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Two Operas of Benjamin Britten: An Analysis of Style

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TWO OPERAS OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN:

AN ANALYSIS OF STYLE

(TITLE)

BY

RICHARD O. SCOTT

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1967

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE

August 2, 1967

DATE


ADVISER

July 28, 1967

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DEPARTMENT HEAD

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

This study is an analysis and comparison of two of Benjamin Britten's operatic works--Peter Grimes and The Turn of the Screw. It is an attempt to interpret Britten's operatic style. Although Britten has written successfully for other media, it is the opera that has established him as an international composer. The premiere of Peter Grimes (June 7, 1945) marked the entry of England into the international operatic scene.

Britten has produced only two operas which are classified as grand opera, Peter Grimes and A Midsummer Night's Dream (1960). The remainder of his operas are chamber works, the first one being The Rape of Lucretia (1946). In this study the writer will analyse one of Britten's grand operas, Peter Grimes, and one of his chamber operas, The Turn of the Screw, and compare these two works along lines suggested by the analysis.

With the exception of the Prologue and first interlude of Peter Grimes, the measures of both operas are numbered by act. Examples are taken from the vocal scores.

CHAPTER II

ORIENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

Not only is Britten England's most widely performed opera composer since Purcell, but he is also one of today's most important opera composers. According to Charles Reid:

Britten is probably the only living composer who has been obliged to stock autographed photographs of himself for handing out at stage doors; who has had the number of his operas produced multiply in great theatres of Europe and other continents; who has scored with genius for tin tea mugs, handbells, and boys' bugles.¹

In view of his skill and popularity as a composer, surprisingly few scholarly studies have been made on the elements of his style.

Benjamin Britten. A Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists is currently the major publication on Britten and his works.² This book contains many enlightening articles and studies on Britten's life, his training, and all his major works published before 1952. Not only does it interpret Britten's works, but this book also provides some indication of musical thought in England. Contributors to this volume include: The Earl of Harewood, Donald Mitchell, Peter Pears, George Malcolm, H.F. Redlich, Arthur Oldham, Hans Keller, Erwin Stein, Norman

¹Charles Reid, "Back to Britain with Britten," High Fidelity, Vol. 9, No. 12 (December, 1959), 180.

²Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (eds.), Benjamin Britten. A Commentary on his Works from a Group of Specialists (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953).

Del Mar, Paul Hamburger, Boyd Neel, Joan Chissell, Georges Auric, A.E.F. Dickinson, Imogen Holst, Lennox Berkeley, William Mann, E.W. White, and Desmond Shawe-Taylor.

Another book of interest is Benjamin Britten, a Sketch of his Life and Work.³ First written in 1948, this book is essentially a sketch which includes a biographical study of Britten, an account of some of the most prominent musical and intellectual influences in his development, a clear outline of his creative evolution, and a detailed examination of many of his works.⁴ It was revised in 1954 to include such works as the coronation opera, Gloriana (1953).

Since both books were published several years ago, many of his important works--including The Turn of the Screw--are not discussed. This paper is intended to provide further insight into Britten's style.

³E.W. White, Benjamin Britten, a Sketch of his Life and Work (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1955).

⁴Robert Sabin, "A Study of Britten and his Compositions," Musical America, LXXV, No. 15 (December 1, 1955), 22.

CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Benjamin Britten was born on November 22 (St. Cecilia's Day), 1913 at Lowestoft, on the east coast of England. He was educated at the Royal College of Music, where he studied piano with Arthur Benjamin and Harold Samuel and composition with John Ireland and Frank Bridge. He was the son of a prosperous dentist and a quite musical mother. He began putting notes on ruled paper (mainly because they looked pretty) at five years of age and wrote a Schubertian setting of Burns' "O That I'd Never Been Married" at nine.⁵ At the age of twelve he met Frank Bridge, with whom he studied until going to the Royal College of Music in 1929. By the age of fourteen he had written ten piano sonatas, six string quartets, three piano suites, one oratorio, and a tone poem called Chaos and Cosmos.

As a student at the Royal College of Music, Britten was somewhat of a failure. This was not due to any inability on his part, but rather to his professional technique which he acquired while studying with Frank Bridge (1874-1941). It seems that the general attitude of

⁵Reid, loc. cit., p. 74.

the student body at the Royal College was amateurish and folksy.⁶

In 1934 while still at the college, Britten won a traveling scholarship, the Arthur Sullivan Scholarship, which was worth 100 pounds. He decided to spend this money studying with Alban Berg (1885-1935) in Vienna, but the administration refused to let him go, on the ground that Berg was an "unsuitable person." The implication seemed to be that he was unsuitable on more than just musical grounds. Britten never received an opportunity to study with Berg, because Berg died the following year.⁷

Britten's first real work was writing documentary music for the General Post Office Film Unit. For this he earned about 3 pounds per week. After leaving the General Post Office he decided to come to America. He felt that England had a lazy and apathetic attitude toward new things, while the new world seemed ready to welcome new ideas. Along with Peter Pears, the well known tenor whom Britten had befriended a year earlier, Britten came to the United States in the year 1939. He had intended to become an American citizen, but after many perplexities, he decided to remain British.

Early in 1942--during the darkest days of World War II--Britten and Pears returned to embattled England, where he was granted unconditional exemption from military service--a very rare concession--on the ground that in the cultural field he was already serving his country to

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., p. 75.

best advantage.⁸

While in America Britten had written Paul Bunyan, his first opera, and Sinfonia da Requiem. Paul Bunyan was the result of a collaboration with W.H. Auden. It was given a week's performance in America in 1941 at Columbia University, and was withdrawn from performance shortly thereafter. Sinfonia da Requiem was a result of Britten's being asked to write a work for the Japanese government in commemoration of the 2,600th anniversary of the foundation of the Mikado's Dynasty. After the work was completed, it was rejected by the Japanese government on religious grounds. It was premiered by John Barbirolli and the New York Philharmonic in 1941. Serge Koussevitzky later performed it and commissioned Britten to write his second opera, Peter Grimes, Op. 33.

Among those Britten admires are Purcell, Monteverdi, Bach, Gluck, Weber, Schubert, and Berg, whose compositional techniques appear throughout his music.

He seems to be strongly preoccupied with the proneness to destruction which is subsequent to the loss of innocence, i.e., with man's vulnerability in the face of violence--natural or man-made.⁹ While this tendency is apparent throughout Peter Grimes, it is most obvious in W.B. Yeats's line, "The ceremony of innocence is drowned," which appears repeatedly in the first scene of the second act of The Turn of the Screw.

Britten did not consider writing opera until about the age of

⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

⁹ A.M. Whittall, "Benjamin Britten," The Music Review, Vol. 23, No. 4 (November, 1962), 315.

twenty-five. "The first operatic performance to make an impression on him was Mozart's Le Nozze di Figaro (The Marriage of Figaro), given by the Dresden Opera Company at Covent Garden."¹⁰ By 1945 he had completed two grand operas, Paul Bunyan and Peter Grimes. After the latter he turned to chamber opera, the first of which was The Rape of Lucretia (1946). With the composition of The Rape of Lucretia Britten formed the English Opera Group, probably Europe's most renowned chamber opera company. He also founded the world-famous Aldeburgh Festival in 1948.

The existence of Peter Grimes is partly fortuitous, for it was by chance that Britten, reading The Listener in 1941, discovered an article about George Crabbe (1754-1832), written by E.M. Forster. Moved by this article, he read Crabbe, taking a liking to "The Borough," which was about Britten's own beloved coastline of Suffolk and the people there.

When asked by Koussevitzky to write an opera, they discussed the possibility of an opera based on Crabbe. Britten asked Montagu Slater to write the libretto, which took eighteen months. Britten began the music in January, 1944, and completed the score by February of 1945.

Peter Grimes had its premiere performance on the seventh of June, 1945, at Sadler's Wells. The Earl of Harewood describes his first impressions of Peter Grimes:

Reactions at first were strong but bewildered--
the emphasis was on the orchestra, on the vocal
line, the opera was a study in neurosis, a series

¹⁰Anthony Wright, "Britten's Miniatures and Magnums," Opera News, XX, No. 14 (February, 1956), 11.

of character studies, it was an intimate opera,
a recreation of grand opera.¹¹

This opera established Britten as a major composer, and it turned the tide for British opera, which had had no international representative since Henry Purcell.

The hero of the opera, Peter Grimes, is a fisherman who lives alone and takes no part in village life. His only desire is to make enough money to marry Ellen Orford, the village school teacher. Peter's apprentice-boy dies, and Peter is suspected of causing his death. He takes another apprentice, whom he maltreats. Ellen is the first to see signs of physical abuse on the boy's body. After many rumors, a committee goes to Peter's to investigate. Peter and the boy elude the committee, but in escaping, the boy accidentally falls and is killed. When Peter is finally found, he is put in a boat and pushed out to sea to take his own life.

The Prologue and three acts of Peter Grimes are linked by six orchestral interludes. Interludes I, II, III, and V are sometimes performed as an individual concert piece under the title of "Four Sea Interludes," Op. 33a. The fifth Interlude, the passacaglia, is also performed as a separate concert piece under the title of "Passacaglia," Op. 33b. Britten's masterful handling of the orchestra, as well as that of the choral sonorities, plays an important role in creating the dramatic atmosphere of the work.¹²

¹¹The Earl of Harewood, Peter Grimes. Op. 33, recorded by the Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, conducted by Benjamin Britten, London A 4342 (program notes to the recording), p. 4.

¹²Donald J. Grout, A Short History of Opera (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 544.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF PETER GRIMES

Prologue

The Prologue takes place inside the Moot Hall, which is arranged for a coroner's inquest. The room is crowded. Hobson, carrier and village constable, holds back the crowd. (See Appendix A for list of characters.) Swallow, lawyer and Mayor of the Borough, is acting as coroner. As the curtain rises, the woodwinds play a brisk theme, which delineates the character of the proud and haughty Swallow. Throughout the Prologue this theme is assigned to Swallow (See Ex. 1).

Ex. 1: Swallow's theme, Pro., mm. 1-4



After this brief introduction by the woodwinds, Hobson, the village carrier, is heard summoning Peter Grimes. Next, Swallow is heard announcing that an investigation is being made to determine the cause of death of Grimes's apprentice, William Spode.

