

‘OUR TRUE NORTH’: WALTON’S FIRST SYMPHONY, SIBELIANISM, AND THE NATIONALIZATION OF MODERNISM IN ENGLAND

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DURING THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY of Walton’s death in 2008 it is unlikely that he will be widely celebrated by musicologists as a central figure in English or European musical modernism. Despite a promising start (the adjective is loaded with modernist-teleological aesthetic urgency) with the unruly *Façade* (1922–9), the conservatively modern Viola Concerto (1928–9), *Belshazzar’s Feast* (1930–1), and at least the first three movements of his First Symphony (1931–5), his career is generally felt to have stalled in the mid-1930s. Starting roughly with his Elgarian coronation march *Crown Imperial* (1937) and the Violin Concerto (1936–9) Walton took a more comprehensively conservative turn, resulting in the lush, reactionary, Italianate opera *Troilus and Cressida* (1947–54) and the emotionally indulgent Cello Concerto (1955–6), among other late works. Although it is possible to enjoy his later music, it seems clear that during the 1930s something occurred—perhaps nothing more complicated to grasp than his increasing separation from the ultra-modern Sitwells, with whom he had lodged for over a decade—to deflect him from any recognizably modern approach to musical language and form. He is disqualified from the club of composers whose works can justifiably figure in the narrative of music history.

One indicator of this problem is that Richard Taruskin can find no space for him even in his distinctive narrative of the twentieth century.¹ Taruskin privileges accessibility over progressiveness, indeed anathematizing almost all modernism that does not originate somehow in Russia. If a composer as accessible as Walton, and as prominent in twentieth-century British music for at least a few decades, cannot find his way into so accommodating a narrative, he is suffering from a critical problem. One explanation for this omission, however, could be that Taruskin’s meta-narrative, a welcome counterbalance to the prevailing twentieth-century one, is nevertheless distorted by a cold-war understanding of history. To Taruskin the long-standing twentieth-century total hegemony of America and Russia seems to elevate those nations to a pan-modern historical significance that is projected backwards over the nineteenth century and held in force artistically, as if as a pendant to their military clout, through his reading of the twentieth.

Walton’s music may not arrest listeners with the ‘shock of the new’, but shocking an audience is not the same as making an intelligent and progressive artistic statement.

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¹ Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols. (New York, 2005), vol. 5.

As composers like Sibelius, Nielsen, Strauss, and Elgar continue to be examined as early modernists, our definition of what makes music modernist will continue to be reformed.² Typically these recent assessments of musical modernism locate the source of the music's progressiveness and its intellectual engagement with the broader modernist project in the arts in the music's *form* rather than just its sounding surface. Although the latter will always appear the more obvious indicator of modernism, especially to the general listener—just as Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* will always seem to indicate it in literature—it is by no means clear that the prevalent critical diagnosis of musical modernism is a genuine aesthetic observation and not simply a coded statement of the belief that people who consider Sibelius modern do so simply because they are too aurally conservative to tolerate Webern.

Although it is bootless to suggest that Walton was a modernist in the way that composers of the preceding generation had been, there is nevertheless an important sense in which his place in musical (and indeed socio-political) history is both characteristic of his time and usefully considered alongside the literary development of writers like Eliot and Woolf as an outgrowth of that earlier modernism.

This essay opens up literary and artistic contexts that bear on Walton's position, and by associating the artistic zeitgeist that its reading outlines with the philosophical vision for the arts offered by what seem to me Heidegger's similarly motivated (and contemporary) writings on art, it connects artistic style and technique with social, political, and ethical concerns. At the same time as it tentatively offers a new assessment of Walton's position in the general cultural and intellectual climate of his times, it suggests a revision of current understandings of the English nationalist movement in twentieth-century music, and one of the many important streams in general music history of the last century.

SIBELIANISM OF FORM AND CONTENT

Walton's First Symphony is a special case in this development and historical contribution. It had two premieres: the first three movements were given in December 1934, and the complete work, with the fugue-infused finale, in November 1935.³ The critical response was that it was a Sibelian work, and for that reason a great modern symphony. The reasons for this are not obscure. Sibelius was the post-war influence of choice for British composers.⁴ Writing in the *Musical Times* in March 1935, between the two premieres of the symphony, G. D. Skelton summed up the prevailing English

² Among these contributions, see Daniel M. Grimley, 'Modernism and Closure: Nielsen's Fifth Symphony', *Musical Quarterly*, 86 (2002), 149–73; id. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius* (Cambridge, 2004), id. and Julian Rushton (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. xix, 253; David Fanning, *Nielsen: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge, 1997); James A. Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge, 1993); id., 'Sibelius', in D. Kern Holoman (ed.), *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony* (New York, 1997), 417–49; id., 'Elgar', *ibid.* 327–44; id., 'Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero? Strauss's *Don Juan* Reinvestigated', in Bryan Gilliam (ed.), *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and His Work* (Durham, NC, 1992), 135–75, id., 'Framing *Till Eulenspiegel*', *19th-Century Music*, 30 (2006–7), 4–43; and J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist* (Cambridge and New York, 2006).

³ The first three movements of the work were given in a concert on 3 Dec. 1934, the complete work, whose finale had given Walton labour pains, on 6 Nov. 1935. On the gestation of the symphony and its premieres, see Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Walton* (Oxford, 1989), 71–86.

⁴ In a BBC interview on 24 Sept. 1965 Walton said 'the great figure of the time was of course Sibelius. He was the great symphonic writer. And one couldn't help but know all his symphonies very well, because every concert one went to one or the other of his symphonies was being played.' British Library Sound Archive recording, 'Sir William Walton: His First Symphony'. From BBC Information and Archives, BBC Sound Archive. Original archive reference: MY2 LP34332. Lending copy reference: CDA34332. I am grateful to Michael Byde for providing a transcription of this interview.

attitude: ‘To the question “Who is the greatest living composer?” a German would probably reply “Richard Strauss”, and an Englishman probably “Sibelius”.’ He notes that the Nazis had of course banned the Jewish Mahler.⁵

Following the success of Sibelius’s visits to England in 1905, 1912, and 1921, and the simultaneous waning of Elgar’s popularity during that period, there was space for a new idol. Peter Franklin trenchantly suggests that ‘Sibelius left England on 30 October 1912 almost as an honorary member of its musical avant-garde’, and that ‘his position as a leading “British” modern would hold firm against contestation for nearly thirty years.’⁶ This strange north European miscegenation was, as Franklin demonstrates, a cultural adoption ‘as much in writing as in sympathetic performances’,⁷ and the chief soldiers in this pro-Sibelian critical vanguard were two of Walton’s most influential and sympathetic friends, Cecil Gray and Constant Lambert.⁸

He met both of them during his time with the Sitwells, the influential family of writers and salonnières, in the 1920s. Walton was a largely self-taught composer, albeit one with ample opportunity for musical exploration in his youth.⁹ It was inevitable that put in close proximity to respected critics with tongues that could slit throats at fifty paces he was bound to absorb their views on modern music, and on Sibelius they spoke with one voice.

Although Lambert’s *Music Ho!* of 1934 is by no means intended solely as a paean to Sibelius, the Finn is held up as the standard by which all other composers should be judged—the symphonic master-craftsman who can offer convincing answers to the problems of the modern symphony, and at the same time show up the shoddy work of Stravinsky and the Schoenbergians.¹⁰ That Sibelius seemed to have effectively given up composition by the time he was adopted this way in England adds to the sense that the pro-Sibelian movement in British music was already a nostalgic phenomenon—a fact that I shall develop later.

Walton was not alone in toeing the Lambert line: Arnold Bax and Ralph Vaughan Williams, for instance, dedicated their Fifth Symphonies to Sibelius (1932 and 1943 respectively, the latter ‘without permission’).¹¹ It was inevitable that Walton’s symphonic music would be judged—in England at any rate—in an essentially post-Sibelian context, and it was because of the 1929 Viola Concerto’s perceived debt to Sibelius that,

⁵ G. D. Skelton, ‘Musical Fashions in Germany’, *Musical Times*, 76 (1935), 220–1 at 220.

⁶ Peter Franklin, ‘Sibelius in Britain’, in Grimley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, 182–95 at 187.

⁷ *Ibid.* 189.

