An Awkward Reverence :
Composing Oneself in the 21st -Century Anglican Church

Another church…

Hatless, I take off
My cycle clips in awkward reverence…

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete…

- **Philip Larkin, -** ***Church Going***[i]

1. Introduction:

The gift of Philip Larkin, like that of several other major poets of our time, was to clothe deep matters of common human concern in a language which is never self-consciously 'poetic', but often plausibly conversational, in tone; certainly the poet reading his own work sounded the same as he did 'in person'. The depth of the poem quoted here resides in its carefully balanced ironies and ambiguities. In writing, many would render the *act* of church-going either with a hyphen or as a single word. Larkin's choice not to do so here already suggests wry acknowledgement of an ailing institution on its way out, a notion made uncomfortably explicit a few lines later in his encapsulation of a particular church building as *'this accoutred frowsty barn'*. Nor is his line *'recognised and robed as destinies'* as straightforward as it might at first appear: the initiative taken in this 'recognition' of human 'compulsions' seems to be that of the Church, not its visitor. The 'robing as destinies' thus carries an air of inscrutable expediency which strikes to the very heart of how the established Church –of whatever hue or creed –has always 'managed' things (and human ignorance) to its own social, political or less classifiably strategic advantage.

It is part of the human condition to perceive one's own epoch as 'the worst of times' and, in the present, to ignore the huge advances which distinguish our environment from that of, say, the Middle Ages. However, an immense acceleration of scientific and technological knowledge, often vaguely ascribed to 'the industrial revolution' but having particular roots in the French Revolution's aftermath and the rise of Napoleon, has progressively eroded the power of religion to speak persuasively to a restless society. Communications, travel and 'weapons capability' have all conspired to shrink the world, ushering in the expression 'global village'; and a growing knowledge of the cosmos, while revealing also the vastness of remaining human ignorance, already serves to counter unquestioning religious belief with scientific rationalism. Bishop Richard Holloway has spoken of the logical impossibility of accepting literally (with what amounts to a 'flat earth' mentality) the Nativity story in a post-quantum age, pointing instead to that form of mythical truth which arises from the plight of the

rootless outsider as embodied by Jesus and the perennial need for humanity to make reparation to others for his treatment.

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to articulate 'good theology' (or even bad) in respect of the works submitted with it. Rather, an attempt will be made to identify areas of received thought and contemplation which have impinged upon my own 'hints and guesses' as a restless sceptic within the Anglican tradition, increasingly alienated by the complacently perpetuated anomalies of the established Church. My own journey within and outside Christian faith so far has brushed against a number of writers willing to grapple with the meeting points of science and faith or doubt. One such thinker, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, observed over half a century ago how

object and subject marry and …transform each other in the act of knowledge; and from now on man willy-nilly finds his own image stamped on all he looks at.
…Man is unable to see himself entirely unrelated to mankind, neither is he able to see mankind unrelated to life, nor life unrelated to the universe.
…If to see is really to become more, if vision is really fuller being, then we should look more closely at man in order to increase our capacity to live. [ii]

Despite appearing here to echo a similar observation made some seven centuries earlier by St Thomas Aquinas, to the effect that man sees only according to the mode of his own perception, Chardin seems still to belong to a small and rarefied group of thinkers prepared to embrace both religion and science. The temptation to the lay person to blur their meeting point arises no doubt because, as the scientifically-trained theologian John Polkinghorne has written, *'…books are many and life is short, and much science is formidably technical in appearance'*.[iii] Polkinghorne goes on to deplore a general reluctance on the part of science to admit theological debate into its own sphere, while conversely noting the technical inability of theologians (even those willing to engage with science, such as Torrance) to achieve any great sophistication or insight when grappling with areas which lie by definition beyond their reach.[iv] A partial response to this is given by Richard Holloway, who states that

…in addition to the human factors involved, scientists do have an external reality to work on and look at in the form of everything other than themselves that exists. Theologians, in spite of the claims they may make to the contrary, do not have access to an equivalent metaphysical reality from which they can make deductions and conduct experiments. [v]

Holloway goes on to comment that one fascination of theology is its capacity to hold up a mirror to the human soul. (One notes his willingness to accept the scientifically unverifiable notion of 'soul' in the first place.)

To pursue this line of enquiry further in the present context would be to wander away from my intended subject. Nonetheless, two elements in my own struggle with faith have been, and still are, [i] the weight of evidence contradicting any notion of man's centrality in the cosmic order of things, and [ii] the willingness of the Anglican Church to take refuge behind a literal but highly selective application of Biblical writ to modern life, without concession to fundamental changes in the social and ethical order of existence since the time of the Old Testament. Holloway, who for me continues to shine as a lonely beacon of reason, acknowledges how far this has served

to alienate and divide its constituency by being morally prescriptive at the same time as casuistically slippery, noting also the obvious fact that religious belief causes at least as much strife and suffering as it allays:
We don't beat each other up over multiplication tables, but we get very agitated about religion and politics, because it is impossible to establish their incontrovertible truth.[vi]

Everything said so far would be applicable even were one to ignore the atrocities which have held sway throughout the twentieth century and have continued unabated into the twenty-first. As things are, theologians, philosophers, historians and artists have had to grapple with man's inhumanity to man on an increasingly epic scale. The phenomenon of the Holocaust remains central to this in the West, notwithstanding the more concealed and dissembled horrors of the Spanish Civil War, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Stalinist rule, the gruesome but largely forgotten Korean War or the more recent human tragedies of Vietnam, the Falklands, Bosnia, Iraq, Rwanda and so on. A graphic image is provided in the Museum of the 1941-1945 War in Moscow, where one large chamber features an uncountable number of steel filaments hanging from the ceiling, each representing an individual life lost in the conflict; but this merely emphasises, rather than dispels, the power of such phenomena to defy understanding. Theodor Adorno, George Steiner and others have contended that attempts at art predicated upon the Holocaust are both morally indefensible and practically unfeasible, since they seek to reduce the incomprehensible to finite, manageable and, hence, unwarrantably anodyne proportions. However, the lessons of history are for ever unlearnt in the generation following, even while in our own time the injunction to 'bear witness' is ever before us as a matter of human conscience.

It is clear that the artist with something burning to be said cannot hope to find universal favour; but no less evident to me that, since 'classical' music already enjoys so tiny a place in the mass culture of our age, deference to such as Adorno or Steiner (however high-minded their intentions) would be idle, even if seriously considered. For the composer seeking to articulate a moral conscience arising from the state of the world around him, the injunctions of two composers, Gustav Holst and Dmitri Shostakovich, are very much more to the point: Holst advised, *'never compose anything unless the not composing of it becomes a positive nuisance to you'* [vii] ; while Shostakovich is at least alleged by his controversial interlocutor, Solomon Volkov, to have stated, *'I feel that you must look truth right in the eyes'*. [viii] The former statement is one of creative pragmatism, the latter of human moral obligation. The two stand divided by circumstance: despite some experience of being 'the outsider' in the years immediately before the Great War, when he expediently dropped the Germanic 'von' from his name, Gustav Holst was of Russian ancestry exiled to Riga before it reached England, did not see active service, became a major figure in British music and experienced no privations even remotely comparable with the life of Shostakovich. *Mars* from *The Planets* was sketched in the year preceding the outbreak of hostilities and owes its impact to an abstract premonitory intensity, in which the inscrutable surface of an alien planet looms from outer darkness much like the face of an unknowable future.

It is widely noted that the Great War produced a far greater outpouring of poetry than its successor in 1939-1945, and that this might be ascribed to finding (as Wilfred Owen did in a laconic preface to his collected poems) *'the Poetry …in the pity'*, in an

environment where an enemy was regularly visible, the whites of his eyes sometimes harrowingly in view. In the Second World War, despite many exceptions, the foe had become depersonalised, because largely hidden. Although it is arguably mistaken to attribute higher quality to the poetry of the First World War than to that of the Second, it is evident that poets of the latter conflict (Sydney Keyes, Alun Lewis and Keith Douglas in particular) were by no means exclusively concerned with the poetry (or the pity) of warfare. In contrast it has been plausibly conjectured that Owen was intrinsically a 'war poet' who would have found little to say in peacetime, much as Churchill appears to have been a 'wartime' prime minister who recognised and rose to his own finest hour.

Owen epitomised a poetic urgency rooted in human conscience and in the pathos of close human encounters. There is therefore some curiosity in the fact that Holst's *Mars* heralds the horror of the trenches with a prophetic and elemental impersonality (even if the apparent patriotism of parts of *Jupiter* does not), while the Shostakovich of the early 1940s frequently charts the inward torment of individuals suffering side by side, not least within a traumatised civilian population (as in the Siege of Leningrad, for example). If there is some ostensible reversal of expected rôles here, it is a change which might be said to have prefigured the advent in more modern times of urban guerrilla conflict, terrorism, ethno-religious division and a new warfare on the doorsteps of one or another community. In such a context, almost nothing remains invisible.

The impact of war (and, indeed, of famine or other disaster) upon civilians is nowadays captured and transmitted into peaceful Western homes by highly mobile technology in the hands of courageous reporters. Its obscenely voyeuristic immediacy is deliberate, mitigated by genuine moral outrage on the part of those who gather it and an insistence that we should indeed 'look truth in the eyes'. At the same time, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism has confronted the West with an adversary within, both visible and invisible (or undetectable) in society's midst. An alienating force of fearful suspicion merely drives in deeper the wedge between cultures already rendered mutually inimical by inertia, ignorance and the default mechanism of a passively accepted 'ghetto' mentality.

Faced with such a tide of events, the restless sceptic still grappling with the challenges of faith is forced to interrogate yet more deeply the nature (not to say also possibility) of God – any god. Since my reflections upon faith have operated largely through the prism of music and have been ordained as much by disillusionment as by lively hope, some articulation of a personal position is now in order, even if it is a stance only transiently captured in its state of continuing flux.

Archbishop Michael Ramsey once addressed a question to all contemplating the Christian challenge from outside:

'...if in sincerity you cannot say that you want God you can perhaps tell him that you want to want him; and if you cannot say even that perhaps you can say that you want to want to want him! Thus you can be very near him in your naked sincerity; and he *will do the rest'.* [ix]

On the face of it this seems fallacious: why is any level of 'wanting to' not the same as actually doing so? For the troubled sceptic, the illusion of some gentler 'fall-back' position is all too redolent of the mentality of double-think and compromise which characterises so much of the Anglican Church, both today and in history. (The cynic might note that an institution founded upon royal adultery is upholding its traditions robustly in the person of its present *fidelis defensor*.)

The Church of England as a whole maintains an expediently selective attitude to Biblical writ. It is possible to visit any church, collegiate chapel or cathedral in the land for evensong and to be regaled with exhortations to an all-powerful deity to strike down our enemies and destroy them in their own wickedness. This is especially disturbing in an age when a nebulous Islamic threat, conveniently easy to superimpose on 'the heathen' in context of the received textual forms of Anglican worship, has arisen as if to provide an obliging enactment or human projection of shared 'Christian' fears. Holy writ on the various subjects of homosexuality, treatment of women, work on the Sabbath and ritual sacrifice provides ample and anomalous illustration of the status of the Bible as what Holloway has called 'a human construct'. An example is in order: many who regard themselves as Christian are happy to alienate and condemn homosexuals, without regard for the possibility of their leading mature lives as instruments of good precisely because they are fulfilled and empowered by lasting relationships. (Heterosexuals in adulterous and dysfunctional marriages do not, it appears, qualify for the same treatment.) Holloway makes the necessary point that it is questionable whether those who - for reasons of a subjective expediency - accept the teachings of St Paul on homosexuality, or those of the Psalms on praying for the righteous destruction of enemies, extend their observances to ritual sacrifice, murder of those who work on the Sabbath (or even a boycott of Sunday trading), ostracism of women undergoing menstruation (a tricky question to frame politely), and so on. He sums the position up thus:

Like an ancient galleon that has spent ages at sea, Christianity is encrusted with customs and attitudes acquired on its voyage through the centuries and it is making the tragic mistake of confusing the accidents of theological and cultural history with eternal truth.[x]

I have seen fit to include these reflections because they are a necessary indication why, in the course of composing many works and responding to many commissions within the Anglican Church since 1983, I have found a restlessness or malaise progressively asserting itself. This I perceive to be directed at the institution of the Church itself; also at aspects of its public and internal conduct which strike me as dysfunctional, complacent, disingenuous, occluding and self-defeating. That is not to say that my 'problem', if such it is, directs itself similarly at God, with whom the issues are other, though no less real and no less widely shared. The difference between these two problematic areas is that the former is sterile, disillusioning and rooted in human failing. Conversely, the latter is a fertile area of struggle which challenges creativity and might be thought of as something *intended* of human beings. Surely, if there were God, he would *expect* us to ask questions, to wrestle with doubt on the way to a faith hard-won enough to be worth its trouble, to frame myths with which to disperse or transfigure into good what we do not or cannot understand, and to pour our creative gifts from God into what amounts to an actual expression of

being: as the composer Carl Nielsen (actually a relatively serene humanist) wrote both simply and profoundly, *'music is the sound of life'*.[xi]

Even to begin to think in such terms is already to concede a small, imperilled but intact area of the self that still yields something to Archbishop Ramsey after all, reaching out for divinity and wishing it could believe in something, even while failing to see any true possibility of doing so. The questions which our age impels us to ask turn principally upon doubt. Man's human predicament in this area seems essentially circular. Richard Dawkins has pointed to the essential flaw in rejecting a godless universe simply because some inarticulate sense of moral or natural justice conceives that to be 'unfair' on a doomed humanity stuck in a particular tiny corner of space; for if there is no god, neither is there any 'justice' greater than our tiny selves: one returns to Chardin's sage observation that man cannot see other than with or through his own imprint. Nonetheless, man projects his doubts onto some 'other' entity even when more generally he affects to disbelieve in its presence: the person afflicted with human tragedy who cries 'why?' to the skies unthinkingly addresses something beyond both himself and humanity as a whole. That the presence of such a being might compel it or him to answer, and that this answer might be either beyond mere human comprehension or actually intolerable to the person asking, seems a notion with which we prefer not to engage, just as the absence of any such response from on high does not amount to universally accepted proof that no one is listening. Calamities have succeeded one another down the ages and, as Porphyria's murderer dryly commented, *'yet God has not said a word'*.[xii] Voltaire's slyly disingenuous conditional (*'si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer'*) remains true of human nature, if not necessarily of a divine being. (In fact, his original purpose was to repudiate an apparent proponent of atheism by pointing to Christian belief in an afterlife and divine judgement as a salutary means of regulating an otherwise lawlessly inclined society. Taken out of context, at least, his aphorism hints at private solidarity with the supposed opposition.)[xiii] In the meantime, those either facing directly the atrocities of the twenty-first century or bearing witness to them from the wings may find that their deepest utterances speak more resonantly to the human condition for being cradled in restless, galvanising doubt, not an artistically sterile certainty. This would seem to hold true even of a work such as Britten's *War Requiem*, where a God invoked *in extremis* offers no reply and an afterlife encounter envisaged by Owen seems almost to take place in some other-worldly military sick bay, offering no ultimate escape from the horrors of earthly conflict.

Owen is but one among many who have sought to impose a semblance of reason on the incomprehensible by seeing the Crucifixion as an emblematic event, symbolically or perhaps supernaturally re-enacted within the atrocities of successive ages. A striking instance of this occurs not in his poems but in one of his better-known letters, written to Osbert Sitwell from the front on 4th July 1918:

For 14 hours yesterday I was at work – teaching Christ to lift his cross by numbers, and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine he thirst till after the last halt. I attended his Supper to see that there were not complaints; and inspected his feet that they should be worthy of the nails. I see to it that he is dumb, and stands at attention before his accusers. With a piece of silver I buy him every day, and with maps I make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha.[xiv]

Owen himself was killed exactly four months later.

Britten's indentification with Owen sprang not least from a pacifist outlook able to share the poet's revulsion at the waste and horror of war, but also from awareness of shared homosexuality. It is probable that the social and cultural climate of their respective generations, which certainly engendered in Britten an acute sense of gazing in from a distance upon the world he inhabited, rendered the imagination of both more susceptible to the Christ figure's dual status as mysterious outsider and as Everyman. They are, however, by no means alone in exploring this theme.

The notion of the Suffering God is one which has been embraced in myriad ways through the centuries and in recent times has found particular focus through the Holocaust. As the German theologian Jürgen Moltmann has written,

…even Auschwitz is taken up into the grief of the Father, the surrender of the Son and the power of the Spirit. [xv]

Some are unable to reconcile divine non-intervention with the presence of any God. These have tended to find unacceptable the alternative implications that a suffering deity must also be a weak one, and thus seemingly of no avail, or that God is, after all, a fire-and-brimstone, malevolent dispenser of quasi-mediaeval 'justice'. However, the Bible – whether merely 'human construct' or not – does embrace the Suffering God, and it is surely in his image of forgiveness and reconciliation, rather than in that of the God of vengeance, that the seeds of humanity's potential to save itself, at least on this earth and in this life, are to be found. Such a thought acquires no little concentration in an age when mankind possesses the capability to destroy his planet several times over at the press of a button, though it should be noted that Moltmann emphasises a meeting of grief and surrender with power, echoing words of St Paul:

And he [the Lord] *said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness'.*
Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. [xvi]

Here, Christian belief reflects a reciprocal state of being in which the good Christian suffers for Christ because he –and, through him, the Suffering God –first suffered for humanity and –if Moltmann and others are to be accepted –does so still, continually. This, it would seem, is where intimations of faith and a sense of humanitarian obligation meet; for one glimpses here the acknowledgement that a divine mystery may after all be present in all humanity, and the possibility that 'looking truth right in the eyes' may occur no less mystically through acts of charity in the famine-torn Third World, or selfless manifestations of courage in the heat of battle, than kneeling in prayer in a place of worship. Indeed, the Suffering God may best be sought where he is most likely to be found. If belief is to be apprehended anywhere, it may perhaps be where something, or someone, stares back at us and some unquantifiable, numinous sense of mutual recognition is born.

Of course, it cannot be proven that this is not merely a manifestation of man's capacity for a more generally spiritual (as opposed to Christian) dimension. Pressed recently by Richard Dawkins on whether he truly espoused a faith affording hope of an afterlife, Lord Winston eventually responded that the framework of his Judaism provided him with an unimpeachable model for the leading of 'a good life'. One senses the unfairness of being cornered by a relentless zealot for atheism, since in response Winston (ever the good scientist) expressed no more than that of which he could be categorically sure, and may have left the encounter sensing that in some way he had traduced by understatement mysteries which he actually embraced more deeply, notwithstanding their ineluctable uncertainty. Nevertheless, the exchange offers a salutary reminder that Christian *values*, in common with those of other religions, can be a potent force for good in themselves.

I have set out these preliminary comments in order to touch upon some of the tangled ambiguities, inconsistencies and frail human doubts which have informed my creative work within the Anglican Church since 1983, the year of my first commission for a sacred choral composition. My path since then has embodied several settings of what might be termed 'standard' Anglican texts, but since the mid-1990s it has also diverged to encompass increasing personal unease within the established Church and a growing sense of need to engage with humanitarian – and, indeed, potentially humanist – issues which seem to inhabit the 'real world' in a way which the Anglican Church manifestly does not. I no longer subscribe to a Church content to embrace the anomalies created by Holy Scripture in our modern age, and my reaction to this has been an ever wider and more oblique range and intent in the matter of choosing texts for musical treatment. This increasingly includes the use of ironic or unsettling juxtaposition to heighten meaning or effect. The body of work submitted herewith has been subject to regular commissions where negotiation has been necessary, and the degree of creative freedom delegated to me as composer has varied. The foregoing comments serve to give an extra-musical context to this creative journey and to indicate the point to which it has led me in 2007. My most recent work in this area, an oratorio entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing*, epitomises my concerns. These might best be encapsulated in the following words from the eponymous mediaeval tract, collated in this sequence to form the text of the oratorio's Epilogue:

[And therefore,] if thou wilt stand and not fall, cease never in thine intent: but beat evermore upon this cloud of unknowing which is betwixt thee and thy God. For in the other life shall be no need as now to use the works of mercy, nor weep for the Passion of Christ. For then shall none hunger nor thirst as now, nor die for cold, nor be sick, nor houseless, nor in prison… He that is thine enemy, yet for pure pity thou risest up and helpest him, -O Lord! since a man may be so merciful in grace, what pity shall God have then. And therefore lift up thine heart with a blind stirring of love; for if it begin here, it shall last without end. [xvii]

An element of modern transliteration notwithstanding, this (collated) passage is strikingly contemporary in its essentially humanist feeling, which is not subsumed by its mystical undercurrents and manages to convey with a poignant urgency the transience of our chance to 'make a difference' for the common good while we are yet in the world. Taken as a whole, *The Cloud of Unknowing* demonstrates an arresting insight into human nature on the part of its anonymous author, nowadays believed to have been a monk writing in the East Midlands during the last quarter of the

fourteenth century. It has much to say also to those of an agnostic or atheistic disposition, or to those who prefer to draw some valid personal distinction between religious inclination and a less specifically directed spirituality. The sense of fleeting opportunity, and of an elusive human ideal, in the words quoted above calls to mind a train of thought pursued by Sir Isaiah Berlin in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, a work borrowing as its title a phrase from Immanuel Kant, who found the 'timber' from which man was made to be so twisted that nothing entirely straight or perfect could ever be fashioned from it. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* seems to suggest that salvation may be found not only in a kind of pure goodness, but also in the self-knowledge which springs from its pursuit. To this and the beliefs of countless other thinkers, Berlin adds the following:

If …we complain about our condition here on earth by pointing to conflict, misery, cruelty, vice, …-if, in short, we declare our state to be short of perfect, this is intelligible only by comparison with a more perfect world; it is by measuring the gap between the two that we can measure the extent by which our world falls short. Short of what?
…There is almost no view of the sources of true knowledge that has not been passionately held and dogmatically asserted in the course of …the Hellenic and Judaeo-Christian tradition. About the differences between them great conflicts have broken out and bloody wars have been fought, and no wonder, since human salvation was held to depend upon the right answer to these questions. …The point I wish to make is that all sides assumed that these questions could be answered. The all but universal belief that this amounts to is that these answers are, as it were, so much hidden treasure… Or, to use another metaphor, mankind has been presented with the scattered parts of a jigsaw puzzle: if you can put the pieces together, it will form a perfect whole which constitutes the goal of the quest for truth, virtue, happiness. [xviii]

Richard Holloway provides the necessary contemporary gloss to this:

…Religion is the result of our search for meaning. We look out on life and in on ourselves, and that act gives rise to religion, which is a way of connecting ourselves to the mystery of what is beyond ourselves, however we define it. That is why it is legitimate to think of atheism as a religious response, because it is a response to that ultimate concern, that final question we all ask ourselves. What we call faith, of one sort or another, is unavoidable here. …For [the German theologian] *Paul Tillich, the only real atheism is lack of concern for the meaning of our existence: 'Indifference toward the ultimate question is the only imaginable form of atheism'.* [xix]

All this has much to do with the inclination of a wavering and uncertain Christian to compose music which may speak to the condition of his fellow men. I have found that particular events and experiences in life have conjured an intimation of something which might be called faith. The poet Vernon Watkins likened artistic inspiration to a voice heard down a variable telephone line: for a time the line might be clear, the voice unimpeded. Then, the pen would race across the page and ease of communication would lead to rapid work imbued with its own instant certainty, seldom requiring revision thereafter; but sometimes the line would fall prey to sudden interference, the mist would descend again, and the work might have to await its due season. In either case, such a view acknowledges the sense of being the vessel or medium for what passes through one's faculties from elsewhere: not a new concept,

though one seldom expressed with such vivid simplicity as by Watkins. My own experience is at times comparable with this. More haunting in their intensity, however, are those occasions when certain completed works first see the light of day in performance. It is at such moments that a composition, now externalised and transformed for its creator into some state of ‘otherness’, takes on a countenance of its own and stares back at its progenitor. Through it, perhaps, gazes whatever unseen force first visited it upon the uncertain medium of a listening human. The sense of a strange mutual recognition, mentioned earlier in relation to actual human conduct, is achieved again. Such moments have on occasion been literally hair-raising in their apprehension of that ‘uncontrollable mystery’ to which the poet Yeats referred.

These introductory remarks have laid emphasis more upon a personal perception of the human condition than on individual experience. It is in the nature of things that my own musical awakenings (as a chorister within the Anglican tradition as perpetuated in its oldest universities and cathedrals) should inform my entire development since, proving another instance of the child becoming father to the man. However, disenchantment with the Church itself suggests that a distinction be drawn between apprenticeship (a kind of empirical bedrock which first imparted some ability to perceive critically) and the inner promptings of a more mature sensibility taking continuous stock of its place and smallness in an uncertain world. To that end, the ensuing section of this dissertation adduces only those parts of ‘the chorister experience’ which help to appraise matters of compositional and stylistic development; while (as befits a composer) the closing part of the document offers an attempt at synthesis of the tributary themes flowing finally into it. Between these sits a detailed exposition of much compositional work and of the personal ‘narrative’ which it might be said to form.

2. Compositional influences, development of a personal identity, critical reflection and comparative observations:

The ‘chorister experience’ was - and remains – the cornerstone of my development as a composer, having first awakened my awareness both of composers in general and of composition as a pursuit. It is valid to make some anecdotal comment on this formative period, since it has exercised comparable influence on a considerable number of other composers of my generation and also predisposes the receptive mind towards a certain eclecticism at an early age.

As a rule, choristers are boarders attending school some distance from where they sing. In my own case as a chorister at New College, Oxford in the late 1960s, serving under Dr [now Sir] David Lumsden, I and my contemporaries were not permitted to take back to school any scores which attracted our particular interest. By default, this provided an exceptional form of aural training, since it was consequently necessary to carry home as much of a piece as one could accommodate in one’s head by a mixture of aural and visual/notational memory, then work at reproducing it by memory and ear at the keyboard. As a result, large quantities of Tudor and Stuart music, including the ‘Great Service’ evening canticles by both William Byrd and Thomas Tomkins and

much music by Purcell, Boyce, Battishill, Stanford, Parry and innumerable others, remain in my memory and fingers to this day.