When asked to step into the box and give evidence, Grimes takes the oath with an air of mockery. The mocking manner of his repetition of the oath immediately establishes him as the exact opposite of the self-righteous Swallow, ". . . a puppet whose actions depend on the strings jerked by public opinion."¹³ When asked to tell the story in his own words, Peter hesitates until prompted by Swallow. Peter tells of the big catch they had made, and how they had planned to go to London to sell it, for it was too great for the local market. After being blown off course, they ran out of drinking water, and the boy died. Swallow inquires further as to what Peter did when he arrived at the Borough. Peter explains that he called Ned Keene, the apothecary, and somebody brought the parson. At the mention of the name of the quack, Ned Keene, there is giggling from the spectators. At this point we hear the opening theme in augmentation:

Ex. 2: Swallow's theme, Pro., mm. 59-61

SWALLOW

You mean the Rec - tor, Mis - ter Ho - race

A - dams

¹³Arthur Oldham, "Peter Grimes: The Music; The Story not Excluded," edited by Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, *loc. cit.*, p. 103.

After more questioning, Swallow then asks if Grimes abused a respectable lady in the excitement. Before he can answer, Mrs. Sadley shouts, "Say who!" Peter exclaims, "I don't like interferers!" The spectators, portrayed by the chorus, begin a hubbub. The hubbub takes the form of a short, but strict four-voice canon. They comment on the gossip-- "When women gossip, the result is someone doesn't sleep at night."

Here it might be in order to mention the role of the chorus in Peter Grimes. Throughout much of the opera Britten uses the chorus only as an agent or medium that comments on the action. Primarily, "It represents the crowd, the unified protagonist pitted against one personality who will not merge with the others."¹⁴

After Hobson silences the crowd, Swallow asks if Ellen Orford, the schoolmistress, helped him to carry the boy home. As Ellen steps forward, there is renewed hubbub in the room. Again the crowd is silenced, and Ellen is questioned as to why she would help a person of the character of Peter Grimes. Swallow then waves her away. Another thing in Peter's favor is that he is said to have saved the boy from drowning in the March storms. For lack of evidence to the contrary, a verdict of "accidental death" is returned. Swallow's theme is again heard as Swallow advises Grimes not to get another apprentice:

¹⁴Arthur Cohn, Twentieth Century Music in Western Europe (New York: J.B. Lippincott Co., 1965), p. 71.

Ex. 3: Swallow's theme, Pro., mm. 108-109

SWALLOW *f pomposo*

Pe- ter Grimes, I here ad- vise you!

Do not get an- oth- er boy ap- pren- tice.

On hearing the verdict, the crowd starts another uproar. Again Hobson silences them, after which Peter speaks. He explains that he must have a boy apprentice, because he cannot afford to pay a man's wages. Swallow then advises him to get a woman to look after a boy. Peter exclaims that he wants a woman, but not until he has stopped the gossip. Swallow asks Peter to step down, but Peter angrily demands a trial, for otherwise, people will always think that he is guilty. Again in imitation, the chorus comments: "When women gossip, the result is someone doesn't sleep at night, but when the crowner sits upon it, who can dare to fix the guilt?"

After the court is cleared, Ellen approaches Peter to console him. Although Peter cares for Ellen, he rejects her comforting words. Britten brilliantly projects this feeling of rejection by writing their recitative duet in two different keys--E and A-flat (see Ex. 4).

Ex. 4: Duet, Pro., mm. 162-167

Recitativo (senza misura)

Peter

The truth... the pi-ty... and the truth.....

Ellen *p dolce* *pp*

Pe-ter, Pe-ter, come a-way

f agitato

where the walls them-selves gas-sip of

in - quest!

Peter finally accepts her affection, at which time they sing a duet in unison.

Ex. 5: Duet, Pro., mm. 179-183

Piu lento e tranquillo

E. *pp* My voice out of the pain is like a

P. *pp* Your voice out of the pain is like a

E. hand that you can feel,

P. hand that I can feel,

The duet makes effective use of the minor ninth, which is associated with loneliness and yearning. Not only does Britten use this interval quite freely in this opera, but he also uses it in The Rape of Lucretia for the same emotional effect.¹⁵

Interlude I

As the curtain falls on the Prologue, Interlude I begins. We hear the haunting call of the crying seagulls, as the wavelets gently

¹⁵Hans Keller, "Peter Grimes: The Story; The Music not Excluded," edited by Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, *loc. cit.*, p. 115.

wash the beach (see Ex. 6).

Ex. 6: Interlude I, mm. 1-9

Lento e tranquillo (♩=44)

Vlns.
Flts.

pp dolcissimo

dim.

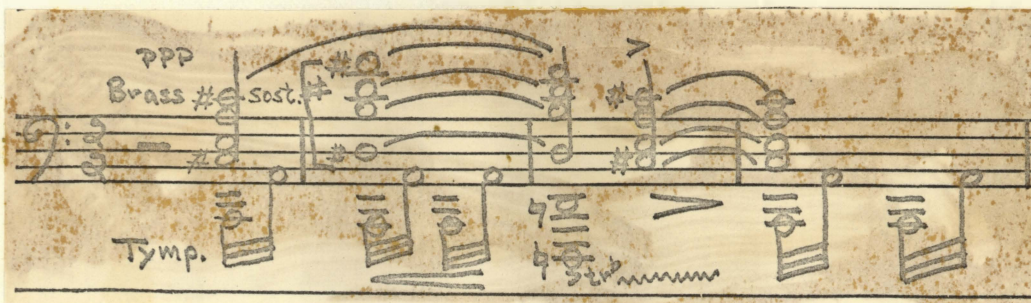
(pp)

pp f

Clar., Harp, Vla.

We can also hear the deep surge of the surf beating the shore.

Ex. 7: Interlude I, mm. 10-13



This first Interlude is comprised entirely of these three ideas. It is a good example of tone painting, for as one listens, one can almost see the sea before him. Interlude I, which provides the orchestral accompaniment for the first part of Scene I, leads directly into the first Act.

Act I

Scene I

It is the middle of the morning, a few days later. As the curtain rises, the Borough beach and street, the Moot Hall, Boar Inn, Ned Keene's shop, and the church porch are seen. The women are mending nets, as the men haul in their boats. They sing gently to themselves of the hardships and changes of the daily routine:

Chorus

Oh hang at open doors the net, the cork
While squalid sea-dames at their mending work.
Welcome the hour when fishing through the tide
The weary husband throws his freight aside.

Fishermen

O cold and wet and driven by the tide
Beat your tired arms against your tarry side.
Find rest in public bars where fiery gin
Will aid the warmth that languishes within.

At this point several fishermen cross to The Bear, where Auntie stands in the doorway. She asks them to come in. Boles, the Methodist fisherman, stands aside from all this drinking and exclaims, "Her vats flow with poisoned gin." Balstrode, a retired merchant skipper, laughs and cries, "Boles has gone methody." Outside, sea-boys are playing on and around the boats. Balstrode sees them and shoos them away.

As Dr. Thorp approaches The Bear, a storm is spotted at sea. After some rather bitter comments by the fishermen about the ruthless sea, the Rector and Mrs. Sedley are seen coming down the street. They greet each other with a friendly "good morning," and are soon joined by the nieces, who are the main attraction of The Bear, Keene, and Swallow in morning salutations. Keene lets Auntie know that he enjoys the company of her nieces. Boles is quick to let Keene know that God's storm will drown his desires. Of course, Keene does not take Boles seriously.

The underlying orchestral accompaniment of this entire portion of the first Scene has been the music of the first Interlude--the sea-gulls and the surf, reminding the listener that the sea still rules the lives of the people of the Borough.

As the scene continues, Grimes is heard calling for help to haul in his boat. Boles replies, "Haul it yourself, Grimes!" Of course, nobody is really anxious to help. After a call for someone to bring the rope, Peter appears and takes a rope from the capstan to his boat. Balstrode and Keene volunteer to give a hand as they move to the cap-

stan and start pushing it around. Keene remarks, "We'll drown the gossips in a tidal storm." With an air of innocence, Auntie hastily declares that she has taken neither side. On the other hand, Boles admits his contempt for Grimes, and wants to shun him from "respectable" society.

After the boat is hauled up, Keene informs Peter that he has arranged to get an apprentice from the workhouse for him. He explains that all they need do is send the carter to get him. Hobson, the carter, is somewhat reluctant to do this job. Boles also states his objection to "using" a boy. Keene again asks, "Hobson, will you do your job?" Here, Hobson sings what Britten calls a "half number" (see Ex. 8).¹⁶

¹⁶Peggie Cochrane, Peter Grimes, Op. 33, recorded by the Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, conducted by Benjamin Britten, London A 4342 (program notes to the recording), p. 7.

(For reasons of space and proper placement of the following example, the remainder of this page is left blank.)

Ex. 8: "half number," Act I, mm. 239-248

HOBSON *pesante*

3 I have to go from pub to pub,
 Pick-ing up par-cels, stand-ing a-bout. My
 cresc. jour-ney back is late at night.
 f Mis-ter, find some o-ther way.... to bring your boy
 back.

It is a "half number" because it has no refrain. Before Hobson finishes, Ellen interrupts, "Carter! I'll mind your passenger." The villagers are shocked at Ellen's actions, but she is not at all ashamed. She then sings Hobson's "half number," convincing him that he will need help with the boy. Ned Keene agrees, while the villagers condemn her. At this point, Ellen sings her "Let her among you" aria. These lines--"Let her among you without fault cast the first stone, and let the Pharisees and Saducees give way to none . . ."--make this scene analagous to that of Jesus's saving a sinful woman in St. John, when Jesus says, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." While this aria is simply constructed, it is quite moving. It is in A-B-A

form. The A section begins in F-major and modulates to f-minor, and the B section returns to F-major then modulates to A-major. When A returns it begins in F-major but ends in d-minor. Hobson, moved by Ellen's words, is ready to go and get the boy. Some of the crowd follow as Hobson and Ellen go down the street.

Shortly thereafter, Balstrode, looking seaward through his glass, spots a storm cone. The first section of the storm scene is built on the following subject:

Ex. 9: Now the flood tide, Act I, mm. 356-363

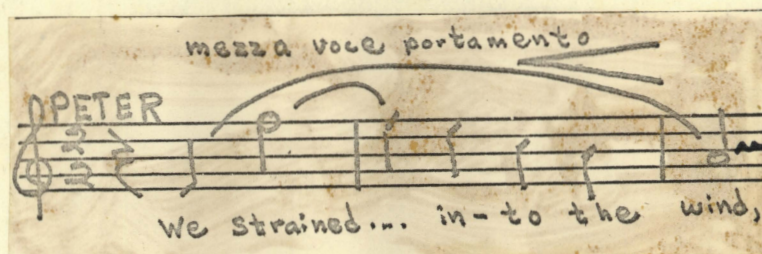


This subject is treated canonically, being tossed back and forth between the soloists and chorus eleven times. While the subject is sung, the other voices embellish it with a brief syncopated figure, creating excitement and tension. At the climax of this segment of the storm scene, Britten changes from polyphonic writing to a strictly chordal style.