⁸ Walton had no close relationships with the other great English Sibelians of his time, Henry Wood (with whom he had a basic professional rapport), Granville Bantock, and Rosa Newmarch. Other important contemporary reception includes Karl Ekman, *Jean Sibelius: His Life and Personality* (London, 1934); Rosa Newmarch, *Jean Sibelius: A Short Story of a Long Friendship* (Boston, 1939); Bengt de Törne, *Sibelius: A Close-Up* (London, 1937); Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis*, ii, iii, and vi (London, 1935–9).

⁹ He was a chorister at Christ Church Cathedral School in Oxford and then progressed to Christ Church, Oxford itself—for six terms only, after which he was sent down—to study towards a BA in Music.

¹⁰ Constant Lambert, *Music Ho!: A Study of Music in Decline* (3rd edn., Harmondsworth, 1948; orig. edn. 1934). In his antagonism to Schoenberg and Stravinsky, Lambert is a mirror of the views of the even more gushing Olin Downes, the *New York Times* music critic who helped establish Sibelius in America in a broadly similar context as the continuer of the Beethoven–Brahms line. His interpretation was powerful enough to have provoked a sustained reaction in the United States; it is sensitively explored in Glenda Dawn Goss, *Jean Sibelius and Olin Downes: Music, Friendship, Criticism* (Boston, 1995).

¹¹ On the dedication of Vaughan Williams’s Fifth Symphony, see Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (2nd edn., London, 1980; orig. edn. 1964), 262.

at the time he was finishing his First Symphony, Walton found himself ranked by Lambert among 'the most vital minds of the present generation'.¹²

But before Lambert set pen to paper, Cecil Gray had already written two remarkable and still frequently cited books on Sibelius, in which he held up the composer not just as the great hope of modern music, but also as the greatest symphonist since Beethoven—this through a carefully tendentious definition that identifies Sibelian fingerprints, calls them echt-symphonic, and then analyses Sibelius's music, inevitably finding these ideal symphonic elements, and remarking as if discovering something by marvellous accident on Sibelius's fitness for the task of symphonic composition.¹³ If Walton was the great Sibelian that Lambert insisted, it would be because he wrote in a style that borrowed techniques identified at the time as Sibelian.

It is difficult to believe that Walton would not have come into contact with the ideas developed in these books, published in 1931 and 1934, by the time he wrote the symphony. Indeed during this period Gray was one of Walton's musical confidants; the composer showed him drafts of the First Symphony's slow movement at least, and their discussion seems to have played a part in Walton's decision to remove an ill-fitting reference at its heart to the material of the preceding scherzo.¹⁴

At the risk of oversimplifying the critical reading of Sibelius in the 1920s and 1930s, and therefore the kind of answers critics would look for to the problem of the symphony in a modernist style, one can say that early commentators on Sibelius's symphonies tended to focus on its seemingly organic mode of development. Gray wrote of the Second Symphony that

The internal organization of the movements reveals many important innovations, amounting at times, and particularly in the first movement, to a veritable revolution, and to the introduction of an entirely new principle into symphonic form. The nature of this revolution can be best described by saying that whereas in the symphony of Sibelius's predecessors the thematic material is generally introduced in an exposition, taken to pieces, dissected, and analysed in a development section, Sibelius in the first movement of the Second Symphony inverts the process, introducing thematic fragments in the exposition, building them up into an organic whole in the development section, then dispersing and dissolving the material back into its primary constituents in a brief recapitulation. Furthermore, the convention of first and second subjects or groups of subjects is abandoned; in this movement one can detect several distinct groups of thematic germs none of which can claim the right to be regarded as the most important.¹⁵

Writing more recently, James Hepokoski has fitted out this old interpretation with more ergonomic intellectual furniture by developing a means of discussing early modernist symphonic form, largely in the music of Sibelius, which gives it a clearer definition alongside the tradition of sonata-form composition. One of the most important of his observations in the context of Walton's Sibelian technique in this symphony is his suggestion that Sibelius composes deformed sonata forms based on rotational

¹² Lambert, *Music Ho!*, 239. Explicitly or implicitly, throughout his career critics tended to compare Walton's latest work to the Viola Concerto. It became a nagging touchstone, which may largely explain Walton's later reluctance to allow the performance of new works until he was satisfied that they would not—or at least not immediately—be damned by comparison with it (see Kennedy, *Portrait*, 286). That Walton welcomed adverse criticism of his work, however, is evidenced by a reminiscence of Cecil Gray's, quoted in Kennedy, *Portrait*, 73.

¹³ See Cecil Gray, *Sibelius* (2nd edn., London, 1934; orig. edn. 1931), and id., *Sibelius: The Symphonies* (London, 1935).

¹⁴ See Kennedy, *Portrait*, 72.

¹⁵ Gray, *Sibelius*, 134–5.

treatment of his material. That is to say that musical material is recycled or ‘rotated’ in several iterations during a movement. The original material may be reordered or expanded, or it may be rotated in much the same order each time. The arrival of each new rotation may, and often does, coincide with a traditional formal boundary, like the beginning of the development or recapitulation.¹⁶

In fact on this definition ‘rotation’ is a fundamental design feature of much sonata composition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and can even be detected here and there in Baroque ritornello forms: there is nothing very obviously ‘modern’ about it. As with other of Hepokoski’s ‘sonata deformations’, it seems such a common component of even quite early nineteenth-century sonata forms that it might better be considered a ‘sonata accessory’, not a ‘sonata deformation’. Where Hepokoski’s notion is more useful, and more localized to Sibelius’s music, is his suggestion that the essential outcome of the rotation process—and this is also what Gray has in mind in the quotation given above—is that themes *evolve* as the rotations unfold. Germinal ideas are regurgitated for more rumination before disappearing back into the stomach of each rotation, and it is only at the end of a movement, or even of a work, that the real thematic goal of the piece, the *telos*, is attained. In a sense this is an adaptation of Beethoven’s late presentation of the ‘real’ idea of the first movement of the ‘Eroica’, the D_♭-less rocking motion between tonic and dominant in the coda. But the Sibelian rotational form works this goal-directedness more essentially into the form as a generative process. We shall see this method of teleological genesis operating in Walton’s First Symphony.

The other component of the Sibelian style that blends with this ruminative mode of composition is what Hepokoski, following Dahlhaus, calls his ‘*Klang*-meditation’. As Hepokoski notes in his study of Sibelius’s Fifth Symphony, the structural use of the *Klang*, here meaning a principal focal sonority, as pervasive as a background flavour, is not unique to that composer, ‘but when coupled with the high focus associated with . . . ever-deepening rotations or meditations, and teleological genesis, *Klang* emerges as an especially prominent musical factor’.¹⁷ There is little doubt that Walton’s use of *Klang* in the First Symphony—in which it is perhaps the most striking structural feature, alongside the first-movement pedal points—is a conscious essay in the Sibelian method, but its roots in nineteenth-century representations of nature are carried over as a significant vestige. Carl Dahlhaus summarizes this tradition:

Almost all the outstanding [nineteenth-century] musical renditions of nature—the Forest Murmurs from *Siegfried*, the Nile scene from *Aida*, or the riverbank scene from Gounod’s *Mireille*—follow a principle that was driven to extremes in modern art music, even serving as the basis for entire works: the sound-sheet, or *Klangfläche*, outwardly static but inwardly in constant motion. Regardless of whether the scene is a bucolic idyll or a thunderstorm (like the

¹⁶ He makes especially fruitful use of this theory in Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony No. 5*. See also Warren Darcy, ‘Rotational Form, Teleological Genesis, and Fantasy-Projection in the Slow Movement of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony’, *19th-Century Music*, 25 (2001–2), 49–74, and Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, chs. 3 and 4, for applications of this model to other early modernist music.

¹⁷ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony No. 5*, 28. He also makes use of the idea of *Klang*, rotation, and teleological genesis, in other more recent studies of Sibelius (and others): on Sibelius see Hepokoski, ‘The Essence of Sibelius: Creation Myths and Rotational Cycles in *Luonnotar*’, in Glenda Dawn Goss (ed.), *The Sibelius Companion* (Westport, Conn., 1996), 121–46; ‘*Finlandia* Awakens’, in Grimley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius*, 61–94; ‘Rotations, Sketches, and the Sixth Symphony’, in Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomaki (eds.), *Sibelius Studies* (Cambridge, 2001), 322–51; ‘Sibelius’ in Holoman (ed.), *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony*; and ‘Sibelius, Jean’ in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Laura Macy <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>.