For the receptive chorister, the eclecticism mentioned above is unconscious and instinctive, since the rapid progress of aural perception and memory is untroubled at this early stage by notions of stylistic difference or of any overarching dialectic linking the works in question to musical history. Moreover, even were the chorister to possess some prodigious intuitive ability to place works in a kind of stylistic (rather than purely chronological) context, he would almost certainly still be 'tripped up' by the tendency of much church music to lag an immense distance behind the currents of stylistic innovation in the wider compositional world outside the church. Much that he sings is intensely, and also endemically, conservative (in a narrow sense arising from its creators' frequently self-restricted experience), a fair amount of it having been written by musicians whose urge to compose confined itself entirely to the Church and the organ loft. However, this need not prevent a fruitfully haphazard form of osmosis from taking place, precisely because the chorister ear is apt to accept and absorb, rather than sift and categorize. In my notes for the CD release *Meditations and Remembrances*, submitted herewith, I wrote how

'the blithe stylistic innocence of extreme youth blinded us to what separated more conservative parts of the twentieth century from the radical tendency of the sixteenth. I remember ending some infantile choral setting with a late-Tudor 'English cadence' disfigured by a final chord where 'Leighton-esque' major second supplanted conventional major third.' [xx]

While partially anecdoctal and intended for the classical consumer market, this note is worth quoting here at slightly greater length:

*Leighton was 'cool' (the term has undergone a recent recycling): he had come to a recording, smoked a pipe between sessions and brought a taboo pint of beer into the vestry from the College bar, to the delicious consternation of the Chaplain (Stravinsky's description of Diaghilev post-*Pulcinella *as embodying 'the offended eighteenth century' springs to mind). Leighton was also charmingly approachable, self-deprecatingly signing autographs for his star-struck exponents. I think I already sensed that his* sound *–translated into parallel terms –was like some strange meeting of the works of El Greco and Jacob Epstein, both of whom graced New College Chapel or antechapel: angularly and astringently of its time, yet embodying the ageless virtues of contrapuntal, polyrhythmic mastery and much else drawn from a centuries-older, more mellifluous sensibility. (As I think Bacon wrote,* 'there is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion'.*) Here was the bedrock of a dawning critical objectivity upon which I draw with gratitude to this day.*

[Citation of Bacon's aphorism seemed apt in that El Greco's elongated forms are believed to have arisen from an astigmatic condition, and therefore embody – for us, if not for him – a perceptual strangeness of proportion, as well as an antiquity to complement the modernity of Epstein.]

The appeal of Byrd (in particular) and his contemporaries lay in a miraculous exercise of imitative counterpoint. While the extremely young composer's interest in elaboration *per se* may be meretriciously equated with grand designs and impressively

dense notation on the page, attention to such detail in the hands of Tudor and Stuart composers usefully concentrated the mind on passing note procedures and, hence, linear direction of individual voices. In the case of Byrd, this could give rise to wondrously exuberant flights of rhythmic fancy, as in such a work as the motet *Laudibus in sanctis Dominum celebrate supremum*, of which its composer himself thought highly and which he placed at the head of his *Cantiones Sacrae* of 1591. Moreover, Byrd demonstrated a transcendent ability to deploy both rigour and a matchless kind of lyrical freedom, with an effect which defies logic by achieving memorable melody (as opposed to an entirely composite, cellular effect) even while obeying - or sometimes spectacularly reinventing - the dictates of polyphonically generated material. A suitable example is the ostensibly restrained English anthem, *O Lord, make Thy servant Elizabeth our Queen* (at the textual point *'and give her a long life, even for ever'*).

A further source of interest in English music of the Reformation period and beyond is that creative flair with which it confronts the inexact science of modality. 'Pure' modality entails the maintaining of opposing poles of tonality in a perpetual balance, neither becoming sovereign (or, in modern parlance, a 'tonic' to the other's dominant or subdominant). Already this becomes an art of compromise, whereby (for example) the supertonic of the Dorian modal scale may legitimately conform to the raised or major sixth of the Mixolydian scale a fifth below it –but the raised sixth of the Dorian modal scale itself refuses to be reconciled with the flattened or minor third of the Mixolydian mode, necessitating distortion of one scale or the other.

The balance of two modal 'poles' creates an ambiguity for the contemporary musician: if *x* is the tonic, *y* is the dominant; but let *y* be thought of as tonic, and *x* becomes *de facto* **sub**dominant. This explains the residual tendency of a good deal of music in the Baroque period to present one symbol fewer in the key signature than the modern eye or brain might anticipate; and it also accounts for fugal answers in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries which appear to the modern reader to be pitched in the subdominant rather than the expected dominant – the fugue from the celebrated *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* for organ being a case in point (though this is almost certainly not the work of J.S.Bach - little about it ever suggested that it was - and is now believed to have been transcribed and arranged by him, in transposition, from a work for violin solo). From this, in any case, the laterally inclined mind can take away a useful notion of an ostensible 'tonic' which is actually undermined by ambiguity to create fruitful conflict and, potentially, resolution into some new tonal area altogether. The significance of this for me personally will become clearer later on, especially in relation to Carl Nielsen.

If the repertoire of a collegiate choir such as that at New College passively encouraged a fledgling composer's blurring of stylistic boundaries, it also usefully exposed areas where reinterpretation of older truths is at work. For example, organ scholars tended to favour the sonatas for the instrument by Mendelssohn as voluntaries. From these it became apparent to me even then that Mendelssohn's fugal thinking can sound virtually indistinguishable from Bach for, say, five bars out of six, but then consciously take some step clearly audible as a blatant solecism in the terms of Baroque practice. The process in operation here is one of reinterpreting old principles; of working both fruitfully and by choice within the long shadow cast by compositional titans of an earlier age.

The Austrian lyric poet and dramatist Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874-1929) observed that true imagination is always conservative. By this, the Orcadian poet Edwin Muir (1887-1959) persuasively suggested, Hofmannsthal might have meant that imagination *'keeps intact the bond which unites us with the past of mankind'*. [xxi]

Muir dares to speculate that Hofmannsthal might also have been remarking how imagination sees

…the life of everyone as the endless repetition of a single pattern. It is hard to explain how we can enter into past lives if this is not so. We become human by repetition; in the imagination that repetition becomes an object of delighted contemplation, with all that is good and evil in it… In the world of imagination…you find no consistent progress, no starting where the previous generation left off; instead there is continuity. Every human being begins at the beginning, as his fathers did, with the same difficulties and pleasures, the same temptations, the same problem of good and evil, the same inward conflict, the same need to learn how to live, the same need to ask what life means. Conspicuous virtue, when he encounters it, may move him, or a new and saving faith; since the desire for goodness and truth is also in his nature. He will pass through the ancestral pattern, from birth to childhood and youth and manhood and age and death. He will feel hope and fear and love and hate and perhaps forgiveness. All this may seem dull and monotonous to the detached thinker, but it enchants the imagination for it is the image of all human life. But when change becomes too rapid, and the world around us alters from year to year, the ancestral image grows more indistinct than it was in simpler times, and the imagination cannot pierce to it as easily as it once could. …The acceptance of the past can enlarge and purify our image of human life. [xxii]

Where Muir is surely mistaken is in his assumption that this is what Hofmannsthal meant. Hofmannsthal had indeed used the word *konservativ* - leaving little room for etymological misconstruction. The context is a posthumously published *Tagebuch* or diary of aphorisms and brief philosophical meditations on the nature and evolution of art, some of them quoted from French, British and other German thinkers but most coined by Hofmannsthal himself. The observation *‚starke Phantasie ist konservativ'* stands in isolation, therefore offering little immediate context or qualification to guide the reader's interpretation. Muir's own meditation appears a legitimate if personal extension of the initial utterance. For all that Hofmannsthal indeed turned artistically to an historic past, achieving his own potent revival of tragic allegory upon the modern stage, there is a seemingly unconscious irony in the fact of Muir's response; as David Miles has written, Hofmannsthal's 1927 speech to the University of Munich (advocating a revival of form and *‚eine neue Deutsche Wirklichkeit'* [a new German realism]) *'…has often been discussed – with an eye to its elegant insistence on nationalism, right-wing revolutionism, mystical-romantic totalities, and the spiritual unity of the community –as being proto-fascist'*.[xxiii] This sorts oddly with Muir's own experience of post-war Prague in the late 1940s. Willa Muir, the poet's wife, recalls in her own memoir how they read Hofmannsthal together while in Austria between October 1923 and May 1924, and how in Vienna they encountered a virulent anti-semitism all the more shocking than that of Salzburg

…because it was fully conscious, buttressed by would-be intellectual arguments… They 'proved' to us that all subversive minds were Jewish, therefore Bernard Shaw was a Jew and, equally, of course, Ramsay MacDonald. …Goebbels later provided another clinching argument against Highlanders like Ramsay MacDonald: they came from the Hebrides, - the Hebrew islands. [xxiv]

Later, referring to Edwin's period as Director of the British Institute in Prague between 1945 and 1948, Willa Muir writes how

Not only were Czechs excluded from all higher education, they were told that the national history they had been taught was false to the core and in primary school were given a simplified version prepared by German scholars, showing that any part played by the Czechs in the history of Europe was the result of following German leadership or example; it was rubbed into them that they were an inferior mongrel race, born to be subordinates; that their legends were lies, their traditions fraudulent, their art and music merely derivative, their literature rubbish, their language a kitchen language unfit for higher uses. [xxv]

The palpable anger of these words contrasts strikingly with what must be read as either an unthinkable degree of philosophical (and vicarious) acceptance or an almost contemptible innocence on the part of Edwin Muir himself. In this context, the notion that all humanity shares *'the same difficulties and pleasures'* or *'the same problem of good and evil'* seems altogether too comfortable. Moreover, Hofmannsthal himself had been both secretive and highly sensitive about a Jewish strain in his own distant ancestry, in a way which does little to engage the sympathies of those untainted by anti-semitic inclinations. But it is in Muir's poetry that his clear-eyed experience, sharpened in the grim industrial Glasgow of his youth, emerges unblinkingly. Among the poems of his collection *The Labyrinth*, published in 1949 and in the immediate aftermath of his second Prague experience (he had been there also in the mid-1920s), the following may be found in a poem of subtly layered ambiguities, tellingly entitled *The Usurpers*:

There is no answer. We do here what we will
And there is no answer. This our liberty
No one has known before, nor could have borne,
For it is rooted in this deepening silence
That is our work and has become our kingdom.
If there were an answer, how could we be free?
It was not hard to still the ancestral voices:
A careless thought, less than a thought could do it.
And the old garrulous ghosts died easily,
The friendly and unfriendly, and are not missed…

…We live in light and darkness. When night comes
We drop like stones plumb to its ocean ground,
While dreams stream upward past us to the place
Where light meets darkness, place of images,
Forest of ghosts, thicket of muttering voices…

…For these fluttering dreams

They'd trouble us if we were credulous,
For all the ghosts that frightened frightened men
Long since were bred in that pale territory.
These we can hold in check, but not forget… [xxvi]

This digression is necessary because it is important to understand Hofmannsthal as the mere point of departure for a benign and affirming vision which is entirely Muir's own, and the ground for much which unites the relative artistic 'conservatism' of my continuing compositional work with an underlying strain of humanism and humanitarian conscience, to which I will return later. On a purely musical level, had I chanced upon the clarity and simplicity of Muir's excursion around Hofmannsthal during my chorister years, I would probably have both recognized and accepted what was being said. For many children of a generally receptive and contemplative disposition, what proves life-changing about 'the chorister experience' is not merely the music itself, but the wider sense in which that element fits into a mosaic of questions and intimations. Whether or not such children find themselves set for good upon the road of the professional musician, there can be few who do not carry forward with them a powerful respect for what Muir identifies as a kind of ancestral past (easily stilled and nullified, as his poem suggests and his wife's memoir more passionately confirms). The epithet 'timeless' is easily debased through over-use, but applies aptly to the formative experience of participation within an ancient devotional liturgy, observed amid the seemingly ageless permanence of beautiful buildings and a university tradition stretching back into the thirteenth century. What therefore emerges especially appealingly from Muir is something currently manifest in the pendulum swing of research trends within our academic communities: the notion that 'the life informs the works', that circumstantial knowledge of an artist cannot be lightly discounted, and that, in some all-embracing sense, artistic creativity itself serves as a simple, direct yet profound expression of 'what it means' to be alive.

One should not discount the possibility that one or another particular artist's work may appear to articulate the third of these points in defiance of what he himself may put into words: invited to provide autobiographical details during an Arts Council exhibition of his work in 1968, the controversial Franco-Polish painter Balthus (Balthazar Klossowski de Rola, 1908-2001) gnomically replied, *'Balthus is a painter of whom nothing is known. And now let us have a look at the paintings'*.[xxvii] This viewpoint is shared by many artists. Their wish to distance themselves from any egocentric reading of their work rests upon a fear that, like the courtiers of Louis XIV who turned from the altar to worship *le Roi Soleil* while he worshipped God, we might be gazing the wrong way: namely, in *at* the artist, not out *with* him. The artist as conduit or vessel for something from outside and beyond himself is instructively represented by the great performing artists of music, whose rôle is explicitly secondary and *re*creative. In a broadcast debate about concert dress conventions, the pianist Nikolai Demidenko defended the white tie and tails precisely because they *are* indeed anachronistic: this, he said, enabled them to preserve the necessary functional anonymity of a uniform, thereby deflecting attention from the presence and personality of the individual wearing them. In this sense they mirrored the partially 'selfless' artistic responsibilities of the performer who serves as medium for, say, Beethoven or Schubert.

It is evident here that a distinction has to be drawn between Muir and Balthus, or between that which the artist expressly intends and that to which he may be subject against his will (though arguably with no less validity). It may be seen also that the two points of view are not necessarily opposites, nor always mutually exclusive. What Balthus railed against has scope within it for an irresponsible or sensationalist misappropriation of circumstantial fact; while Muir's view cannot be expected to hold universal appeal, even though couched ostensibly in the terms of some immutable truth or law. However, in the case of Muir we do not yet have the complete picture: in view of his perceptions already quoted, it comes as something of a surprise to read the following barely a page later. For 'poetry', we can equally validly read 'composition':

...Poetry will not truly be contemporary, or truly poetry, if it deals merely with the immediately perceived contemporary world as if that existed by itself and were isolated from all that preceded it. [xxviii]

It would have been easy to take the earlier remarks out of context, and thereby to conclude that Muir was fundamentally averse to anything contemporary. In fact his point is rather different, stressing necessary means rather than prescriptive ends. Muir also quotes from an essay entitled *Inside the Cage*, by his younger contemporary, Stephen Spender:

The dead and their works should be regarded not as illustrations of the ideology of the living but as coherent and indissoluble entities situated in past time. The sun and moon, like Dante and Shakespeare, are far removed in time when their light reaches us, but we do not, for that reason, consider that the principles according to which they exist are 'historically correct for their time', though not for ours.

...To talk about the 'suspension of disbelief' in approaching the faiths of the past, already betrays the analytic attitude which attempts to convert past beliefs into our *ideas, and then finds them unacceptable. ...Probably what is required of us today is something far more complex than the so-called complexities of analysis; we need both to employ the analytic method and to reject it. To analyse the work, and to realise at the same time that it maintains its own intrinsic reality, like sun and moon, outside the analysis.* [xxix]

In these reflections of mine there has already been a necessary intertwining of the selective, intuitive formulation of some personal philosophy and an objective, technical observation of how certain forms and processes of music work. Spender performs a service in succinctly showing how the two may legitimately meet - even though Muir believed him to have the model of Marxism pre-eminently in mind in the wider context of *Inside the Cage*.

From a personal point of view, the child is father to the man, in that the experience of choristership has predisposed me to embrace the arguments here quoted from Muir and Spender, and largely (though selectively) to reject that of Balthus. The emotional bedrock of formative chorister years endures as an abiding respect for the past in its many dimensions, nurtured not by anything as definite or coherent as faith in God, or even *a* god, but by the inarticulate sense of a 'leading kindly light' or providence at work in this privileged journey through childhood and, hence, within or behind the personal joys and losses of life ever since. Of that, more will be said in the closing

section of this thesis. In the present context, these comments suffice to indicate a general state of heart and mind, upon which empirical lessons and artistic epiphanies fell at intervals.

My first guiding light was almost certainly Byrd, though this is hard to remember in any detailed way after nearly forty years. Already, for reasons mentioned earlier, in my eyes and ears he stood above all his contemporaries, both in England and abroad (where the constraints of Catholicism and the Papacy conjured a far more Procrustean climate within which composers had to work). In those days the irony was lost on me that enforced service to a fledgling Church of England must have led Byrd by the nose towards many of his most exuberant and, nowadays, defining inspirations.

The occasional work from the fifteenth century would be sung too, such as a setting of *Veni Creator Spiritus* by John Dunstaple. Failing to grasp the dialectic connecting this with Byrd, I regarded it as egregious, vocally gruelling and largely incomprehensible, while yet happily imbibing those syllabically and metrically prompted syncopations for which Byrd predisposed me to feel enthusiasm. At the time I was unaware how the primacy of the hard-edged perfect fourth and fifth as harmonic intervals might later reveal itself to be congruent with certain trends in twentieth century harmony and counterpoint, including the thinking of minds as diverse as Hindemith and Nielsen.

In the New College musical 'diet' Bach and Handel loomed large, but made their appearance more often in concert contexts than in the course of worship. While their impact registered as an extension of Byrd's, the quasi-instrumental character of much of Bach's choral writing (added to the experience of singing with the accompaniment of a Baroque orchestra) led me increasingly into the concerto repertoire of his period, and towards his orchestral Suites. The *concerti grossi* of the violin *virtuoso* Locatelli and, especially, his Dublin-based counterpart, Geminiani, exercised a powerful influence at that time, as did the four-part string *concerti* of Albinoni with their attractive but formulaic fugal last movements. The restrictions of a prescriptive harmonic language did not prevent this music from achieving a particular plangency (rooted also in its sonority and the composers' pure spatial awareness of the ensemble). I paid careful attention to the workings of 'Neapolitan' sixth formations and to the ways in which they could be either enhanced by decoration or deliberately mitigated by subtler attention to what was common between them and their immediate surroundings: for example, the Neapolitan 6/3 chord enabling a bass preparation and an ensuing, suspended third inversion of the dominant seventh. I recall my particular delight in a gloriously Byzantine excursion around this which occurs at the end of the Sinfonia to Bach's cantata [no.4] for Easter Day 1724, *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, an example which surely endures as the *ne plus ultra* moment of its kind.

Already, I now think, a kind of unconsciously selective synthesis of Baroque styles, dramatic resources and musical 'figures of speech' was taking cautious shape. When my mother died in 1995, in her loft I and my siblings came across a large box which proved to contain virtually everything I had written between the ages of ten (when I began trying to compose) and fifteen. Having thrown most of it away at various stages, I was disconcerted to find that so much had been retrieved, lovingly smoothed out and quietly kept. The passage of almost a quarter of a century since the more mature efforts enabled me to view these discoveries much as if assessing the work of someone else altogether (possibly a student of my own), but nonetheless awakened

moments of very personal mortification, albeit among others of frank surprise. A quasi-Baroque sonata for violin and keyboard, written in 1970 at the age of twelve, showed a close awareness of Bach's Concerto in D minor for two violins, BWV 1043, including chordal formations which, while properly belonging more to the Classical period, register as plausible extensions of normal practice as presciently executed by Bach himself. Since my knowledge of Classical repertoire at that time would have been minimal, this seemed to present evidence of an instinct quite well developed in certain directions, and of the ability to finish whole movements within an identifiably Baroque idiom. However, the capacity to create a viable fugal exposition had yet to extend to the notion of consistent countersubjects after the fashion of Bach, and there appeared also to be a blind spot regarding recapitulatory entries, where I consistently reverted to a single voice before building again from scratch. Nonetheless, a serious but largely autodidactic interest in counterpoint was clearly visible. This extended through early years of secondary education, including an imitation French overture and stage music for a school production of Molière's *Le Malade Imaginaire* in 1973 (though by this time certain other major discoveries and changes of stylistic direction had taken place, and had to be kept mentally separate).

The event which eventually deflected my development onto a fresh path was my discovery of Vaughan Williams, made first through the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. Some years beforehand, a recording of this had been played to a group of choristers by Paul Drayton, himself a fine composer and, in those days, Director of Music at New College School. Intrigued at that stage more by the notion of appropriating Tallis's metrical tune than by the resulting sounds, I enjoyed the experience without sensing any seismic shift of my own thinking in response. Nonetheless, some seed was sown. During my secondary education as a music scholar at Winchester College, the phenomenon of what is lazily dubbed the 'English Renaissance' became helpfully contextualised through academic studies, and I was able to appreciate Vaughan Williams (again initially through the same work) in terms of a much deeper revisiting and reinventing of sixteenth century models than had previously been apparent. The first 'classical' records I had ever bought had been a performance of Bach's 'Brandenburg' concertos by the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis under August Wenzinger; the first work of the twentieth century to be added to my modest collection was the Sixth Symphony of Vaughan Williams. I had encountered the Epilogue of its first movement as credits music for a television drama, *A Family at War*, which charted the struggles and vicissitudes of a large extended family in Liverpool in the early nineteen forties. I had noted that, while in some sense still predicated on the sovereignty of the triad, this music ranged further and less predictably than many of the composer's much earlier, Tallis-inspired harmonic shifts, and that it conjured a bleakly evocative kind of cold 'realism' detectably outside the scope of the more pastorally contained language of those works which had initially ensured Vaughan Williams's reputation. This impression was powerfully confirmed and extended by the impact of the rest of the Symphony. I recall being intrigued that the large-scale episodic format of the first movement (as well as the dramatic weight of the *scherzo* and the adoption of a slow *finale*) seemed in some ways to recall the outward lineaments of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, despite an immense disparity in actual sound.

Unsystematically, I both succumbed to and rebelled against aspects of Vaughan Williams's technique and 'language'. In view of the rigour of both local counterpoint

and overarching design in the latter half of his Fourth Symphony, I found some of his looser constructions oddly unsatisfying and some of the triadic parallelisms (by no means all) curiously undemanding both upon their composer and upon his audience. In particular I already found –and still do - that his 'non-functional' reliance upon regular parallel uses of the second inversion triad had about them a kind of rather lazy, *faute de mieux* expediency and occasionally (not always) created a somewhat inert effect because they divorced the sound from history's technical view of the fourth as a form of dissonance, therefore subject to normal rules of preparation, suspension and resolution. While music had of course moved on and other generations had found their own valid usages for the fourth, there was something irksome about Vaughan Williams's way with this device which aroused my scepticism. However, the three middle symphonies, the Ninth and the so-called 'Masque', *Job*, exercised a powerful influence, despite what seemed to be slack moments in the *finale* of the Fifth. (The Ninth became truly revelatory only much later, when a recording by Vernon Handley and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra convinced me that the performance I already knew, by Sir Adrian Boult, approached the outer movements at something like half the intended speed.)

In more general terms, I remained selective about British music of this period. Rather to my surprise, I became passionate about the music of E.J.Moeran, an affection for which has lasted to this day, and that of Sir Arnold Bax, for which my tolerance in adulthood abated sharply. Moeran's music struck me then, and does still, as refreshingly unpretentious, expertly orchestrated (more continentally aware in this respect than Vaughan Williams) and - partly because of this - admirably fluent (though this is not the same thing as structurally unimpeachable, and questions abide regarding Moeran's only completed symphony). Although I was probably under-equipped to recognize it then, I may well have responded at some instinctive level to a kind of music which offered both wide-ranging eclecticism and a gently distinctive personality of its own. Curiously, what Moeran subsumed into his own style tended to be softened and, in a sense, diluted, and yet contributed ultimately to a language capable of rugged drama. Delius (against whose work I reacted decisively) seemed to emerge in a more edifying guise in some of Moeran's harmonic language. Elgar and Walton seemed to achieve some *rapprochement* within the allusions and formal boundaries of the *finale* in Moeran's Symphony in G minor; Holst's *Mars* and the Ravel of *Daphnis and Chloë* lurked behind his First Rhapsody, with both those composers surfacing also in some of the piano solo pieces (roundly and, I think, wrongly dismissed later by Moeran as mostly *'complete tripe'*).[xxx] The idiomatic wind writing of *Daphnis* meets Sibelius head-on in the slow movement of Moeran's Symphony and in a powerful central passage of its *finale*. Of Vaughan Williams there is little sign here.

Moeran is worth dwelling on in this context because his G minor Symphony was the first piece with which I fell in love sufficiently to become acquainted in minute detail with its published score. This led to an interest in orchestration which has been valuable not only for itself in latter years, but also for casting an oblique light upon matters of word-painting, choral 'instrumentation' and harmonic spacing in the largest two works presented herewith. This attachment to a particular score was intensified because, until I discovered the G minor Symphony, I knew of Moeran only as the composer of a rather indifferent set of Evening Canticles and (more true to its guiding spirit) a notably bibulous madrigal, *Good Wine* (from his 1930 set, *Songs of*

Springtime), which was routinely performed by the Choir after dinners in New College, where we would regularly be required to sing the Grace. The chorister experience affords little chance to learn of the wider *oeuvre* within which certain choral works may sit, and it was easy to 'typecast' relatively versatile composers as restricted figures inhabiting only the sphere of music in which one first encountered them. Moeran taught me - *inter alia* - that many happy surprises of this order lay yet in store.

If Moeran engendered a taste for smooth continuity in music, Bax was more of a two-edged sword. I had managed to read a certain amount about him and was aware that his early reputation at the Royal Academy was as an almost supernaturally gifted sight reader and score reader. His compositional pre-eminence emerged later. My own sight reading as a pianist had by now become exceptionally fluent too through wide exploration, though my technique was compromised by a tendency not to see things through to any polished conclusion: once a piece had yielded up a certain amount of what inspired my curiosity purely as a composer, the incentive to master it fully tended to evaporate, and in pianistic terms I was prone to moving prematurely on to the next object of my interest. This remains something against which I have to fight whenever called upon to perform publicly.

Bax's music held a natural appeal for any romantically inclined adolescent, and to this day I perceive in it a kind of arrested emotional development alongside the undoubted brilliance of its orchestration (virtually a master class or text book in itself). An interest in it persisted into my undergraduate days at Cambridge, where it was largely 'embarrassed' out of me by my tutors and by contemporaries of a more sophisticated inclination. By then, in any case, other interests had long superseded it, and I had begun to analyse much more carefully (if still very subjectively) what strengths and weaknesses any work or composer appeared to possess. It was not until very recently, when I heard a spirited defence of Bax *'contre les Philistins'* by Vernon Handley, [xxxi] that some conclusive thoughts about Bax's problematic symphonic credentials fell fully into place. These touch upon much wider considerations as to musical architecture and processes of development, and are therefore of major significance in relation to my own relatively ambitious canvasses.

Handley claims that Bax's powers of symphonic development are under-estimated or ignored. He also manages to imply quite robustly that any problem resides in the limited powers of intelligence of certain listeners, not in some inherent defect of the music itself. However, this draws the sceptic's attention to what it is that Bax appears to attempt. Handley points to the fact that, even where detractors may be perplexed at an apparent lack of symphonic cohesion, Bax's germinal material is still present. Herein lies precisely the problem: for Bax's notion of primary material is in some respects a reinvention of the Classical one. Though a Classical composer might fairly routinely avoid enlisting his primary and secondary subject matter for development, instead using some entirely subordinate cell or motif as a 'vehicle' for an essentially tonal expansion rather than a transformation of the material itself, his intention would rest mainly upon a kind of *ostinato*-based, *notatim* repetition of this vehicle or pattern, not on a progressive metamorphosis of its content out of one state and into another (the largely Beethoven-driven process which led to such problems for certain later composers with the whole notion of recapitulation). One might liken this distinction

to the difference between seeing a particular image through several successive shades of glass, and actually altering the image itself into an entirely new one.