Before the storm reaches its greatest force, there is a general exodus from The Boar, leaving only Peter and Balstrode. As the two of them talk, Balstrode brings up the inquest, to the tune of Swallow's theme. As Peter again tells Balstrode of that horrible day at sea, we

hear ninths, which again serve to show longing and yearning (see Ex. 10).

Ex. 10: Ninths, Act I, mm. 535-537



As they continue to talk, Grimes spells out his intentions. Though Grimes is violent, he yearns to belong to these people, but does not know how to win them over to his side. He pretends to despise his fellow man. He wants to marry Ellen Orford, but he resents the idea that she might accept him out of pity, so he wants to fish the sea dry to become a rich merchant. For this, he needs money. To get money he must conquer the sea, but his relation with the sea is a tragic one. All his misfortunes are directly traceable to the power of the sea. The death of his first apprentice, which has already occurred when the opera opens, is a direct act of malevolence on the part of the sea. We are told that Grimes is lured by the huge catch of fish, and no sooner does he sail the boat around the coast, with the intention of putting in to London, than the wind turns against him and blows him off his course. For three days the sea keeps him, until the drinking water is all gone, and the apprentice dies. The storm which starts in this first scene will also add to Peter's tragedies. At this point Balstrode leaves Peter alone on the stage. Grimes expresses his faith in Ellen and his

love for her.

Ex. 11: Ninths, Act I, mm. 682-686

espress. largamente

PETER

what har- - - bour shel - ters peace,

As he dreams of life with Ellen, the curtain falls on Scene I, and the second Interlude begins:

Interlude II

we suddenly hear the stormy sea, with the wind whipping the waters into a frenzy.

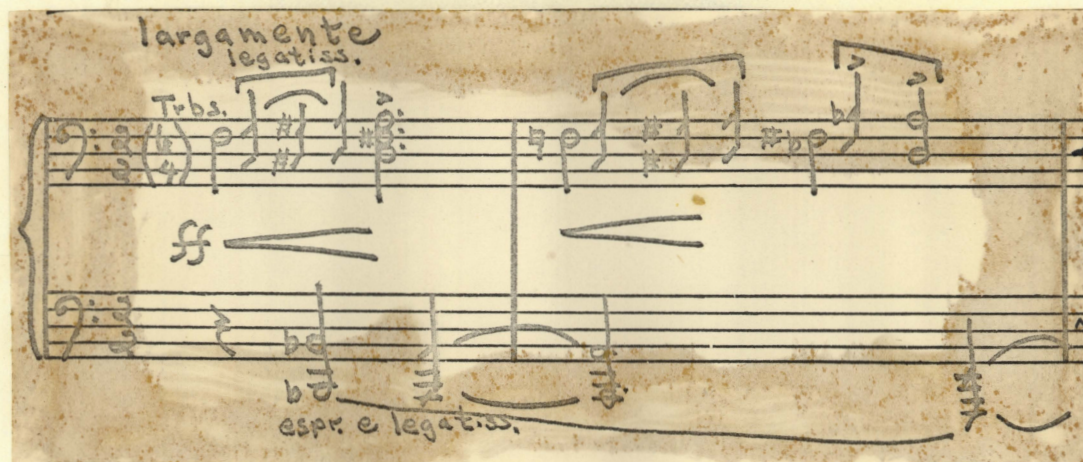
Ex. 12: Rondo theme (A), Act I, mm. 718-720

Presto con fuoco (♩=108)

ff

This effect is achieved primarily through an agitated style and an irregular change of meter. The interval of the sixth in the first measure of the example is undoubtedly derived from Example 9. Next, a moaning theme is heard, which sounds as if some wounded creature of the deep were moaning in endless, abysmal pain. Parallel fifths are used to enhance this effect (see Ex. 13).

Ex. 13: Rondo episode I (B), Act I, mm. 752-753



Three other episodes are employed to make this Interlude a rondo with the following scheme: A-B-A-C-A-D-a-X-D-a-A. (The upper-case letter A represents the Rondo theme, while B, C, and D represent episodes. The lower-case a's represent only a fragment of the Rondo theme. The X denotes a brief section in which the strings play a fugato, the theme of which is the last few notes Grimes sings at the end of the last scene, as the woodwinds play the rhythm of the Rondo theme.) The episodes are quoted in part below:

Ex. 14: Rondo episode II (C), Act I, mm. 787-790



Ex. 15: Rondo episode III (D), Act I, mm. 825-828



Scene II

As the scene opens, Auntie is admitting Mrs. Sedley to The Boar, while the storm continues at hurricane force. Balstrode and some fishermen also return. It is here that the "good" Methodist preacher, Boles, gets drunk and expresses his desires for the nieces. It is Boles's behavior that leads Balstrode to start a song, which is one of the poignant choruses of this opera (see Ex. 16).

Ex. 16: We live and let live, Act I, mm. 1059-1065

Allegro molto (come sopra) ($\text{♩} = 120$)

BALSTRODE PP

We live.... and let live, and look.....

... We keep our hands to our - selves.

Each time the door of The Boar is opened we hear the storm raging (see Ex. 12). As the storm worsens, Keene rushes in with the word that some of the cliff behind Grimes's hut has collapsed. Shortly after this, Grimes enters, and Mrs. Sedley faints. In points of imitation the chorus is heard saying, "Talk of the devil and there he is . . ." When Peter sits down, the others move away from that table. He then sings an arioso in which ". . . he seems to divine the unescapable tragedy of his character."¹⁷ Here is Hans Keller's description of this arioso:

This arioso has four parts, although the verse has three stanzas. The first two musical strophes, that is, coincide with the first two stanzas, while the third stanza is at first taken up by a contrasting *molto animato* section, and then returns, in the last line, to the music of the first two strophes.¹⁸

¹⁷Keller, *loc. cit.*, p. 116.

¹⁸*Ibid.*

The underlying orchestral accompaniment is a canon which proceeds from the double basses upwards. When the canon returns after the molto animato, it begins in the violins and proceeds downwards. As the outcome of a canon is inevitable, so is the fate of Grimes.

Peter's arioso leads the occupants of The Boar to declare: "He's drunk or mad!" In the course of events, Boles attempts to strike Grimes with a bottle, but Balstrode knocks it out of his hands and shouts: "For peace sake, someone start a song!" The song they start turns out to be a catchy triple canon in seven-four time. It consists of three songs, which are woven through the soloists and chorus until each, with the exception of Grimes, has sung each song in full at least twice. The first song to be heard is "Old Joe."

Ex. 17: "Old Joe," Act I, mm. 1201-1203

Con slancio! (d + d + d.) (♩ = 246)
 leggiero

KEENE

Old Joe has gone fish-ing and Young Joe has gone fish-ing and

This song is soon joined by another:

Ex. 18: Pull them in, Act I, mm. 1209-1212

KEENE

Pull them in in han'-fuls and in
can - fuls and in pan - fuls

Then the last is sung:

Ex. 19: Bring them in sweetly, Act I, mm. 1216-1220

KEENE

Bring them in sweet-ly, Gut them com -
plete-ly, Pack them up neat-ly. Sell them dis-
creet-ly.

This chorus also serves an important dramatic purpose, for when Peter enters he nearly succeeds in upsetting the musical apple cart. His special treatment of the tune is characteristic of his unwillingness or inability to conform to the rules of civil behavior. Instead of becoming a part of the singing ensemble, Grimes symbolically disturbs and antagonizes his fellow singers by giving the melody a different rhythm and a new key. He sings in D-flat while the others sing in E-flat.

Peter is finally overwhelmed, and the chorus continues.

Just as the canon ends, Ellen, Hobson, and the boy, Grimes's new apprentice, enter. They are soaked and chilled to the bone. Before the boy can warm and dry himself, Peter is ready to take him home. At this point we hear ". . . the first open manifestation of the vicious lengths to which the villagers are capable of being driven, . . ."¹⁹ as they shout, "Home, do you call that home!" They let it be known that their delight is in persecuting Grimes. As Peter takes the boy out into the storm, the curtain falls on Act I.

Act II

Interlude III

This Interlude sets the mood for the first scene of the second Act. This, as well as the first part of this scene, is in the Lydian mode built on D. The horns, portraying bells, and the woodwinds with their dancing figures, portraying the glitter of sunshine, create a festive Sunday morning mood (see Ex. 20).

¹⁹Oldham, loc. cit., p. 107.

(For reasons of space and proper placement of the following example, the remainder of this page is left blank.)

Ex. 20: Interlude III, Act II, mm. 1-7

Allegro spiritoso ($\text{♩} = 80$)

Hrns.
fp *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp*

W.W.
f *f* *f* *f* *f*

fp *fp*

After the ringing of bells, we hear the cellos and the violas playing the melody of what is to be Ellen's first song in the first scene. Again this is a perfect example of the unifying construction that Britten uses in these orchestral interludes. As this lovely melody is completed, the bells are again heard as the curtain opens on Act II.

It is a bright Sunday morning some weeks after the storm. As some of the townspeople hurry to church, Ellen, accompanied by the boy, John, sits down between a boat and a breakwater. As she knits, she sings to the melody which was just played by the strings: "Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight. . ." This melody is shaped in a great musical arch that reaches over an octave and a half.

When the church service begins, Ellen and the boy remain outside. Ellen tries to draw the boy into friendly conversation, but when she discovers that his shirt is torn and that he has an ugly bruise on his neck, she begins to suspect that perhaps Peter has been maltreating him. Ellen tries to console him with the thought that he may have a holiday, since it is Sunday. Here Peter enters, looking for his apprentice. He has sighted an enormous shoal of fish, and feels that this is his chance to haul in the catch that will make him wealthy. When Ellen reminds him of his promise to let the boy rest on Sundays, Grimes responds by saying, "This is whatever day I say it is. . . He works for me, leave him alone, he's mine!" Ellen's efforts to calm him are futile. The argument turns into a violent quarrel, and Grimes strikes Ellen and walks away chasing the boy. This scene marks the first open manifestation of Grimes's lower nature.