Prelude to Act I of *Die Walküre*), the music remains riveted to the spot motivically and harmonically, no matter how gentle or violent its rhythmic motion. To put it another way, a musical depiction of nature is almost always defined negatively, by being excluded from the imperative of organic development which, at least in the mainstream of compositional history, dominated the thematic and motivic structure of nineteenth-century music as well as its harmonic schemes. The *Klangfläche* conveys a landscape because it is exempted both from the principle of teleological progression and from the rule of musical texture which nineteenth-century musical theorists referred to . . . as ‘thematic–motivic manipulation’, taking Beethoven’s development sections as their *locus classicus*. As Hegel would have put it, musical landscapes arise less from direct tone-painting than from ‘definite negation’ of the character of musical form as a process . . . Without their internal motion, the *Klangflächen* would not stand in dialectical contradiction to the temporal structure of the music but would merely sound dull and lifeless. This internal motion, however, derives not only from the rhythmic patterns underlying the arpeggiated chords but also from a device connected with the handling of dissonance: the unresolved nonharmonic tone.¹⁸

A *Klang* is established at the opening of Walton’s symphony and projected across the work as a basic form-generating device with—a surprising addition, maybe—an ethical component that emerges when the ‘unresolved nonharmonic tone’ is reined in by the frank B₃ major of the finale. Rather than straightforwardly developing thematic material in the traditional manner, meditation on the *Klang* is bound up with the rotational plan, in line with the Sibelian model. Walton’s referential sonority is chewed over and restated at important structural moments, and the form of the piece is dictated in large part by the slow modifications to the *Klang* that point up the unfolding of the musical landscape. In constructing a symphony around the rotational rumination on a *Klang* Walton fixes his sights on Sibelius, but he does so with a critical mind and an urge to bend the model to his own aesthetic ends.

WALTON’S COMPASS

In a short article called ‘Music as Art’, published in 1931, William Walton argued that to listen too unreflectively to criticism of old styles of musical composition in an age of great experimentation is ‘to play upon our inferiority complexes, and to deflect us from our true north’.¹⁹ Great music, he says, remains great and valuable as a model for contemporary composition even if its vocabulary has become unfashionable, because its artistic successes cannot be invalidated by changes of fashion.

As I have noted, after the Second World War, Walton’s music ceased to be considered a vital engagement with modern musical trends. Since then it has seemed somehow aesthetically significant that he ensconced himself on Ischia, an island near Capri in the Bay of Naples, far from the musical world of London (or anywhere else), and produced increasingly Romantic works at the very slowest drip.²⁰ As a consequence, the conservative opinions in ‘Music as Art’ neatly fit our picture of the man, and it perhaps need not worry us that they were not written by Walton at all. Michael Kennedy points out that this article, one of a series on different subjects, was by a writer (call him the ‘pseudo-Walton’) who by chance had the same name as the composer. The periodicals’ editors never acknowledged the confusion bound to follow from publication of these essays, but in

¹⁸ Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley and London, 1989; orig. edn. 1980), 307.

¹⁹ William Walton [pseudo-Walton], ‘Music as Art’, *The Sackbut*, 12 (1931), 25–6 at 25.

²⁰ Michael Kennedy offers a sensitive rejection of these prejudices in Kennedy, *Portrait*, 280–9.

1977, when Stewart Craggs's catalogue of Walton's output was published,²¹ the composer protested that he had had nothing to do with the articles. 'I have never written an article of any kind ever... I should perhaps be ashamed to admit it, but I was (for that matter still am) incapable of putting pen to paper in a coherent way.'²²

Walton may not have been the author of this article, but he can certainly be associated with its sentiments. Again, though, this is for aesthetic reasons that are not so obvious as today's instinctive critical response might suggest. Walton was not an unthinking conservative, aloof from musical life in mid-century because he found it tiresomely unattractive. On the contrary, he made no secret of a fondness for Schoenberg's music.²³ Though he made no further inroads into mainstream modernism than an accommodation into his style of aspects of Stravinsky and the Schoenberg of *Pierrot lunaire*, in his youth he had enjoyed wearing the label of *enfant terrible* as the composer of *Façade* (premiered in its first version in 1923) and, the work immediately preceding it, a post-tonal string quartet (1919–22), which was played at the inaugural festival in Salzburg (1923) of the International Society for Contemporary Music alongside Berg's String Quartet and Bartók's Second Violin Sonata. Berg liked the quartet, and on the strength of it introduced Walton to Schoenberg. Walton's association with Berg and Schoenberg did not grow, but the fact that they met is suggestive.²⁴ As we have seen, it was only from the late 1930s that Walton's music took a more obviously conservative turn, inviting predictably negative critical judgements.

For over a century now the basic critical attitude of music critics and musicologists has often shown signs of uncritical acceptance of the doctrines of modernism. I have no interest in dismantling this attitude, but will point out that opposition of 'progressive' and 'conservative' obscures some of the subtleties in individual composers' response to musical and political change. Walton's period of compositional maturity, which for simplicity's sake we can date from the writing of the Viola Concerto (1928–9) to the *Variations on a Theme by Hindemith* (1962–3), overlapped—as no twentieth-century composer's life could fail to do—with seismic musical and political shifts, not least in England. The fact that relatively few of those years of compositional maturity came before the 'conservative turn' in Walton's music does not indicate any diminishing of ability or ambition after the composer started to distance himself from the Sitwells in the early 1930s. Instead, it sets him and his oeuvre in a recognizable stream in English modernism in art and literature. The pseudo-Walton's reference to the authentic touchstone of 'our true north' is, furthermore, of great relevance to an understanding of this stream. Walton's later music only seems atavistic and irrelevant

²¹ Stewart R. Craggs, *William Walton: A Thematic Catalogue of his Musical Works* (London and New York, 1977).

²² Kennedy, *Portrait*, 62–3. Walton also said that 'his' article on Frank Bridge had been 'disagreeable and malicious', and had made a later meeting between them noticeably awkward (*ibid.*).

²³ He included Schoenberg's *Variations* among his choices for his interview on the BBC's 'Desert Island Discs' in 1965 (the full list of this, and his second interview in 1982, is given in Susanna Walton, *William Walton: Behind the Façade* (Oxford, 1988), 239). In an interview with Hans Keller, published in 1966, he was asked 'if you were woken up in the middle of the night, to name the five most important 20th century composers, whom would you name?', and answered 'Debussy, Schoenberg, Stravinsky—after that it becomes difficult... I suppose Sibelius in a kind of way, and Mahler. If I'd been asked for seven I would have added Hindemith and Britten.' See 'Contemporary Music: Its Problems and its Future: Sir William Walton and Hans Keller', *Composer*, 20 (1966), 2–4 at 4.

²⁴ Writing to his OUP publisher Hubert Foss in 1932, Walton described this sequence of events in a way that seems to acknowledge both his respect for Schoenberg and his knowledge that his own later compositions would be likely to disappoint: 'Although not too popular a work in England, nevertheless [the String Quartet] excited the interest of the great Alban Berg, who took the shy & nervous young composer to see the even greater Arnold Scho[e]nberg... who gave the little brute his blessing (luckily he has not to the composer[']s knowledge heard any of his late compositions)' (William Walton, *The Selected Letters of William Walton*, ed. Malcolm Hayes (London, 2002), 76).

because—as a result of the modernist critical attitude—insufficient attention is paid to developments outside the central sphere of modernism as generally understood in musical terms. Its aesthetic proclivities might be seen to parallel those of the other arts.