Bax, in short, does not metamorphose his material, yet seeks to impose primary, *Urmotiv* ideas as the driving force for symphonic argument. When this predictably fails to establish a viable process of transformation and the subject matter itself threatens to operate on a law of diminishing returns, he is compelled to fall back upon the reactive, camouflaging tactics of *tempo* shifts, externalised atmospheric effects and, unavoidably, a sense of orchestra-driven escalation through a series of episodes towards a climax which seldom feels ‘earned’. The thematic material resists transformation and development, so the background has to overwork distractingly in compensation. This lack of ultimate justification is not for consciously ironic reasons such as those of Shostakovich in his Fourth Symphony, where the whole point of the edifice is precisely a rotten, worm-in-the-apple kind of hollow triumphalism, gratuitously crowning a series of counter-intuitive digressions and chillingly exposing its final parody of a corrupt political reign of terror. Paradoxically, the whole process is at the same time anything *but* gratuitous, and reminds one of Ravel’s celebrated response when Calvocoressi accused him of artificiality: *‘It never seems to occur to people that one might be artificial* by nature*’.*[xxxii] Instead, with Bax there is a pervasive, quasi-elemental extravagance, impressive in its own way but excessively dependent upon the resources of a huge orchestra, and exposed for what it is in the parallel output of piano sonatas, where sheer visceral force is fatally unavailable. A shade depressingly, the early, unnumbered five-movement orchestral poem-symphony, *Spring Fire* (1913), with its evidence of Wagnerian and Debussian lessons learnt, seems notably superior as an achievement to all the rather jejune seven symphonies which followed it from 1922.

The consequence of a sudden Pauline conversion to the early twentieth century was that my musical tastes and knowledge began to expand in reverse, reaching progressively back from that vantage point towards the Baroque tradition. An eventual result of this was my reaching the roots of Classicism in any meaningful sense last of all, when already a young adult. This strikes me as a natural and fitting state of affairs, since in many respects it is the music of the Classical period that demands of its listener the greatest maturity of critical response, or else which slips most undetectably into a kind of misconstrued blandness if approached too readily at naïvely estimated face value. It is worth commenting on this and also making a distinction between Mozart and Haydn. It is a distinction rooted not least in the former’s pre-eminence in opera and the latter’s relative avoidance of it. Whereas opera allows the Mozart disciple all manner of extra-musical, philosophical, personal and circumstantial constructs to bring to the task of defining and understanding him, the particular challenge posed by Haydn is one which has been brilliantly articulated by the contemporary composer Robin Holloway:

He is the purest of all composers; his art has the fewest external referents, is more completely about itself than any other. ...If there is an angle from which this complex figure can be seen steadily and whole, it must surely be in the idea of music’s intrinsicality; whatever else might or might not be present, music as music, unsullied ...by extraneous matter, autonomous. Haydn leads more directly than any other composer to this easily uttered but endlessly slippery idea. ...He is music’s supreme intellectual. ...He is as consummately in control of ...questions about how music is

doing what it is doing as he is of the materials and processes of a particular piece. There is an omniscience to his art that surpasses even Bach's, who knew everything about the science of music but was, one senses, unconscious of what his music was saying through its extraordinary transcendence of its stylistic norms and ostensible aims. Bach is the profounder artist; Haydn is the greater realist. None of which renders him any more graspable. To the last, Haydn the Ambigious. [xxxiii]

A book could be written at this point about Haydn the Enigma, about the formal processes of Classicism in various hands or on the ways in which music conveys what it conveys or withholds what it withholds. In my own case it is more pertinent that Holloway offers a starting point for an open-ended meditation on the phenomenon of Haydn, and that accordingly this continues to inform my own self-awareness as a composer, my reflections on the hermeneutics of music in general and my creative responses on many levels to the relationship of music and words. In the same essay Holloway cites Mendelssohn's well-known contention that music possesses a power to establish 'resonances' more concrete than verbal ones. Many commentators and scholars have alluded to Debussy's suggestion that *'music begins where words are powerless to express'*, and probably an equal number to Stravinsky's *'Music is powerless to express **anything**'*. The issue is complicated both by a fog of semantics and by Stravinsky's likely propensity for intellectual mischief in such contexts; but a point worth making is that, whether Debussy and Stravinsky flatly contradicted one another or (as it appears) merely found complementary formulations for much the same thing, such a debate serves unhelpfully to polarise the functions of words and music, in a way which pays little or no heed to musical setting *of* words. When words are set to music, their meaning must retain a particular form of sovereignty over any compositional response; and yet, the notion that thereby the music might settle for some purely reactive, supplementary rôle is plainly unacceptable to any composer of serious intellectual and artistic purpose. While 'local' events within a score may well arise in direct intuitive or emotional response to passing cadence or imagery in a verbal text, the exercise of structural planning and control (through years of instrumental writing, study and tuition) is not lightly abandoned. A consequence of this in maturity has been my growing sense of purpose in choosing text (from multiple sources, if needs be) through the prism of some preconceived structural plan, before exploring within it the possibilities of ironic verbal juxtaposition, dislocation of sequence, antiphony, ellipsis, and other resources.

It seems clear that no work which sets text can be as *'completely about itself'* as Haydn's music in the assessment above by Holloway, unless because there is some immutable, generic impersonality in the verbal convention, in the sense that one might think true of, say, the Latin Mass as repeatedly set by Palestrina. However, such a notion does not serve to vindicate Holloway's (admittedly summarised) diagnosis where Haydn's own choral writing is concerned, since the text of a work such as *The Creation* is bowdlerised through mistranslation into something completely *sui generis*. The subject is one where Eliot's *'hints and guesses'* inevitably apply.

Personal restlessness within the confines of the Anglican Church and a corresponding wish to conflate sacred and secular poetic texts have recently caused me to dwell at length on the varying freedoms and constraints imposed by different kinds of text, and this train of thought will be examined further at a later stage of this dissertation, partly in the context of my most recent work, the oratorio entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

A return to my early experiences of twentieth-century music is now necessary, since at the age of sixteen these yielded further epiphanies of a lasting kind. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to say that at no time during my secondary schooling was I given any tuition in what might be termed 'original' composition; instead, I at Winchester College I attended the Harmony & Counterpoint class of Raymond Humphrey. In retrospect I am astonished to realise how rigorous this must have been, especially by the abysmal academic standards of today. By the age of sixteen I was well used to the reconstructive and conjectural demands of six-part polyphony by Palestrina. Raymond Humphrey was a former bank manager who had opted for a change of career and become Organist of Winchester College. While the only areas in which I could conceivably have resembled Beethoven in those days were an alarming hairstyle and a recalcitrant attitude to formal instruction of any kind, there is little doubt in my mind that Humphrey's mixture of innate, often perplexed kindliness and a certain archaic, courtly formality must have had much in common with 'Papa Haydn'; our own teacher/pupil relationship may therefore have embodied something of the same uncertain dynamic. Humphrey continues to perambulate Winchester today in his early nineties, his step *un poco piu lento* but his tweed-clad back still regimentally straight and a folder of work in progress always tucked under one arm, at an angle so constant that one must presume the volume accompanies him even in slumber. Not infrequently he used to carry around with him a mathematical textbook, blithely explaining when asked that it was his recreational reading and that he found serenity in its exposition of method. His approach to Palestrina was an inspired meeting of the bank manager's almost spiritual devotion to orderliness and a true, humble musician's spontaneous joy in its expression through the workings of towering creative genius. The subtleties of the mediaeval mind, so different from our own and in some respects so much more complete, spoke to his intellectual condition. From him I certainly acquired an intimation of a meeting point for mathematical, artistic and spiritual truths and a heady impression that it was not wholly fanciful to apprehend these tracing the lineaments of some cosmic order or mystery. This made a kind of sense of what had remained inarticulate during the chorister years, and continues to exert its own fascination even in the face of adulthood's dubious triumph of experience over hope.

Palestrina's counterpoint was a lastingly valuable substratum to discoveries from a more recent past. The defining event of this formative period was the advent of Carl Nielsen (1865-1931), whose Fourth Symphony landed like a bolt from the blue when I was sixteen, in a vinyl [RCA] recorded performance by Jean Martinon with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, complete with an apt cover photograph of a volcano in mid-eruption. Like many works of substance and stature, this one bears a wide variety of interpretations successfully, and I have since realised that Martinon's sits at the extreme 'driven' end of the spectrum, to a point where in the *finale* the innate sluggishness of a large double bass section actually causes temporary mayhem as the players fall behind their more agile partners higher up. However, this was a performance of blazing conviction, and one to which I became so accustomed, through repeated listening, that even markedly superior ones continue to be measured instinctively against it.

Nielsen's Fourth Symphony, opus 29, bears the subtitle *'The Inextinguishable'*. Early in my love affair with it I became affrontedly aware of the widespread levity which

this had tended to provoke in terms of suggested alternatives: *The Inflammable*, *The Indigestible*, *The Dispensable*, *The Unplayable*, and so on… Some had even turned their fire upon other composers altogether, positing Mahler's *Interminable* and other similarly uncharitable works of fiction. Beneath this lies a more serious point, since it is not the Symphony itself that is 'inextinguishable' at all: the Danish word for symphony is feminine, whereas Nielsen's formulation *Det Uudslukkelige* is neuter, as in the directly comparable German, referring therefore to the *concept* of 'that which is inextinguishable'. Inside the score published by the Danish house of Wilhelm Hansen, the composer sanctioned the following prefatory note:

Under this title the composer has endeavoured to indicate in one word what the music alone is capable of expressing to the full: The elemental Will of Life. [*sic*]

Music **is** *Life and, like it, is inextinguishable. The title given by the composer to this musical work might therefore seem superfluous; the composer however has employed the word in order to underline the strictly musical character of his subject. It is not a programme, but only a suggestion as to the right approach to the music.*[xxxiv]

Elsewhere, in various forms, Nielsen coined the related aphorism that *'Music is the sound of life'*, and this runs as a constant implicit subtext to everything which he wrote. His materially unprivileged and modest upbringing amid the low-lying meadows and wetlands of Fyn, the southern island of Denmark often referred to indigenously as its 'garden', engendered both a self-sufficiency and a quizzical attentiveness, the latter attuned as much to human nature as to the physical world around him. These were to take on deeper human resonances as he entered maturity and, more particularly when, as the inhabitant of a neutral state, he followed the grievous events of the Great War from the distant vantage point of a country bordering Germany but dissociate from its imperialist politics. The Great War compelled him, like others, to focus upon humankind's *yin*-and-*yang* capacities for seemingly mindless, bestial destruction and a redeeming, selfless nobility of purpose; and in doing so he seems to have maintained a capacity to interrogate and comprehend such matters simultaneously from an individual and a universal perspective. In connection with his Fourth Symphony he wrote later that if the world were to be devastated, eventually new life would begin to break forth again, delicate at first through the slow burgeoning of roots and tendrils but ultimately affirming, redemptive and unquenchable. This locates the rhetoric of the Fourth Symphony as much among the trenches of the Somme, Ypres and Passchendaele as anywhere – not to mention also in the quiet posterity today of Northern France's seemingly infinite military cemeteries.

'Rhetoric' is arguably a pejoratively loaded term, and one which Nielsen's music significantly resists. As his champion, the British composer Robert Simpson, commented, Nielsen seemed to undertake *'an instinctive search for an objective view'*. Simpson offers the following perceptive assessment:

Nielsen composed against the trends of his own time, against the overblown romanticism of the turn of the century as much as against fabricated theories and prefabricated music aiming at the self-consciously 'new'. ...It is markedly a trend of our time to judge artistic work by its so-called 'relevance' to a vague ethos of modern life, to judge it by the laid-down criteria of whatever allegiance happens to be in

fashion. ...It is likely that Nielsen, with his direct approach to music-making and his avowed concern with human issues, would have reacted as much against our trends as against those of his own time. No one can tell how his work would have been influenced by the music of the latter half of this [the twentieth] *century; no doubt he would have picked up from it what he felt he needed. In view of his famous remark that* 'without a current my music is nothing'*, it is most probable that he would have been disappointed by the absence of movement in much music today.* [xxxv]

These words raise a number of separate issues already touched upon in this dissertation. Simpson's comments on 'relevance' to trends of our own time echo the view of Spender quoted earlier, in arguing implicitly for a broad, necessarily qualified view of such vexed terms as modernity, originality, 'newness' and so on. Simpson also acknowledges Nielsen's '*avowed concern with human issues'*, about which more remains to be said; and his citation of Nielsen's comment about a 'current' is of personal significance here, since my own grounding in the music and technique of Palestrina undergirded my early discovery of Nielsen as both composer and man. Palestrina was of considerable importance also to Nielsen's exact Scandinavian contemporary, Sibelius, whose elliptically compact Sixth Symphony had been preceded by extensive study of the sixteenth century composer. The work evinces a clearly related type of purity and simplicity in its initial stages. Nielsen's engagement with polyphonic counterpoint is a feature of his broader architectural planning in a way not applicable to Sibelius, whose symphonic methods were in certain respects antithetical to those of his Danish counterpart. Writing to his junior contemporary, the Swedish composer Vilhelm Stenhammar [1871-1927], when the latter had appealed to him for advice in the face of a desperate case of 'composer's block' while midway through his commissioned symphonic cantata *Sången* [*The Song*], Nielsen advocated starting with a monodic line and developing it contrapuntally. His own most rigorous and intensive interrogation of such methods arises in the extended, austere (and largely fugal) organ work, *Commotio*, dating from the year of his death. There the rationale of a 'hierarchy of dissonance' - and a judicious balance between the vertical and the linear - is empirically tested in a cumulative series of arresting paragraphs informed by the relatively radical works of the nineteen twenties: the Wind Quintet [1922] and the concertos for flute [1926] and clarinet [1928]. Even when not explicitly or strictly contrapuntal, Nielsen's mature music proclaims counterpoint as the *fons et origo* of its momentum and its animating 'current'.

I can no longer say with any certainty how much of this impinged upon my thoughts as a teenager newly imbibing Nielsen's music, but I do know that the prefatory note in the score of the Fourth Symphony impressed me comparably with the music itself and, indeed, seemed to me to be an intrinsic aspect of it. There seem also to be other kinds of 'current' at work: there is that of an ingrained, instinctive humanism; a willingness to address deep truths in the human condition, both heroic and unpalatable, without becoming mired in questions of faith, divinity, afterlife or mysticism. Indeed, Nielsen's music might be fairly described as some of the most *anti*-mystical to be found anywhere. This is possibly one reason why he unwittingly aroused the jealous vitriol of a little-known contemporary, the organist and composer Rued Langgaard [1893-1952]. Langgaard's aesthetic is probably closer to that of late Skriabin, if anything. His central work is an apocalyptic opera entitled *Antikrist*, which the Royal Danish Opera rejected in both its original and its revised versions, possibly alarmed at its subject matter and unable to align itself with the composer's

view of Antichrist as a kind of unifying icon for the *Zeitgeist* after the Great War. Langgaard went on to vent his spleen towards Nielsen to the latter's posthumous disadvantage in 1948, with a Satie-like work sardonically entitled *Carl Nielsen, Our Great Composer*. The title also provides the entire text for this score, which runs to a mere thirty-two bars and 'concludes' with the mildly troublesome instruction *'to be repeated to eternity!'*. Composers do not come much more embittered than this, though an ageing Josef Holbrooke did take to sending Vaughan Williams vituperative letters in purple ink, in which he repeatedly accused him of 'betraying the cause of English music'; at least he addressed a living artist.

The other qualities which I think I discovered quickly in Nielsen are a striking lack of affectation of any kind; a directness and clarity of thought and utterance; and an unmistakeable message that this is in the deepest sense *honest* music which never confuses ambition with pretension, instead fulfilling the former through the sheer solidity and command of its technique and the steadiness of its vision. Nielsen wrote a considerable volume of prose in essays, diaries and letters about music, and here I later discovered much that adumbrates one's impression of an attractive personality – while coming as little surprise. Part of the attraction resides in Nielsen's respect for inherited tradition. In an essay neatly entitled *The Fullness of Time* occurs the following:

Are we to return to something old, then? By no means. We should cease to reckon with either old or new. But woe to the musician who …fails alike to learn and love the good things in the old masters and to watch and be ready for the new that may come in a totally different form from what we expected.[xxxvi]

Such a view clearly has much in common with that of Hofmannsthal, quoted earlier, in that it acknowledges the possibility of fresh and rejuvenating inspiration arising from a reverence for and attentiveness to the lessons of the past, and hence also of a kind of genius which is (*pace* Hofmannsthal in Muir's rendition) inherently conservative. In examining the past, Nielsen also draws an interesting distinction between two artistic archetypes: the artist who is mired in egocentricity and whose work amounts to a costive struggle with both his inner being and the materials of his work in progress; and the figure who *'comes swinging along with light, springy steps, free and easy and with a friendly smile, as if walking in the sun'*.[xxxvii] In the former category he goes on to place no less a figure than Beethoven (along with Aeschylus, Rembrandt, Ibsen and Michelangelo); in the latter, Mozart, the composer whom he held in highest reverence and whose musical processes many commentators have intriguingly found to exercise a more potent effect than those of Beethoven in Nielsen's own work. Mozart finds himself bracketed here with Leonardo, Molière and Goethe.

What Nielsen has to say on the comparison of Mozart with Beethoven came as a considerable surprise to me when I first read it, and in certain respects still does:

In Mozart's art, the lyrical –the subjective and the epic-artistic –are more evenly balanced than in Beethoven's works. Beethoven, for all his great compositional power, is really only a lyricist. We may feel *more on hearing Beethoven's works, but people a hundred years hence may feel quite differently, and art based chiefly on emotion becomes redundant*[,] *unless it is universal in time in the sense that there will*

always be something to learn from it. And in a purely artistic, musical sense there is far more to learn in Mozart than in Beethoven.[xxxviii]

Though one hundred years have not yet passed since this was written, it seems unlikely that listeners of the kind envisaged by Nielsen *will* 'feel quite differently' upon listening to Beethoven in eighteen years' time from how they felt eighty-two years ago. Moreover, the notion of Beethoven as 'only a lyricist' is particularly hard to apply to a design such as, say, the first movement of the *Eroica*, Beethoven's Third Symphony. If one were to dismiss the architectural and other ostensibly obvious dimensions to this achievement, one might then feel compelled to amend Nielsen's 'only' to an even more negative 'not even'; but to do so is wantonly to ignore the purpose and *modus operandi* of such music, which remains a defining event in the erosion of conventional sonata forms (particularly recapitulation processes) and the evolution of structures where successive movements are subsumed into a monolithic, quasi-cyclic whole.

I referred earlier to the Classical convention whereby frequently the primary and secondary material of a sonata movement would be avoided during the unhelpfully-termed 'development' section. This was partly because a repeated exposition, necessary to establish a degree of familiarity with the principal subjects and their tonalities, rendered intensive dissection of such matter a high-risk strategy: such a process was liable to promote over-exposure to ideas which would then make a reappearance at the start of the recapitulation, just as the listener tired of them and parted company with any wish to hear them again. Instead, succinct, often *ostinato*-based motifs embedded inobtrusively in the *codetta* of the exposition might be brought into the limelight as vehicles for a seemingly preconceived process of tonal expansion and contrast.

This practice worked satisfactorily enough for a host of composers within the Classical tradition, including Mozart and also highly conservative later figures such as Hummel. The status of Dussek, Hummel and others as instinctive melodists was little compromised or threatened by such a format. Indeed, it thrived upon it, since expositions and recapitulations could be artificially and self-indulgently expanded through fleeting exercise of variation technique, whereby a primary or secondary subject might immediately be subject to quasi-improvisatory alternatives (as in the A major Piano Sonata, opus 47, by Dussek) or a complete restatement laden with pianist enhancements (the E flat Piano Sonata, opus 13, by Hummel). This deflected a certain amount of inimical obligation from the central section of the movement, which could accordingly remain relatively brief and almost wholly detached from the exposition in as much as it excluded primary thematic ideas. The dangers of doing otherwise are amply demonstrated in one of the period's impressive near-misses, the imposing F minor Piano Sonata, opus 77, by Dussek, in which a *quasi-fugato* first subject is not merely enlisted as vehicle for both tonal and (further) *fugato* expansion in the central development, but also propelled through *every* key in the chromatic scale. The folly of this becomes all too apparent with the seamless onset of the recapitulation, whereupon the rest of the movement becomes progressively arduous.

A movement such as the first of the *Eroica* stands at immense distance from the melodic efflorescences of *petit maître* figures such as Dussek and Hummel, and also from essays in sonata form by Classically-conditioned major composers such as

Schumann, Brahms and the less iconoclastic Mendelssohn of later years. This is largely because – if one may risk an expedient generalisation – Beethoven frequently conceives his raw musical material less for what it already is than for what it has the potential to become, while the others present it like Athene from the head of Zeus, fully formed, lyrically complete and unlikely to yield richer discourse by being taken to pieces subsequently like a Swiss watch and then put back together again. One might make a case by analogy to justify the former of these strategies (in general terms, perhaps seen at its most obvious in the working of fugue expositions) by asking rhetorically whether anyone embarking upon Tolstoy's *War and Peace* expects to be as arrested by sublimity on page one as in the middle or at the other end of the experience. Raw material is termed 'raw' for a reason.

The Classically-prompted Romantics in Beethoven's shadow may have revered Mozart as much as Nielsen did (Brahms was certainly a case in point), but they were less inclined than conventional Classical composers to abandon primary and secondary thematic material for purposes of a central development. The consequences of this could emerge in an arguably perfunctory light, if set not against the standards of lesser earlier figures but alongside these later composers' own highest expositional achievements. For example, I have long considered this to apply to the central (first movement) development in Brahms's A major Violin Sonata, opus 100, where a judicious brevity cannot disguise the lack of anything very meaningful to be said or done. It is not so much that the material is resistant to such treatment, but that no heightening of human or artistic experience is gained by it, since there is a certain intractably definitive wholeness *already* to the exposition itself. The dutiful subjugation of a Romantically rhapsodic sensibility to the Procrustean mould of Classically inherited form seems here to put Brahms firmly in the first of Nielsen's two human categories, if only because the idea, more than the personality, was problematic.

I explored these issues further when invited in 1995 to contribute booklet notes for an issue by Hyperion Recordings of the Brahms String Quintets. Brahms was unusual in the extent and depth of his grasp of choral polyphony. His career included conducting performances of music by Byrd and Schütz, and also by Palestrina, whose work he was virtually alone in knowing in such detail (here he eclipsed his mentor, Schumann, whose faintly self-righteous advice to Brahms had been to follow his example and acquaint himself fully with the counterpoint of Bach). Since in this dissertation I wish to adduce diverse reflections upon the matching of content and form to medium and technique, and since such thoughts need not spring at all exclusively from appraisal of received choral repertoire in order to shed light on my own additions to it, it is worth quoting my own earlier essay at greater length here. The intention is not so much to veer away towards Brahms from Beethoven (to whom I shall return), but, rather, to take the comments made about Brahms as more widely empirical observations, applicable to compositional endeavour by others, including oneself:

Brahms evinces an attitude to form which, in his chamber and symphonic works, upholds Classical and Beethovenian tradition. Often it is to the former of these that he turns, while much has been made of the supposedly paralysing influence of the latter (certainly Beethoven's symphonic legacy inhibited and delayed Brahms's mature emergence in the mid-1870s as its natural heir). Part of the reason for this apparent atavism resides in the differing credentials of Beethoven and Brahms as melodists.

Even when Beethoven's melodies do conjure a wholly lyrical first impression, they arise almost invariably from an instinctive prior appraisal of the architectural potential of their constituent parts. Much the same may be noted in Beethoven's variation technique: where a composer of paramount lyrical instinct and intention might have begun from a ready-made melody, and perhaps laboured to derive a convincingly disciplined discourse from it, Beethoven may set out not merely from the foothills but from the lowliest grass roots of an idea. The mountain thus conquered appears all the more formidable once viewed from the summit.

Development is pre-eminently Beethoven's driving force, and his tailoring of thematic resources to that end results in a stream of transformations and feats of construction which often barely restrain themselves even until the initial statement of their material is complete. Even as early as the C major Piano Sonata of his opus 2 one sees him restlessly pushing against the inherited frontiers of sonata structure, while the forms of his late sonatas and quartets create and justify themselves with a striking intrinsic logic and prescience.

For a spontaneous melodist, however, lyrical contours are necessarily established less by what they may subsequently become than by what they already are. Thus their sonata development, such as that may be, confines itself more readily to the preconceived central 'development section' so generalisingly referred to by academic textbooks. Such development, moreover, may rely more upon fortuitous further inspirations as to context, poetic atmosphere and transient juxtaposition of harmony and key. This notion lacks the preconceived formal anarchy of Beethoven's and may find itself more explicitly dependent upon the variety and rhetoric of externally applied symphonic orchestration in order to emerge with success.

These considerations present us with something of a paradox in relation to Brahms; for we can with justice identify spontaneous melodic genius as a crucial attribute of the Romantic composer, and such a genius Brahms abundantly possessed. Yet it is this very quality in him that forces him back into a Classical approach to sonata structure. His 'developments' are prescribed sections, not perpetual processes. They are not necessarily fundamental to our reappraisal and comprehension of primary thematic material in the way that Beethoven's inherently are. More crucially still, Brahms's themes may lack the plasticity of those conceived with an ulterior structural motive in mind, and thus, like many a Viennese citizen long before him, he may pursue 'development' less through the evolution and transformation of raw material than by its relatively consistent repetition against a succession of tonal backgrounds.

Counterpoint, however, looms large in Brahms. 'I can now write canons in all possible artistic forms'*, he reported to Clara Schumann in 1856 (not, perhaps, a moment when she was best placed to pay attention). His detailed knowledge of Palestrina revealed itself continually in his substantial choral output. His motets, though florid in their 'orchestral' richness of chordal texture, achieve at times an austere harmonic simplicity which accommodates some canonic writing of startling ingenuity.*

…Contrapuntal polyphony does not present an ideal answer to problems of development in works where such a course could exacerbate difficulties in the

balance and reconciliation of disparate instrumental types. Hence the medium of various string ensembles may be viewed as a natural solution, and it is unsurprising that Brahms found himself drawn to the string quartet, quintet and sextet at separate stages of his career.[xxxix]

This essay also considered the piano as a sometimes counterproductively dominant textural force in the chamber works of Brahms, while aligning it with that of Beethoven:

The conceptual nature of Brahms's piano writing is more Beethovenian than Lisztian. Both in the solo works and in the chamber output, which it dominates, the piano can evoke the orchestra, but this in the indirect, perhaps incidental sense of rejecting studiedly 'pianistic' arabesque in the pursuit of wholly abstract musical discourse; whereas Liszt may 'recreate' the orchestra, laterally rather than literally, as an explicit type of musical colouring implied on new terms by a virtuosity calculated to exceed the supposed limits of its solo medium. Not surprisingly, this is an impression confirmed by the music actually written for orchestra by the two composers. In connection with the Beethoven influence it is interesting to note that the quality of Beethoven's musical thought became ever more demonstrably detached from the minutiae of varying media as he lived further into his deafness, and that his often hair-raising technical demands could arise in this sense unconsciously, or awkwardly, whereas Liszt the pianist's remained ineluctably 'professional', callisthenically elegant and self-aware.[xl]

A personal conclusion reached outside the scope of that essay was that in many respects choral polyphony was the most natural of all habitats for Brahms; and that there were particular compositional risks involved in the importing of its methods into other instrumental media – especially the piano trios and the sonatas for one instrument with piano, where the complement supposedly balancing the keyboard contribution could not actually do so. Brahms was notoriously a composer prone to endless uncertainty in the choice of medium for various works, and it is no accident that the highly successful Piano Quintet, opus 34, underwent an earlier incarnation as a sonata for two pianos, thereby establishing content whereby -in the event of any revised instrumentation -nothing smaller than a string quartet could adequately serve to balance the remaining keyboard element.