The gradual progress from the radiant holiday mood to the climax

of the quarrel is handled in a masterful fashion--both musically and dramatically. Of particular interest is the fact that every aspect of the stage action has its exact counterpart in the words and music of the church service which is sung off stage. As the scene progresses, the pious congregation's worship in the background becomes a travesty of Ellen's conversation with the boy and the mysterious circumstances surrounding the death of Peter's first apprentice. This scene also provides further indication of Peter's inevitable fate. Ellen's early efforts to draw the boy into conversation coincide with the sustained notes that end each of the chanting phrases of the opening anthem. (This is a device similar to that which Wagner uses in the opening scene of *Die Meistersinger*.) At the beginning of this scene the congregation sings, "Now that the daylight fills the sky." While they hold their note on sky, Ellen sings, "Nothing to tell me, nothing to say?" (See Ex. 21.)

Ex. 21: Church scene, Act II, mm. 140-142

Maestoso (Pistesso tempo) (♩ = ♩) sempllice (quasi parlato)

ELLEN

CHORUS unis. (in the church)
S.A. *ff marcato*
T.B.

Now that the day-light fills the sky,.....

Nothing to tell me, nothing to say?

This idea is expanded to cover the entire church service from the opening anthem to the final amen. At the end of the scene, after Peter has struck Ellen, the congregation sings, "Amen," and Grimes echos this by saying:

Ex. 22: Peter's amen, Act II, mm. 293-294



This example is imitated four times in the orchestra while Peter chases the boy. This particular theme is the last main theme to make its initial appearance, although it is used frequently and powerfully in the remainder of the work.

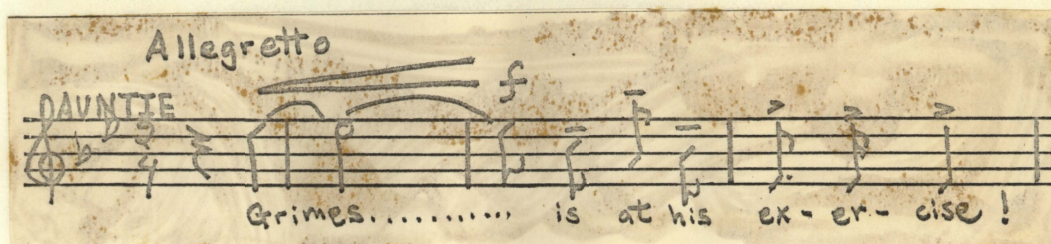
This is the turning point of the opera. Peter has shown that he is not only unable to keep peace with the woman he loves, but he is also capable of hurting her.²⁰

It seems that the tragic scene between Ellen and Peter has been seen by some of the villagers. The rumour that "Grimes is at his exercise," spreads among the villagers as they leave church. Their hatred for Grimes is stronger than ever. Gossip, which has been such an important dramatic element in this opera, again emerges. Musically this

²⁰Keller, *loc. cit.*, p. 119.

part of this scene is built around the following example:

Ex. 23: Peter's amen, Act II, mm. 316-319



This is the same theme as that of Example 22. It is used here in a polyphonic chorus, the purpose of which is to further depict the intense animosity the townspeople have for Grimes.

Now Boles accuses Ellen of being Grimes's accomplice. As she begins the next chorus, Ellen explains that she helped so that Peter and the boy might have a new start, a chance to live a decent life. Even after Peter has struck her, Ellen still cares for him. This chorus is built around one figure which is first stated by Ellen. This figure is repeated as different voices are added. At the end of the chorus the full cast and chorus are singing, as they accuse Ellen of helping Grimes murder the boy.

They now go en masse to Grimes's hut. Again a song of gossip is heard. It is the stirring, marching song that the villagers sing as they march to Grimes's hut. (See Ex. 24.)

Ex. 24: Marching song, Act II, mm. 642-645

Grave ($\text{♩} = 126$)
 Mrs. SEDLEY *ff*

Now.... is gossip put on trial.....

Now..... the rumors ei - ther fail,.....

At the end of this tune, Auntie, Ellen, and the nieces remain dejectedly on the empty stage. Together they contemplate the lives they lead, bringing the first scene to a close.

Interlude IV

The musical idea in which Grimes earlier hurled his defiance at the world now becomes the ground bass of a passacaglia that serves as the fourth Interlude. While this theme is repeated in the bass, another, with ten variations, appears above it (see Ex. 25).

Ex. 25: Passacaglia countertheme, Act II, mm. 748-758

pp espress. *espr.*

VIOLA

pp *Più f e sonore* *dim.* *pp*

cresc. molto f

Not only is Britten interested in writing good dramatic entertainment for the layman, but he is also interested in musical material that appeals to the intellect of the musically trained. Thus, this interlude, as well as all the others, serves a two-fold purpose--it unifies the opera and serves to satisfy the musical appetite.

The countertheme is first stated by the solo viola. It is a rather sombre, plaintive melody. Its first variation involves merely diminution in the woodwinds. In the second variation the countertheme is never fully stated, but only outlined by the brass, while the strings do flourishes on the outline. The woodwinds present the countertheme in augmentation in the third variation. The fourth variation is stated by the strings, while the woodwinds play a pulsating rhythmic figure beneath them. In the fifth variation the trombones and trumpets play the countertheme in a broken chord fashion, giving a pyramiding effect. A rhythmic accompaniment to the countertheme, suggesting diminution of the passacaglia itself, accompanies the passacaglia for the sixth variation. The seventh variation is played in a triplet pattern and in diminution by the strings. The brass play the countertheme in long note values in a well-marked and forceful manner in the eighth variation. In the ninth variation the countertheme is heard as outlined in the second variation, treated here imitatively by the strings. The tenth variation extends the idea of the ninth variation by adding the full orchestra. It leads directly into the second scene.

Scene II

The second scene finds Peter and the boy entering Grimes's hut, which is really an upturned boat. The boy cries quietly as Peter demands

that he hurry and change clothes, so that they might catch a shoal of fish. Peter is so obsessed with the hope of getting rich and marrying Ellen, that he again maltreats the boy in his haste to get down to the sea.

Peter now stops to contemplate how it might be, should he marry Ellen. In Crabbe's poem, "The Borough," Grimes is an utterly despicable character. One of the problems of writing the libretto was that of giving Grimes some likeable qualities. This end was partially accomplished in this aria, "In dreams I've built myself," in which Grimes yearns for domestic happiness--to settle down with Ellen. For a few moments, Grimes shows his innermost desires. Of the entire opera, this is probably Peter's most beautiful aria. It is in A-B-A form.

As this aria ends, Hobson's drum can be heard as the Borough procession approaches Grimes's hut. For a moment, Grimes is haunted by the terrible death of his first apprentice. He then hears the procession approaching. He accuses the boy of talking with Ellen again, after which he hurries the boy out the door, so that they may elude the procession. In his haste, the boy loses his hold, screams, and falls to his death. Peter runs to the cliff door and quickly climbs out. The men enter the hut and find nothing of any consequence. To Swallow, it appears that the case is closed. He draws the moral:

Here we come pell-mell,
Expecting to find out we know not what.
But all we find is a neat and empty hut.

As he states the lesson of this incident, we hear the beginning statement of the opera (see Example 26).

Ex. 26: Swallow's theme, Act II, mm. 1034-1036

Andante moderato ($\text{♩} = 68$)
 pom-passo

SWALLOW *f*

Gen-tle-men, take this to your wives:.....

... less in-ter-fer-ence in our pri-vate lives.

They all leave, except Balstrode, who examines the hut more closely. He then leaves through the cliff door and hurriedly climbs down the way Peter and the boy went. As this act closes, we hear pizzicato basses playing very softly the passacaglia theme.

Act III

Interlude V

This "Moonlight Interlude" is intended to depict the profound tranquility of the summer evening which enfolds the village and harbour. The tiny stabbing phrases for flute and harp suggest a tormenting jabbing within Grimes's mind. It reminds the listener of his inescapable predicament.²¹ The entire interlude is built on one phrase, which is repeated several times, reaching a dynamic climax, then dying away. This phrase is shown below:

²¹Cochrane, *loc. cit.*, p. 10.

Ex. 27: Moonlight interlude, Act III, mm. 1-6

Andante comodo e rubato (d=44)

This phrase is comprised of a traditional tonic, sub-dominant, tonic, sub-mediant progression.

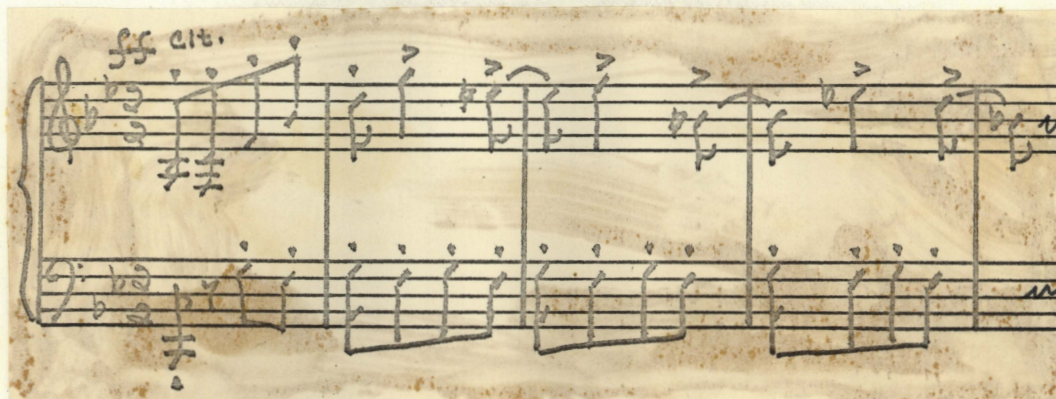
The curtain rises on the village street and beach a few nights later. The band can be heard playing a barn dance at the Moot Hall. (There is an off-stage band.) Swallow is trying to seduce the nieces. In the midst of the merry-making, Mrs. Sedley approaches Keene to tell him that she suspects that Grimes has murdered the boy. Thinking she is just a meddlesome old woman, he pays her no attention. She goes on brooding in the shadow of the boats. While Ellen and Balstrode walk up slowly from the beach in earnest talk, Mrs. Sedley listens, but does not show herself. It seems that Peter's boat is in, and Balstrode has found the boy's jersey with Ellen's embroidered anchor on it. She sings the "Embroidery" aria. Ellen embroidered the sweater with love and hope, and it now becomes the clue, the meaning of which they try to avoid.