MYTH AND RETREAT

In the period between the end of the First and Second World Wars an aesthetic and ethical divide existed in English art, tied symbolically (and often physically) to geography in such a way that the idea amounted to what Michael Saler calls the ‘myth of the North’.²⁵ Before the first war, Leeds had been the de facto modern-art capital of England, home to the Leeds Art Club, the influential *Sunday Times* critic and curator of the Leeds City Art Gallery, Frank Rutter (1876–1937), and the important collection of Michael E. Sadler (1888–1943, then Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University). The North seemed attractive to visual artists because of its harsh visual clash between the beauty of the countryside on the one hand and the ugliness of modern technology and its slag heaps on the other. This influence worked in two directions: while the ‘organic’ sculptors Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore (both born in Yorkshire) were attracted to the contrast between nature and technology (Moore said that his desire to sculpt in the open air and relate his work to the landscape was a result of his Yorkshire youth),²⁶ the Vorticist painters Edward Wadsworth (born in Yorkshire) and Frederick Etchells (born in Newcastle) were attracted by the ‘dynamism of machines and factories’.²⁷ For Eric Ravilious too, the north of England was a steady focus for self-discovery and a well-spring of his individuality, a wasteland whose spaces were sites for future possibilities, as well as markers of decay.²⁸

A small group of northern modernists, as well as parts of the media, often associated visual art with the provincial North (in a definition that included the Midlands) whose ‘popular’ or ‘artisanal’ traditions distinguished it from the ‘traditional’, ‘elitist’, and ‘cosmopolitan’ South²⁹—a South that had, of course, given Walton the *enfant terrible* his grounding and first success. The association was probably encouraged by the modernist aesthetic itself,³⁰ but possibly also developed from a view of Ruskin’s, expressed in 1884: ‘All great art, in the great times of art, is provincial, showing its energy in the capital, but educated . . . in its own country town. . . . Further, the tendency to centralization, which has been fatal to art in all times, is at this time, pernicious in a totally unprecedented degree.’³¹ The distinctive Englishness of ‘Northern’ art was seen to be proof against the ‘homogeneous’ popular and mass cultures of the inter-war South, and so for a time (until the end of the Second World War) ‘North’ came to mean the same, artistically, as ‘nation’. Although its geographic focus was different, we shall see that a similar motion affected modernism in literature.

²⁵ Michael Saler, ‘Making It New: Visual Modernism and the “Myth of the North” in Interwar England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 47 (1998), 419–40.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 425.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ See Peter Davidson, *The Idea of North* (London, 2005), 101–9.

²⁹ Saler, ‘The “Myth of the North”’, 420.

³⁰ It is commonplace to consider an assault on populism and a contempt for the masses to be the heart of modernism, and the integration of high and low art forms to be a defining feature of postmodernism: see e.g. Lawrence Rainey, ‘The Cultural Economy of Modernism’, in Michael Levenson (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (Cambridge, 1999), 33–69 at 34.

³¹ Cited in Saler, ‘The “Myth of the North”’, 421.

This view of the North was always a myth because, as Saler notes, Leeds was unusual in having public support for modern art. In addition, there and elsewhere the enthusiasm of vocal individuals had the effect of exaggerating the real love of modern art in the North. Artists had good reason to suggest that they were part of a vibrant local tradition, of course, but the myth had a broader appeal because at a time of great political and social uncertainty it dealt with issues concerning national identity.³²

Arguments played on familiar national and gender stereotypes. The influential notion of ‘significant form’, first coined in Clive Bell’s *Art*³³ but picked up by Roger Fry and Herbert Read, stated that form, not content, was the principal aesthetic quality of a work of art. This ‘was widely decried as being French rather than English, as it emphasized disinterested contemplation rather than social utility and evinced an aristocratic disdain for the people in its arcane formal vocabulary, which focused on a work’s “plastic” and “volumetric” aspects rather than its ethical import’.³⁴ The ethical focus on the utilitarian function of art, in an age of rapidly diminishing national wealth, was a principal concern of a countervailing group of English critics.

Fry’s aesthetic developments tended to be gendered as well as attributed to the traditional national enemy. The Arts and Crafts movement of which he was a member till 1910—a morally upright tradition, grounded in the Church of England—was defined as ‘constructive’, ‘architectonic’, and ‘purposive’, designations ‘all connoting the male domain of enterprise and instrumental rationality’.³⁵ When he left his job as Curator of Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Fry returned to England to make the abrupt switch to Post-Impressionism on which his reputation as a modernist rests. This tradition was considered ‘spontaneous’, ‘primitive’, and ‘childlike’, all feminine attributes.

The value of criticizing Fry was that it enabled the definition of art as formally constituted and autonomous (a modern attitude) to be associated with non-Englishness (especially Frenchness) and implied sexual deviancy—no small concern in a country that still remembered the Wilde trials. Contrarily, the Northern modernism which stressed artisanal production and masculine, utilitarian works, could be viewed as the authentically English movement. ‘Significant form’ was acceptable, but only if that form was fit for ‘design, advertising, and other utilitarian functions’.³⁶

By constructing a positive interpretation of England’s insularity, late modernism in art in the 1930s traced a course parallel to that in literature, from the high modernism of Joyce, James, Eliot, and Woolf to a literature that makes the authentic cultural unity of England a central theme. In *A Shrinking Island*, Jed Esty takes the unusual step of associating the late works of Eliot and Woolf with writers as diverse as J. R. R. Tolkien, the economist J. M. Keynes, and the Birmingham school of cultural studies, to demonstrate a continuity between literary modernism and the romantic nationalism that followed.³⁷ His intention is to offer a post-colonial reading of late modernism, the

³² Ibid. 426–7.

³³ Clive Bell, *Art* (London, 1914).

³⁴ Saler, ‘The “Myth of the North”’, 429.

³⁵ Ibid. 435.

³⁶ Ibid. With England at the centre of a dissolving empire, and the ‘destructive’ forces of European modernism perhaps seeming an obvious (if veiled) political target, the explosion of watery post-Herderianism in the school of English Pastoral composition seems a predictable response. This would also support the notion that Walton’s movement from ‘European’ experiment to the satisfying and established French-bashing provided by writing the score for Olivier’s *Henry V* (1943–4), along with other more or less nationalist films, was not motivated entirely by general urgencies of war but applied a maxim: modernist autonomy bad, national service good.

³⁷ Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, 2004).

argument being that in the throes of imperial decay England's imperializing tendency and discourse was focused inward by an 'anthropological turn'. He writes that 'the anthropological turn names the discursive process by which English intellectuals translated the end of empire into a resurgent concept of national culture—one whose insular integrity seemed to mitigate some of modernism's characteristic social agonies while rendering obsolete some of modernism's defining aesthetic techniques'.³⁸ Among these techniques is the pervasive irony that Edward Said interprets, in typically paradoxical fashion, both as a critique of empire and as a 'formal correlate' to it.³⁹ In summary, Esty's claim is that modernist literature concerns itself with the relationship between the imperial metropolis and its colonial periphery, and that in developing a different focus late-modernist writers were turning their attention away from imperial cohesion towards the need for social cohesion at home. That is to say that the early work of Eliot and Woolf is about empire and the later work is not.

Indeed Esty associates empire very directly with modernism, suggesting that the social problems and changes that had influenced the artistic movement saw a quasi-pandemic in the destruction of Europe:

For some influential English writers, the end of empire entailed a metaphorical repair of the social divides that had conditioned modernism's aesthetics of failure and fragmentation. Working backward, then, we can identify imperialism's place in the modernist imaginary as both a floating symbol and a material predicate of lost cultural wholeness.⁴⁰

He admits that this reading relies on Said's insistence on the

'cultural integrity of empire', reminding us that good theoretical or historical work cannot divorce the effects of imperialism in the colonies from its effects in the center, nor can it separate colonial power from European high culture. With this in mind, we must recognize imperialism as a significant context even for modernist works that seem insulated from imperial concerns.⁴¹

The problem with this premiss, obvious to anyone but a post-colonial theorist, is that it prevents Esty from making his claim for an 'empire-to-nation' progression in literature—which makes things difficult, since such is his fundamental argument. If one asserts the 'cultural integrity of empire' one is prevented from asserting that a work of late-modernist literature that *seems not* to be concerned with empire *is not* concerned with empire. According to the rules of the Saidian game, a work of literature that has no *ostensible* imperial theme ('seem[s] insulated' from imperialism) in fact must have a *concealed* imperial theme (have imperialism as 'a significant context').

Once we have moved beyond Said's paradox, however, the value of Esty's observations becomes plain. His 'anthropological turn' can be defined in terms of a spiritual move from Bloomsbury to a wider nation, from cosmopolitanism to parochialism—from South to North, in terms of the myth current in contemporary art criticism. The 1930s were genuinely a period that saw the country's international influence shrinking, hence Esty's title. Even if (early) modernist literature was not fundamentally about

³⁸ Ibid. 2.

³⁹ Ibid. 30.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 5–6.

