration of the tonic,” alongside numerous climax points, showcases even some Wagnerian aspects of the music.\(^{206}\) There are frequent tonal shifts, extensive chromaticism, and startling arrivals where the musical veil is lifted to reveal a new contrasting section. Town describes the orchestration as “delightfully chamber-like, but subsequently it becomes powerfully full and robust.”\(^{207}\) After the small six measure phrase in the dominant marking the midpoint of the movement, the tonal scheme unwinds through G♭ major and A♭ minor before finally making its way back to the tonic of B♭ major. The baritone solo does not end in the tonic, however. As the movement unwinds from the

\(^{205}\) Town, *An Imperishable Heritage*, 91.


\(^{207}\) Town, *An Imperishable Heritage*, 98.
energy generation by the final iterations of “O Death!” it ends on a dominant seventh to prepare for the arrival of the next movement.

Figure 2. Form of Movement Two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse 3</th>
<th>Verse 4</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-18 tonic + 19-40 dominant</td>
<td>41-47 dominant + 48-76 trans. 77-107 tonic</td>
<td>108-126</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The third movement, marked *Andante grazioso*, opens in the dominant of G major for a small introduction. The soprano soloist is accompanied by a women’s choir of soprano, alto I, and alto II. The movement is organized by the creation of a melody in the solo voice and its subsequent repetition in the chorus. This is then followed by a harmonization by the chorus where it loses its original character. The movement opens with a twenty-one measure introduction, utilizing rapid upward motion via sextuplets. The movement features some of the most original scoring in the composition, emphasizing the harp, emphasis of the cymbals (to be hit with a drumstick) and triangle. The first two lines of the verse are repeated to emphasize the text “adornments and feastings, dances for thee,” highlighting the dance-like movements. The last six measures in E♭ major flow into the subsequent movement, following the same pattern as the previous movement.

Figure 3. Form of Movement Three.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental Intro</th>
<th>Phrase 1</th>
<th>Phrase 2</th>
<th>Phrase 1’</th>
<th>Coda</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-21</td>
<td>22-42</td>
<td>43-66</td>
<td>67-88</td>
<td>89-111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last movement in E♭ opens with the same tumultuous triplet undertow juxtaposed with open homophony in the chorus. Town notes that movement explores substantial harmonic motion within the first half of the movement; in the seventh verse the fugal writing takes over as it moves to D major. Development of the small subject generates a surprising amount of music in this section. Afterwards, the thirty measure instrumental section recalls themes found in the

---

first movement and provides much slower harmonic motion than the previous sections. The ode closes with twelve measure refrain of the first line, “Come, lovely and soothing death.” The effect is enhanced by the omission of “O death” in the last line, such that the suspense from the carol until the final iteration of death is prolonged. Furthermore, the absence of the direct object in the last line gives yet more credence to Town’s suspicion that the *Elegiac Ode* was for his late father. With the absence of death, his father would be the one receiving the carol with joy. Critics were less receptive to this movement; the *Cambridge Review* believed the soprano solo was “somewhat unelegiac,” though, not uncharacteristic of the text.

Figure 4. Form of Movement Four.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse 6</th>
<th>Interlude</th>
<th>Verse 7</th>
<th>Coda + Refrain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-45</td>
<td>46-62</td>
<td>63-197</td>
<td>198-243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stanford’s *Elegiac Ode* was the catalyst for the creation of a musical “cult of Whitman.” From his work, many of Stanford’s students would follow in his wake, including Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, and Charles Wood. By the turn of the century, assessments of Whitman’s poetry as obtuse or eccentric were dropped from newspapers. In the newspaper review following the Reading Festival Concert of April 1907, no mention is made of Whitman, other than as a source. Still, Stanford was hailed as a master of counterpoint and orchestral tone painting. Dibble describes the ode as, “one of Stanford’s most imaginative choral works and merits revival.”209 Stanford had no quips about musical borrowing, even going so far as to praise those that engage other’s compositions in his treatise. He believed that “too many students are afraid, from a natural desire to be original, to copy the examples which the great composers provide; but if they wish to get at the root of the methods in which their predecessors successfully worked, they must make up their minds to do so.”210 Stanford strongly advocated

---

that others, as he had, should utilize the frameworks of master composers. That Stanford would, as Town and Dibble described, willingly or unconsciously pattern the ode after Wagner, Mendelssohn, and Brahms is proof of his adherence to this belief.  