Not only is this one of the most beautiful arias of the entire work, but also the most independent. Pitched in B-minor, it consists of two strophes and a short refrain, with a brief parlante middle section.

Balstrode offers to find Peter and help him, but Ellen knows that all is lost.

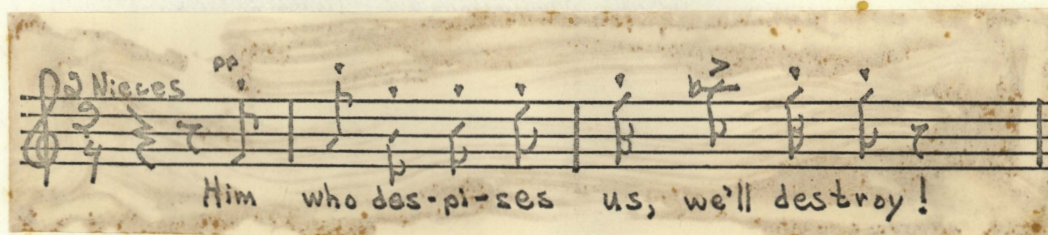
We can hear the dance music commencing again. This time we hear a galop (see Ex. 28).

Ex. 28: Galop, Act III, mm. 439-442



As the music plays, Mrs. Sedley runs into The Bear looking for Swallow. She shows him Grimes's boat. Swallow asks Hobson to investigate. As the dance music fades out, the dancers and drinkers congregate outside, and to the same tune to which they were dancing a few minutes earlier, they sing the lynching chorus (see Ex. 29).

Ex. 29: Lynching chorus, Act III, mm. 576-578



With guns and lanterns they search for Peter.

Interlude VI

This interlude immediately follows the lynching chorus. It tells us that Peter's mental torment and physical stress have driven him to the point of insanity. This "... interlude integrates Peter's disintegrated mind with the help and against the background of a constant dominant seventh on D, sustained by three muted horns."²² Throughout we hear fragments of Peter's own music. The flute first echos his, "These Borough gossips listen to money. . . ." The harp then plays a reminiscence of his dream in the hut. We hear the oboe play part of his E-major arioso from Act I, Scene II, followed by two clarinets playing his, "Wrong to plan!" Following this, the basses and bassoons play a version of Example 22, which combines with Example 11, inverted to make a minor second. These two thematic fragments reach a climax which leads into the second scene.

In reviewing the six interludes, we find that the three which are preludes to the three acts are really sea interludes, while the remainder are Grimes interludes. The "Storm" interlude is both.²³

Scene II

It is the same scene, but a few hours later. The sound of the fog horn and the cries of the searchers are heard in the distance. The

²²Keller, loc. cit., p. 122.

²³Ibid.

stage is quite empty. The dominant seventh of the preceding interlude is continued, but this time in the distant cries of the villagers: "Grimes! Grimes!" The distant fog horn (tuba) also continues the minor second.

Peter enters, weary and demented. The prediction of the previous interlude has come true. Peter is present only in body. This scene is made up of reminiscences, manifest in a series of incoherent phrases sung by Peter. ("Britten's title figures--Lucretia, Albert Herring, Billy Budd--are . . . given reminiscences in the end.")²⁴ In this vocal cadenza, not only is Peter's music heard, but also that of Swallow and the chorus. Parts of the cadenza are done in a mimicking manner. We also hear Peter's best-remembered phrase, but this time it is addressed to the villagers (see Ex. 30).

Ex. 30: Peter's amen, Act III, mm. 709-713

animato

PETER

To hell..... with all your mer-cy! To

rall.

hell with your re-venge,.... And God..... have mer-cy u-

animato molto

pon you!

²⁴ Ibid., p. 123.

As the voices of the townspeople draw quite near, Peter shouts back at them. As he calms, Ellen and Balstrode approach him. Ellen urges Peter to come home with them, but he does not hear her. (She uses some of her previous music.) He is no longer disturbed by the shouters who are off the track and drifting away. Peter sings his last notes, which are the same as Example 11. The words are also the same. It is quite evident that Peter is absolutely insane. In the only spoken words of the opera, Balstrode tells Peter to sail out to sea and sink the boat. Peter obeys.

As dawn begins, the Borough slowly comes to life. Some members of the manhunt are just returning home. The music reverts slowly to the first interlude and the first chorus of Act I. Swallow enters and announces that a boat is sinking out at sea, but nothing can be seen from shore. Again, to the villagers it is just another rumour. The stage fills with people singing, as they go about their daily work, heedless now of the tragedy of Peter Grimes, a man who died as he lived--alone.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE TURN OF THE SCREW

The Turn of the Screw was commissioned by the Venice Festival of Contemporary Music, for performance in 1953. However, it was postponed a year because of Britten's commitments at home for the Coronation celebrations. It was premiered at the Venice Festival by the English Opera Group on September 14, 1954. With The Turn of the Screw, his seventh chamber opera, Britten produced a work of international appeal.

Again, as in *Peter Grimes*, there is the unresolved struggle between good and evil, or more exactly between innocence and guilt. Good is represented by the Governess, while evil is represented by the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel, a former man-servant and a former governess. (See Appendix C for list of characters.) As is usual in Britten's operas, we find not the ultimate triumph of good, but the sacrifice of innocence.²⁵ The story is based on Henry James's short story by the same name. The libretto is set by Myfanwy Piper. Although it is written for five soprano voices and one tenor, Britten manages to keep the work fresh and interesting.

The Turn of the Screw is written in a prologue and two acts.

²⁵Christina Thoresby, "Britten Premiere," Musical America, LXXIV, No. 13 (November 1, 1954), 5.

There are sixteen scenes. Immediately following the Prologue, the theme, upon which Britten has written fifteen variations interspersed between scenes, is introduced. These orchestral interludes play an important role in the drama of the opera. By casting these interludes in the form of a theme (the "Screw") and variations, Britten is more able to make the listener aware of the ever increasing tension of the dramatic action of the work. Furthermore, this theme and variations can be extracted from the opera and performed as a concert piece.

The tale is set in and around Bly, a country house on the East of England about the middle of the nineteenth century. The central dramatic action concerns a conflict between the Governess and the ghosts of Quint and Miss Jessel. During their lifetime, Quint and Miss Jessel had an unnatural influence over the two children, Miles and Flora. After death, they return to continue this influence. The new Governess refuses to admit this influence, resulting in a struggle between good (the Governess) and evil (the ghosts and the children).

The Prologue occurs in front of a drop curtain. It is sung by a tenor, who is usually the same person who sings the role of Quint in the opera, and it is accompanied by solo piano. In recitative style, he explains that a governess is summoned to care for the young nephew and niece of a young gentleman. Because he is so busy, the gentleman asks the Governess never to contact him after taking charge of the children, but to care for the children as she sees fit. Near the end of the Prologue, the theme is announced in the piano, in a sequence of rising fourths.

Immediately following the Prologue, the theme is stated in the piano. It is a series of double-dotted quarter notes, followed by six-

teenthths, which begin in D-major and progress through E, F-sharp, G-sharp, B-flat, D, and ends in D (see Ex. 31).

Ex. 31: Theme, Act I, mm. 41-49

Very slow ($\text{♩} = 48$)

pst.

molto

The tension of the "Screw" can be felt in the agitated rhythm and quick changes of key.

Scene I: The Journey

The galloping rhythm which follows the theme introduces Scene I, The Journey. The Governess can be seen riding in a coach. This first scene is free, unmeasured recitative. The galloping rhythm can be heard throughout this first scene, as the Governess contemplates her future at Bly. Near the end of the scene she sings "O Why did I Come?" to a

motive, which is labeled Motive A.

Ex. 32: Motive A, Act I, mm. 72-74



Her anxiety about her new job is quite evident.

Variation I

In Variation I, in twelve-eight meter, the theme is stated by the strings while the woodwinds sustain the dominant seventh of B-major. As this interlude gathers momentum, the woodwinds alternate some inverted secondary dominants, which form cross rhythms with the theme. (See Ex. 33)

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Ex. 33: Variation I, Act I, mm. 84-86

Scene II: The Welcome

As this scene begins, we find the children playing on the porch of Bly. They sing a very merry imitative duet. Flora starts and Miles enters a measure later. Before their duet ends, they sing in unison. After Mrs. Grose, the maid, quiets them, she has them practice curtsying and bowing. A downward glissando of the harp depicts the bowing. When the Governess arrives, we hear Motive A played in the solo violin. Somehow or other, it seems to tell the listener that the Governess will regret her stay at Bly. After the children curtsey and bow to the Governess, she and Mrs. Grose begin a duet which develops into a quartet when the children are added. In the duet the Governess expresses her delight in being there, and Mrs. Grose expresses her pleasure at having a new governess. When the children enter, they sing the same melody as that of their previous duet, which is merely added to the ladies' parts to make a quartet.

Variation II

In this variation the woodwinds and strings take turns flirting with the theme in rapid triplet patterns, while the bass instruments play a walking melody in half notes, which is reminiscent of the Governess's part in the previous quartet.

Scene III: The Letter

The Governess receives a letter, which informs her that Miles has been dismissed from school, because his behavior is detrimental to the other children. As the Governess relays this information to Mrs. Grose, Motive A is heard in the solo viola. Because the school officials have made such a decision, the Governess feels that Miles must certainly be bad, but Mrs. Grose thinks not. At this point, the children are seen playing together at the window. After hearing the children sing "Lavender's Blue, diddle diddle," the ladies are no longer in doubt that Miles is really an angel. In this quartet the ladies sing in two-four while the children sing in three-four. The Governess decides to do nothing in the way of disciplining the boy. As she makes this decision to do nothing, some rather dissonant and non-functional chords are heard. The first one is a D-minor eleventh, and the next is an E-major eleventh. This dissonant effect seems to serve to let one know

(For reasons of space and proper placement of the following example, the remainder of this page is left blank.)

that the Governess has made a wrong decision.

Ex. 34: The Letter, Act I, mm. 308-312

GOVERNESS

I shall say no-thing.

MRS. GROSE

And what shall you say to him?