These reflections dwell upon both the formal problems faced by a composer such as Brahms and the tension which can arise in the attempted matching of content to structural or instrumental medium. What is profoundly interesting here is the collision of inherited sonata thinking with a natural strength and confidence in the exercise of polyphonic counterpoint, since the latter argues in favour of a long historical view back into the Baroque tradition and well beyond, whereas the former remains obstinately of its time - or else retrospective only as far as Classical practice. Like Nielsen, the percipience of whose artistic 'character groupings' becomes clearer, Brahms idolised Mozart, and might well have endorsed Nielsen's views on the balance of *'the subjective and the epic-artistic'*. Yet in his instrumental and symphonic music he did not seek primarily to establish a meeting of Classical

inheritance and the motivically-derived counterpoint of an earlier era. In contrast, one returns to Beethoven and to the first movement of the *Eroica*.

Here one does encounter a defining 'seismic shift' away from the received tenets of Classical sonata thinking. Though the initial statement is not contrapuntal, its material is determinedly anti-thematic in any intrinsically melodic sense, amounting instead to an articulation of 'E-flat-ness' and of an accompanying rhythm. Immediately this is subject to an undertow in the form of a chromatic descent of the harmonic bass, which questions and undermines the apparent solidity of what has just been set forth. Within moments a fresh start occurs from the same point; but already the *Urmotiv* is displaying a protean character, with the chromatic undertow now twisting its tail and extending itself to form a sequential upward progression. Even at this early stage, it is plain that what was heard first of all is less a theme than a prototype, chosen to be amenable to organic extension, metamorphosis and, in the most abstractly dialectical sense, sheer musical 'process'. While it is not my intention to analyse such an immense movement here, it is reasonable to compare this approach (to acting upon primary motivic matter) with the process by which an acorn becomes an oak tree. It is irreversible, the acorn being relevant to the oak tree only in the sense of providing its origin, not by consummating its existence. In contrast, the outward lineaments of conventional sonata thinking within the Classical tradition resemble more some kind of flower arrangement: a sterile disposition of symmetry and dead elements, the balance of whose outer components is interdependent, yet relatively little affected by whatever entity may lie in the middle. There is a frozen conventional order to this concept, like a mould which will force any poured contents to assume the same aspect, no matter what their initial fluidity. While it would be absurd to shackle Mozart to so demeaning an assessment, these comparative images may be helpful in serving to question Nielsen's assessment of Beethoven as *'really only a lyricist'*.

The organic process of transformation in the *Eroica*, and in Beethoven's later quartets and piano sonatas, renders it easy in places to see why conventional recapitulation became so troublesome for later Romantic composers still wedded to Classical tradition. Thematic material might outgrow its original form and render the *notatim* revisiting of such matter an unsustainable exercise. For those Romantic composers still wedded to conventional recapitulation no matter what, this reciprocally imposed an irremediable strain upon the logic and cumulative potential of the supposed 'development' passage. This has been examined with a subjective brilliance and acumen by Charles Rosen in his books, *Sonata Forms*, *The Classical Style* and, in particular, *The Romantic Generation*. It is unnecessary here to trace the extension of Beethovenian thinking through works of Schubert and others, though its manifestation in such formal innovations as the *Wanderer* Fantasy of Schubert and the B minor Sonata of Liszt has provided food for extended reflection in the course of many years of teaching and study since I first encountered them in my latter school years. What is intriguing in the present context, and worth dwelling upon, is the fact that Beethoven's influence palpably animates a great deal of Nielsen's own symphonic thinking, the latter's comparative comments on Mozart notwithstanding. From a superficially gestural perspective there are obvious nods towards Beethoven, such as the energetic pounding of a repeated octave A at the start of Nielsen's Third Symphony (*Sinfonia Espansiva*), initially reminiscent of what launches the *scherzo* in

Beethoven's Ninth Symphony but generically related also to the corresponding movement in the *Eroica* and the opening movement of the Seventh Symphony. Despite some validity in the notion that Nielsen owes more to Classical symphonic processes than Romantic ones, this is a view which seems to risk avoiding the whole Beethoven issue by failing to clarify which camp he himself might be thought to inhabit (though one could equally ask, is such a classification genuinely instructive, or even possible?) . Similarly, although in such works as his Second Symphony (*The Four Temperaments*) Nielsen does seem to display an indulgent observational interest in the foibles of individualised human nature, arguably therefore comparable with the operas or Mozart, in his Fourth and Fifth Symphonies the sense of epic conflict between the heroically affirming and the demonically destructive in mankind is unavoidably Beethovenian in scale and elevation, rather than Mozartian in its dissection of some profound but intimate *condition humaine*.

I will return now to the Fourth Symphony of Nielsen. Though I did not absorb all this at the age of sixteen, what immediately captured my attention in this work (after its sheer sound, which in its *tutti* passages reveals a pervasive orchestrational awareness of Beethoven) was its overarching strength of continuity and design. Cast as four linked movements in a continuous span, the work begins eruptively with an articulation of much the same rising C-D-F# motif as that found at the start of both Sibelius's Fourth Symphony and Vaughan Williams's Fifth, though in Nielsen's case it emerges obliquely from a composite approach to voicing and embodies a dissenting F natural as well. The secondary subject, first heard in A major, amounts to a kind of chorale, yet one in the time signature of 3/2, in which dotting of the minim on the second beat imparts a *sarabande* flavour. Once implanted in the scheme of things, this assumes a central, almost gravitational significance; indeed, it emerges in E major as a triumphant peroration to the final movement. By this stage in Nielsen's symphonic career the notion of what Robert Simpson later termed 'progressive tonality' was well developed, and the most compelling aspect of it remains the view of a defining tonality as a *destination*, not a starting point, gained ultimately in defiance of both internal argument and externally applied bombardments (the respective timpani and side drum onslaughts of the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies).

The 'sarabande' subject spawns many motivic patterns and cells, sometimes harnessed for *ostinato* punctuation of slower-moving argument and displaying a type of quasi-kinetic, agitating abruptness comparable with similar devices in the hands of Janáček. Interestingly, the rhythm and texture of the sarabande's first climactic statement (very early in the work) are quite comparable with those reserved by Sibelius only for the closing stages of his Second Symphony, and this image may serve to underline ways in which the symphonic processes of these two coeval composers arguably functioned as diametric opposites: the one allowing his '*Ur*-idea' immediately to generate numerous concurrent microcosms or tributaries, the other causing the central melodic synthesis and mainstream to emerge only in a final, definitive stroke, as the *ne plus ultra* sum of its foregoing (and initially disparate) cellular parts. Nielsen's design embraces also a bucolic *intermezzo* (woodwind-dominated but incorporating limited, discreet rôles for horns and strings) in place of any *scherzo* movement. The ensuing slow movement develops a plainchant-like, incantatory motif, transforms much earlier material and inverts the shape of the whole

work's opening cell as an element within the central climax. The *finale*, which opens with a headlong, notated *'quasi cadenza'* in strict time, launches into an aspiring and affirmative melody which might be seen as an archetype of Nielsen's musical personality, possessing both spacious nobility and a directionally agile, elliptical quality rooted in chromatically- and modally-inflected originality of mind. It was the opening of this movement that first stopped me in my tracks at the age of sixteen and caused me to listen, transfixed and open-mouthed. At the time I was unaware of its context, and hence of the unimpeachable symphonic logic with which it crowns an imposing, multi-faceted work uttered by a unique compositional voice. Such a quality of spatial and temporal reasoning is crucial in a composer, but not enough on its own, and it was the persuasive force of Nielsen's sheer sound which held me spellbound, as it still does (unlike most other composers with whose works I may have fallen in love at that age). Much later, having by then taught at university level for many years, I came upon the words with which Nielsen concludes the brief chapter *The Fullness of Time* in the essay collection *Living Music*. Whether the felicitous ambiguity of the chapter's title is present also in the Danish, I do not know (linguistically I suspect probability to be against this); but the following spoke with such directness of wisdom, simplicity and humility that I read it with a start of unexpected recognition, finding myself oddly and deeply moved in much the same way as I had been by the music of the man. Moreover, in an incidental way the passage casts a commendable light on Danish society and *mores*, apparently well ahead of their time:

…let us not forget that every single creature is different from his neighbour, though all must have time to realize the fine strong growth which perfects itself. …Every musician is entitled to use tones as he thinks fit. Old rules may be accepted or rejected at will. Schoolmasters no longer take their scholars by the ear; whipping and thrashing have been abolished, abuse and scolding silenced. But let no man assume that he can relax his efforts on that account. It is up to you to listen, seek, think, reflect, weigh, and discard, until, of your own free will, you find what our strict fathers in art thought they could knock into our heads. We have the glorious badge of freedom and independence. And should our path take us past our fathers' houses, we may one day allow that they were after what we are after, we want what they wanted; only we failed to understand that the simplest is the hardest, the universal the most lasting, the straight the strongest, like the pillars that support the dome.[xli]

This extract serves to pinpoint again the innate conservatism of the supposedly 'original' voice, thereby inspiring the creative courage of one's personal convictions and offering a succinct image of what one's own music might hope to achieve. It applies strikingly to Nielsen himself.

These comments about the *Inextinguishable* Symphony and the impact of its sound apply in more or less equal measure to Nielsen's Fifth Symphony. However, here I became interested by degrees in a particular aspect of the work which arises strictly from its informing musical processes. Nielsen's harmonic and tonal language is, in a local, moment-by-moment sense, strongly characterized by perfect intervals, and by a a sense of tonal 'navigation'. Despite an idiosyncratically chromatic sleight-of-hand in particular places, the aural 'image' received is a robustly tonal one, with a keenly diatonic, modal instinct informing even those moments where bitonality is implied or

actually consolidated. Seen from a greater distance, however, the scheme of the Fifth Symphony reveals a predetermined journey from something resembling A minor (the opening violin oscillation of C and A, followed by bassoon phrases entering first on E and C, then on an open fifth, E and A) to a heroic peroration in E flat major (albeit an E flat inflected by the transposed Mixolydian mode, with a flattened seventh). Such a form of implicit tonal conflict mirrors that epitomized in the iconic opening bars of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* [1857-9], whereby the 'spine wall' of the conventional diatonic scale - with its unequal division according to the perfect intervals within it - begins to collapse. (We may well owe this misleading attribution to Wagner's sheer strident, attention-seeking egocentricity, since the same device can be seen working to striking effect in the first *Allegro* movement of the Sonata in F sharp minor [*Elégie Harmonique*], opus 61, by Dussek, written a half-century earlier, in 1806; and, no doubt, contemporaneously elsewhere.)

The comfortable *sangfroid* of contemporary exposure to Bartók, Stockhausen or Birtwistle invites us to view the erosion of a diatonically based tonality as no more than a minor natural consequence of Classical inheritance (wherein permutations of the enharmonically ambiguous augmented sixth and diminished seventh could be freely deployed in a sonata movement's central stages to undermine the ostensible certainties of a prior exposition). However, there are rather less conveniently obvious cause and effect about the way in which this leads us both to Wagner and, at a kind of opposite extreme in most senses, to Nielsen. Rather than dwell any longer on such a divergence for its own sake, I wish simply to note here that in the 'language' of Nielsen an overarching tonal design can operate tritonally, supplanting the convention of the diatonic scale in its long-term conflict and direction, even while the 'local' harmonic vocabulary itself remains defined largely by a salient use of the perfect harmonic intervals and by the primacy of the root triad. Subsequent composers have explored this to fruitful effect, but Nielsen is the *fons et origo* of such thinking in my own stylistic development, even if not necessarily in the canon of western musical history and repertoire. Some of those who investigated such an approach did so in the process of identifying and establishing their own relationship to atonality. A usefully compact example of this occurs in the last of the eight *Préludes* for piano solo (1948) by the Swiss composer Frank Martin (1890-1974).

Martin had initially experienced the pioneering serialism of Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951) as a startling epiphany, but soon recognised that its systematic application was inimical to his instinct. I have often applied my own 'walking stick' principle in talking about technique to my own students, using the image to convey the simple notion that a composer who has acquired a rounded kind of 'received' technique then uses the letter of it (as opposed to its spirit) only as long he needs it, casting it aside when it ceases to serve a useful purpose. In like fashion, Martin identified the most transferable element in serial thinking: that if you use all twelve degrees of the chromatic scale once but only once, every note in its context must bring something intrinsically new to the argument. Serialism is the logical extreme of such a situation; as its rigour is relaxed, so too must the active 'newness' of every pitch become exponentially diluted. However, what such a strategic dilution *does* enable is the maintaining of a judicious awareness and control of balance: in Martin's case, arguably a subtle and agile fine-tuning of the equilibrium between consonance (rooted

in the triad, which he showed a reluctance to abandon) and an intrinsically dissonant atonality. In the cited *prélude*, a straightforward rondo structure is enlivened by fruitful tension and contrast between a recurring 'A' idea, characterized by improbable triadic juxtapositions and multiple 'false relations', and episodic material where a- and tri-tonality generate a counterpoise of dissonance arising predominantly from diminished or augmented intervals. While both sectional types make full and persuasive use of all the elements in the chromatic scale, and indeed depend wholly upon them, the one adheres to a hard-edged sovereignty of perfect intervals and triadic blocks, while the other appears intent on effacing them altogether.

The perfect fifth, erased so notably at the opening of *Tristan*, is in essence the very fault line separating tonality from atonality, and the last stand of one against the advance of the other. In this sense, one slender - if vividly imagined - piece by Martin offers a strange *conspectus* of where one might end up by extending the tonal and harmonic thinking (not necessarily actual sound) of a Nielsen, on the one hand, and a Wagner, on the other. Moreover, what is fascinating about out-and-out serialism as an applied method, viewed in this light, is that *de facto* it is atonal *because* it lacks consonance. One might put this another way: it abandons the triad not because of some abstract aesthetic reluctance in the subjective mind of the composer who applies it to the letter, but because - to use the jargon of contemporary academic management - such a consequence is already presciently 'embedded in its methodology'. In realizing how far Schönberg was metaphorically and compositionally tying one hand behind his back, perhaps one senses the more deeply how desperate his need and wish to escape the weight of musical history and of the triad, which becomes unwieldy, inimical and logically displaced within the context of serialism. Yet at the same time, one sees Martin comfortable to live on the cusp between a partially consonant, triadic atonality (even sometimes a clear tonality) and twelve-tone rigour, all the while testing the flexibility of the dividing line.

This view of Martin reminds me of a time when, as an acquaintance in Denmark of the celebrated *virtuoso* recorder player Michala Petri during the 1980s, I had the temerity to ask what truly attracted her to playing an instrument of such evident mechanical and other limitations. Unoffended, she replied that it was precisely this received perception which inspired her to test and explore every last inch and ounce of possibility – in a way, she commented, that might not apply if the possibilities in the first place seemed endless, as arguably in the case of the piano. Similarly, the music of Martin has fascinated and informed me since I encountered it at the age of about seventeen through the celebrated *Petite Symphonie Concertante* for harp, harpsichord, piano and two string orchestras. Here and elsewhere, one sees and hears a composer perpetually weighing and empirically testing the limits, and doing so in two opposing directions: how serial can he become before the overarching triad collapses into the tunnel and buries him? How consonant can his vertical structures become before a definitive tonality asserts itself instead? Might he occasionally, wilfully allow either or both of these to occur? Here again, one gains some perspective on Hofmannsthal and the notion of an imagination which cannot elude a certain type of conservatism, even – and perhaps, particularly – in the act of sifting what can be abandoned, what retained unchanged or re-invented. If he were not

defined by the rising ground of history on which he stands, the artist would instead be resting upon thin air.

It might be argued from the above that all composers are by definition eclectic, whether they choose to recognize it or not. However, some sense an innate eclecticism at an early stage, and welcome it, perhaps seeing in it with Muir (quoted earlier) how *'...acceptance of the past can enlarge and purify our image of human life'*. For such a composer, influences may be too numerous to identify individually. In the present context it is pertinent to mention two more for specific reasons.

At much the same time as I encountered Martin, I was becoming interested in the music of his near-namesake and exact contemporary, the Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů (1890-1957). The work which initiated this process was his *Double Concerto* for two string orchestras, piano and timpani, first performed by Paul Sacher and the Basle Chamber Orchestra in Basle on 9th February 1940. I believe I sought out this work on account of an intriguing instrumentation broadly comparable with that of Martin's *Petite Symphonie*. While there are superficial meeting points in terms of an underlying motivic flirtation with serialism, the key feature separating Martinů's Concerto from the work by Martin is that it is music of circumstance and of the external world. It is vividly and nervously alive in the same macabre sense as the condemned man moments before execution has been documented as preternaturally, almost maniacally alert, as if in some doomed reflex attempt to snatch something compensatory back in those final seconds from impending eternity. The Double Concerto narrowly predates the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Nazis. Though written on holiday within the country in late summer of 1938, it radiates a premonitory anxiety rooted in awareness of events in Munich, which determined Czechoslovakia's imminent destiny and ruled out any return to permanent residence in Bohemia or Moravia for the composer. Martinů had met his wife Charlotte in Paris and the couple were there in 1939 (in March 1941 they escaped to the USA). Charlotte's memoirs convey the air of foreboding which had settled on the composer in Paris:

...he was not himself, restless, nervous. He ...walked through Montparnasse, looked for friends but found no one... He returned home, the stove was not heating. In this depressed mood, the fire that had gone out suddenly seemed symbolic to him. As he told me on my return, first he listened to a great silence in the flat, which seemed to tell him something... tragic. ...It seemed to him that the whole weight of the times lay on his shoulders.[xlii]

In 1943 Martinů composed his orchestral *Monument to Lidice*, a memorial to the Moravian village destroyed by the Nazis in June the previous year in direct reprisal for the partisan murder of Heydrich. The village was rased and some 340 men, women and children murdered. Martinů's tribute, symbolically incorporating the opening thematic motif from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, was performed at a concert which I attended in Fiesole, the hillside town above Florence, during the summer of 1976. The concert had featured the Double Concerto earlier on, and the cumulative impact of premonition, unholy consummation, raw grief and righteous anger was exceedingly powerful. It is probably to this event that I can ascribe a slowly

awakening commitment to the notion of a music of human conscience, and therefore also a path leading to the largest work submitted herewith, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

Martinů surprised nobody when, in 1945, he acknowledged himself as *'a concerto grosso type'*. He viewed this somewhat atavistic form or style as a beneficial means of regulating both developmental means and the unfolding of emotional or dramatic currents in his music, having found that the latter in particular threatened to dominate the proceedings too easily in a symphonic context (the first five of his six symphonies were written in consecutive years from 1942 to 1946). This view is interesting in itself, since the type of emotion embodied in *Monument to Lidice* is by its circumstantial nature subjective, individual and couched so as to dissemble dispassionate exercise of compositional craft in favour of an illusion of unbridled spontaneity, like a kind of musical scream; yet, paradoxically, such an impression is strengthened by an absence of neo-romantic egocentricity: the emotion emanating from it (especially in a concert context) is public, and intended as such, while the individual dimension is that of the listener in response, not of the composer as medium. Were the 'dynamics' of such a work not rooted to an almost visceral degree in human atrocity, one might liken such a stance to Nielsen's benign humanistic detachment, which speaks to the individual but about the broad swathe of humanity. It is possible also to make a case for aligning Martinů's astonishingly fecund and extensive wider output with Nielsen's Mozartian, rather than Beethovenian, archetype, cited earlier.

This consideration returns us briefly to Nielsen's fascinating contention that *'art based chiefly on emotion becomes redundant, unless it is universal in time in the sense that there will always be something to learn from it'*. Such a notion is problematic in the sense that no composer agreeing with its qualifying clause would then set out to base music chiefly on emotion, since the proof of the pudding in terms of universality could not be eaten or gauged within any foreseeable future. Nonetheless, it is clear that Nielsen's word 'something' intends to imply 'something about humanity' or 'something about human truths other than music itself'. Once verbal text is added to the equation, the shades and layers of overt or non-overt emotion multiply, confounding any attempt dependably to ascribe emotional content, egocentricity or objectivity to words or to music. (The situation becomes further vexed in the event of translation.) As I hope to show later, texts from Biblical sources possess a certain ineluctable objectivity rooted in an ageless, more or less universal familiarity and in the forms of Christian worship; but secular, poetic, possibly modern texts may embody a more interpersonal, subjective or egocentric directness of utterance and of engagement with their reader or auditor. The composer alive to such concepts and possibilities may seek to make his dramatic, expressive or philosophical points by heightening differences and playing upon contrast, or he may find that a juxtaposition of texts from different 'categories' requires him to impose some unifying stamp of his own through exceedingly careful calibration of his music's response to the words. In the case of a lengthy, complex work such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* (to be discussed later), this delicacy of approach is heightened and complicated immeasurably by any allusive resonance which the text may fortuitously have within the currents and events of the new work's own time. In that event, appropriation, juxtaposition and blending of texts may be accomplished with the

conscious aim of achieving some emotional resonance more than the ostensible sum of its parts, – for instance, where juxtaposition is savagely or tragically ironic in intention. Yet the objectivity called for in successful exercise of such an approach is still paramount: the composer must quantify and assess what emotional index has arisen from his collation of text; then he must identify how best to preserve it. Paradoxically, whatever picture it already projects must be illuminated and modulated, to some felicitous artistic and hermeneutic effect, through what is musically done to it; and yet, the more emotionally overt or 'head-on' the concomitant musical statement to the emotion of the informing text, the greater the danger of overloading the proposition and debasing the currency. One might liken the text element to George Herbert's image in his short poem *The Elixer*, often appropriated as an Anglican hymn:

A man that looks on glasse,
On it may stay his eye;
Or, if he pleaseth, through it passe,
And then the heav'n espie. [xliii]

If the verbal text is the glass, the task of the music is to lead the eye and ear through and beyond its surface to what lies there (either definitively or else through the subtleties of some valid interpretative suggestion). In accomplishing this, the music is no more altering the lineaments of the image through which it passes than the sun disfigures the image of the rose window through which it shines. What are altered are colouring, tone, inflection and, crucially, contemplative distance. The responsible purpose, then, is to illumine an underlying fidelity to text, not to imply subjective perceptions of how it might beneficially have been different. If one fails to bear this in mind at the outset, the eventual musical result is unlikely to do justice either to compositional intention or to original text, unless by a good luck which it then hardly merits. There is, of course, a fine and debatable line between the kind of interpretative insight which might be one of many embraced and suggested by a text's own subtleties, and a more predatory agenda of one's own which may cross over into bending the text away from its true image. The best the composer can do is acknowledge this quicksand of possible misconceptions and then tread as safely as possible across it – or not at all. In closing this particular meditation, it is instructive to cite the pianist Alfred Brendel, who, when asked why he played no Rakhmaninov, replied that it was not the *fact* of the music's 'emotionality' that alienated him; rather, he said, he found that he mistrusted the actual *quality* of emotion displayed. One must presume that such mistrust would betray itself in performance, notwithstanding the celebrated gifts of the pianist in question (attested not least by his artistic scruples); and it is fitting too for the composer choosing text to ask himself repeatedly whether the quality of emotion emerging from the marriage of a text with his musical response to it can justly claim a listener's trust in the same way as indicated by Brendel. It is for complex reasons such as these that the reflections of Nielsen and the impact of Martinů have both exercised a valuable influence on my own thinking as a writer of sacred choral music, just as they may in slightly different form where my instrumental and orchestral music is concerned. In passing, one should note that the kind of integrity implied in this process is entirely separate from that of religious conviction

or a lack of it: there is as much integrity in the reality of doubt as in the comfortable assurance of faith, and a single honesty common to both states of being.

It is pertinent now to return to Martinů and to view his harmonic approach (albeit briefly) in a slightly more technical light. Even in a work such as the Double Concerto, with a reduced instrumentation which obscures wider view of the composer as one of the twentieth century's supreme writers for woodwind, one is conscious that an astringently polytonal use of dense chording is offset – indeed, made possible – by great skill in orchestration. (Evidence of Martinů's immense range and imagination in this regard lies *inter alia* in the ballet scores *Istar* [1922] and *Špalíček* [1932], in the six symphonies (the last dating from 1953) and also in the three *Frescoes of Piero della Francesca*, completed in 1955 and published the following year, which postdate them all.) In the Double Concerto, the composer's means of conjuring arresting harmonic inflection or conflict noticeably resembles that of Holst in works such as the choral and orchestral *Hymn of Jesus*. In both cases, one senses that single contrapuntal lines have had triadic or (through doubling of the fundamental at the octave) tetradic formations superimposed on them. The directional and linear thinking of two interacting 'fundamental' lines is therefore still that of a more orthodox contrapuntal approach; but the consequence of multiple upper partials functioning essentially as 'passengers' on top is a series of intense, sometimes strenuous collisions where harmonic focus seems to undergo spasm before regaining a more consonant, contiguous clarity. Throughout his *oeuvre*, Martinů shows himself capable also of juxtaposing artlessly candid, straightforward major key diatonicism with abrupt extremes of polytonality and of dissonance. This may have originated from his early Paris years, when he was aware of *Les Six*. A comparable practice by one of its number, Milhaud (1892-1974), was entertainingly seized upon (to Milhaud's own reported amusement) by his friend Constant Lambert (1905-1951) in his egregious youthful study, *Music Ho!* :

The mechanical imposed polytonality of Milhaud's earlier works, which jump sharply from the most academic euphony to the most startling cacophony, remind one of a host who having forgotten to put gin in the first round of cocktails puts methylated spirits in the second round to make up for it. [xliv]

More seriously and with considerable insight, Lambert observed within the same argument how

if a tune depends for its vitality on the unsuitability of its harmonic background, it is impossible to develop it, use it contrapuntally, or add anything to it after its first statement. Although the harmony may seem wildly at variance with the tune from the vertical point of view, it is yet indissolubly linked with it from a horizontal point of view. [xlv]

For the composer whose technical mainspring is counterpoint, this is a salutary warning. Lambert uses the idiosyncratic but useful term 'extrinsic' to describe harmonic backgrounds such as that mentioned above. It is striking here that harmonic oddness is no more objected to *per se* than actual sound (as opposed to parallelism as a principle) is academically frowned upon in so-called 'parallel fifths'. Rather, the

objection is to a function inimical to wider application. In contrast, then, it is instructive to turn to a work of such conspicuous oddness as the fugal *finale* of Beethoven's final 'cello sonata, the Sonata in D, opus 102 no. 2. A separate volume could be written on the effects of lengthening deafness upon 'real time' thinking, and upon a tendency in several of Beethoven's late works (especially the last quartets) to suggest a kind of mental ellipsis and 'telescoping mentality' (rather than any mere loss of normal harmonic coherence), - much as if a more conventional work had been penned and then two metaphorical book-ends applied to either end of the result, in a kind of wilful compression of its argument. Fascinatingly, a comparable tendency may be observed in the last chamber works of Fauré (1845-1924), whose sense of auditory distortion had for many years precluded normal function and had caused him to avoid the outer extremities of the piano keyboard well before actual deafness took an advancing hold.