**CONCLUSIONS**

Whitman’s poetry dealt with themes of love and death in a positive light, with “plenty of apostrophes to the “soul,”” a convenient new name for God that satisfied both Christian and agnostic. Moreover, his metrically free verse patterns [...] were a gift to composers who wanted to make a rhetorical impact in their declamation.” Composers made use of these traits to set his “war poetry;” both the atheistic Delius and pantheistic Holst would find such rhetorical elements desirable Delius and Michael Tippett found solace in Whitman’s method of organizing even the smallest lines and symbols into a larger design. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Frank Butcher, Rutland Boughton, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Cyril Scott, Havergal Brian, and the migrant Philip Dalmas also tried their hand at setting Whitman’s poems. Even performers felt a certain connection to Whitman’s poems. William Stone, the baritone soloist in Robert Shaw’s recording of Hindemith’s *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d* said that he and other musicians regarded Whitman’s poetry as particularly musical; it was flexible in rhyme, form, and rhythm.

Even a decade after Stanford’s first setting, the literary climate of England underwent a profound shift. Critics no longer discussed the obtuseness of Whitman’s poetry. Perhaps heavily rigid rhyme and form were no longer relevant after his death, but those in the “cult of Whitman,”

---

211 Paul Rodmell, too, believed Stanford to be predisposed to the Germanic music climate, but also an undoubtedless Anglo-Irish identity that permeated his works as an uncompromising “moodiness.” Paul Rodmell, *Charles Villiers Stanford* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).
212 Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 27.
213 Sullivan, *New World Symphonies*, 97. Tippett referred to America as “my dream country” after his first encounter with the poetry.
214 Ibid.
including Oscar Wilde, used it as a ground to support themselves. It is unfortunate that so many of these early settings never maintained a relevance in the music climate. The people who would wanted to purchase domestic music, the lower middle class, exhibited conservative tastes into the twentieth century. On the other hand, the audiences who attended larger productions like the Stanford were perhaps the same audiences who grew to be receptive to Whitman.

Much like the poetry of the American Walt Whitman, musical settings did not find purchase in the lower classes. These settings were instead developed by a select intellectual class. The growth of an intellectual class, separate from an aristocratic class formed the perfect catalyst for the first settings of Whitman. Following the Great War, Whitman’s settings did not gain strong momentum as a new class of British war poets emerged – it was more favorable to set one’s own countrymen. These poets, mostly lower class, became the equivalent of Whitman in England.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Labilliere, Francis Peter de. *Federal Britain; or, Unity and Federation of the Empire*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1894.


“Norwich Musical Festival.” *Cork Constitution*, October 18, 1884.


——. My Captain. London: Elkin, 1904.


Cecil Sharp Correspondence, Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, London

SHA-07-0787-8


LOC. 01960 – John Addington Symonds to Walt Whitman, 7 October 1871.
LOC. 01961 – John Addington Symonds to Walt Whitman, 7 February 1872.
LOC. 05769 – Anne t Gilchrist to Walt Whitman, 26 October 1884.
Office of Research Integrity

September 7, 2016

Jacob Bird
2632 Washington Blvd.
Huntington, WV 25705

Dear Mr. Bird:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled “Musical Representations of Walt Whitman’s Poetry in Victorian England.” After assessing the abstract, it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction, it is not considered a human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided, then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director
APPENDIX B: SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

Appendix B.1 – Selections from preface to Whitman’s 1855 *Leaves of Grass*

“The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem”

“But the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors…but always most in the common people”

“The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people. To him the other continents arrive as contributions…he gives them reception for their sake and his own sake. His spirit responds to his country's spirit…he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes.”

“Of all nations the United States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets and will doubtless have the greatest and use them the greatest.”

“Whatever stagnates in the flat of custom or obedience or legislation he [the great poet] never stagnates”

“The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else and is in the soul. The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight. The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form. The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems or music or orations or recitations are not independent but dependent.”

“The American bards shall be marked for generosity and affection and for encouraging competitors…”

“The American bard shall delineate no class of persons nor one or two out of the strata of interests nor love most nor truth most nor the soul most nor the body most . . . . and not be for the eastern states more than the western or the northern states more than the southern.”

Appendix B.2 – Whitman’s “Many in One”

Any period, one nation must lead,
One land must be the promise and reliance of the future.

These States are the ampest poem,
Here is not merely a nation, but a teeming nation of nations,
Here the doings of men correspond with the broadcast doings of the day and night,

Here is what moves in magnificent masses, carelessly faithful of particulars,
Here are the roughs, beards, friendliness, combativeness, the soul loves,
Here the flowing trains, here the crowds, equality, diversity, the soul loves.

Race of races, and bards to corroborate!
Wondrous the English language, language of live men,
Language of ensemble, powerful language of resistance
Language of a proud and melancholy stock, and of all who aspire,
Language of growth, faith, self-esteem, rudeness…
Language to well-nigh express the inexpressible,
Language for the modern language for America.