Variation III

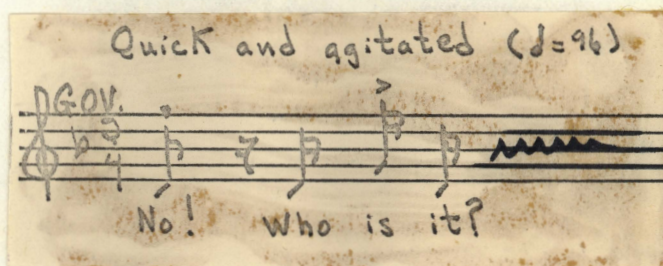
The intervals of the theme are used in a melody, which is played by oboe, flute, and clarinet. The first statement, by the oboe, is the same as that of the Governess in the next scene. The primary tonalities underlying this interlude are D, A, F, and D. As usual, Britten's harmonic scheme is rather straightforward. This interlude is intended to convey the effect of a quiet summer evening. It leads directly into Scene IV.

Scene IV: The Tower

It is now evening, and the tower is visible, as the lights fade in on the house. The Governess strolls in and sings of the charm and beauty of Bly, as well as that of the children. At this point, the sup-

porting accompaniment is the music of the preceding interlude. As she dreams of her employer, she only wishes that he could see just how well she does his bidding for him. As the celesta strikes a G-minor seventh, the ghost of Quint suddenly appears on the tower. (The celesta becomes the instrument by which the ghosts are characterized.) He stares at her, as an *accelerando* passage is played in the celesta. At first, the Governess thinks it is her employer, but after a closer look she discovers that it is a stranger. Here, in an agitated manner, she sings a melody of rising fourths, which is Motive B.

Ex. 35: Motive B, Act I, m. 394



When the scene fades, she is still unaware of whose image she has seen.

Variation IV

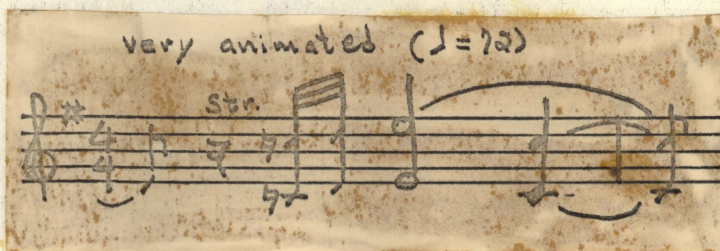
The fourth variation is harmonic. It begins in A-major and progresses diatonically upward until it reaches E-major, where it comes to rest. These progressions are made by parallel octaves in the piano and double bass. Above the variation, the strings and percussion are playing a rather hideous marching rhythm which is comprised of tone clusters.

Scene V: The Window

As the lights fade in on the hall, Flora and Miles ride in on a hobby horse. To the accompaniment of the music of the fourth interlude, they sing the nursery rhyme, "Tom, Tom, the Piper's Son." As the

Governess enters, the children ride out. She looks about for a moment, picks up a pair of gloves, and is about to leave, when she sees Quint appear at the window. The celesta begins a brief interlude built on Motive B, the rising fourths. As this "Ghost" music continues, Quint and the Governess stare at each other until he disappears. Mrs. Grose enters and finds the Governess absolutely bewildered. Here, they sing a duet in recitative style, which involves primarily the fourths of Motive B. After the Governess describes what she has seen, Mrs. Grose tells her that it was Peter Quint. She proceeds to give the details of Miss Jessel's and Quint's stay at Bly. It seems that Quint had a powerful influence over Miles. His influence also reached Miss Jessel and Flora. Because of this influence, Mrs. Grose is certain that Quint is trying to continue his spell over the children, even after death. To an ugly and ghostly version of Motive A, the Governess agrees that wicked things have occurred at Bly. Britten has distorted this motive by having the oboe and horn play it in parallel major sevenths. As Motive C is played, the Governess vows to protect the children from the ghosts (see Ex. 36).

Ex. 36: Motive C, Act I, mm. 645-646

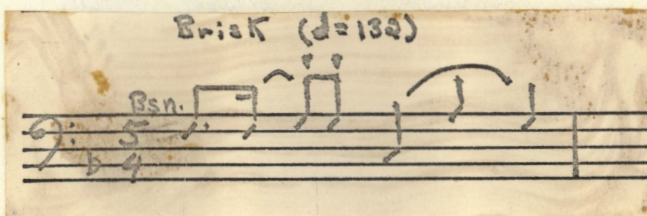


By way of secondary dominants, Britten modulates to F-major, the tonality of the fifth variation.

Variation V

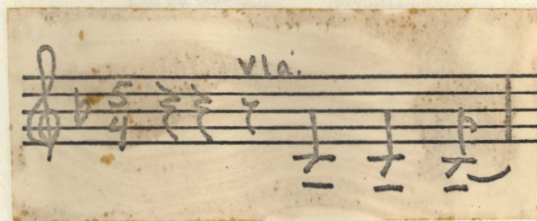
Variation V is an invention. It begins in F-major and is in quintuple meter. The motive is introduced in the first measure by the bassoon (see Ex. 37).

Ex. 37: Invention motive, Act I, m. 658



Against the motive, the viola plays the counter-motive (see Ex. 38).

Ex. 38: Invention counter-motive, Act I, m. 658



This motive is then repeated, followed by some free material in the viola. In the fifth measure there is an episode, which leads directly into the motive. This time the motive is a step higher (begins on G) and is played by the oboe. Here, the counter-motive is played by the cello. Again, it is followed by some free material and the episodic material, which contains a "motive-element."²⁶ The third entrance of the motive is still

²⁶In his book, *Counterpoint* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), p. 62, Kent Kennan uses the term "motive-element" to describe that part of an episode in which portions of the motive are employed.

another step higher, and is played by the clarinet. Not only is the motive accompanied here by the counter-motive, but also by the free material. From this statement of the motive, Britten goes directly to its fourth statement, which is still another step higher in the piccolo. Following this, there is a lengthy (four measures) episode, again accompanied by some free material. Still another step higher, the fifth statement of the motive is in the horn. Here, it is followed by three measures of episode and free material. The tympani play the sixth statement of the motive. Accompanied by the counter-motive and some free material, it is pitched here in E-flat. After another brief episode, the piano states the motive three times in F-major, the original key. The woodwinds play the free material, while the bassoon plays the counter-motive. As with the theme, Britten goes by whole step from one octave to another.

Scene VI: The Lesson

This scene is set in the schoolroom, where the Governess is supervising Miles's Latin lesson. Flora helps him. Accompanied by various forms and fragments of the invention motive, the children name several Latin masculine nouns. The Governess commends him on this part of his lesson, but when she asks him to continue, he hesitates and begins singing to himself a rather curious song called "Malo I would rather be, Malo in an apple tree." This is the first open manifestation of his deranged mind. The song has a rather simple line, typical of what a child might sing. It is accompanied by root position triads

played by the harp (see Ex. 39).

Ex. 39: Malo, Act I, mm. 722-726

Slowly moving ($d=60$)

MILES *pp*

Ma - lo, Ma - lo, Ma - lo I would

Vla.

pp

harp

ra-ther be.....

Variation VI

This interlude is comprised of segments of Miles's "Malo" melody and a series of sextuple figures which go through the same harmonic scheme as does the theme. This time the harmonic scheme is transposed to begin in C-major.

Scene VII: The Lake

As the scene opens, the Governess and Flora wander into the park. Flora, curious about the differences between rivers, seas, and lakes, asks the Governess if the local lake is in her book. Taking advantage of a learning situation, the Governess has the child name all the seas that she knows. After naming the seas, she sings a lullaby, the lyrics of which are just as peculiar as those of "Malo." To make it even more queer, Britten has the harp and muted strings accompany it with a series of unresolved ninth chords. As Flora ends her lullaby, Miss Jessel appears on the other side of the lake. The Governess, who has been reading, looks up and sees Miss Jessel, who disappears. After the tympani furiously sound Motive B, the Governess commands Flora to fetch Miles, for she realizes that each child is in danger. Furthermore, she is now quite aware that the children are not as innocent as they pretend to be, for she is quite certain that Flora saw Miss Jessel and made no effort to say anything. All the while the orchestra is reiterating Motive B. Thinking herself to blame, to the melody of Motive C she berates herself, calling herself useless. On a repeated descending fourth, she exclaims the damnation of the children. Just as the scene ends, the ghost music of the celesta can be heard as it introduces Variation VII.

Variation VII

In this interlude the theme appears in its original shape. Played by the horn, it is accompanied by harp, celesta, gong, and double bass. They play the harmonic framework, which consists of a series of unresolved dominant seventh chords.

Scene VIII: At Night

As the scene opens, Quint is heard (off stage) calling Miles. His call, which is a vocal cadenza, is a melismatic and distorted version of Motive A. As he calls, the celesta softly plays its "ghost" music. As the lights fade in on the house and tower, Quint can be seen on the tower and Miles in the garden below. Miles is dressed in his sleeping garments. Unable to resist the temptation, Miles answers. In a rather lengthy recitative, Quint presents himself as a god to Miles. Here are just some of the things he calls himself:

I'm all things strange and bold,
The riderless horse, snorting, stamping, . . .
on the hard sea sand,
The hero-highwayman plundering, plundering
the land.
I am King Midas with Gold in his hand.

He continues tempting Miles until he is sure that he has complete control of him. Quint is soon joined by Miss Jessel, and they both call the children. Flora is at the window and Miss Jessel by the lake. The four of them join in a question and answer session, the purpose of which is to influence the children so they can do nothing but follow them. To further enhance their influence, Quint and Miss Jessel, in a duet, tell the children that they wait everywhere for their every call. As they finish this duet, Mrs. Grose and the Governess approach. Here, all six voices are heard. The Governess and Mrs. Grose are calling the children, while the ghosts do likewise, but the children vow to be faithful to Quint and Miss Jessel. As the sextet begins, the horn and woodwinds can be heard sounding the original theme (the "Screw"). As the Governess runs to Miles, the tympani are heard playing Motive B in an agitated fashion. As she reaches Miles, she tells Mrs. Grose to hurry to Flora, because she now knows that there has been a rendezvous of the children and the

ghosts. Accompanied by a series of descending minor ninth chords in the harp, Miles very innocently admits being bad. His melodic line here is composed of those fourths of Motive B. It is also the same interval to which the Governess exclaims the children's damnation in Scene VII. The tympani finish the act by repeating these fourths.