Something of this kind has for many years struck me in relation to the *finale* of Beethoven's opus 102, no.2. There is, however, no shirking the fact that its power resides specifically in the received sense of drastic truncation, and in its offering a (presumably deliberate) compressed antithesis to the timeless expansion of the foregoing *Adagio*. One is therefore left uncertain how to calibrate one's assessment of a fully 'proactive', empirically developed intent against the possibly unconscious workings of sensory deprivation upon a composer's technique, imagination and intellectual perception. Nonetheless, and *pace* Lambert, here a downright harmonic oddness *is* functionally valid and appropriate, arising as it does from the counterpoint itself and from a linear approach which is willing to subordinate 'problematic' vertical events to a driving horizontal force. Indeed, such moments are not merely 'a price worth paying' (they could have been avoided with ease and the whole conception altered accordingly, had that been Beethoven's intention): they have a kind of strenuous, costive power to them which is an intrinsic (not <u>ex</u>trinsic) part of the expressive and emotional message.

Debussy avowedly used the term *Etude* as pretext for piano works which explored compositional as much as performing virtuosity. In the nineteenth century, the 'concert' *étude* might court virtuosity, inviting and projecting nonchalance in the face of an implied or actual difficulty, with the performer 'living dangerously' while wearing an insouciant smile, like Blondin over Niagara, balanced on a single leg of a stool. While Beethoven's intention and entire frame of reference are altogether more serious in opus 102 no.2, the sense there that intellectually argued (as opposed to emotionally instinctive) music can allow and actively embrace the problematic, living uneasily or 'dangerously' with its material and even trying to bludgeon its way out of tight corners, serves as an apt artistic metaphor for an imperfect sphere of creation, a difficult universe and even, perhaps, an uncomfortable humanity chafing hopelessly against the inevitability of its individual mortality. The tight corners, though actually conceived as such and set in place within a given scheme by the composer, assume a kind of externalised significance. If the composition as a whole is a river, these seem to say, then we are the rocks which divert its course and around which it must flow to find its future. The same notion applies to Nielsen's Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, briefly discussed earlier, though there the obstacles generated from within by musical argument are augmented by external, more graphic or desynchronized impositions

such as the disruptive timpanists or maniacal snare drummer. Whatever Nielsen's respective views of Beethoven and Mozart, Beethoven refuses to go away.

Martinů's effect upon my own thinking amounts to a starting point for wider meditations of a general sort, notwithstanding some direct influence by his sound itself. Many years ago I was intrigued that I had noticed a single two-chord formula which recurred somewhere in every work of his I had heard, somewhat like Hitchcock's cameo appearances in all his own films. Finally I was able to trace this 'signature' not to Martinů but to Janáček, – to the final movement of *Taras Bulba*. This nod at a musical iconography, with its potential for cross-reference and musical homage, obviously echoes the Wagnerian '*Tristan* effect' cited earlier; or, indeed, multiple cross-references in the solo piano and chamber outputs of Chopin, Mendelssohn and Schumann or the solo piano music of Medtner and Rakhmaninov. In Martinů's case, however, the implication is one of nationalist pride and a fiercely guarded cultural heritage or identity, sharpened in the event by Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia and years of exile. The potential for imported references of this sort to bring external significance of their own into the frame of a new work is one which intrigued me in the recent context of my own oratorio *The Cloud of Unknowing*, to be discussed later.

As implied above, the question of musical influence is a tangled one in which general lines of enquiry, meditation or lateral thinking may become difficult to remember clearly and to retrace anecdotally. The single most significant point arising from my appraisal of influences so far is that most of the twentieth-century composers who have influenced my work began to do so before the end of my secondary education. Few modern composers have begun to exercise a comparable effect in more recent years. Instead, my adult development as a composer has been a matter primarily of lengthening focus, and of a much more lateral, dispassionately technical assimilation of structure, method and tonal planning in the music of much earlier mainstream composers. There are exceptions to this: the symphonies and quartets of Robert Simpson have exerted an increasing intellectual fascination (since first acquaintance with his Third Symphony while still an undergraduate). An early attachment to the lean, muscular polyphony of Tippett's first opera, *The Midsummer Marriage*, lengthened into a selective exploration of his subsequent output. Heard in the late 1970s, the opening pages of that opera formed a kind of epiphany, in which appropriation of elements in sixteenth century triadic practice and suspension no longer meant reinvention through the prism of folksong-based nationalism and Vaughan Williams. A comparably selective exploration of Britten's output has unfolded over many years, though the catalyst for this, the *War Requiem*, remains a problematic piece, seeming paradoxically to epitomise a personality so elusive that no definitive personality exists. While such a work may in a spiritual sense be hollow in intention and at its very core (the god invoked *in extremis* making no response), Britten has recurrently reminded me of a description which I once read of Sir Laurence Olivier: until 'poured into the vessel' of a new rôle and able to invent his personality accordingly, this great actor was alleged to have no personality or clear identity of his own at all, much as a painting first requires a canvas which is blank.

Explorations over more recent years include many works by the British and Irish composers James MacMillan, Julian Anderson, Minna Keal, Barry Guy, Deirdre Gribbin and Frank Corcoran; the Americans William Bolcom, John Corigliano, Lowell Liebermann, Ned Rorem, Aaron Jay Kernis and George Tsontakis; the Scandinavian or Baltic composers Arvo Pärt, Peteris Vasks, Einojuhani Rautavaara, Herman Koppel, Vagn Holmboe, Eduard Tubin and Joonas Kokkonen; the late Czech composer Viktor Kalabis; the Georgian, Giya Kancheli; the Poles, Lutoslawski and Górecki; and the Russian-born composer Alfred Schnittke. From these, general principles and possibilities have sometimes arisen: from Bolcom and (very differently) from Schnittke an interest in *collage* treatment both of materials and of a variety of styles; from Pärt and Kancheli, and to a lesser extent from Vasks, a salutary awareness that music can be built up from silence, rather than chiselled from sound; from Kokkonen's Fourth Symphony and his 'Cello Concerto, an apparent continuation of aspects of Frank Martin's thinking, but allied to a lean, cool, essentially Nordic ear for the orchestra. Having explored MacMillan's *concertante* work *The World's Ransoming* (1997), for cor anglais and orchestra (in the process of planning a comparable work of my own), I then encountered *Colored Field* (*sic*, 1993-4), a concerto for the same forces by the American composer Aaron Jay Kernis. A memorial to the horrors of Auschwitz and Birkenau, this work was prompted over a period of years by the haunting recollection of a visit to the camps, where Kernis saw the child of a Brooklyn family sitting outside, innocently playing musical notes on blades of grass which had formerly been metaphorically or literally soaked in blood. A commercial recording of the work (Argo, 448 174-2) describes *Colored Field* as articulating *'an idea that something overwhelming exists underneath all we perceive on the surface'*. [xlvi] Such a notion accords naturally with the thoughts put forward in the opening section of this dissertation; while, in the event, the music itself (sober, enigmatic, unrelenting yet laudably unsensational) amounts to a statement so painful and unrepeatable that its agency as a direct influence is obviated. Nonetheless, as music of human conscience this work is a potent inspiration on lines comparable with Martinů's *Memorial to Lidice*.

To these composers I must add Nikolai Medtner, whose output, similar in scale and pianistic focus to that of Chopin, forms the basis of my own continuing musicological research and some of my performing activity. While a composer of this type appears incongruous beside most of those cited hitherto, a particular interest in his music is the co-existence of relatively conservative harmonic language with a radical and highly idiosyncratic treatment of rhythm. Here, as elsewhere, the word conservative must lead us back to Hofmannsthal's contention; and there is indeed an understated, retrospective and somewhat reticent originality in Medtner's work, which one might be tempted to liken to similar properties in Fauré's music, were not the actual sound of it mostly so different (there are demonstrable, if probably coincidental, meeting points in the first of Medtner's three violin sonatas). Medtner's rhythmic thinking enables him to see barlines as a form of visual punctuation, not as the proverbial, metrical tyranny. At its best, this is allied to an arguably unique skill in the handling of motivic counterpoint. At its worst, it engenders an unmanageable proliferation of imitative possibilities without seeing them as mutual alternatives rather than individual loose ends, thereby leading in certain cases to an overall prolixity quite at odds with the austere compositional discipline which engendered the problem.

While the unsurpassed elegance of Medtner's purely physical, callisthenic 'pianism' renders him easy prey for those whose hostile agenda is to diagnose a composer 'thinking through his fingers', the voluminous drafts and sketches deposited in Moscow's Glinka Museum and at the National Library of Canada, in Ottawa, reveal a composer implacably refusing to succumb to such superficial considerations until wholly satisfied with the 'raw' workings of his contrapuntal processes. In studying these and other, fuller drafts, I became both fascinated and slightly unnerved by recognition of a mind which worked so much in the same way as my own. Since it is inevitably easier to exercise objective critical judgement upon the works of another composer than upon one's own, my analytical assessment of Medtner's successes and shortcomings has proven especially instructive over recent years in particular.

Since I am already engaged upon the writing of an extended critical study of Medtner, it would be easy at this point to digress irretrievably. Instead, two particular observations are worth making as succinctly as possible. First, Medtner neatly illustrates a point made earlier concerning general currents of thought which can lead from a point of specific influence to consideration of some much more general compositional issue or to comparative perceptions which may straddle apparently unconnected stylistic territories. One of Medtner's intermittent characteristics is the cultivation of a kind of major-key, prayer-like candour and innocence. Such a recourse is a two-edged sword: when it succeeds, it does so disarmingly and with a memorable radiance; when it fails, as it not infrequently seems to do, the result sounds archly self-conscious, or even, occasionally, trite. While there might be no other conceivable reason to link Medtner with Britten in a single sentence, this much can be fairly (if subjectively) said of Britten too. As a success, one might cite the E flat major 'still centre' of the canticle, *Abraham and Isaac*, while archness might be said to pervade F major choral passages in *Rejoice in the Lamb* or, indeed, the central *scherzando* material in the *Hymn to St Cecilia*. The subjectively adduced cases here might be contested, but the underlying danger can probably be more objectively conceded. This is a valuable perception in gauging the nature and substance of one's response to particular lines of text when writing chorally.

Secondly, Medtner was famously hailed by Taneiev, his counterpoint teacher, as a composer *'born with sonata form'*. [xlvii] In pursuit of his more or less habitual sonata structures (found also in his many *skazki* or 'tales', generically linked with Chopin's *Ballades* and not bearing the sonata designation), Medtner tends to formulate an *Urmotiv* which serves initially to do little more than articulate an inchoate sense of tonality, as at the outset of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. However, he displays something of the same long-range vision and prescience as Bach and Beethoven in identifying a *Motiv* amenable to almost ubiquitous use both as thematic foreground (sometimes in augmentation or diminution) and as its own motivic accompaniment. In Beethoven's hands this can become the instrument of a fruitful formal anarchy, whereby the frontiers of the genre are pushed back as the motivic idea begins to develop in a Protean way almost the moment it is first encountered; in Medtner's, the concept of recapitulation is kept intact even despite development processes which attend almost exclusively to primary and secondary subject matter, rather than (as in Classical practice) to entirely subsidiary material from the exposition's transition

passage or *codetta*. The result is often something which works in ostensible defiance of reason, rather in the way that the celebrated *stretto* fugue in D major from Book Two of *Das Wohltemperierte Clavier* should exhaust itself prematurely, having limited its material by evolving its countersubject as a direct motivic extension of the (exceedingly short) subject. The risk taken in either instance is one which a lesser intellect would shirk, but one also which amply repays the composer's own confidence in embracing it.

The handling of sonata or sonata-derived forms by Classical, Romantic and post-Romantic composers is a subject which I have found endlessly fascinating in the course of many years teaching both received and original techniques of composition within Higher Education. While one may learn much from specific context and example, the 'transferable skill' available here is that of seeing the whole in relation to its parts, the outer lineaments of a grand design in relation to its more local, internal junctions or relationships, and the empirical cause-and-effect of thematic metamorphosis necessitating fresh approaches to recapitulation. Such considerations led in the nineteenth century to key rotation in such seminal works as Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy, and also to cyclic thinking whereby thematic material began to straddle all the movements of a work, the earliest symphonic example being Schumann's D minor Symphony (heard originally as his Symphony no. 2 in 1841 and presented in revised form as no. 4 in 1853) and a pre-eminent instance in chamber music the Violin Sonata in A major by César Franck. When allied to later, more anarchic tonal (or 'counter-tonal') planning such as that of Nielsen in his Fifth Symphony, such processes lead naturally to spacious formal designs which overarch an entire work, especially when – as in the case of Medtner – a strong contrapuntal resource is deployed too, bringing with it a multiplicity of opportunities. These demand to be applied in a stringently selective way if discursive chaos is not to be the end result.

When a major choral work rests upon collation of texts from a wide variety of sources, and when the resulting text as a single entity runs to several pages in articulating its own message, a composer abandons himself to an intuitive musical response at his peril, for reasons already hinted at. Detailed awareness of a variety of structural innovations, traditions and pitfalls from the canon of orchestral and instrumental music is essential in such circumstances, even though this is not to say that intuition has no place; rather, the kind of intuition required is one informed by long habit, and therefore educated into dependable patterns of the subconscious. (For this reason, the sudden awareness, long after completion of a work, that there are thematic inter-relations previously unnoticed should be taken as a reassuring event, much as it can also be disconcerting.) Most importantly, the overarching framework of a large-scale composition should be determined not least by reference to works where no verbal text figures. While there may be no certain knowledge (at least on the part of the lay person) as to what narrative of creative and conceptual events attended the filling of a canvas by an old master, one can be reasonably certain that the sense of proportion famously present in, say, Poussin resulted from meticulous location of certain crucial points of foreground or distance prior to the filling-in of local detail or colour. While colour may arise directly from substance, it cannot usurp its position and begin to ordain the substance instead; and yet, paradoxically, a prior sense of the

one proceeding from the other may well be essential to the artist's capacity to start doing anything at all. For the composer, the proverbial Irishman's comment *'if I were going there, I wouldn't start from here'* is actually not a joke, but soundly pragmatic common sense, provided the composer has at least considered a work's ultimate destination. Alternatively, one might embrace Eliot's *'In my beginning is my end'*, or even invert it (either might be true, or both).

Even a work such as the Bach D major Fugue cited above might perhaps guard its own secret history of happy chances and discoveries along the way, where instinct honed and elevated to the condition of genius 'created its own luck'- so that no true distinction could ever be made between conscious conceptual brilliance and a sort of charmed Midas touch: somewhere the two become one. This lies outside the province of all but the most prodigiously gifted; and even Tchaikovsky is reported to have remarked that 'every work is a dress rehearsal for the next', thereby seeming to acknowledge that where a work ends is never truly quite what or where we expected: its image and resonance have changed subtly but detectably along the way, like someone absent from us for a time, whose continued sameness we have assumed meanwhile in a way that turns out no longer to be quite true to life. Every work entails a leap of faith and of initial creative momentum, like a bicycle which will fall with its rider unless mounted and propelled decisively enough. Only thereafter, perhaps, can the rider directly control where he is going, as opposed to merely thinking about it. At the outset, Spender's words concerning *'a rhythm, a dance, a fury, which is as yet empty of words'* [xlviii] remain pertinent: the initial impulse to compose, whether in response to text or in its absence, may well be inarticulate, and may even persist (or not) for a long time without finding its musical 'way in' (the term 'opening' is avoided here, being potentially misleading).

I have attempted here to provide some (necessarily selective) overview of personal reflections, investigations and discoveries spanning the past three decades and more. While some of the music submitted herewith is too modest in scale to be measured against my reflections upon large-scale form and design, in broad terms my compositional path in choral music has embodied a gradual increase of ambition, leading steadily towards the consciously epic scale of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The ensuing section of this dissertation first outlines some further thoughts specifically on choral writing, from both a contemplative and an anecdotal perspective, and then examines and adumbrates the submitted works of my own one by one.

Choral composition in the twenty-first century Anglican church:

Before discussing my own choral works individually, it is necessary to articulate further reflections and recollections concerning personal style and technique, with particular focus upon subjective preoccupations and aims. To some extent this again entails reference to sacred choral music by others. However, the perceptions advanced here are mostly further end-products of the long process of osmosis and critical reaction encapsulated above, and therefore reflections of a relative musical maturity. They have continued to be shaped by adult experience, both as a lay clerk in the

Cathedral Choir at Winchester (1991-2001) and as a tutor in Compositional Techniques at Oxford University (broadly the same period), and also by teaching and practice since then. A continued element of personal reminiscence is therefore expedient, as is critical reflection arising in the present from the sum of such experience.

The compositional resource most fundamental to my approach and to my instincts is counterpoint. Early exposure to sixteenth century choral polyphony and to fugally conceived music of the Italian and German 'High Baroque' tradition has much to do with this. Moreover, it would therefore seem no accident that later composers who made a particular impact on my thinking all harnessed counterpoint in significant ways, whether in linear but self-contained movements (such as the first movement of Martinů's Double Concerto, cited earlier) or in the fashioning of an overarching structure (be it broadly cyclic in conception or governed by something like Nielsen's 'progressive tonality').

Counterpoint was deployed with an idiosyncratic freedom by many composers of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, thereby leading to such virtues as a generalised motivic discipline or, more simply, an interesting and fruitful independence of linear direction in bass lines. (For example, the latter quality has been noted by more than one commentator in the large-scale paragraphs of Mahler's symphonies, where ostensibly non-contrapuntal textures may yet rest upon free contrapuntal symbiosis between the uppermost and lowest strands in the design, in a kind of 'embroidered' two-part counterpoint.) Despite this, however, there are certain lessons to be learnt from the exercise of stricter counterpoint which serve usefully to heighten perception in one's own work.

The schooled keyboard player's proficiency is likely to embrace reasonable competency as a sight reader, and probably therefore informs his or her assimilation of contrapuntal as well as general harmonic practice (many pianists with no particular public aim as performers will trawl through 'The 48' for personal satisfaction or enlightenment). Oddly, however, the piano is in some respects the last musical place in which to seek mastery of strict counterpoint; for, while Bach's creative liberties in his fugal keyboard writing are generally outweighed by the vast discipline brought to bear, later composers for the piano were happy to exploit a self-evident freedom. If a fugue for piano begins to dissipate and to dilute any clear impression how many voices are involved, the instrument remains one instrument or sonority; and the player is still a soloist. A movement such as the *finale* of Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy can effect the shift from fugal discipline to a tenuously related, ornamental rhetoric with ease, avoiding any sense of dislocation. By contrast, 'real parts' for disparate instruments admit of no such licence. Once another player is physically present in the performance, the composer cannot allow him to sit or stand around like an overlooked guest at a party. While ensemble-based counterpoint does admit of part-crossings and certain forms of clarity not necessarily open to the keyboard composer, at the same time it imposes a kind of long-term commitment to the established voicing and textural range of the music. One sees this, for example, in the string quartet and quintet writing of Mendelssohn, whose contrapuntal discipline causes him to build climactic points purely through musical argument, not through superimposition of

'external' instrumental resources such as double-stopping and octave doublings. Essentially this represents the difference between the mentality of the contrapuntist and that of the orchestrator, because at the opposite extreme it is possible for a composer such as Debussy or Ravel to approach the entire modern symphony orchestra as if it were not so much one hundred soloists as a single huge, composite instrument: the second harpist or the contrabassoonist may contribute a tiny arabesque of colour having remained dormant for one hundred bars, and with a similar silence to follow. The disjunction of that player's part is incontestable, but entirely irrelevant: Debussy or Ravel is there using the orchestra in very much the way Schubert in his *Wanderer* last movement uses the keyboard. In keyboard terms the same textural freedom is extended through Liszt's B minor Sonata, the contrapuntal workings of Medtner's piano sonatas (for all his rigour and care over the prior conception of raw material), and latterday, isolated phenomena such as the *finale* of Samuel Barber's Piano Sonata, opus 26. In orchestral terms it is far more widespread, for the obvious reason that no orchestral fugue could embody as many voices as there are players or potential parts. The 'doubling' mentality of orchestration there co-exists with the rigour of the fugal thinker, and great self-discipline is required if the former is not to dilute and progressively impede the latter. (This fact incidentally provides an apt measure of Barber's high achievement in the cited example, where *quasi*-orchestral virtuosity demanded of the player is entirely mirrored in a remarkable technical control already deployed by the composer.)

If these reflections err on the side of the obvious, they are offered nonetheless because of the somewhat unforgiving light which they cast on a good deal of sacred choral music within the Anglican tradition. Whereas it may be a good deal easier to 'bury' both the contrabassoonist and, along with him, any compositional conscience, merely by excluding him from the page at hand, the choral composer rather more obviously reaps what he sows. Once deployed at all, an individual part *'insists upon its own direction'* not merely musically, but also in the terms of its verbal continuity. Whereas the symphony orchestra may fluctuate considerably in size, the cathedral or collegiate choir remains resolutely within the same format: trebles (or, more and more nowadays, female sopranos, whether children or adults); altos, tenors and basses; and an organ, which may or may not be used. The lay-out of the building in question probably causes the choir to be divided into two halves which face each other across vacant middle ground, from stalls named in deference to the seats occupied by the Dean on the one hand, the Precentor on the other (a disposal all too likely to reflect some Trollopian state of perpetually uncertain *détente* outside the confines of worship).

The mental 'default setting' of the Anglican composer is 'SATB'. In many cases this Procrustean imposition arguably has little bearing on the actual nature and substance of the composer's ideas or upon the compositional technique brought to bear upon them. In this context, one can return to the notion of the keyboard as a potentially *un*helpful medium of instruction, since so many church composers are and have been titular organists at the same time. They may well have undertaken the kind of contrapuntal and technical exercises demanded of them in the context of examinations determining Associateship or Fellowship of the Royal College of Organists (ARCO or FRCO; one hapless failure in the former is mythically alleged to have received an

envelope by post, with PIZZICATO maliciously appended after his name). They may also have undertaken music degrees at one of a number of prestigious universities. However, a great weight of compositional slackness has been imposed in the past century-and-a-half. Charles Rosen squarely blames Mendelssohn, citing the cripplingly restrictive influence of royal patronage and artistic 'tastes' on compositional ambition –and also hinting at the consequent possibility that, in Mendelssohn's least distinguished music, Victorian Englishmen fatally discovered the flattering illusion that they could go and do likewise.[xlix] Ironically, whereas Mendelssohn's music does embody a kind of 'fearful symmetry' in its relentlessly metrical adherence to four-bar, question-and-answer phrase structures, exercise of counterpoint generally remained his salvation from this (a glorious departure of another kind is the asymmetric inspiration behind the secondary subject in his overture, *The Hebrides*); but it is the fate of many Victorian would-be composers to bind unadventurous counterpoint and metrical regularity together in an increasingly tired and enervating embrace. Eventually, all that remains of Mendelssohn himself is an odour of sanctity which, on its own, offers a mere travesty of even his most pedestrian work.

A besetting problem for the organist-composer would seem to be that he follows in a tradition where the provision of new works was once a necessity and a civic expectation, but threatens nowadays to degenerate into a distasteful exercise in public self-regard. If one considers Byrd, Weelkes and Tomkins, one discerns composers who were also organists – even if that is not how, at the time, they perceived themselves. The range of their available musical grammar and technique was infinitely more circumscribed than ours, even in the hands of Byrd, the alcoholically-fuelled Weelkes or the rurally secluded Tomkins (a fascinating mixture of innate originality and the effect of living partially out of touch with the stylistic currents of his time; in this sense his genius epitomises Hofmannsthal's, or at least Muir's, 'conservatism'). What composers of today very widely fail to recognise is that such a robust framework of grammatical rules, observances and recognised solecisms serves to limit the sheer practical possibility of truly *bad* music. There are exceptions: some of William Mundy's clumsy attempts at counterpoint stand up forlornly or not at all beside the work of more gifted practitioners; but therein, too, lies the point: in an 'anything-goes' climate, such exceptions fade back into the general mass of things, and ergo become acceptable as the debased currency. This is to say not that the technique of Anglican church music in the twenty-first century should return to a kind of atavistic, hard-line fundamentalism, but, rather, that the composer who dives blithely into today's general stew of technical and stylistic freedom does (more than ever) need first to have donned the lifebelt of some serious thought on what he wishes to say and the best means of saying it. Unhelpfully in this context, however, the rise of evangelical trends within the church has contributed to two things: first, a banishing of mysticism from the forms of service, so that a God who is supposedly everywhere may be familiarly addressed as if he were actually anywhere but in church; and, secondly, an ethos of Christian tolerance, proper and laudable in principle, but which has been allowed to colour actual artistic standards. As my namesake and ancestor, the clergyman and hymn-writer Francis Pott (1832-1909), wrote (in the hymn, *Angel-voices ever singing* [*sic*]),

Yea, we know that Thou rejoicest
O'er each work of Thine;
Thou didst ears and hands and voices
For Thy praise design …

…and, two verses later,

Of the best that Thou hast given,
Earth and Heaven
Render Thee.[l]

Whether these sentiments have been traduced by a lowering of standards or were already unwittingly complicit in it, there are plentiful and melancholy reasons to feel that God would have to be tolerant to a point of idiocy in order to delight in some of what is sent heavenward nowadays. The fatally indulgent mantra that it is enough to do our best leaves no room for the possibility that, if our best is *not* actually good, silence might be a welcome alternative. Where this applies to the well-meaning if errant parish church organist, there is at least the saving grace of *try*ing to be better than nothing and to dignify sincerely (however uncertainly) the forms and workings of a tradition the value of which, for many, lies partly in its antiquity. Where it applies to the hymns of evangelical composer-authors such as Graham Kendrick, however, what trips up the average congregation is not some intrinsic limitation of its own, though such a group can hardly be expected to excel vocally. The problem is likely to be that the hymn is ill-fashioned. Its text may be poorly scanned and syllabically inconsistent, meaning that underlay is variable between verses, sometimes requiring the singer to gabble; its harmony is ill-structured and directionless, characterised by parallelisms and counterproductive repetition; it may have been conceived on, and for, the guitar – which may be largely inaudible to the congregation in performance; and it may pay little heed to placement of vowels, or may inhabit an unfeasibly high tessitura for such a context. The result, as purveyed regularly in the parish church of my own village, is a dewy-eyed, unholy and entirely predictable shambles, dripping with pained sincerity, shifty discomfiture and sidelong glances. The possibility that even the receptive evangelical could emerge from such an experience helped upon his Christian path is seemingly remote; for the trained musician, the consequent state of mind is more likely to be (in its own terms) that described by Raymond Chandler in relation to a particular blonde: *'enough to make a bishop kick a hole in a stained glass window'*. [li]

The crucial word here is training; for if, in the eyes of some, there is an arrogance in decrying such music, so is there too (albeit of a different kind) in imposing wanton chaos on a hapless congregation out of some complacent assumption that one is innately gifted enough to enhance the Christian experience of others through sloppy, *un*trained and self-satisfied musical gropings. It would be helpful to be able to point to some disparity between this and the pulpit; but even there, the rise of evangelicalism – and of 'I am doing my best for Jesus' – has ushered in a new surfeit of lay preachers and 'family worship' events at which, it seems, anybody professing faith can presume to patronise the assembled throng, usually in the terms of homely anecdotal non-event, strained Christian analogy and despairing intellectual leap towards the elusive

trapeze of some wholly fallacious conclusion. The point, in any case, is that the trained musician's objection to Kendrick and his kind is rooted primarily in the practical, not the snobbish: Byrd may not appeal to all, but of its kind it is surely *'of the best that [God has] given'*. Exacting on every level (including the devout effort which went into its creation), it is conceived in such a way as to 'work' when approached with the reverence and care which it intrinsically demands. Kendrick is difficult to place in the same pigeon hole when one is in the midst of a hymn whose awkwardly jejune text actually fails syllabically to fit its compositionally untutored music, whose sentiments amount to demonstrably dubious theology and whose enforced rendition is causing mayhem all around one. Even when performed correctly, its continual syllabic mismatch of text and music sounds counterintuitive and distracting. Was such music genuinely given by God in quite the way my ancestor might appear inclusively to imply from his nineteenth-century vantage point? Here the question is invited as to how many gifts, and of what kind, are generally given in the private hope of receiving them back again.