⁴¹ Ibid. 6.

empire, Esty persuades when writing that ‘with the engines of imperial (and industrial) expansion sputtering in the thirties, England was recoded, or seen to metamorphose, from a Hegelian subject of world-historical development to a Herderian object of its own insular history’.⁴²

According to Esty’s view, what distinguished the progression to insularity in late-modernist literature from the similar move in art was that there was no Northern set of writers who produced art in a different tradition from the Southern set. Rather, the Southern set simply changed tack. In a move anticipating the full-blown fantasy writing that typified the mid-century writing of Orwell, Golding, Tolkien, and others, Eliot and Woolf, to name just two modernist writers, began to dream in their work about a fantastic, rural, Christian England. It is a fantasy North that, Peter Davidson suggests, held W. H. Auden in its grip. Davidson expands on Christopher Isherwood’s view that the North was ‘the essence of early Auden’, noting that even when away from England the North of England remained Auden’s ‘idea of the paradisaic landscape’.⁴³

Esty identifies this fantasy England in works such as Eliot’s *Four Quartets* (1935–42) and Woolf’s last novel, *Between the Acts* (published posthumously in 1941). In the latter he discusses the use made of the then popular ‘pageant play’, an anachronistic neo-traditional dramatic genre (also of interest to Eliot and E. M. Forster) that romanticized rural England.⁴⁴

Modernist interest in folk-dramatic forms no doubt reflects at some level the need to establish alternative public ceremonies to the corporatist rituals of fascist Europe (and to mass cultural forms at home), but this renewed interest in native and Anglocentric rituals also takes shape within the broader logic of the anthropological turn. For the modernists in the 1930s, appropriation of the genre’s tribal solidarity provides an occasion to explore English cultural integrity at the end of empire.⁴⁵

In Woolf’s last novel the pageant play is used as a central theme, albeit in a presentation that is considerably ambiguated. In an unusual but illuminating reading, Esty suggests that Woolf sees in the motion towards nationalism—which the pageant play focuses especially well—the death of the modernist project:

As the novel vividly suggests, national tradition could easily sponsor stultifying ideologies and mob aesthetics—effects that threaten to curb liberal freedom and bring to ground the ‘suspended beauty’ of modernist art. On the other hand, the ritual invocation of national tradition seems to pose a meaningful shared history against the social fragmentation of the metropolis and against the social marginalization of modernism.⁴⁶

If the fragmentation of modernism saw hope in the possibility of a new social cohesion during the 1930s, then as the war unfolded and passed the vision had to be considerably narrowed in ambition. To this end Esty compares Eliot’s *Four Quartets* to Tolkien’s ideal vision of ‘the Shire’, which Esty takes to be a representation of the ideal England in *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–5). In Tolkien’s

⁴² Ibid. 16. Esty’s conflation of ‘England’ and ‘Britain’ is especially confusing when he is talking about the empire.

⁴³ Davidson, *The Idea of North*, 84–109, quotations at 85 and 100.

⁴⁴ Forster wrote two pageant plays, *Abinger Pageant* (1934) and *England’s Pleasant Land* (1938), while Eliot wrote one, *The Rock* (1934).

⁴⁵ Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 17.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 107.

myth the English are no longer empire-builders, or even a nation with an intention of having a voice in world politics. The vision proposed now is simply a

timeless, rural England: a country shire, plenty of food, artisanal production, stable social relations, a commonly felt sense of tribal belonging, the warm comforts of ale, roasts, and tobacco after dinner. But as this list suggests, we are talking about a deliberately modest and homely brand of myth making. . . . In this sense, Tolkien's hobbits offer a distilled and historically apt version of little England's self-image on the eve of the Second World War. . . . In Tolkien as in Eliot, realistic and romantic elements converge in a discourse that manages to both reenchant England and recover its ordinariness.⁴⁷

Re-enchantment and ordinariness are important themes in the philosophy of Heidegger: they both tie in with exactly the kind of personal and national authenticity that is the centre of his ethics, and which Esty sees as the ultimate ethical ambition of this literary offshoot of modernism. This same ethical concern can also be read into the development of Walton's music from the mid-1930s.

REPETITION, PRESERVATION, AND WORLD

Walton moved in modernist circles in art and literature in the 1920s and early 1930s: by virtue of his residence with the Sitwells he met T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound at least.⁴⁸ Like Eliot and Woolf, Walton began his career as a conventional modernist before taking a conservative, or as Esty would say an 'anthropological', turn. Certainly the ironies of *Façade* and post-tonalism of his early, suppressed string quartet prefaced a transition to what can be construed as an 'anti-London' or 'anti-cosmopolitan'—certainly un-Schoenbergian—mode for his works after the mid-1930s. The First Symphony turns out on examination to be an interesting focus of this change of aesthetic, with the process almost being acted out *during* the symphony itself.

Although Walton was a Northerner by birth, the careful humiliation that characterizes the outsider's treatment in an exclusive English prep school ensured that in contrast to Northern artists of a younger generation, such as David Hockney and Alan Bennett, Walton did not emphasize his Northern origins as an important element of his personal and artistic character. The 'true north' of the pseudo-Walton and the 'myth of the North' that motivated art criticism in the same period cannot therefore be straightforwardly mapped onto Walton's regional identity. But the serendipitous English musical interest in the (differently) Northern Sibelius—the honorary Englishman who could function as a politically safer, non-German influence, perhaps—together with what can be shown to be Walton's shift towards a kind of English national composition that differs from that of Vaughan Williams, for example, lends the image of the North a useful metonymic resonance.

In Heidegger's terms, what occurred in the 'myth of the North' and the 'anthropological turn' was that late-modernist artists and writers 'repeated' and 'preserved' their authentic community traditions. 'Repetition' and 'preservation' are given typically new and challenging definitions by Heidegger, and in the sense in which he intended them we shall see that Walton did both. First, however, the context of the development of

⁴⁷ Ibid. 122. What he does not say is that this vision of social, conversational Englishness is also distinctively middle class. To the extent that it does not care for the multitude it also remains modernist.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, *Portrait*, 19. Before joining the Sitwells, he had even shared a house in Oxford with another of Esty's exemplars, Tolkien. See J. R. R. Tolkien, *Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (London, 1981), 95.

Heidegger's ideas must be sketched, since it may have a profound impact on our final understanding of Walton's symphony.

In the 1930s Heidegger envisaged German regeneration (an important part of the 'repetition' and 'preservation' I discuss below) along *völkisch* lines that were then popular, and to which the 'blood and soil' rhetoric of the Nazis also appealed. This has quite understandably led to concerns that Heidegger's philosophy—at least of this period, and perhaps in all periods—is tainted with totalitarianism. Of particular concern is his suggestion, in 'The Origin of the Work of Art', that new human community may be established by an artwork on a massive scale (a definition he associates with Ancient Greece, where he considers that art was a more communal and political experience), namely the founding of a state. In *The Politics of Being*, Richard Wolin takes this as confirmation of Heidegger's desire to establish a new leadership with 'violence as an ontological imperative': community-formation from above, with Hitler as artist of a new human society.⁴⁹ He is mistaken, if only because Heidegger's habit of radically redefining commonly used words puts him in a position of danger.

Heidegger uses the word 'polis' in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* in a way that Wolin finds implicitly totalitarian, and which seems to confirm Hitler as poet, thinker, and maker of supermen. But Heidegger explicitly says that although *polis* is usually translated as city or city-state, it means most fundamentally in his usage 'place', the 'Da' of Dasein, meaning simply the place where the human kind of being is located. Community for Heidegger operates first and most powerfully on the smallest scale, and the founding of states, even by artistic 'creators', is a later and lesser stage. As Julian Young observes in his intricate exploration of Heidegger's politics, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism*,

Heidegger has in fact an anti-statist conception of politics. Far from denying the autonomy of civil society Heidegger's sole political concern is with the preservation and vitalisation of civil society. Politics . . . comes into play only after authentic community has already come into being independently of the activity or existence of any state. The business of the 'state creator' is the 'completion (*Erwirkung*) through the state of the existence of a people as a people'.⁵⁰

It is this building-up of community from the bottom that I believe is part of Walton's artistic project, not a totalitarian imposition of community from above. Yet even if Heidegger's thought cannot convincingly be wedded with fascist ideology, some readers of Walton's symphony may find something of this (probably forever unshakeable) darkness adding menace to the finale. I shall not expand upon potential sinister meanings later, but acknowledge here their possible validity for those who hear a boot stamping on a human face forever in the huge cadences of the finale. For either my interpretation or a darker one to open its wings, however, a firm link must be made between Walton's adoption of Sibelian method, late-modernism in art and literature, and the mechanisms by which the retrenchment that Walton's musical language partly represents can be construed in terms more subtle than simply as 'a return to the past'. For the latter point Heidegger's thoughts on 'repetition' and 'preservation' must be examined.