Act II

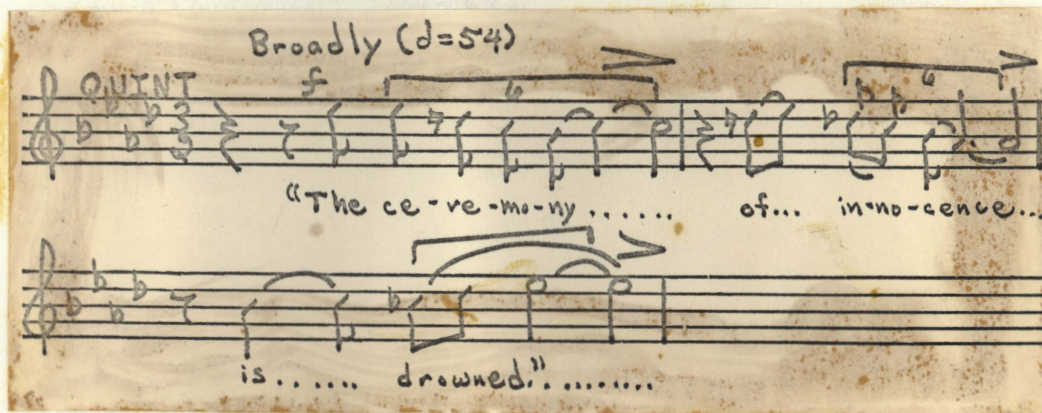
Variation VIII

This variation is a set of bi-tonal chords, each of which is followed by a cadenza. The first cadenza, by the clarinet, is built on Motive A. In the second cadenza the first violin plays a very melancholy line, which is reminiscent of the theme, but composed of different intervals. One quarter-note after the first violin begins, the second violin enters a third lower with a tonal imitation of this line, but when this duet ends, the two violins are only a semi-tone apart. The third cadenza, heard in the flute, contains rhythmic elements of the theme. The fourth cadenza is a viola-cello duet. This is a rhythmic variation of the theme. The harp cadenza is an animated passage containing broken chords and tremolos. In the sixth cadenza the horn plays a rhythmic melody which is quite reminiscent of the rhythm in the accompaniment of "The Journey." The theme is heard in augmentation in the seventh cadenza, which is played by bassoon and double bass. In the eighth cadenza the oboe hints at the rhythm of the theme. The last cadenza is given to the tympani. The tympani repeat a broken C-minor eleventh chord, which is the same chord that the celesta plays when Quint appears in "The Window."

Scene I: Colloquy and Soliloquy

As the scene opens, Miss Jessel is heard asking Quint why he summoned her to his side. Quint denies influencing her, but this is a rather obvious lie. It becomes evident here that Miss Jessel is just as much Quint's victim as his accessory. Quint now admits that he has returned to take possession of Miles's soul, so that the boy can perform all his sinister activities. Here, Quint quote's W.B. Yeats's line, "The ceremony of innocence is drowned." The melodic line is that of Motive A (see Ex. 40).

Ex. 40: Motive A, Act II, mm. 68-70



The significance of Motive A is now apparent. Britten uses Miss Jessel and Quint to demonstrate man's vulnerability to sin in the face of violence.²⁷

After expressing her intention to possess Flora's soul, Miss Jessel reiterates Yeats's line. To the tune of the theme in augmentation, the ghosts firmly tell how they are gradually winning over the children.

²⁷Whittall, *loc. cit.*, p. 314.

Repeating "The ceremony of innocence is drowned," Miss Jessel and Quint complete their colloquy.

In her soliloquy, not only does the Governess see evil, but she admits that innocence has corrupted her. Her perplexity is dramatized in the music by quickly-moving chromatics in the strings.

Variation IX

This interlude serves as a prelude to the second scene, "The Bells." In this variation, which features the bells, Britten maintains only the gesture of the original theme. Neither the rhythm nor the intervallic relationships of the theme remains intact.

Scene II: The Bells

As the scene opens, the lights fade in on the churchyard. While the bells continue ringing, the children walk in chanting in the manner of choir boys. As they settle themselves on a tomb, Mrs. Grose and the Governess enter, engaged in casual conversation. Meanwhile, the children continue singing their satirical praises to God. Unaware of the nature of their song, Mrs. Grose thinks they are sweet children. When they sing, "O Mrs. . . Grose, Mrs. Grose, Bless ye the Lord: May she never be confounded!" the Governess suddenly realizes that they are talking horrors. As they address Mrs. Grose, Britten punctuates this section by accompanying it with a series of secondary dominants which move directly to their tonic chords, but the tonic chords contain a nonharmonic tone which creates a sharp dissonance (see Ex. 41).

Ex. 41: The Bells, Act II, mm. 256-258

FLORA and MILES

(d=d) (broadly)

May she ne-ver be con-

Mrs. Grose finally suggests that the Governess write to their uncle, but the Governess refuses because she was charged never to worry him. The children continue their chant, and the ladies continue their conversation, forming a quartet. The Governess tries to convince Mrs. Grose that Miles and Flora are under the spell of the ghosts, but thinking her slightly mad, Mrs. Grose tries to comfort her. They all go toward the church. As they walk, Miles, knowing that his uncle knows nothing of what is happening at Bly, all but challenges the Governess to interfere. He then joins Mrs. Grose and Flora in the church. Knowing that she is alone in her efforts to uncover the plot of Quint and Miss Jessel, the Governess decides to quit Bly while the others are in church. Here the orchestra plays brief fragments of Motive A.

Variation X

In this interlude the theme is disguised in the walking bass line, while the strings play sixteenth note rhythms which symbolizes the perplexed mind of the Governess as she runs away.

Scene III: Miss Jessel

The third scene finds the Governess entering the schoolroom, where she finds Miss Jessel sitting at the desk. Miss Jessel makes known her plan to have the child. In a rage of passion the Governess displays her love for the children and vows never to abandon them. More angry than frightened, she commands Miss Jessel to leave, and she does. Convinced that she can no longer face this impossible situation alone, she decides to write her employer. In the letter she asks to see him at once so that she may tell him of what is happening at Bly.

Variation XI

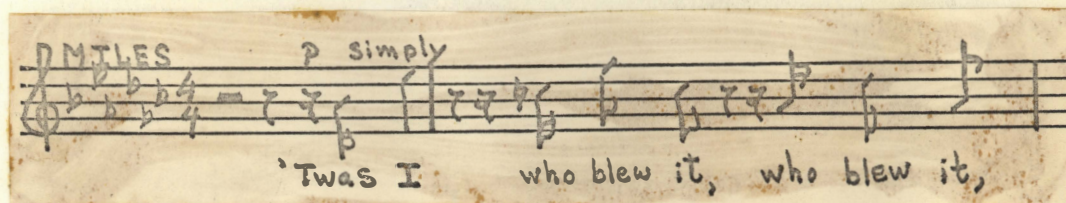
The bass clarinet opens this interlude with the theme (not the original rhythm). The alto flute follows three beats after the bass clarinet with the theme at the twelfth. The two of them then participate in an animated duet of arpeggios. Now, these two instruments play the theme together at the twelfth, followed again by the arpeggiated section. This procedure is repeated, leading directly into the next scene.

Scene IV: The Bedroom

Miles is seen in his candle-lit bedroom, sitting restlessly on the edge of the bed. As the bass clarinet and alto flute trill major seconds, the English horn plays Miles's melody, "Male," after which Miles sings it. The Governess enters, quite surprised to find Miles still up. With an air of innocence Miles tells her that he is contemplating the queer life that he and Flora have been leading. Hoping that Miles will admit his collaboration with the ghosts, the Governess pretends that she knows nothing of what he is saying. She then informs the boy that she has written his guardian. The ever-increasing tension of the "Screw"

can be felt as the alto flute and bass clarinet continue to sing the theme. As the Governess vainly tries to persuade Miles to talk, Quint's voice is heard summoning Miles. As both the Governess and Quint try to win Miles's confidence, the candle suddenly goes out. Miles shrieks. Realizing that Quint actually blew out the candle, Miles, to his "evil" fourths, admits doing it (see Ex. 42).

Ex. 42: Motive B, Act II, mm. 585-586



As the scene fades, we again hear the English horn play "Malo," while the bass clarinet and alto flute continue their trills.

Variation XII

In this variation we hear the voice of Peter Quint, as he persuades Miles to take the letter which the Governess has written to the guardian. He uses free recitative and ohne stimme (without voice). The variation is achieved by maintaining the intervallic gesture in the quickly moving and imitative pizzicato string passages.

Scene V: Quint

In this extremely short scene (only 27 measures) Quint continues persuading Miles to get the letter. (All the while, Quint is unseen.) Miles finally goes to the desk, gets the letter, and returns to his bedroom. The scene ends with the English horn playing "Malo," which serves as a reminder that Quint's influence over Miles grows stronger and stronger.

Variation XIII

This interlude is a graceful and satirical piano piece, played by Miles. It serves as a prelude to the next scene. Britten has cleverly disguised the theme in the dainty piano melody (see Ex. 43).

Ex. 43: Piano melody, Act II, mm. 658-659



In these turns the theme is played in retrograde motion with three of the intervals inverted. Immediately following this, the theme is played in forward motion, but some of its intervals are inverted. At the very end of the interlude the theme is played again, transposed down a minor third with four of its intervals inverted.

Scene VI: The Piano

As Miles continues playing, the Governess and Mrs. Grose hover about. Flora is sitting on the floor, playing at "eat's cradle." Together Mrs. Grose and the Governess commend his playing ability. While Miles is seemingly engrossed in his playing, the Governess calls Mrs. Grose aside and tells her that she has written to the guardian. Miles, suspicious of what is happening, suddenly plays pianissimo, but the Governess orders him to play. As he plays, they continue praising him.

While the Governess stays by the piano and Miles, Mrs. Grose walks over to watch over Flora. By now Miles has finished his first piece and is playing the second. During the conversation between Flora and Mrs. Grose, Miles begins showing off at the piano. As Miles performs,

Flora lulls Mrs. Grose to sleep. As she sleeps, Flora slips quietly away. Aware that the children have tricked them, the Governess stops Miles's playing, and she awakens Mrs. Grose. They now know that Flora has gone to Miss Jessel. As the scene ends, they rush off.

Variation XIV

This variation also features Miles. As the orchestra outlines the theme in parallel octaves in a rather agitated fashion, the piano plays a rather triumphant march-like figure.

Scene VII: Flora

Mrs. Grose and the Governess are heard calling Flora. Mrs. Grose finds her and scolds her, while the orchestra continues the driving accompaniment of the previous interlude. Against this the clarinet and flute engage in a prankish duet of cross rhythms and dissonant seconds.