The comparison between Byrd and Kendrick may be specious, even facetiously extreme in some respects; but it remains true that Byrd represents a kind of *ne plus ultra* as a church musician and creator of transcendent gifts. Moreover, the point has just been made that his music is exacting in every sense. Effort (physical, intellectual, emotional, expressive) must be made by all its participants to do justice to what it embodies and signifies, and thereby to achieve the rich rewards which its successful realisation can bring. It is music for which one can readily imagine the composer regarding himself as a mere vessel or medium, chosen by some power greater than his own will. It therefore commands a proper reverence of its own, because (to appropriate Herbert's image again) it encourages the listener to accept it as a glass through which the light of something numinous and transfiguring shines upon him, its source unseen and unattributable but its effect disarming in the deepest possible sense. At the same time, music of a relative antiquity retains the composer's self-perception as a kind of artisan, for whom craft comes first, art (God willing) thereafter. This, applicable among others to Bach, is something which society, the Church and our artistic climate have progressively lost.

Although it would be as unfair to blame Kendrick for a lowering of artistic common denominators as it arguably is to lay Anglican Victoriana at the door of an unwitting Mendelssohn, it is perhaps valid to see the evangelical hymn industry in objective, trained musical terms as the offshoot of a wider popular music culture, and therefore not reasonably subject to the dictates of classically based musical training. Enlisted here as a generic representative, Kendrick co-exists nowadays with classically conceived sacred music within the forms of everyday worship. In my own parish I received a letter a few years ago from the vicar, who laid before me her growing uncertainty and anxiety in the face of mutually implacable demands from two separate constituencies within the congregation - and then asked me to offer written comment. In accepting this poisoned chalice, as far as possible I avoided potentially sectarian issues of spiritual and liturgical preference and argued instead for the inclusion of only those evangelical hymns which could be objectively demonstrated to fit words competently to music and to be conducive to a reasonably assured rendition by an unrehearsed congregation. The two musical trends now sit side by side, represented

by two separate hymn books with sharply divergent contents. Uneasy neutrality now prevails. Through comparison, the obligation to sing from both books at different stages within a single service emphasises the superannuated sterility of tediously rehearsed craft-without-inspiration, in the case of the Victorians, but also the pervasive self-regard of the *soi-disant* evangelical church musician, in stark (if unthinking) contrast with that humility for which exercise of the Christian way of life supposedly calls. If the latter tendency is indeed a *nadir* of a kind, somewhere between this and the transcendent isolation of Byrd at his zenith lies a prolonged deterioration. Since Byrd was not, in any case, an 'Anglican', it would be an artificial exercise to try to postulate some consistent process of attrition stretching between these poles. English sacred choral music boasts a fitful history, graced by the odd solitary beacon such as Purcell but beset also by long periods of aridity and (in terms of any comparable greatness) virtual silence. It is striking that Gerard Manley Hopkins, who made amateur attempts to compose, found himself drawn more to Purcell than to anything closer to his own time; and yet also natural. A clergyman poet whose inspired subversion of conventional syntax, stress and cadence prefigured much modern verse (notably Dylan Thomas) may have had no taste for the iconoclasm of Wagner, or else little knowledge of it, therefore arguably having to reach back two centuries in order to find a kind of freakish (and indigenously accessible) genius able to mirror the strangeness of his own.

While the contemporary church composer may esteem himself stoutly resistant to the sounds of evangelical worship, it is possible that he falls prey to them in latent, insidious ways. Observations have already been made about detachment from any kind of axiomatically applied compositional technique, and about a stylistic freedom which is in effect boundless. At the same time, the blurring of boundaries between perceived 'popular' and 'classical' music, driven by a new market and embodying so-called 'crossover' trends in the industry as a whole, serves to promote certain forms of music for reasons having little to do (or have they?) with origin and intention. A composer such as Sir John Tavener affects publicly to write in response to the dictates of contemplation and prayer as a member of the Russian Orthodox Church and, more recently, as an adherent to the notion of a single 'pan-religious' truth. The resulting music regularly embodies hypnotic repetition, stasis and the illusion of timelessness through actual length (sometimes out of all proportion to content, except in terms of a kind of disembodied spiritual experience). Whatever one may think of such work, its surface effect is undemanding, and sometimes commonplace. In a public interview some years ago Tavener famously denounced all forms of counterpoint as *'intellectual wank'* [lii], and an acceptance of his musical message rests little, if at all, upon gradual assimilation of new depths of detail. The cynic might see this as a wily piece of dissembled pandering to the popular market and a play for its huge financial rewards; certainly Tavener is an exceedingly shrewd manipulator of the media. Whatever his motives, though, his sacred works have established themselves before a far wider public than much concert music does, and this despite the tendency for most church composition to remain hermetically sealed into its own world, cut off from the concert hall and many of the normal currents of music criticism. The appetite of a rootless, restless public for new material experience and the homogenising tendency of 'world' culture (which at its worst amounts to little more than the ubiquitous no-man's-land of McDonald's in every nation on earth) serve to offer a new stamp of

approval to music which may have been simple for entirely other reasons - not all of them necessarily flattering.

In the wake of this, it becomes ever easier for the casual composer to legitimise in his own mind a kind of blandly uneventful music, which appropriates the stillness of supposed inner contemplation and recasts it in its own expedient terms as something easy to 'knock off' in a day or two. Whatever the sincerity or otherwise of this, it is a far cry from anything which underpinned sacred music before the later decades of the twentieth century, and a quantum leap away from the kind of 'ancestral past' cited in the introduction to this thesis through the words of Edwin Muir. Whether 'timeless' or merely inert, the stasis of such composition takes its cue from the rise of 'world music' (again, often a homogenised hybrid rather than a true cross-fertilisation), and hence from a past which – in the West – is not truly our own. It has found voice in the USA through the music of Morten Lauridsen and, more recently, Eric Whitacre. While capable of a kind of beauty, this work is both exceedingly easy to imitate and, for related reasons, both impersonal and oddly antiseptic in impact. The impersonality behind it lies not least in the fact that personality is very often best gauged by the trained musician through his perception of how a composer works with, within or consciously *outside* a particular technique. What is problematic in the critical reception of this new wave of sacred composition is arguably that it threatens to elude most, if not all, technical definitions: it might even be thought 'music with***out*** technique'. This is exceedingly difficult to decry, even if one wished to do so, since, as in colloquial use of speech, what is current becomes *de facto* correct through more or less universal habit: the person who telephones home and says 'it is I' is likely to be laughed at, even though 'it's me' is strictly 'wrong' (until when?). Those who deplore the tendency of today's youth to utter the word 'like' two or three times in almost every sentence ('I'm like' now being an accepted form of 'I said') seldom stop to wonder why they themselves probably reach for an 'um' or an 'er' no less often. In the sixteenth century the singular and plural conjugations of verbs were more interchangeable than today, and consequently the Lord's Prayer states that the kingdom, the power and the glory *'is'* Thine. Afforded a *quasi*-mystical gloss of antiquity and distance, such things become acceptable through their dissociation from our own practice; and yet there is a chain of demotic connection between the two. When I was a New College chorister, the then Warden of the college was Sir William Hayter, a retired diplomat of great distinction. Owing to his distaste for sixteenth-century pronunciation the choir was under permanent instruction to sing 'temptation' and 'salvation' in their modern form on Sundays, when he was present, but 'tempta-see-on' and 'salva-see-on' the rest of the time, when he was not. It seemed to me to serve him right that there was always somebody who would audibly and sibilantly forget when it was Sunday.

The strange, seemingly transitional state of church music in 2007 seems to threaten a decisive break with tradition, and to divorce sacred choral composition from its ancestral past. While there may be no harm in the sinking of new roots in the present, and while fresh, lateral approaches are inevitable given the exponential exhaustion of innovations rooted in the mainstream of music or its ancient tributaries, for the composer with a powerful sense of connection to an historic past there is a no less compelling need to preserve what he deems to be his. It is partly for reasons such as

these that I have continued to explore a path where motivic counterpoint and a linear sense of rhythmic development can flourish. In doing so, I have cast a critical eye and ear over much of the music which has become familiar to me over decades of singing. I have separated the following reflections from foregoing ones in order to emphasise their specific relation to my choral writing, rather than to my more general compositional and technical development.

A composer central to the Anglican choral repertoire of the twentieth century is Herbert Howells (1892-1983), whose popularity both in Britain and in the USA is enduring. In many respects he remains an enigma, since the scope and rhetoric of his remarkably assured early works for chamber or orchestral forces (in particular the highly ambitious First Piano Concerto of 1914) afford a glimpse of what might have been, but a savage review of his ill-fated Second Piano Concerto (played by Harold Samuel, who disliked it and had sought to extricate himself from performing it) caused him to retreat into the safer world of the church. The works written by Howells following the death of his only son in 1935 inhabit an increasingly rarefied world of their own. However, despite this personal tragedy and the sincerity of the music written in direct response to it, much of Howells's work can appear meretricious and self-regarding. In trying to identify and consider what it is about this work that alienates me, I have come to the following instructive conclusions, which have informed my own approach to contrapuntal textures in what might be termed a cautionary way.

The choral music of Howells demonstrates particular pitfalls when it is accompanied. Here, the organ serves to plug harmonic gaps left by a haphazard approach to imitative vocal writing; either this or (worse) the organ part seems in effect to amount to a pre-existent form of notated improvisation. Vocal parts therefore arise as little more than random excrescences from, or excursions around, this harmony, and are only loosely governed by any true contrapuntal discipline or intent. Such vocal lines may thus cease to be truly necessary or germane linear events in themselves, succumbing instead to an embarrassment of choices. Nor may it be said that the choral complement is necessarily self-sufficient in harmonic terms, for there is a sense in which the choice of notes for the organ part and that for the voices becomes arbitrary. To put it bluntly, this is fundamentally lazy composition. Rigorous imitation as a generative force evaporates, replaced by mere approximation and loose rhythmic cross-reference. In consequence, frequently the music ceases to justify its chosen forces through its content; indeed, conscious choice itself may be called into question, since the 'default mechanism' of standard SATB choral formation appears causally detached from the kind of music which the composer wishes (or is constrained?) to write. Such matching of manner to matter, of means to medium, is ignored generally at one's peril. This is the case all the more when an actual emotional and dramatic response to the given text begins to seem suppressed or traduced, calling the entire expressive purpose into question. In the case of Howells, the sheer number of occasions on which he set and reset the text of the morning and evening canticles begins to militate against any sense that the composition is driven by an intuitive response to words, to verbal imagery and to meaning. Moreover, a recurrent weakness for Sarabande-like metres brings its own problems (not least for the singers, whose lungs are regularly taxed to the limit). Triple rhythm militates against any cumulative density of counterpoint: the bar cannot be evenly divided, unless by deploying

rhythmic diminution, which then creates cross-rhythms and may work against the prevailing rate of harmonic change. *Stretto*-based imitative entries are possible, but these are liable to be short-lived and to be anchored by a static chordal backdrop if there is an organ part (as, with Howells, there usually is). Ultimately, the music lacks true organic thrust, direction and, crucially, an overarching structural vision. Motivic ideas, such as they are, seem to settle for a mere short-term usage subservient to the duration of particular verses within the psalm or canticle text, and therefore never to expand into coherent longer spans. There is a lack of imaginative energy and discipline about the way in which disparate timings of words too quickly fall back into homophonic place, and the end of a musical paragraph all too often elicits the same agogic, harmonically unresolved device from the organ as a means of pulling the music back off the ground. All this seems depressing when one considers that Howells's early Piano Quartet in A minor is brimming not merely with panache and evident enjoyment, but also with an order of metrical subtlety, fecund imitative string-writing and pivotal harmonic agility reminiscent of Fauré. In view of this, it seems puzzling that much of Howells's sacred choral music makes as if to create the illusory surface effect of genuine contrapuntal polyphony without going to the trouble of enlisting the real thing.

Much other twentieth-century British practice contemporaneous with Howells's early and middle years, whether accompanied or not, tended to create similar pitfalls by basing dense chordal textures on the habits of orchestration, where 'real' voices give place to a sense of quasi-orchestral doubling at the octave. A work such as the *Requiem* by Howells himself or *Mater, Ora Filium* by Sir Arnold Bax is thus demonstrably of its time, surveying compositional history from the distancing end of a neo-romantic telescope. The composite surface of such music can be appreciated (with ears half shut) as an approximation to the same effect as deployed by Byrd or (pre-eminently, in his forty-part motet, *Spem in Alium*) Tallis. The particulars of technique are, however, a pale shadow of their ostensible models, and the material cannot be attributed in the same way to the generative strength of motivic, truly imitative ideas. This is the case partly because the composers in question may have had no comparably rigorous intention, but also because in any case they would have been confronted by the difficulty mentioned earlier: all composition is, at some level, an attempt to balance and reconcile vertical (harmonic) and horizontal (linear) concerns, which generally work in inverse mutual proportion.

My own compositional output began to find something of its own voice during my latter student years, when I was studying with Hugh Wood at Cambridge University. Although Wood never brought his full (and formidable) critical artillery to bear on Howells during this time, it is from him that I may have acquired my general (admittedly not consistent) aversion to Howells's choral music. Wood's mantra, not infrequently aimed at some dereliction of my own, was *"sheer com-po-si-tion-al* ***la-zi****-ness!"*, delivered *molto crescendo* and usually accompanied by the strangely rhythmless pounding of an affronted fist upon the desk top. His teaching was the formative experience of my compositional life and nowadays I still imagine his benign - if splendidly irascible - presence watching over my shoulder, ready to pounce on anything suspect on the page like a hawk homing in on a hapless field mouse. He himself had been a History scholar at New College. He exuded not only intellectual breadth, but also that sense of an almost moral urgency about his subject which is the preserve of those whose prime specialism may not have been evident to them until

relatively late in their formative years. The same was true of Robin Holloway, who had been my tutor before Wood and who had read English at university. Holloway tolerated my compositional obstinacy for a year before delivering the memorably ominous judgement, *'you should go to Hugh next year for some functional unpleasantness'*. This is indeed what I received; but, strangely, overall I enjoyed the experience, even though demoralised at times to a point of almost (never quite -that would have been unthinkable) giving up.

It was during this time that I encountered the symphonies of Robert Simpson, initially through his Third in the recording by Jascha Horenstein, which inculcated a deepening interest in formal process as an abstract, self-determining force. I also became 'hooked' on Tippett's opera *The Midsummer Marriage*, mentioned earlier, the very opening page of which presented some epiphanies in its appropriation and recasting of shifting triadic processes rooted in, and yet excitingly emancipated from, sixteenth-century practice. I investigated the Sixth Symphony of Sibelius, having read that it emerged out of the composer's thorough study of Palestrina. This seemed evident only in its opening stages, but I fell in love with the work nonetheless. At this point there seemed to be a coming together of all these strands and the influences of Nielsen, Martin, Martinů and Vaughan Williams, all cited earlier and operating in flexible union. Holloway had commented to me once that composing could at least partly be simplified down to *"dipping into what you already have from the past, and coming up with the mixture of it all that is you"*. The notion took a hold, appearing excitingly compatible with my innately eclectic musical upbringing and instinct.

With these things in mind, I began to develop something approaching a personal idiom. The first work which I continue to acknowledge, and which received the Gerald Finzi Trust's national composition award in 1981, was a fourteen-minute, two-movement piece for organ solo, *Mosaici di Ravenna*, prompted by the coolly ethereal interior of the church of Sant' Apollinare at Classe, some five kilometres outside Ravenna itself. The work's nature was to some extent prescribed by the competition, which somewhat eccentrically required a piece based on a melodic or motivic outline from any of the Gerald Finzi songs as published by Boosey and Hawkes. Finzi's fondness for major keys and the high incidence of conjunct intervals in his writing made this difficult, but eventually a work emerged which applied a transitional passage from his Shakespeare song, *It was a Lover and his Lass*, to a new context, where it became modally inflected against a new 'tonic'.

In this work (recorded for commercial CD by Jeremy Filsell at Ely Cathedral in 1991) I can still discern a particular harmonic preoccupation already awakening, which has evolved fitfully over the ensuing decades. Such things are sometimes rooted in personal history: it has been said that Charles Ives's *collage* tendency owed much to his father's hand in organising public events where several brass bands might be playing at once; indeed, the future composer was reportedly once plucked to safety just before being mown down by two such groups marching in more or less opposite directions, presumably each playing music of its own. Similarly, the infant Mahler (perhaps apocryphally) escaped some domestic agony into the street to be confronted by a local ensemble on the move, which supposedly surfaces anew in the studiedly harsh, unblended unison doublings of high single and double reeds characteristic of his symphonic woodwind writing. There may be some comparable anecdotal origin to my harmonic style dating from earliest childhood. If so, I have forgotten it; but what it

amounted to initially was a wish to conjure the sense of music heard as if from the next room, through walls or from a great distance. Incapable of any scientific approach to this, I nonetheless began to develop the idea that – at least at a certain depth of pitch – bass lines might remain functionally somewhat detached from the harmonic 'critical mass' of what went on above them, yet exert some kind of quasi-gravitational force upon it. I had begun to realise that I probably had a great deal of choral music within me for the future, and my inside knowledge of singing in choirs led me to worry about the difficulties of pitch and voice-leading which must surely arise if one were to impose too anarchic a harmonic style upon the entire texture. At the same time I was already deploying counterpoint instrumentally, and anticipated that I would wish to do so in choral works. Given the fact that imitative polyphony found greatest freedom in the simplest harmonic formulations, any approach to choral writing which preserved triadic thinking and found its own rationale for the modified treatment of suspension techniques must surely be pragmatically sensible. Even so, an attempt to appropriate and reinvent the polyphonic richness of the sixteenth century, while yet holding a more complex and sometimes astringent harmonic vocabulary as axiomatic, would be no easy task, if indeed possible at all.

These thoughts continued to formulate during conception and execution of another organ work, *Empyrean*, a single, motivically governed ten-minute movement consisting of a slow introduction and an *Allegro* broken midway by a gentler central section. While recollection and the evidence of *Mosaici di Ravenna* both suggest that the preoccupation with conjuring a sense of distance by harmonic means had already shown itself in completed music, *Empyrean* was indeed subject to a specific experience along the supposed lines of Mahler and Ives as cited above. In the summer of 1980 there was a performance of the Requiem Mass [*Grande Messe des Morts*, opus 5, 1837] by Berlioz in Ely Cathedral. Almost the entire academic musical community from Cambridge decamped to the neighbouring city in a hired procession of double-decker buses. The event (which came a day or two after I discovered I had been successful in the Cambridge Mus.B. examinations) is therefore memorable not only for the music itself, – which made a profound impression even though not new to me then, – but also for the powerful sense of a shared experience. This was also a kind of consummation of belonging for four years to something greatly precious, from which I was about to depart finally into the wider world.

In this highly impressionable state of mind I found myself sitting close enough to the famous mediaeval 'Octagon' (the ornate lantern window set centrally above the crossing of Ely Cathedral) to see up into it during the performance. On a perfect summer's evening, the plentiful daylight outside created vivid intersecting shafts in exactly the manner which the Octagon's creators must have had in mind, and thereby (also no doubt intentionally) offered a potent visual metaphor for the aspiration of the Christian spirit upwards from this earth towards some world or afterlife beyond. The idea for *Empyrean* began to take shape there and then, certainly encouraged by particular celebrated moments of spatial imagery in the writing of Berlioz. At a slightly later stage, memories of the Octagon seemed mirrored within the first and last verses of one of the finest hymns by Isaac Watts, written in 1709:

Give us the wings of faith to rise
Within the veil, and see
The saints above, how great their joys,

How bright their glories be…

Our glorious leader claims our praise
For His own pattern given,
While the great cloud of witnesses
Show the same path to Heav'n. [liii]

Since chorister days I had known and admired an astringently dramatic setting by Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988) of the complete hymn. Whereas Watts implicitly mirrored the mass of mortal life on earth with a 'great cloud of witnesses' beyond human sight, Leighton's brilliantly intuitive inspiration had been to substitute the word 'me' for 'us' in the opening line. He was thus able to begin his piece from the perspective of an entirely individual human frailty and doubt. The cloud of witnesses – when it comes finally into view – thus emerges as an infinitely outnumbering force of collective will and encouragement, thereby enabling Leighton to plan the whole as a monolithic process of inexorable escalation from solitary human dust towards the hard-won yet boundless universality of eternal life. A salutary example to me in terms of his flexible contrapuntal mastery (polished by his studies in Rome with Guido Agosti), Leighton responded to his plan in music which is generally harsher, more implacable than those works of his where rhythmic exuberance is sovereign, and which broadens into a highly arresting processional grandeur in its closing stages. In his hands, *Give us/me the wings of faith* acquired an added potency which undoubtedly served to encourage *Empyrean* into being.

At much the same stage I was also deepening my understanding of Nielsen, and in the process had discovered the symphonies of Robert Simpson as a natural extension of having read his seminal work, *Carl Nielsen, Symphonist* (1952; Stanmore Press in association with Kahn and Averill, 1979). At that stage the only available recording was of the performance of Simpson's Third Symphony by the London Symphony Orchestra under Jascha Horenstein (cited briefly above). This music was tough, sometimes abrasive and always elemental, rather than humanly rhetorical, in feeling. It was also driven by counterpoint, with the added property that motivic cells tended to sometimes to function in a secondary way as fixed *ostinati* against evolving material. These were sometimes incidentally reminiscent of Janáček in the inscrutable, deceptively 'random' manner of their starting and abruptly stopping, as naturally as a bird concealed in a tree. Such devices could find little place in choral polyphony of the type I had in mind, but have remained in my thoughts ever since as having potential in terms of accompanying forces or my own use of the orchestra. In any case, a personal epiphany occurred for me early in the latter of the two dense movements forming Simpson's Third Symphony (composed in 1962 and dedicated to the maverick British symphonist Havergal Brian). I will return to this shortly. Simpson wrote of this movement as being prompted by the experience of waking early and lying passively listening to the gradual unfolding of a dawn chorus outside; he added that this was therefore *'nature music, in a sense, – the only piece of mine which has an origin in some external situation'*. [liv]

Since this was my first experience of Simpson the composer, I cannot say whether this work would have commended itself especially to me under any other circumstances, but suspect that its acknowledged roots in human experience, rather than in a philosophically or elementally objective discourse, might well have

remained significant. To the end of his career Simpson remained powerfully rooted in a kind of Holy Trinity consisting of Beethoven, Bruckner and Nielsen. What I continue to find fascinating in his work is the tangential relationship of human consciousness to the music, as the latter is heard by the individual listener or, in a converse sense, by the composer. This reaches back into the benign detachment of Nielsen observing human types in his Second Symphony (*The Four Temperaments*), but extends Nielsen's notion into implacable territory where the phrase 'what is observed' arguably becomes inappropriate: with the exception of Simpson's avowed example in the Third Symphony, the music is not so much 'observed' and 'expressed' by any creator source, as simply happening, with the perfect objectivity of a total human absence which seems to efface the composer as a personality or presence entirely. In this sense, for all that the music may have been overtaken in more superficial ways by much which nowadays we might style 'cutting edge', Simpson represents a kind of extreme of radical anti-romanticism: the complete eradication of self. While this need not *per se* eliminate all possibility of a *divine* (as opposed to human) presence in the mind of the receptive listener, it does bring a harsh new resonance to what Robin Holloway wrote of Haydn and of *'…whatever else might or might not be present, music as music, unsullied …by extraneous matter, autonomous'.* It is no surprise that critical reception of the composer's Ninth Symphony in 1987 embodied comparisons with astronomy (one notice likened it to some implacable phenomenon enacting itself in outer space). At the same time, Simpson was doubtless aware of extending approaches and ideas which had begun as far back as Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (the *Pastoral*). There, movements overtly expressive of a human presence within themselves alternate with 'nature music' of an impressionistic hue, where the only human presence – if any – is that of the composer as observer; but more striking is the absence of human *Zusammensein* as encountered in the rustic *scherzo* or the concluding *Hirtengesang*. Absent also from Simpson is any hint of invocation or prayer. His is music which challenges the listener to make the best of it that he or she can; and yet his symphonic canon is not by any means devoid of humour, nor is his sequence of string quartets.