The subtlety of Heidegger's use of 'repetition' springs from his use of the two principal senses of the German verb *wiederholen*. In its first sense, 'to repeat, replay, resit' or

⁴⁹ Richard Wolin, *The Politics of Being: The Political Thought of Martin Heidegger* (New York and Oxford, 1990), 123.

⁵⁰ Julian Young, *Heidegger, Philosophy, Nazism* (Cambridge, 1997), 125.

retake [an exam, etc.], the verb is structurally inseparable: sentences cannot be constructed in the form *holen . . . wieder*. The second sense, the separable form that allows such constructions, means ‘to fetch or get back’. Repetition is basic to the project of *Being and Time* for two reasons: first, because Heidegger thinks we need to ‘get back’ an understanding of being that has been lost since the Ancient Greeks, and second, because for an individual Dasein in the process of projecting its own authentic existence it is necessary both to ‘repeat or replay’ past possibilities that Dasein’s historical and temporal situation provides and to ‘get back’ an understanding of its ownmost nature from the obscuring herdishness of *das Man*. This is ‘the They’ or ‘the One’ in such expressions as ‘I’ll get married, despite being a homosexual, because *they* want me to, or *one* expects it’. For Dasein repetition is an imaginative reuse of existing possibilities for ways of being, which allows the individual to reclaim its own self from the stultifying muddle of social convention.⁵¹

‘Preservation’ is in part an application of ‘repetition’ to art, made by Heidegger in his essay ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, the last of three versions of which was written in 1936, making it contemporary with the artistic and literary movements discussed above, and Walton’s First Symphony (premiered 1935).⁵² He defines ‘preservation’ in a way which establishes it at the heart of his ethics:

Preserving the work [of art] means: standing within the openness of beings that happens in the work. This ‘standing-within’ of preservation, however, is a knowing. Yet knowing does not consist in mere information and notions about something. He who truly knows what is, knows what he wills to do in the midst of what is.⁵³

Although the language is less terse than in *Being and Time*, it still requires unpicking. The ‘openness of beings’ (which he also calls simply ‘the open’) is an image of a clearing, as it were in a dense forest, that art establishes as a site of a particular kind of revelation. Our ‘world’ is generally inconspicuous to us: we cannot see the wood for the trees. It is the framework of a particular set of understandings; Heidegger uses the word in the figurative sense we do when we speak of ‘the world of pigeon racing’. We are not aware of a world’s shaping of our understanding. In Heidegger’s (over-)familiar analysis of van Gogh’s *A Pair of Shoes* the ‘world’ of the peasant who wears the shoes discloses them to him or her as ‘equipment’: the shoes seem in that ‘world’ to be merely useful things for going about work. To the painting’s viewer, though, the shoes are a revelation of the struggling life of the owner: in the ‘world’ of art the shoes appear differently and mean (and say) different things. They are in a sense ‘re-enchanted’, wrested from their ordinary everyday meaning into a more richly suggestive one.

We all understand our world or worlds fundamentally, in the same way that we understand the meaning of words in the context of what Wittgenstein calls ‘language games’. We understand the world of reading enough to interpret the markings of newsprint; we understand the world of cutlery enough to eat bacon and eggs, and so on. But generally that understanding is ‘invisible’ to us, ‘covered up’: ‘world is never an object that stands before us and can be seen’ in the way that ordinary entities are seen.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford, 1962; orig. edn. 1927), §1 for repetition and the ‘question of being’; §71 on repetition as ‘the temporal meaning of Dasein’s everydayness’, and §§25–7 on the relationship between Dasein and the community of ‘the They’.

⁵² Martin Heidegger, ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. and trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, 1971), 15–86.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 65.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 43.

Being itself is 'hidden' from us in large part. Help is at hand, though, since artworks (including works of philosophy like *Being and Time*) 'thematize' the world and make its nature a foreground issue that we cannot overlook. The 'openness of being' is thus the 'space' in artworks where the lights come brightly on to show us the stage rigging in our constructed world, whatever that world is, so that 'the world announces itself'.⁵⁵ As well as being heuristically useful, particularly in a critique of cancerous intellectual traditions like poststructuralism, which have been internalized as an intellectual analogue to the experientially transparent 'automatic pilot' that characterizes the physical memory of drivers or performers, such 'opening up' serves an ethical function too.

Heidegger's second main point, that 'he who truly knows what is, knows what he wills to do in the midst of what is', emerges from the assertion that 'the openness of beings . . . is a knowing'. The kind of knowing that it entails is an ontological knowing, a knowledge of the nature of things that gets hidden away by a particular 'world' view (such as the view of the peasant's shoes from the world of the peasant). This knowing is an ethical knowing too, and ontology and ethics are consequently shown to be the same thing, because the kind of knowledge that shows an individual what is true about a thing—and that thing might be a human being, or a human society—when it is allowed to speak on its own terms, rather than being prejudged from a particular world view, is inevitably the kind of knowledge that leads to informed decisions on practical action. Without this kind of knowledge, being is as much covered up as it is disclosed, as much hidden as seen.

The world that modernism discloses is dissociating, its own tensions tearing it apart. In it the strength of human bonds is seen to break down and their geographic reach becomes drastically circumscribed. The world that late modernism discloses contains all the same elements but the interpretation is different, more positive. Small reach means greater cohesion. Fragmentation means cultural distinctiveness, and authentic community. (We see this understanding, incidentally, in modern British ideas of 'multi-culturalism', which attempt to maintain both fragmentary distinctiveness within ethnic groups and cultural cohesion among them.) The world disclosed by the early modernists is an *ethically* different one from that disclosed by the late modernists, and Walton's symphony: the late-modernist world is governed by national, not international, rules.

THE ETHICAL COMPONENT OF LATE-MODERNIST AESTHETICS

In the next section I interpret Walton's rotational form and teleological genesis as symbols of Heidegger's repetition and preservation respectively, but the meaning of these symbols depends on their relationship to late-modernist art generally, and to the function that Heidegger considers all art to have. The effect of Walton's appropriation and late-modernist refraction of certain of Sibelius's structural techniques is closely bound up with the implications of this philosophy.

In the 'Epilogue' to 'The Origin', Heidegger locates his philosophy alongside Hegel's thesis of the 'death of art'.⁵⁶ He suggests that the tradition of aesthetics smothers art because it locates the worth and function of art purely in experience. 'Experience is the source that is standard not only for art appreciation and enjoyment, but also artistic creation. Everything is an experience. Yet perhaps experience is the element in which

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 105. For *Being and Time's* treatment of similar themes, see §16, 'How the Worldly Character of the Environment Announces itself in Entities Within-the-world'.

⁵⁶ Heidegger, 'The Origin', 77–9. This was written at an unknown time between the original essay and the 1956 'Addendum' that follows (pp. 81–6).

art dies. The dying occurs so slowly that it takes a few centuries.⁵⁷ That many can still appreciate Handel's music but not Machaut's seems to suggest that as art the latter has lost interest. This view of art as bearer of experience rather than truth is what motivated Hegel to complain that

Art no longer counts for us as the highest manner in which truth obtains existence for itself.

One may well hope that art will continue to advance and perfect itself, but its form has ceased to be the highest need of the spirit.