Just as the Governess arrives, Miss Jessel appears on the other side of the lake and begins calling Flora. She tries to point out the ghost to Mrs. Grose, but Mrs. Grose does not see it. Flora also denies seeing Miss Jessel. At this point the four female voices are involved in a quartet, in which the Governess tries to expose Miss Jessel; Mrs. Grose tries to comfort the Governess; Flora admits her hatred for the Governess and flatly denies seeing or hearing Miss Jessel; and Miss Jessel begs Flora to keep quiet. Having successfully completed her mission, Miss Jessel disappears, while the Governess watches Mrs. Grose and Flora go off comforting each other.

Aware that she has lost Flora, in her recitative the Governess exclaims upon her failure, accompanied by a descending scalewise passage in the orchestra. As the scene closes, the Governess is left repeating

"She hates me!"

Variation XV

In this short variation Britten uses tremolo chords to introduce two cadenzas. The piccolo has the first cadenza and the tympani the second. The only resemblance this has to the original theme lies in the tremolo chords, which are similar to those used to accompany the original theme.

Scene VIII: Miles

This scene finds Mrs. Grose and Flora ready for traveling. In her sleep Flora has told Mrs. Grose everything. To save the child Mrs. Grose is taking her away. As Mrs. Grose and the Governess talk, pieces of Motive A can be heard in the harp. After Mrs. Grose and Flora leave, the Governess faces Miles in an attempt to make him tell all. At this point a passacaglia, which consists of the first six pitches of the original theme, begins in the bass instruments. As Miles saunters in, the strings are heard playing the rhythm of the theme in diminution. As the Governess gains Miles's confidence and convinces him to talk, Quint can be heard calling Miles, but Miles cannot see him. Here, Quint's music is Motive A. When Miles finally decides to tell all, Quint appears on the tower, but the Governess sees him and pushes Miles around so he cannot see the ghost. Here, Miles admits taking the letter. As the Governess tries to force Miles to admit being under Quint's power, she and Quint become involved in an open conflict to win the boy's confidence. As he did in Scene VIII of the Act I, Quint tries to tempt Miles, while the Governess prods him to just mention the name of Peter Quint. Suddenly, Miles screams, "Peter Quint, you devil!" and runs into the

Governess's arms.

After Quint slowly disappears, the Governess believes that now all is well. To the tune of Motive A, Quint says his last farewell to Miles. It is here that the Governess realizes that Miles has died in her arms. As she tries vainly to revive him, the English horn sings "Malo." After she lays him on the ground, the Governess sings "Malo." Thus Miles's enigmatic song becomes his requiem.

CHAPTER VI

COMPARISON OF PETER GRIMES AND THE TURN OF THE SCREW AND SUMMARY OF BRITTEN'S STYLE

Grand Opera Versus Chamber Opera

Although Benjamin Britten has written successfully both grand and chamber opera, his preference seems to be chamber opera. In comparing his best large opera with one of his better chamber works, one finds the main difference between the two lies in the number of performers used. While Peter Grimes uses a large cast (fourteen performers), a chorus, full orchestra and small ensemble off stage, The Turn of the Screw uses an extremely small cast (six performers), no chorus, and small orchestra (thirteen performers on eighteen instruments). (See Appendices A, B, C, and D.)

As one would suspect, one of the reasons for writing chamber opera is the easier manipulation of the smaller forces. Because the forces are smaller, unification of materials is more easily attained. Furthermore, in his chamber works, Britten has obtained the maximum effect by the most economical means. Another reason Britten has turned to chamber opera is the public appeal of smaller, more subtle works.

In his own words:

In these days commercial art, the films and television all aim at producing a realism impossible in live art. I believe this will make opera, for instance, concentrate on subtleties and abstractions; for these the small theatre and small forces are better suited.²⁸

Although Peter Grimes is considered his most important operatic work, The Turn of the Screw has been performed more often. However, this is attributed not only to the small forces involved, but also to the economy of producing a chamber work. Chamber opera--because it requires fewer performers and rehearsals--costs much less to produce.

Britten's compositional techniques and idiosyncrasies will be discussed under separate headings below.

Harmony

Since Britten is primarily a vocal composer, his harmonic style is basically diatonic and maintained by reason of his melody.²⁹ This is particularly true of Peter Grimes. Because of the macabre nature of The Turn of the Screw, chromaticism and non-functional harmony play a greater role in creating the desired effects. Pyramiding and imitation to build tension are common to both these works. Bi-tonality may also be found in both works. His modulations are usually conventional and he does manage to modulate in a subtle manner. A favorite practice is that of either moving by the interval of a second or modu-

²⁸Wright, loc. cit., p. 12.

²⁹Howard Hartog (ed.), European Music in the Twentieth Century (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 141.

lating to the super-tonic. To quote Donald Mitchell:

Generally speaking, his harmonic poise is refreshingly unsymptomatic of his time--a case of the composer creating his time rather than being created by it.³⁰

Counterpoint

While Britten is not a great contrapuntalist, he achieves a light, clear texture through a polyphonic means. In Peter Grimes and The Turn of the Screw he employs such contrapuntal techniques as triple canon and invention. The Turn of the Screw maintains a polyphonic quality throughout. In Peter Grimes can be found some of the finest choral contrapuntal writing in the modern operatic repertoire.

Melody and Recitative

Britten has an extraordinary gift for writing melody. He is essentially a melodist. Peter Grimes is more beautiful than Wozzeck because of Britten's melodic invention.³¹ He seldom writes extended melodies, and seems to be partial to the intervals of the ninth and fourth. He is also fond of modal melodies. A prime example of a lovely modal melody is that of the third interlude (Lydian mode) in Peter Grimes. Ellen also sings to this melody in the first scene of Act II.

According to Hans Keller, ". . . he Britten has musicalized the recitative out of existence."³² Furthermore, ". . . Britten could

³⁰Donald Mitchell, "The Musical Atmosphere," edited by Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, loc. cit., p. 34.

³¹Hans Keller, "The Musical Character," edited by Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller, loc. cit., p. 346.

³²Ibid., p. 348.

never have gained his melodic freedom without divesting the recitative of its freedom and independence."³³ He has sublimated speech to the point where it approaches song.

Rhythm

Britten seems to have an affinity for rhythmically active music. Both works under discussion are never rhythmically static. Although dotted rhythms appear fairly regularly, it cannot be said that there is a particular rhythmic device by which Britten's style might be characterized. In both works meter changes are used often in an effort to adhere to the natural phrasing of the poetry. There are some ensemble sections which use two meters simultaneously. At one point in The Turn of the Screw two-four and three-four meters occur simultaneously, sometimes creating cross rhythms.

Form

While Britten is not a slave to form he does rely on Baroque and other early formal techniques as a means of unification. Two of his favorite formal procedures, the passacaglia and theme and variations, appear in Peter Grimes and The Turn of the Screw. He also makes use of the polyphonic forms, canon, fugue, and invention. A favorite practice is that of using an orchestral interlude as the accompaniment for an entire scene. His arias are most often in A-B-A form.

³³Ibid.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In examining these two works, not only has the writer gained a greater understanding of them, but also greater appreciation of Benjamin Britten's craft of composition.

Britten is not an innovator, but a renovator. He is an eclectic without being derivative. He has taken the best of Monteverdi, Purcell, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Berg, Stravinsky, and other European composers, and used them to best advantage. His capacity for adopting styles and techniques accounts for his international fame and popularity. In his own words:

I do not see why I should lock myself inside a purely personal idiom. I write in the manner best suited to the words, theme or dramatic situation which I happen to be handling.³⁴

There is a certain freshness in his music that is lacking in other twentieth century composers. He is so skilled at his craft that he does not have to rely on gimmicks as a means of expression. Not only does he continue to use the traditional tonal materials, but he has also proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that the tonal materials are far from being exhausted. A.M. Whittall so aptly states the matter when he says,

³⁴Ibid., pp. 329-330.

"He Britten may well be the last composer to write tonally without banality or an aura of false optimism."³⁵

³⁵Whittall, loc. cit.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

CHARACTERS OF PETER GRIMES

PETER GRIMES, a fisherman Tenor

BOY (JOHN), his apprentice. Silent

ELLEN ORFORD, a widow, schoolmistress of the
Borough Soprano

CAPTAIN BALSTRODE, a retired merchant
skipper Baritone

AUNTIE, landlady of "The Bear" Contralto

NIECE 1
NIECE 2 main attractions of "The Bear" Sopranos

BOB BOLES, fisherman and Methodist Tenor

SWALLOW, a lawyer, Mayor of the Borough Bass

MRS. (NABOB) SEDLEY, a rentier widow of an
East India Company's factor Mezzo-soprano

REV. HORACE ADAMS, the rector Tenor

NED KEENE, apothecary and quack Baritone

DR. THORP Silent

HOBSON, carrier Bass

Chorus of townspeople and fisherfolk

Scene: The Borough, a small fishing town
on the East Coast

Time: Towards 1830

APPENDIX B

ORCHESTRATION OF PETER GRIMES

2 flutes (doubling piccolos), 2 oboes (second doubling cor Anglais),
2 clarinets in B-flat and A (second doubling E-flat clarinet), 2 bas-
soons, double bassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, tympani,
percussion (2 players), celesta, harp, strings.

Off stage: 2 clarinets, percussion, solo violin, solo double bass.

APPENDIX C

CHARACTERS OF THE TURN OF THE SCREW

THE PROLOGUE	Tenor
THE GOVERNESS	Soprano
MILES FLORA, young children in her charge	Treble Soprano
MRS. GROSE, the housekeeper	Soprano
QUINT, a former man-servant	Tenor
MISS JESSEL, a former governess	Soprano

The action takes place in and around Bly,
a country-house in the East of England,
in the middle of the last century.

APPENDIX D

ORCHESTRATION OF THE TURN OF THE SCREW

flute (doubling piccolo and alto flute), oboe (doubling English horn),
clarinet (doubling bass clarinet), bassoon, horn, percussion, harp,
piano (doubling celesta), string quartet, double bass.

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Recordings

Britten, Benjamin. Peter Grimes. Op. 33. Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, conducted by Benjamin Britten. Program notes to the recording by the Earl of Harewood, Eric Smith, and Peggie Cochrane. London A 4342.

_____. The Turn of the Screw. Op. 54. Jennifer Vyvyan, Joan Cross, Peter Pears, Arda Mandikian, Olive Dyer, and David Hemmings with The English Opera Group Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Britten. Program notes to the recording by Donald Mitchell. London A 4219.