The fact of Simpson's impact on me through his Third Symphony was provocative rather than problematic, since that work does admit some human presence in its latter stages (at this stage, the Eighth Symphony of 1981 was in the making or brand new, the Ninth had yet to be written and none except the Third was available in recorded form). A deepening engagement with the entire sequence, but especially with the epic scale of the Eighth and Ninth, has served at times as a useful background to thoughts on self and subjective modes of utterance (or otherwise) in my own choral music, since text brings with it humanity and a variable degree of prescribed meaning, and religion itself proclaims a human centrality (even where it also interrogates a divine one), thereby placing such music of mine a pole apart from Simpson. The interesting paradox is that Simpson's deeply informed allegiance to Haydn and Beethoven, and his commitment to rediscovering the sheer energy of their inspiration, might well have allowed him room to think of himself as some form of humanist, even if only in the sense of a thinker intent on other matters than religious expression. Moreover, the stark and often daunting face of his music stands at complete odds with the gentle, genial and plain-speaking modesty of a man who talked of symphonic processes much as he might of something he had repaired over the weekend in his garden shed. The quality which most impresses itself upon the listener again and again is *honesty*; and it is perhaps not so hard to grasp how, combined with a deep personal humility, this

might lead a man to externalise his musical impulses, perceiving little that he thought intrinsically interesting to others about his own *ego* but much which could be made interesting through a creative act of self-effacement. The notion of the artist as medium for higher truths recurs here, and has been mentioned already in relation to Nikolai Demidenko's thoughts on a performer's necessary anonymity on stage.

It is in this general way that Simpson has offered a valuable lesson and example, more than in the specifics of his style. However, a particular moment from the Third Symphony was cited above, and requires brief examination. It occurs just after figure 49 in the published Lengnick score, early in a movement which was conceived as a perpetual process of accumulation in both speed and volume (and which at its climax achieves the singular inspiration of a sudden, Beethovenian dominant seventh, reached unexpectedly and never conventionally resolved; the effect is simultaneously of recognition by the listener and pristine freshness in the music, and precedes a gradual subsiding towards a hushed, mysterious conclusion). The passage cited is as follows:

These bars struck me for their combination of ‘nomadic’ tonality with a natural, unselfconscious modification of suspension processes which seem wholly appropriate in context. They reminded me also of the following four bars at figure 1 of *The Midsummer Marriage* by Sir Michael Tippett:

[Bars 15-18, Prologue to Act I:]

Allegro e vivace ♩ = 138

ff *ma dolce, poco legato* *dim.* *p* *subito ff*

[Upper and lower pedal points: flutes, oboes, / trombones, timpani, contrabassi. Inner chordal writing: horns, trumpets.]

In the second bar of this Tippett extract, the collision of F sharp with a pedal F natural is (no doubt consciously) redolent of the sometimes arbitrary concessions which had to be made in the polyphony of the Reformation period, as composers explored and rationalised the most fruitful means of reconciling linear direction to vertical, composite effect. Momentarily there is an impression that the ‘sharp side’ of Tippett’s process will triumph, possibly causing the bass to descend semitonally. However, the pedal point holds its ground, and the extension of what is happening above it is pulled ‘gravitationally’ back into line. The moment passes, but in it there are the seeds of something conceivable in longer spans and hence, potentially, more anarchic in terms of an overarching tonal or polytonal scheme. The Simpson extract complements this by applying only much briefer pedal points, thereby allowing the sense of an almost tidal triadic ebb and flow to suggest greater freedom – possibly of a more transitional kind.

Taken together, these two passages held within them a glimpse of how one might appropriate and reinvent a kind of *nodal* – as opposed to *modal* – system, whereby polyphonic, imitative thinking and flexible syllabic stresses alighted periodically upon defining harmonic ‘events’, but moved with a potentially astringent melismatic fluidity in between. The solo organ work *Empyrean* [score provided, *q.v.*] appears to have marked a starting point for constructive reaction to these discoveries. The passage running from numbered page 5 of the published score, line 2, bar 3, to page 6, line 3, bar 1, serves usefully to show a tonally flexible order of triadic thinking, where conventional expectation is subverted by directional opposition or contradiction from the pedals, creating a kind of continually renewed tension and release arguably parallel with those of sixteenth-century polyphonists.

Such thought clearly implied a redefined notion of the hierarchy extending from consonance to dissonance. To some extent it would need to invent and evolve its own persuasive logic through empirical application and discovery across a number of works. A clear danger within melismatic choral writing would be the overuse of pedal

points of exactly the kind cited above in *Empyrean* – or, indeed, of low-lying bass parts of any kind, since the acoustical properties of fundamentals and their overtones could cause serious problems, as could four-foot additions to the pedal department if an organ were involved. In *a cappella*, unaccompanied contexts where the question was subject in any case to the limits of bass vocal range, it was plain that a relatively low *tessitura* would militate against the defining harmonic contradictions of the bass line being heard; and also that even a simple line could become exceptionally hard to pitch accurately and sing sufficiently strongly, if tonally opposed by triadic or other agglomerations above which deprived the bass singer of clear focus and projection.

These reflections began at last to cast a slightly more forgiving light upon Herbert Howells, whose use of the organ emerged in more pragmatic terms than before. However, the tendency of Howells towards a perpetually melismatic texture in the choral parts could still be seen to encourage precisely the kind of *de facto* clinging to bass pedal points that I most wished to hold in a reasonable balance with harmonically dictated movement forward. A harmonic bass seemed to find itself allocated predominantly to the (lower) pedals *faute de mieux* and of necessity; but there was still a concomitant need to acknowledge that it might otherwise have taken its place within the choral complement. This argued in favour of integrating it motivically, as a textural strand subject to the overarching imitative and directional logic of the whole. In that respect, study of baroque models was particularly valuable. In particular I gained a useful perspective by studying the *fugato* models of many trio sonatas and organ works written either before or in ignorance of J.S.Bach. In these, either of two possibilities might occur. The theoretical logic governing the option of a 'redundant entry' would be regularly subverted by allowing what would have been the 'free part' to function in advance as an apparently free accompaniment to the opening statement of the fugal subject, heard again in a more calculated, schematic light only a little later on. Alternatively, as in Bach's own trio sonatas for organ solo, the bass might operate as a free foundation to fugal dialogue between the two manuals, but might then occasionally appropriate motivic details from the upper voices – or even earn its own full subject entry much later in the proceedings, well clear of any exposition material. Either approach served to show the bass operating as a relatively free agent but *within* the texture and subject to the directional needs of the strictly imitative parts, not (as with Howells) as a tyrannical force dictating harmonic movement by largely random choice and then compelling any semblance of counterpoint to function within the possibilities already laid down.

Despite their value, these investigations failed to take account of the fact that the organist has hands as well as feet. For a time I was acutely conscious that I had stumbled into a realm of musical thought which threatened to put up brick walls in my path before I had even started. At the same time, I continued to see Howells a little uncharitably as a warning from history, and was conscious too that I did not wish to allow an organ part merely to duplicate choral lines (in the case of works for double chorus, this might be too complex to achieve; and the decision what to shadow and what to omit would necessarily become arbitrary). The presence of an organ should contribute more positively than merely supplying a bass foundation which brought manuals with it like uninvited guests. Such contribution might usefully include antiphonal exchanges between choral forces and the organ, instrumental interludes where choral motivic development was extended, and vocal solo passages where the

organ met a new necessity. However, these possibilities still fell short of providing a solution where full choral forces were active.

An answer to this problem was provided, somewhat unexpectedly, when I revived a fondness I had long had for the late chamber music of Fauré. In particular I had always loved the characteristically deceptive opening subject of the C minor Piano Quintet, opus 115, where harmonic rhythm and the placing of would-be suspensions within hemiolas plays especially upon the perceptions of the trained ear to conjure from triple rhythm the illusion of common time, in a way of which sixteenth-century consort arrangers or composers such as Susato and Michael Praetorius might have been proud. This in itself embodied some kinship with choral polyphony's play upon syllabic stresses (creating a tensile web of fruitfully conflicting impulses within individual lines). However, the penny that now dropped was related more to the general behaviour of individual instruments within the texture. Some considerable time later, in 1995, I had the opportunity to reflect upon Fauré's chamber textures in a CD booklet essay commissioned by Hyperion Records. Here were a chance and a reason to articulate precisely those things in Fauré's compositional make-up which had come to my rescue earlier on, and I did so as follows:

Saint-Saëns provided the young Fauré with an intimate knowledge of the contrapuntal techniques of Bach. In addition, whereas Saint-Saëns was a fully-fledged keyboard virtuoso, Fauré was more simply an able pianist. From these facts proceed significant features of his chamber output.

First, although Fauré's instrumental writing constantly displays freely canonic ingenuity rather than any more stringently 'Baroque' counterpoint, the results retain a certain gestural continuity in keeping with aspects of earlier practice. Textures may be felt to evolve into one another, rather than to be supplanted or punctuated in the interests of illuminating a preconceived Classical structure (even when that structure is satisfyingly present). If a word such as 'rhetoric' applies at all, then it refers most usefully to a generalized - yet distinctive – sense of emotional elevation in the music; but the unfolding of texture remains smoothly organic in every sense. Fauré's is habitually the language of seamless flow, – almost never of dramatic interruption.

Secondly, and relating to the above, Fauré's attitude to the piano differs notably from that of most other composers to whose thinking the instrument has been central. In a Romantic context one might well expect a pianist-composer to treat the piano in a quintet almost as a concertante *soloist, often pitting the rhetorical virtuosity of the keyboard against the sustained line of strings octave-doubled in opposition. This is recognizable more widely as something of a* cliché*, used (sparingly) even by Fauré himself in his two earlier* [*i.e.*, than the late C minor Quintet] *Piano Quartets of 1879 and 1886. But for Fauré's textures to move seamlessly, they must also blend to perfection at any given point. This is where one must qualify any mention of his supposed reticence, for it is mainly through the understatement of his fastidiously crafted piano parts that this composer remarkably succeeds in unifying string and keyboard texture. In the Quintets it will be apparent that the strings as a group are often* far *from reticent, - but the balance of canonic skill and natural melody weaves a pervasive web of harmonic richness, and into this the piano often fits either as unobtrusive equal in the dialogue or as a rhythmically subdivided version of the strings' chordal movement.*[lv]

Not only do these considerations suggest an exceedingly useful model for a particular type of interaction between polyphonic instrumental (or choral) forces; they relate also to questions of form. The first movement of Fauré's C minor Piano Quintet extends its hemiola-based rhythmic subtleties beyond an inspired first subject and into elaborate canonic argument, offering a mirror to the syllabically led elasticity of sixteenth-century polyphony and also finding that (in the interests of the seamless flow mentioned above) it must dispense with any adherence to conventional Classical sonata structure. Instead, and notwithstanding developmental processes of transposed repetition such as Schubert had used (in his E flat major Trio and elsewhere), the movement achieves the illusion of a single unbroken curve of lyricism through a complex and unexpected form: in effect, a system of continuous development and regeneration spread over four sections. Despite its nod at Romantic convention, a climactic recapitulation of the first subject emerges as seemingly spontaneous progeny of the foregoing development processes.

Given that the imposition of text upon a work will generally run counter to any simultaneous attempt at pouring the music into some Procrustean 'sonata' vessel, the seemingly causal link between Fauré's canonic voice-leading or texture and a demonstrably organic, 'self-composing' (but convincing) sense of form is of profound interest. Despite the passage of many years before I found myself needing to formulate such thoughts in print, Fauré provided a crucial epiphany in the early 1980s which has served me well in many compositional contexts since then. Such an approach need not be exclusively or exhaustively applied: a choral work may still harbour a particular use for the organ in contexts where dramatic antiphony, accompaniment of soloists or other such devices are required. Nonetheless, these on their own would not vindicate a composer's use of the instrument in a work defined largely through extensive passages of dense choral polyphony.

These reflections remain open-ended, since fresh discovery, critical reaction or the rethinking of one's own previous efforts all continue unabated throughout a career in composition. However, they serve adequately to articulate in words most, if not all, of those symbiotic processes of thought and instinct which have informed the works submitted herewith and discussed hereafter in more specific terms. There now follows a brief explanation and assessment of each work under its individual title.

3. An examination of works submitted in published score or commercial CD form (or both):

[These works follow in chronological order of composition, rather than of publication or recording. Each title is followed by brief notes setting out details of first performance, notable subsequent performances, applicable ISMN or CD release numbers, duration, etc. Where apposite for whatever reason, reference is made to intervening works which may not yet have achieved publication or which are now inadmissible for reasons of previous submission in an examination context. Both these conditions apply to the Passion Symphony for organ, Christus*, currently available both in print from United Music Publishers Ltd and as a world release on double CD from Signum Records. The latter condition applies to the choral and orchestral*

oratorio A Song on the End of the World*, which was the Elgar Commission of the Three Choirs Festival at Worcester in 1999.]*

Nunc Natus Est Altissimus
1983; *ca* 22 minutes. Four-movement sequence for SSS Choir and Harp. Commissioned by *Music at Oxford* for Francis Grier, the choristers of Christ Church, Oxford, and Frances Kelly (harp). First performance: St John's, Smith Square, London, December 1983. Performed in Bayeux and Chartres Cathedrals and Notre Dame de Paris, France, 1988, by the Oxford Girls' Choir under Richard Vendome (Emma Granger, harp); also by *Schola Cantorum*, Merton College, Oxford, 1989. Published in 1988 by Novello & Co. Ltd. (Rehearsal accompaniment provided in the score for piano with harp enharmonics removed; harp part available on hire from Music Sales Ltd.)

[This work is here considered both as an empirical apprentice exercise and as the seed of later endeavours through its use of text and extra-musical ideas which are revisited elsewhere.]

Given the challenges of developing a polyphonic style in judicious balance with a personal harmonic idiom, it was perhaps fortunate that my earliest commissioned work for any choral forces at all required three treble or soprano parts only, thereby mitigating difficulties to some extent. However, any welcome latitude arising from the use of an accompanying harmonic instrument was largely obliterated by the (admittedly salutary) task of writing for harp. The process was very different from that of deploying one harp or two within a decorative or 'colouristic' orchestral context, where the instrument is only fitfully in use, since in the context of *Nunc Natus Est* a continuum of harmonic background (and hence also of pedal-changing) was mostly in order. The commissioning body, running a prestigious annual festival season of concerts in historic Oxford venues, had initially considered the sensible idea of pairing a new piece with the *Ceremony of Carols* by Benjamin Britten, since usually any harpist enlisted for that work would spend the remainder of the concert programme (or liturgical event) unemployed. However, I soon identified my own intention to write in a more freely imitative fashion than Britten – notwithstanding such canonic inspirations of his as *This Little Babe*, midway through the *Ceremony of Carols*. There, Britten deployed a common *tessitura* for all three vocal parts, but placed them within a limited compass of pitch in the middle ground of the singers' shared range, so that elsewhere he was still free to treat their lines more homophonically as a fairly consistent 'top, middle and bottom'. My own purpose differed somewhat from this, and in the event it is no surprise that these two works have never been performed in a single programme. (A further possible reason for this is that, in the event and despite the good intentions of *Music at Oxford*, a generally unwelcome monotony of texture and colour might result over too long a period.) Despite this, *Nunc Natus Est* opens with a deliberate nod at Britten's *Ceremony* in terms of both tonality and would-be plainchant, as if to suggest two common sides of a single coin. To me now, writing almost a quarter-century later, that betrays the blithe over-confidence of youth, unwilling to recognize how unenviable might be any comparison with work boasting the enduring quality of a major composer.

At this early stage in my career I was already taken by the notion (possibly stimulated by Eliot's *'In my beginning is my end'*, since I had been enthusiastic about his *Four*

Quartets since school days) that for Christians the Crucifixion is prefigured in the Nativity, whether as a premonition spontaneously visited upon the Virgin or as actual prophecy from the lips of her child. (Mediaeval poetry on the Nativity abounds in spoken contributions from the newborn infant Jesus, as the means of his embodying and conveying unmistakably to his horrified earthly parent a supernatural 'otherness'.) In a more objective sense, the Nativity marks also the start of an inexorable narrative 'treadmill' of events leading – not least through their sheer accumulated familiarity within the Christian tradition, though also through the designs of a suffering paternal God – to an apparently predestined Golgotha.

In *Nunc Natus Est Altissimus* I confronted the dilemma posed by setting texts embracing not only birth and death but also resurrection, all within one relatively brief musical span. On the face of it this might commend it to a less exclusively seasonal use; however, subsequent experience has shown that the Church is uncomfortable when required to conflate separate religious events into a single artistic or even liturgical one. This has at times been apparent in the responses of deans and chapters to my Passion Symphony *Christus* for solo organ, which moves (over a span of just over two hours and five cyclically integrated movements) from a world before Christ to one renewed and redeemed (through costive struggle rather than easy victory) in the Ressurrection. A performance on Easter Day or soon thereafter takes the listener back beyond Good Friday, while a Good Friday one poses the arguably greater difficulty of pre-empting Easter Day celebration while the liturgy is yet buried in the three-day darkness of the tomb post-Crucifixion. A disagreement along precisely these lines is currently afoot [autumn 2007] in Winchester, where *A Winchester Passion* is being devised by the city's churches (emulating those already staged in Manchester and Salisbury) and is planned to end in the Cathedral itself, but where the Dean and Chapter are reportedly uneasy about an event which will compress the entire narrative into three hours rather than three days, and this on Good Friday (there being no other day in Holy Week when the liturgy and round of rehearsal provide an empty building during early evening hours).

Nunc Natus Est Altissimus sets four mediaeval (but not precisely contemporaneous) poems. The outer pair is later than the rest, and macaronic. In the second movement of the work (which conflates passages from two separate poems), the Latin appropriated from the first as this musical composition's title is enlisted again as a melismatic - also fleetingly variation-based - background to two solo voices. In that context, its *hallelujah* becomes an expression less of rejoicing than of penitent gratitude for the human suffering of Christ as embodied in the text heard above it. The third movement, which is the shortest, is exclusively homophonic in technique, where not deploying a solo voice only, and sets what is by some distance the oldest of the poems, – its Germanic etymology at times plainly evident. It offers a metaphorical vision of Christ as a bloodstained knight looming from the smoke of battle:

What is he, this lordling that cometh from the fight?
With blood-red wede so grislich idight,
So fair icoyntised, so seemlich in sight,
So stifliche goeth, so doughty a knight.

'It is I, that ne speak but right,
Champion to heal mankind in fight.'

Why then is they shroud red with blood all inein'd,
As treaders in wring, with moist all besprein'd?

'The wring have I treaded all myself on,
And of all mankind ne was none other won.'[lvi]

[*Wede:* raiment. *Icoyntised:* apparelled. *Stifliche:* strongly.]

This extended image (featuring an early allusion to Christ's treading of the winepress of humanity) remained in my memory, to be revived in altered form when some years later I came across *Gethsemane*, a short poem by the twentieth-century American Trappist (Cistercian) monk, writer and mystic, Thomas Merton [1915-1968], of which the following pertinent extract (seemingly written in the year of his unexpected death in a tragic accident) forms just over half:

Slowly slowly
Comes Christ through the garden
Speaking to the sacred trees
Their branches bear his light
Without harm

Slowly slowly
Comes Christ through the ruins
Seeking the lost disciple…

…

The disciple will awaken
When he knows history
But slowly slowly
The Lord of History
Weeps into the fire. [lvii]

Merton presumably had some particular *genius loci* in mind, since the garden here was no doubt that of the eponymous monastery 'Gethsemani' [*sic*] in Kentucky, of whose community and order he was a member. What inspired a sense of recognition here was the common preoccupation of an early-fourteenth and a mid-twentieth century poet with 'the weight of history' and with the accumulated transgression of mankind within it. Whereas this is merely implicit through the mediaeval text, in both poems there occurs the same consciously supernatural evocation of a spectral visitant, and of a torment expressed in the silence of slowly approaching movement (in the mediaeval text, the parting smoke or mist of the battlefield and the advancing figure whom we strain to recognise, having been transported by the poet into his own picture). Implicit also in the mediaeval text is the *seeking* made plain by Merton: both figures require of warring humanity its fitting response before 'their' own *quietus* may be attained and their earthly task fulfilled. As Eliot reminds us, in one's beginning is one's end; and in contemplating this early work of mine from a distance of twenty-

four years, I am arrested by the realisation that it holds the seeds of what in my most recent work has become a humanitarian, therefore inevitably politicised engagement. Central to these more recent preoccupations are those two oft-quoted comments of Wilfred Owen, that the poetry lay *'in the pity'*, and that all a poet of the modern world could truly do was *warn*.

A substantial digression is necessary here, since in a later work I was to return to some of the text used in *Nunc Natus Est Altissimus*. The themes outlined above surfaced again strongly in 1999, when the Elgar Commission of the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester enabled me to compose *A Song on the End of the World*, a sixty-five minute oratorio for three soloists, chorus and full orchestra. The work is inadmissible as a submission in the present context, having been neither published nor recorded, but passing reference to it here assists an overview of both a musical *corpus* and an informing intent. *A Song on the End of the World* took its name from a poem written in the occupied Warsaw of 1944 by the late Polish poet, Czesław Miłosz [1911- 2004]. (Later both the poet and his son collaborated in the translation of his early work from Polish to English, while Miłosz himself began to write in his adopted tongue.)

My aim in this composition was to locate the Crucifixion at the heart of man's perennial inhumanity to man, whereby the suffering Christ could assume the accumulated identity of an Everyman figure in the way Biblically indicated as a part of the divine purpose on earth. However, the 'warning' suggested by Owen and a contemporary resonance were to be provided in two ways at once: at various stages throughout the work an oscillating chordal 'ticking' effect is heard from strings (*pizzicato*) at a constant, seemingly mechanical speed. On a deliberately crude, graphic level this was intended to evoke countdown to the detonation of a (presumably terrorist) bomb, – an occurrence to which our world is by now no stranger. Behind this lay a more abstract intention to suggest a kind of predestined narrative 'treadmill' of events leading to Golgotha and the Crucifixion: something which, like the bomb, could not be stopped once started, and which yet held within its every step a pregnant sense of the need to be averted. Though the poet Michael Drayton (1563-1631) was referring only to expiring human 'passion' in the lower case, not a sacred Passion in the upper, the conclusion of one of his *Sonnets to Idea* happens to express the urgency of this fleeting worldly opportunity perfectly:

Now, if thou wouldst, when all have given him over,
From death to life thou mightst him yet recover. [lviii]

Against this theme I set the wry human observation of Miłosz, in whose poem *On the Day the World Ends* we are confronted with a little world whose diurnal order, self-interested rat-race and intrinsically *petit bourgeois* sense of 'things happening as they should' are unquestioningly accepted as actual proof against its coming suddenly to a shuddering halt. Dissent comes only from a philosophical old man (*'who would be a prophet, / but is not a prophet, / for he's much too busy'*).[lix] While he binds his tomatoes (a symbol of that reverent, simple forbearance which could perhaps have saved mankind?), he sings to himself that *'there will be no other end of the world'*: in other words, it will come on just such a day, when the sun is shining, bees circle their clovers, bouncing babies are born and a drunk lies sleeping Bank Holiday afternoon away in the park; this way, and only this. The voice of moral warning, deafening here

in its unheeded, still smallness, is one which I have revisited in other forms elsewhere, – most particularly in the last work submitted here, *The Cloud of Unknowing*.

One could interpret Miłosz here in terms of a darkness erupting from beneath the surface of things when the normal 'epidermis' of the mundane present is suddenly pealed away; and in this notion the sense of a 'weight of history' again becomes pertinent. In *A Song on the End of the World* I therefore sought both to suggest the broad sweep of centuries, from a human perspective, and the 'blinking of an eye', from what one might or might not accept as a divine one. Accordingly the poem by Miłosz is immediately preceded by a mediaeval Nativity scene from the pen of an anonymous poet. Its text is one of those used already in the second movement of *Nunc Natus Est Altissimus*. This posits the supernatural 'agency' of the infant Christ by allowing him to break into adult and prophetic speech. In *Nunc Natus Est* I enlisted enough text for him to bid his mother sing to him of what will befall him as a man, but then (in the interests of a more elliptical work and experience) I interpolated a separate mid-fourteenth century poem, consisting only of a pair of quatrains, which discover a later Mary at the foot of the cross, pleading with Christ's executioners to exercise mercy. This device here allowed both mother and child a prescient glimpse into their future, in effect conflating Nativity and Crucifixion into one event. The infant Christ then seeks to comfort his mother by prophesying his resurrection to eternal life beyond the horror of the cross, but she continues to lament, hermetically sealed within her own private experience. The musical setting here seeks to preserve at least a synthetically-achieved sense of period by remaining rooted in a single, clearly defined key (modally inflected B flat minor) and by reiterating a *quasi*-mediaeval melody above motivically-led variation in the chorus parts. Such diatonic treatment has the advantage of taking suitable account of the mechanics of the harp as an instrument.

My response to these poetic sources was not fully consummated in *Nunc Natus Est Altissimus*. In conflating and arranging texts for *A Song on the End of the World*, I enlisted rather more of the Nativity narrative already cited above, blending it with lines from a separate fifteenth-century poem of comparable structure. This allowed the response of Mary to her child's prophecies to originate in mere maternal fondness: we find her complicit in the supernatural dimension, greeting her child's spoken plea for a lullaby with mild enquiry as to what she should take as a subject. As the lengthy and implacable answer to this question unfolds, her reaction escalates through pained shock and alarm to a horror compounded by guilt at having borne a son to such suffering:

'Pes! deare sone, say thou me not so.
Thou art my child, I have no mo.
Alas! That I should see this wo:
It were to me gret heivynis.' [lx]

At a later stage in *A Song on the End of the World* occurs a Crucifixion scene; in between comes music redolent of modern warfare, including lines from a premonitory poem written by the Austrian symbolist Georg Trakl before the outbreak of the Great War, in which *'he is risen that was so long asleep'* refers not devotionally to the resurrected Christ but ironically to the spectre of conflict itself. There is also a setting of the Merton text already cited and of *Blitz*-inspired lines of verse by Mervyn Peake,

who was also present at the opening of at least one Nazi death camp in 1945. Oddly pre-echoing a later despot's invocation of 'the mother of all battles', Peake's poem envisions a 'mother of wounds', thereby seeming to invoke the maternal distress of all conflicts but also the specific anguish of the mother of Christ at the foot of the cross. In *A Song on the End of the World*, this leads to a Golgotha where the subliminal ticking of the modern terrorist's bomb and the measuring-out of Christ's final hours become the backdrop to a piece of ironic reversal: it is now Christ who entreats '*say thou me not so… It were to me gret heivynis'*, and his mother whose words cannot be stemmed, while a hushed chorus intones *recordare, Jesu pie, quod sum causa tuae viae* from the Mass for the Dead (the only recourse in the work to liturgical text). A gradual escalation of 'competitive' intensity is broken off suddenly, leaving only the ticking strings and a single child's voice repeatedly intoning the words of the old man 'who would be a prophet': there will be no other end of the world; there will be no other… The ticking stops abruptly, leaving a supernaturally extended instant such as cinema has taught us to anticipate before detonation; and the child's final word, 'end', is engulfed orchestrally by what may be the rending of the curtain of the temple, carnage in a London bus or underground carriage, the same in a Baghdad market, in the air or in a New York tower block, or all of these (that the writing of the work pre-dated some of these phenomena is no matter).