In all these relationships art is and remains for us, on the side of its highest vocation, something past.⁵⁸

Heidegger is not bound to Hegel's belief that history never repeats one of its own earlier stages, so he is free to believe that although the modern age (defined as all history since the Ancient Greeks) is 'artless' it is possible that art could return at a later stage. Writing in the 1930s it appeared to Heidegger that the return of art as a bearer of world-changing truth was the most needful thing for humankind—the 'highest need of the spirit', in Hegel's words.⁵⁹

Early modernism was never uncertain about the present state of human existence. Its sagacious relationship to human history is summed up by the artistically sensitive historian Eric Hobsbawm's observation that modernism had 'anticipated the actual breakdown of liberal-bourgeois society by several years'.⁶⁰ In the terms I have outlined for it, the new nationalism of late modernism predicted the levelling-off process in Europe, the neat ethnic parcelling of land and nations, which Tony Judt describes with cynical levity as 'Hitler's most enduring contribution to European social history'.⁶¹ The comfortable, unostentatious view of England that writers like Tolkien and Eliot propose—and which in twentieth-century British music we see everywhere—has become unfashionable, with Europe culturally and racially intermingled once more, drawing in peoples from further afield than ever before, in numerical terms at least. Even high-profile terrorism in the modern West does not yet, perhaps, portend looming catastrophe in the way that, for the early modernists, the political and financial malaises of the *fin de siècle* had done—but one should not confidently aver that art and history will not re-enter the life cycle of the phoenix where they were a hundred years ago.

In the 1930s art, literature, music, and philosophies such as Heidegger's shared a common vision of the function of art, such that in late modernism we see the return of its 'Greek function' actually taking place. This lends late-modernist art an ethical and historic function to compare with its more highly prized forebear, less exciting perhaps simply because a proclamation of deflated ambition is by its nature less thrilling than the stronger sentiments of anger, despair, and huge ambition. How does Walton's music, and particularly his First Symphony, enrich this picture? The answer lies in his interpretation of the semiotics of Sibelian sound-sheets, the examination of which we can now undertake.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 77.

⁵⁸ Georg Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesung über die Ästhetik*, cited *ibid.* 78.

⁵⁹ See above on the political resonances of thoughts like this.

⁶⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London, 1994), 178. See Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (London, 1987), 219–42 for a brilliant and vivid assessment of the world-historic contribution of the arts in the earlier period.

⁶¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2007; orig. edn., 2005), 36.

TABLE 1. *Walton, First Symphony, first movement, rotational analysis*

	Rotation	Material	Motifs	Bars
Exposition	R1 (a)	P	1–6	1–75
	R1 (b1)	TR1	2–4, 7, 8–11	76–142
	R1 (b2)	S	12–13	143–66
		TR2	2–3, 1, 8–9	167–98
		S	12	199–208
		S2	14, 12, 9, 7	209–47 ²
Development	R2 (a)	P	3, 4	247 ³ –68
	R2 (b)	S2	12, 14, 7, 10	269–372
		TR1	9, 7, 12–13	373–432
		TR2	8–9, 5, 1, 3	433–82
Recapitulation	R3 (a)	P	2, 4	483–518
	R3 (b)	TR	9–10, 2	519–66
		S2	14, 9, 12	567–626
Coda	R4	P	2–4, 1	627–70

P = primary material; TR = transitional material; S = secondary material. Italicized motifs indicate that the material is an intrusion from another section.

ROTATION AND TELEOLOGICAL GENESIS IN THE FIRST SYMPHONY

Table 1 shows a rotational analysis of the first movement of Walton's First Symphony. The exposition unfolds in three motions. A seventy-five-bar opening establishes the *Klang* whose developing role in the work focuses its ethical statement, and also introduces several of the most important motifs, some of which are given in Ex. 1. The primary material is marked 'P', and the opening rotational section R1 (a). The second identifiable chunk, containing both transitional material (TR) and secondary material (S), unfolds in two stages, marked (b1) and (b2). The development and recapitulation rotate through the same material in the same basic order, before a brief, incomplete rotation in the coda. Very gradually the thematic material gains strength and solidifies, but at the same time begins a gradual metamorphosis that we shall trace later throughout the symphony.

Example 2 is a middleground graph of the opening twenty-nine bars of the symphony. The famous opening of timpani rolls and a rising motif on the horns, B \flat –F–G–A \flat , are shown on the graph. Together they establish the *Klang*, an enriched tonic sonority with a flattened seventh (Dahlhaus's 'unresolved nonharmonic tone') that will form the basic referential sonority of the movement—made more or less intense as the movement progresses, and finally purified to the open fifths of the close. Motifs 3 and 4 establish the melodic D \flat that functions as the *Kopfton* of the movement, through neighbouring and descending motion. Already the work's parameters are set. However prickly the rhythms may be, this movement is composed of essentially static melodic material encircling a sonority that the opening bars lodge in our aural memory. Example 3 shows the prolongation of this *Klang* and the motion towards the first significant change of sonority at bar 76, the beginning of the rotation's second phase.

One of Walton's principal tools in maintaining focus on the *Klang* is his heavy dependence on pedal points. This is striking, even on the most cursory glance through the score, as he admitted in 1965: 'Basically if you look at it you find it's more or less tonic

Ex. 5. Walton, First Symphony, first movement, middleground graph of bb. 433–504

433 465 479 482 483 504

V	♭9 ♭7 5 ♯3	♭9 ♭7 ♭6 ♭4 ♭3	♭9 ♭7 5 ♭4 ♯3	♭9 ♭7 ♭6 5 ♯3	I	♭7 5 ♭3
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Hymn' of the finale can be imagined *in nuce* as a counterpoint to the banal theme of the slow movement, it operates too at the level of the entire work.⁶³ It is here that Walton's Sibelian credentials shine out even more strongly than in his ruminative rotational structuring. In fact he takes the method of teleological genesis perhaps further than his model. Far from being an obscurely *Crown Imperial* addition to the end of an otherwise successfully modernist symphony, the finale is an entirely logical outcome of the teleological procedures of the work, and one that ties in with another of Gray's opinions on Sibelius.

Gray writes, of the finale of the Second Symphony, that

in these days of cynicism and disillusion it is of course the fashion to sneer at the convention of the 'happy ending', of which the orthodox symphonic finale is the musical equivalent, and it is certainly true that most modern attempts to conform to it ring hollow and insincere. . . . The fact remains that it is a weakness and a deficiency in us, and there is something of sour grapes in the contemporary attitude towards those artists of an earlier generation who have achieved the state of spiritual serenity, optimism, and repose which makes it possible for them to conclude a work convincingly in this manner.⁶⁴

From our historical remove it is difficult to conceive of how an inter-war writer could hold such views. Had not a generation recently been slaughtered like cattle? A more plausible reading, which does not obscure Walton's debt to Sibelius in the finale, is one that weds it to the late-modernist project in art and literature, rather than implying that Walton's greatness as a symphonist is due merely to his resistance to

⁶³ Hepokoski, *Sibelius, Symphony No. 5*, 26–9, 60, 64–6, 69, 73, 78–84.

⁶⁴ Gray, *Sibelius*, 137.

'sour grapes'. What is critical for this more substantial interpretation is to see how the work ends, and why it does so in that way.

Example 6 shows a segmentational analysis of important themes in Walton's symphony, aligned vertically according to motivic similarity. Towards the end of the first-movement exposition, Walton introduces an important new thematic variation on the basic rising third that opens up the *Klang* at the beginning, marked (a). This new idea, evolution (e), combines the rising third, marked motif 1 in Ex. 6, and the neighbouring motion, motif 2, of evolution (c). The characteristic rhythmic shape of its opening rising third will from this point be omnipresent in the work. It is not too much to say that the entire thematic progression of the work, transacted by rotational rumination on its material, is to open up the *Klang*'s rising third into a rising fourth, transforming its principal motif from an 'incomplete modernist' to a 'complete late-modernist' one. It does this by distinct stages in each movement. The first step in the second movement is to expand the third to an augmented fourth, marked as motif 4. This is shown in evolutions (f)–(h) in Ex. 6. The first thematic idea (f) is derived from the bass line of bars 12–13 of the first movement and the *Klang*'s rising third. At first, the augmented fourth is reached from above after a skip of a third—this basic shape will become increasingly important—but thereafter is just given in a simple rising pattern.

In the slow movement, the opening rising third is elaborated first in an oboe countermelody to the clarinet idea beginning at bar 19 (evolution (i)). This is then gradually expanded into a rising perfect fourth, marked motif 5. Note its similarity, with the approach from the higher neighbour, to evolution (f). Evolutions (j) and (k) are intensifications that come to prepare the recapitulation at bar 76 and the return of this movement's simple unison C# *Klang* at bar 131 respectively. In these two forms, the upper neighbour is given particular emphasis, and the switch from the augmented to the perfect fourth is therefore spotlighted.

By the end of the movement a stable form of the rising fourth motif has been achieved, though the result is not tonal closure but stagnant wallowing in the *Klang*. It is in the hermeneutically problematic finale that the potential of this fourth is used for structural resolution. At the movement's opening the rising fourth, motif 5, is given in its characteristic *Crown Imperial* guise as evolution (m). Soon thereafter, in motif (n), the rising-third component is heard in a reinterpreted fourth-movement form as a falling third, with the upper-neighbour now therefore becoming complete.

The development section was the part that gave Walton most trouble,⁶⁵ and his failure to complete it caused the first three movements to be premiered first—and hence generated the critical problem that has dogged the work ever since. Yet what is demonstrated by evolutions (o) and (p)—the fugue subject and its combination, at the movement's almost comically vamped moment of arrival on the structural dominant, with the triumphant falling motif 2—is that the fugue theme is actually bound up, albeit obliquely, with the work's triumphant progress.

The work thus arrives on a powerful structural dominant whose rhetorical weight is even greater than that of the one so carefully prepared by the finicky pedal points of the first movement. Only the moment of apotheosis and final resolution remains to be heard, and for that Walton makes his most obvious Sibelian borrowing. The conclusion of Sibelius's Fifth Symphony—its self-conscious tonic cadence in E \flat after the teleological version of the 'Swan Hymn' has been reached, with its alternating E \flat s and

⁶⁵ See Kennedy, *Portrait*, 73–7. As Kennedy notes, completion of the finale was also prevented in summer 1934 by the writing of music for the film *Escape Me Never* (p. 76).

B \flat s—is too uniquely audacious a conclusion not to pass off as one's own idea, so Walton more or less steals it wholesale. Leading into it with an apotheotic final presentation of his fourth-movement version of the *telos*, the first two bars of evolution (q), he comes to rest triumphantly on the rising fourth motif 5 with the fugue subject given on thrusting brass below, before exploding plagiaristically with a cadential passage whose voice-leading outline is shown as evolution (r)—the goal of the rising fourth clinching the entire work with an elaborated perfect cadence moving in contrary motion between melody and bass. The original *Klang*—note the flattened seventh, A \flat , on this closing rising scale—is finally pared down to the solid, optimistic, happy-ending bare octaves of the hammering final chords.

ANTICIPATING A LATE-MODERN ENGLAND

By conducting a symphonic argument in the terms understood by English critics to be the most effective modern means of addressing the problems of form generation, thematic development, and trajectory towards an ultimate goal, in his First Symphony Walton made a case for himself as Sibelius's—and, because of the finale's flagrant reference to his ceremonial style, also Elgar's—heir in the English musical establishment. It may seem that his adaptation of Sibelian technique amounted to the manufacture of a style incapable of effectively projecting itself beyond the Second World War: a superbly over-elaborated edifice erected at the end of a blind Finnish alleyway. Certainly in this symphony English Sibelianism reached a hortatory height in composition that in the writings of Gray and Lambert it had already accomplished in criticism, and in that respect alone it is an ideal characterization of a central thread of English musical thought in the middle of the age of anxiety. To answer the question whether it constitutes a new and interesting artistic statement, however, we must interpret the burden of the Waltonian *Klang*.

What Dahlhaus would call the 'outwardly static' *Klang* of Walton's first movement is built, characteristically, on an 'unresolved nonharmonic tone', in this case an A \flat over a B \flat minor chord, which accrues to itself higher power—ninth, eleventh, and so on—as a means of articulating the structure of the movement. By the work's finale the A \flat has been purged, and in the sub-Elgarian ceremonial style of the finale a model of mid-twentieth-century English civil stolidity is presented in an increasingly pure B \flat major. The movement sounds a mood of exuberant revelry that reminds us, and would have reminded its first audience, of the conclusion to *Belshazzar's Feast* (1930–1): 'Babylon has fallen, alleluia!' In the oratorio these brightly sprung rhythmic lines with thumping populist brass choruses symbolize the end of oppression: the joy expressed by the music is a group's exultation in the ability to maintain an ethnic identity in freedom. The symphonic finale might be accused of bombast, and invite a different interpretation. Yet since the characteristic mood of Walton's music after this symphony is one of resignation, it is also fair to suggest that the optimistic projection of the freedom springing from the casting-off of the yoke of the first three movements—symbolizing, I would argue, the discomfiture anent the modern 'world'—spends its energy so fast that to suggest that the victory of the symphony is a more typically nineteenth-century (musical or British-imperial) than a twentieth-century (post-war) one is not wholly convincing. The group identity that revels here could indeed be an English nation newly divorced from its former responsibilities and potentialities, glorying in its little-Englandness, proudly proclaiming that no identity could be more cherishable than one rooted in this royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle.

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With the attainment of various motivic and harmonic *telē*, Walton has turned the modernist fragmentation of the opening into a characteristically late-modernist virtue: the restricted ambition of the Tolkien–Eliot English vision, content not omnipotent, in harmony not hegemony—a vision of an England whose ethical reach is drawn into itself, no longer morally and politically policing the world but withdrawing into a positively construed insular carapace. The combination of dissonant, aimless *Klang* on the one hand and goal-directed pedal points and teleological motivic genesis on the other has the effect of showing a unified landscape (symbolizing a socially cohesive group, no longer torn by internal conflict: a humbled nation not a hubristic empire) emerging from the problems of modernism. The use of the *Klang* and its (we might almost say ethnic) ‘purification’ into a civic, *Crown Imperial B*, at the end of the teleological process is essential to the late-modernist/incipiently nationalist design of the work, and a characteristic contribution to the development of ‘Englishness’ in twentieth-century music.

Walton presents an authentically English usage of the Finnish Sibelian sound-sheet that in its blatant parading in uncomplicated tonality (compared with its obvious and heavily implicated model, the relatively tentative conclusion to Sibelius’s Fifth Symphony) gives the music-structuring gesture a distinctive new ethical flavour. For ‘repetition’ to operate in the Heideggerian sense, it must not be an uncritical exact copy. There is no value in arcadian statements: as he puts it in *Being and Time*, ‘repetition does not let itself be persuaded of something by what is “past”, just in order that this, as something formerly actual, may recur’.⁶⁶ The value in repetition lies, rather, in its creative engagement with tradition. Walton’s ‘repetition’ of history saves itself from this Heideggerian reproof, but one could suggest by contrast that a neoclassicism that ‘repeats’ a kind of cod-English neo-Handelianism effectively proclaims that ‘the formerly actual’—an eighteenth-century England at the start of its major imperial adventure?—‘may recur’. I do not claim that Waltonian or British ‘late-modernist’ tonality is more artistically successful than Stravinskian neoclassicism, but there appears to be a hermeneutic riddle to answer.

Walton’s engagement, focused with special clarity in the First Symphony, with the immediate past of early modernism, as distilled in the structural technique of Sibelius, the modern ‘English’ master, creates from the instability of shrinking global influence a positive, if modest, vision for England’s future. We do not customarily hear post-war austerity and practical coping anticipated in 1930s English music in the way that some hear, for instance, mechanical trench warfare in ‘Mars’ from Holst’s *The Planets* (1914–16), but although the former is less shattering and less exciting than the latter, perhaps its response to motions of history is not without a nobility or wisdom that it may be ignoble or unwise to decry.

ABSTRACT

The debt of Walton’s First Symphony to Sibelian models of symphonic form is often acknowledged, but the debt’s wider implications are seldom considered. The inter-war English idolization of Sibelius may help to explain why Walton should use characteristic Sibelian procedures such as rotational form, heavy dependence on pedal points for

⁶⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 437–8.

structural purposes, and focus on a sound-sheet or *Klang*—however individually Walton treats these devices—but it does not account for all that is interesting in this moment in British musical history. In this article a richer context is drawn by locating Walton's Sibelianism in a more general contemporary artistic concern with what Michael Saler calls 'the myth of the North': an inter-war emphasis on the industrialized north of England. This 'myth', a development of modernist preoccupations with the relationship between technology and humanity, is reflected both in what Jed Esty calls an 'anthropological turn' in writers such as Eliot and Woolf (a turn to a romantic nationalism), and in Heidegger's philosophy of art—connections that open up a range of ethical and political considerations. After presenting an analysis of the Sibelian technique of Walton's symphony alongside discussion of its thematic treatments of nation, cultural, and geographic environment, and the changing antagonisms of late modernism, this article reconsiders the historical significance of Walton's music, and reads it as a presentation of views on authentic community and the place of England in the twentieth century.