In an age when human conception of time has become both extended and confounded (in any literal direction) by growing awareness of the universe and our infinitesimal place within it, Eliot's location of time before and after '*in a dim light'* has never seemed more pertinent, nor the deliberate cloudiness of poetic intent (*'hints and guesses'*) in his *Four Quartets* more fitting. An interference with time in the handling of text for artistic purposes is nothing new, and is already at least implicit in the unadulterated mediaeval poems cited above. For the composer intent upon discovering and articulating some aspect of perennial human truth ('eternal' being too large a word for our earthly future), conflation, juxtaposition and selective excision of text all appear valid approaches if these serve the communication of some particular tenable message, contemplation or idea. In seeking to convey things which in the sense of their human truth may be thought 'time*less*', I have stepped into territory which has been explored in prose of great clarity and beauty by the French existentialist philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961):

We say that there is time as we say that there is a fountain: the water changes while the fountain remains because its form is preserved; the form is preserved because each successive wave takes over the functions of its predecessor: from being the thrusting wave in relation to the one in front of it, it becomes, in its turn and in relation to another, the wave that is pushed; and this is attributable to the fact that, from the source to the fountain jet, the waves are not separate; there is only one thrust, and a single air-lock in the flow would be enough to break up the jet. Hence the justification for the metaphor of the river, not in so far that the river flows, but in so far that it is one with itself. This intuition of time's permanence, however, is jeopardized by the action of common sense, which thematizes it or objectifies it, which is the surest way of losing sight of it. [lxi]

A page earlier, Merleau-Ponty observes that

The past… is not past, nor the future future. It exists only when a subjectivity is there to disrupt the plenitude of being in itself.

While Merleau-Ponty's preoccupation is not least with identifying that perceptual subjectivity and pointing it out, the contemplative dimension of music may be argued as capable of consigning such 'awareness' to a temporary oblivion in which not only self is lost, but also (with it) the sense of linear time, notwithstanding the existence of the music itself as a time-imprisoned event. Eliot may have had something of this kind in mind when he coined the phrase *'the intersection of the timeless moment'* in his *Four Quartets*. One might hazard the formulation that, in some sort of keeping with Merleau-Ponty's contention, being taken by music 'outside oneself' (and therefore outside an awareness of literal time) places one in the best position of receptivity to 'timeless' truth, rather in the sense also that the best way to drop off to sleep is to cease to be aware of its advance and to be 'surprised' by its arrival; and that therefore there is something valid to be said for - as well as by - music which brings to verbal text a complementary but intrinsic discourse of its own, where the self-forgetting contemplation of something numinous may arise. Philosophers and others have long made as if to separate music in general from the other arts. In his authoritative study, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* (1788-1860), Bryan Magee paraphrases the German philosopher's view to the effect that

…all works of art that are not music either represent *objects or doings in the phenomenal world or are themselves objects of practical or decorative usefulness in that world.* [lxii]

Magee goes on to say that, although this view might appear to have been subsequently negated by the advent of consciously abstract art in the twentieth century, in fact it continues to hold water in a way succinctly suggested by Auden's words in his poem *The Composer* (perhaps referring to Benjamin Britten):

All others translate.

Such a position is, however, obfuscated considerably by the process of setting verbal text to music; this might yet be held to draw the music back into that 'decorative' category posited by Schopenhauer. Further investigation of this avenue offers a red herring in context of a chronological examination of my own work; the term 'discourse', however, invoked above, is itself of some separate interest here: examining a perceived difference between 'facts' and 'historical facts', the historian John Bossy has written how

…a historian's facts are those which he has invited to perform on the scene as actors in his expository drama, and which he has made up, in the cosmetic if not quite in the colloquial sense, to do his job for him. They are, at best, like research workers in some collective project; necessary, respected but earthbound collaborators in the historian's creative operations… Discourse is a capacious box in which the outsider may find, among a variety of harmless or useless objects, inflammable substances like universal rules of rhetoric and subliminal messages confirming the arrangements of power. It gives off, when these are ignited, a sort of phlogiston of occult meanings which animates all communicative matter. If you are a historian it decides what is to count as a fact, and constitutes the object you think you are recording.

…Since truth is a matter of propositions, somebody must make a proposition before a real fact becomes a true fact. But the proposer does not make, or help to make, the fact a true fact; he acknowledges, willy-nilly, that it is so. If it was not real, then it will not be true. [lxiii]

Although the composer's stock-in-trade is not 'facts' (nor the 'historical facts' which Bossy is careful to distinguish from these), these words about discourse and communicative substance are both striking and liberating. While acknowledging something of Merleau-Ponty's rightness concerning what is (to borrow Thomas Hardy's favoured word) 'immanent' irrespective of human presence or perception, Bossy potently encapsulates the freedom of the scholar, artist or other receptive intelligence to seek after what can be fixed in the imagination as abiding 'truth' about the human condition or human destiny, and to attach to it the mark of his having been present there, like Amundsen's lonely banner in the South Pole.

While such a train of thought suggests sledgehammers and nuts in the context of so slight a work as *Nunc Natus Est Altissimus*, small beginnings of longstanding preoccupations, advanced through larger subsequent compositions, find their proper place and expression in reference to it. As an apprentice work it retains some empirical value; as the first work of mine to be actively sought out by a publisher (the late Robin Langley of Novello & Co.), it debatably found its way into public, and therefore largely unalterable, form prematurely, its composer having been a little dazzled at the age of thirty by such unsolicited attention, and nervous that rejection of such an opportunity could become a matter of unwelcome later rumour in other quarters. The harp writing ventures into problematic chromaticism in the first movement before gaining better self-control. [In the work's defence, however, a certain initial stiffness has honourable general precedents: the very first C major fugue in *Das Wohltemperierte Clavier* might be thought of as a piece of 'vaulting ambition' that o'erleaps itself in its increasingly egregious *stretto*-induced dissonance. Modern listeners may unconsciously fail to set aside subsequent 'acclimatisation' to Stravinsky or Bartók and perceive how far-fetched that fugue might have sounded, had it been more widely heard and known in Bach's lifetime; but its vertical aspects are startling and - if one can abjure proper reverence for a moment - not wholly satisfactory. It is intriguing to sense a discreet lowering of technical ambition in the ensuing three or four fugues, even if there are admittedly many wonders of inspirational 'engineering' yet to come later on.]

As one might expect, it is in the harmonically static areas that *Nunc Natus Est Altissimus* seems to succeed best at imitative polyphony, though this has about it a slight air (to me now) of too obviously defying certain odds, like a child trying to circumnavigate the room without touching the floor, by contorting or launching himself towards a succession of safe havens above ground. More seriously, the final movement still represents a failure of judgement. Intended in advance to be a jubilant response to the resurrection as a *fait-accompli*, in the event it had to be written partly while keeping a vigil at my father's deathbed in the final month of his life, when for almost the entire time he was unconscious. Not only does a certain perfunctoriness seem to betray itself in the enforced rejoicing, but a lack of truly arresting material is somewhat fatally 'compensated' by the expedient of additive rhythms. The empirical lesson here (one which might seem obvious, but hindsight is a wonderful thing…) is

that such studiedly irregular rhythmic arrangements work against the syllabic contours of reiterated text, compel imitation at a recurrent fixed distance in time, and thereby begin to impose that old 'tyranny of the barline' which is the very thing any latterday imitative polyphonist should be most intent upon escaping, – the barline itself being an invention more recent than the music serving as a generic model in such a case. The movement carries itself through by virtue of a certain excessive fluency and virtuoso demands made of the harpist, but forms a weak conclusion to a work which still seems to me to hold a certain unfulfilled promise elsewhere. If it may seem strange to advance this piece at all in the present context, that is done because empirical lessons rest upon trial and error; and the errors or limitations informing any later relative success need clearly to be recognized and understood.

[Between *Nunc Natus Est Altissimus* and the next submitted work, *Amore Langueo*, came *O Merciful Saviour*, a 10-minute anthem for double choir and organ commissioned by Edington Festival of Church Music and the Liturgy. The text is a conflation of words from the Psalms of David, Thomas Traherne's so-called *Centuries of Meditations* and the earlier Edinburgh poet William Dunbar's *Tabill of* Confessioun. The Edington Festival is unified annually by meditation upon a particular theme, which in 1986 was The Passion. The work was broadcast on BBC Radio Three on 20 August 1986, performed by the Nave Choir of the Edington Festival conducted by Peter Wright (Andrew Lumsden, organ). It deploys its choral forces polyphonically and often imitatively, but without the degree of rigour which I have since adopted for such textures regarding avoidance of consecutive fifths and unisons or octaves. The need to spend significant time generating a typeset score has limited use of this work, which nonetheless remains viable and will eventually receive further performances.]

Amore Langueo

1989; *ca* 16 minutes. Commissioned by *Schola Cantorum*, Oxford. Motet for SATB soli and SATB/SATB chorus *a cappella*. First performance: The Folger Library, Washington DC, 1989: *Schola Cantorum* conducted by Howard Moody. Subsequently performed several times by *Schola Cantorum* on tour, USA, at St John's, Smith Square, London and at Merton and St Peter's College, Oxford. Issued on CD, 2006, by Hyperion Records, CDA 67575: *Schola Cantorum* conducted by Jeremy Summerly [recording made in 1995].

Amore Langueo responds to another mediaeval text, *Christ's Complaint to Man* – or, more accurately, to a conflation of two extant versions of it, both considerably longer than the extract set here. In a programme note at the time of the first performance, I set out my compositional intentions as follows:

The so-called 20th century English musical 'renaissance' saw a reawakened interest in the most glorious genres of the 16th century, but usually stopped short of reinventing its imitative methods. If a work such as Bax's Mater, Ora Filium *shows awareness of the composite effect of 16th century polyphony, the informing instinct is nonetheless an orchestral one of its own time, using 'block' doublings of triadic material in a fairly parallel fashion. This is a tendency which* Amore Langueo *seeks to avoid by borrowing from early models both their outward manner and something of their technique: no easy task, given the need to expand harmonic language and acceptable dissonance well beyond 16th century limits.*

Both versions of the poem observe the so-called macaronic practice of adding a Latin refrain at intervals throughout an English text: in this case, just the two words of the title ('I languish for love'), sometimes prefaced by *quia* (since or because). The music treats these Latin words as a constant, sometimes obsessive undercurrent rising at times to anguished outbursts. The arresting imagery of the poem speaks for itself; but the intention in treating the Latin in such a way was to see the stricken and enigmatic figure waiting for ever on his lonely hill as a Christ perpetually returning to Golgotha to be recrucified within the atrocities of mankind as they re-enact themselves down successive ages.

The narrative parts of the text (preceding direct speech from Christ) spur the music to a considerable climax before four soloists (treated much as though they were a single 'Everyman' presence) utter the words *I am True Love, that false was never*. The two choirs interrupt with increasingly anguished repetitions (*Amore langueo*), but the narrative of the soloists remains meekly accepting until it reaches the word *die*. Another climax follows, in which finally the two choirs resume the English text (*Long thou and live thou never so high…*). The soloists, who are generally deployed homophonically as if they were a single composite voice, respond (*My love is in her chamber…*), and this most beautiful passage of the text is set to music which seeks to match its anguished tenderness. A final elevated climax is heard before the music dies gradually away to silence, briefly recalling the music of the opening. The music seeks not so much to end as to recede beyond hearing. Its ending manifests a tendency for the end of a work to become (largely unconsciously) the starting point for another, even after the passage of a few years, since its mood and tonality are resumed at the start of *Turn Our Captivity* [1993], to be discussed below.

Not until the creation of *Amore Langueo* was already well advanced did I discover the setting (*opus* 18, dating from 1955-56) of words from these sources by Howard Ferguson [1908-1998]. Ferguson made a different selection from the two texts, deploying them for tenor solo, semichorus, chorus and orchestra in a work more than twice the length of my own setting. In his preface to the edition where I found these words, R.T.Davies states how *'poems in this tradition do not appeal to the intellect through ideological elaborations and subtleties but inflame the heart through the contemplation of the physical Passion'*. I was conscious of this when composing the music, discovering only later that Ferguson had responded to the text (and probably also to a reading of Davies's preface) in much the same general fashion. Upon discovering Ferguson's passionate setting, I was intrigued also by our respective treatments of (extra-musical) time. Whereas I had seen the macaronic interpolation *amore langueo* as a more or less constant undercurrent, Ferguson had conceived a circular chain of events, returning at the very end to the unfulfilled seeking of the undisclosed narrator prior to his encounter with the mysterious Christ figure on the hill. As in the case of *Nunc Natus Est Altissimus*, these considerations were to underpin aspects of *A Song on the End of the World* in 1999, where the Crucifixion is again suggested as something subliminally re-enacted within the perennial atrocities of repressive *régimes* and human conflicts.

Jesu, the Very Thought of Thee

1990; *ca* 5 minutes. Motet for SATB/SATB *a cappella*. Composed for the wedding of a friend and colleague in Ely Cathedral and an ensemble formed by professionals (including adult sopranos) from many established choirs. First performance: October

1990, Ely Cathedral, conducted by Paul Trepte. Subsequently performed widely by *Schola Cantorum* conducted by Mark Shepherd. Issued on CD, 1998, by Guild Music, GMCD 7139: *Schola Cantorum* / Shepherd. Score published in 2001 by G.Ricordi [UK], Ltd, London.

This work is modest in length but dense in harmonic content. Despite a generally favourable public response to performances, and especially to that on disc, I have reservations now about certain elements in the voice-leading, which seem compromised by vertical considerations and achieve a less than ideal harmonic self-sufficiency within the respective choirs. The published score's layout (two choirs rather than 'SSAATTBB') acknowledges more the physical positioning of a cathedral choir as *Decani* and *Cantoris* than any specifically antiphonal purpose in the writing itself. The informing intention is more freely melismatic than rigorously imitative, and although the composite effect is as intended, linear detail is at times inferior to that of both later and earlier works. The fine recorded performance tactfully effaces such *caveats*.

Between *Jesu, the Very Thought of Thee* and *Turn Our Captivity* (discussed below) occurred a large-scale setting of the *Magnificat* and *Nunc Dimittis* for double chorus and organ [1992]. This work features an organ part of *virtuoso* proportions and much metrical complexity, albeit of a vocally idiomatic and generally lyrical kind, in its earlier stages. It features an imitatively rigorous *Gloria* in which hocketing techniques are allied to a harmonic language extended from that of Nielsen's Fifth Symphony, and a contrasting *Nunc Dimittis* in which a tenor solo part occupies the foreground.

O Lord, Support us all the Day Long
1991; *ca* 5 minutes. Motet for SATB *a cappella* with minor divisions of the bass part. Issued on CD, 2006, by Signum Records, SIGCD 080: Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, conducted by Judy Martin. Performed by the Vasari Singers, Chester Cathedral, and by other cathedral choirs in the course of worship.

This brief setting of a celebrated and widely-loved prayer by Cardinal J.H.Newman. Like other works on the 2006 disc cited above, this setting was a specific commemoration. It is dedicated to the memory of Alan Gravill (1955-91), one of this country's most gifted pianists and a prize winner in the Carnegie Hall Competition of 1985. A close neighbour in London during the couple of years leading up to his death, he had been preparing some of my piano works for performance when tragically he was involved in a road accident which claimed his life a month later. Quiet, studious, kindly and hospitable, he was a grievous loss both to his profession and to those who loved him. While a piano work might (and may yet) be a more fitting tribute, the present piece embodied a spontaneous reaction and a moment when a longstanding fondness for a particular text suddenly found its purpose. The music is simple in essence (though more so to listen to than to sing), and later took its natural place at the end of the 2006 CD release thanks to its twilight leave-taking of all we hold most dear.

This setting again acknowledges Byrd as he was by the time of some of his most enduring and successful English anthem settings; for example, *Prevent us, O Lord,*

the more extended *O God whom our Offences have Justly Displeased* and *O Lord, Make Thy Servant Elizabeth our Queen*. In such works Byrd never employed fewer than five parts, but nonetheless maintained a style which has been well characterised by the present Master of the Choristers at St Paul's Cathedral, Andrew Carwood, as *'serene, coolly beautiful ...[and] rather austere'*. [lxiv] My intention was to achieve a similar kind of contemplative objectivity while alternating relatively homophonic passages (such as the opening) with freely melismatic writing, as at the setting of the words *'the busy world'*, in the former case, or *'and peace at the last'*, in the latter. Part divisions, however, are kept to a minimum, arising only momentarily where an essential harmonic effect may not be achieved by only four voices. This occurs in all three lower parts, and in the soprano part only for the *pianissimo* final chord of all, where greater density is required. The work attempts no defining structural approach, being content rather to maintain a kind of emotional continuum free of sudden deviations or changes of harmonic tone.

Turn our Captivity, O Lord [Psalm 126]
1993; *ca* 13 minutes. Commissioned by the Southern Cathedrals Festival. Anthem for SATB/SATB chorus and organ. First performance: Winchester Cathedral, July 1993, as part of the Southern Cathedrals Festival of that year: the combined Cathedral Choirs of Winchester, Salisbury and Chichester conducted by David Hill (David Dunnett, organ). Subsequently performed in the UK and the Irish Republic. Issued on CD, 2006, by Signum Records, SIGCD 080: Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, conducted by Judy Martin (Tristan Russcher, organ).

Turn our Captivity extends various ideas explored in two preceding works, *O Merciful Saviour* and *Amore Langueo*. The slow introductory section and contrasting *Allegro* of the former find modified and more satisfactory arrangement in *Turn our Captivity*, while the melismatic 'orchestration' of *Amore Langueo* informs a lengthy *Amen* in the 1993 work. *Turn our Captivity* represents also the first sustained attempt to deploy keyboard writing of the complementary but texturally contrasted, *obbligato* kind mentioned earlier in discussion of Fauré; this too can be seen in the *Amen* section. Choice of text was left to me as composer by the Southern Cathedrals Festival, but a setting of words from the Psalms was suggested. In the event, Psalm 126 commended itself partly through the purely incidental Elgarian resonance of the phrase 'in the South', and partly through its poetic balance of wistful recollection with the prophesy of paradise to be regained in the future.

This work seeks to establish a plausible and convincing kinship with the broad contours of a sonata structure, in that its slow-moving first section is balanced by a return to that momentum and manner after the more agitated central section in one-in-the-bar triple time. Here, satisfying illusion is more important than literal recapitulation, in a way which one might liken to such pioneering explorations in the same direction as Schubert's balance of outer 'movements' in his *Wanderer* Fantasy for piano. However, the organ solo at the opening of *Turn our Captivity* serves to present harmonic, modulatory and motivic ideas which will be of unifying significance throughout the work; and although this was indeed written first, as a means simply of 'working one's way in' to the process of composition, subsequently it was altered with the benefit of hindsight, – a procedure expected in advance and one which has been of use in one or two other works, both for choral or for other forces.

The outer sections of this composition also articulate some polarity between E natural and D flat as tonal centres, consolidating the latter in the final section (not least during the extended *Amen*) in a manner very broadly consistent with Classical sonata recapitulation, although in such a precedent such contrast and opposition are largely expunged in the reconciliatory functions of the recapitulation and *coda*, serving as a foil to a more rigidly defined initial exposition. Here, instead, the D flat undergoes a late enharmonic transformation to become subsumed (as C sharp) into a kind of E minor modality first suggested in the third bar of the work (which was one of the elements requiring revision, as described above). This appears to work satisfactorily even though, as the final chord of the work shows, the overall harmonic language is varied enough to admit of more than one modal extension from E; indeed, several, as the opposition of perfect fourths at the opening of the central section implies.

By the time I composed this piece, I was keenly aware of empirical lessons learnt in such earlier works as *Empyrean* for solo organ (cited earlier). The danger of such diverse harmonic language is its potential for a diffuse kind of modulation: dissonance operates mainly through a polarity or opposition between triadic formations and a discordant bass (or other strand) which embodies some sense of melodic or motivic direction of its own. A fairly natural consequence of this is that modulatory processes tend to arise through enharmonic reinterpretation of particular triadic formulations, allowing the music to 'turn on a sixpence' and head off in a new direction - though the effect is usually less abrupt than seamless, as in the cited case of Fauré.

The risk, then, is that such processes (which, after all, may still legitimately arise as the intuitive response to some local detail in the text) may also become a kind of 'default' reaction, diminishing their own currency by eroding any clear distinction between them and the longer-term tonal planning of events in the musical design. By this time, also, the composer and critic Adrian Jack, in a conspicuously fair-minded and reasoned press notice for *The Independent* in 1991, had expressed the reservation that in the outer movements of my Organ Symphony, *Christus*, the harmonic language was, *'paradoxically, chromatic to the point of greyness'*. This was a danger of which I had been only too well aware, but which (after battling with the work for five years) I felt I had finally averted, until Jack's observation exhumed doubts. Whether or not his view applied objectively to *Christus*, one need only think for a moment of a piece posited entirely upon a whole-tone scale to realise that a musical currency intended to enforce only unifying rigour may instead lead to a featureless uniformity devoid of necessary aural 'landmarks'. This – in addition to sheer scale and length – had been my reason for planning *Christus* much like a Scandinavian tower block, with a 'solid core' of Nielsen-like 'progressive tonality' at its centre from the start, a motivic framework then 'hung' from it and the interstices between filled finally in by a process of almost obsessive cross-reference. Jack's criticism demonstrated that such care could perhaps never free a work from (at least) subjective perception that its informing 'hierarchy' of dissonance and consonance lacked sufficiently arresting definition. That the finished work itself demonstrated at length my own subjective disagreement offered little consolation in this respect; nor could one draw too much complacent comfort from a series of highly positive notices from other quarters within the national and international press. I therefore approached subsequent works with a sense of great pragmatic caution, even where they were to operate on a far more restricted scale than a 'one-off' leviathan such as *Christus*.

Turn our Captivity was followed in 1994 by a private commission to compose a brief *a cappella* anthem for a baptism. I turned to the prayer popularly but erroneously supposed to be written by St Francis of Assisi (allegedly this attribution arose from a nineteenth-century French newspaper in which the text was juxtaposed to an article about St Francis and the two became mistakenly linked in the popular imagination). The setting was published by Kirklees Music in Bradford as one item in an anthology of what it shoes to designate as Communion Anthems. While leaning consciously towards the kind of accessible style espoused at times by John Rutter and others, this brief piece still nods in the direction of post-Reformation, English-text motets by Byrd and his lesser contemporaries, both in its general sensibility and in some of its treatment of individual line or syllabic stress. The music does not, however, attempt or effect any conscious advance over the preceding work and should be viewed as a modest, occasional work. There are other pieces too in this sequence of compositions which give priority to supply and demand rather than to empirical development, though particular large-scale pieces are recognized as deliberate milestones in a journey towards *The Cloud of Unknowing* (2004-2005).

In 1995 I received a private commission, advanced through Christ Church, Oxford, for a work to commemorate the life and tragically early death through cancer of Ian McCarey, father of two choristers and a man whom I had not known. The text agreed with his widow was the following celebrated passage, adapted into the form of a collect from a sermon preached in old St Paul's Cathedral, London, by John Donne, then its Dean, on the (leap-year) 29 February,1627:

Bring us O Lord God at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven, to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light, no noise nor silence, but one equal music, no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession, no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity, in the habitation of Thy glory and dominion, world without end, Amen.

Although I have composed other works as personal memorials, both choral and non-choral, *Bring us O Lord God* was the first of two occasions when a uniquely daunting responsibility arose for rising to the occasion of an acute need on the part of somebody else: a bereaved and grieving stranger seeking to give vicarious artistic form to what had been the cornerstone of her life, demanding therefore some potent balance of celebration and loss. While there could be a *Cyrano de Bergerac*-like element of comedy to a prescription where one is required to give 'unseen' voice to what one intuits that someone else must or should feel, in practice the experience is both intense and alarming. It was little consolation that the chosen text had turned out to be the first thought of both composer and commissioning individual; nor that Donne's words have their own intrinsic power to move the human spirit (not least because posterity makes us aware to what extent the exalted figure in the pulpit raged humanly against the dying of the light a decade later). Nor was there comfort in the widely-loved, unpretentiously eloquent setting of this passage by Sir William Harris, to whom I shall return in the closing section of this dissertation; comparison was unenviable.

I shall return to these thoughts in the context of *The Souls of the Righteous*, written in 2000 and in similar circumstances. *Bring us O Lord God* is inadmissible in the present context, having been neither published nor recorded. A recording direct from BBC

Radio Three (*Choral Evensong*, May 1995) is nonetheless submitted here for information, since the composition represents an extension of the imitative polyphony, allied to *obbligato* and rhythmically fluid organ writing, explored in *Turn our Captivity*. It also forms a significant link in the chain of development leading to *The Cloud of* Unknowing. The music seeks to present a more integrated single experience than its predecessor, though its central passage is delineated in part by recourse to wordless melismatic singing: a response to Donne's *'equal music'*, dovetailed into temporarily homophonic setting of the text itself. The work's *Amen* is greatly extended, as if in representation of a parting repeatedly deferred for another moment's mutual belonging. Prompted by the occasion and the fact of Donne's agency as preacher, I found myself responding here to a couplet to be found in one of his poems, *Song* (beginning *Sweetest love, I do not go / For weariness of thee…*):

They who one another keep
Alive, ne'er parted be. [lxv]

Despite voice-leading which I regard as generally satisfactory here, *Bring us O Lord God* is by some way the most demanding of all my choral works in terms of vocal pitch, rhythmic ensemble and balance. Here again, empirical discoveries were noted and carried forward into succeeding works.

That Yongë Child
1996; *ca* 5 minutes. Carol setting for treble/soprano solo, double chorus and organ. Score published 2005 by Novello & Co. Ltd [Music Sales Ltd]. Issued on CD, 2007, by Griffin Records, GCCD 4062: Choir of Worcester Cathedral, conducted by Adrian Lucas.

In 1996 I was invited (rather than formally commissioned) by Winchester Cathedral to compose a carol setting, and chose the text *That Yongë Child*, included also by Britten as an evocative solo movement within his *Ceremony of Carols*. My own composition employs a treble/soprano soloist and a chorus which expands to SSAATTBB in the central passage of the piece. Harmonically the setting is one of several in which I sought to evoke, rather than slavishly employ, mediaeval practice, whereby an inconsistent legacy of actual *organum* may be glimpsed in the parallel movement of perfect fourths from which the fundamental has become detached, giving place to the linear movement of an independent bass. At the same time the approach is indebted to certain choral works of the 1960s by Kenneth Leighton, notably his cantata *Crucifixus pro Nobis* and his setting of the Evening Canticles for Magdalen College, Oxford, where apparently similar preoccupations are subsumed into a modern aesthetic which one may feel to be consistent with the sculptural angularity of Jacob Epstein or, say, the very personal, prismatic 'take' on Cubism achieved by a painter such as Lionel Feininger. I preserved a strophic arrangement, allowing the organ's opening four-note figure to serve both as a regular interpolation between verses and as the starting point of the verse itself. Like Britten, I took the jarring, discordant note of the nightingale (in the poem, set at nought in comparison with the lullaby sung by the Blessed Virgin) as pretext for a gentle harmonic distortion and aural 'muddying of the waters' before equilibrium is restored.

O Sing unto the Lord a New Song
1998; *ca* 6 minutes. Motet for SATBSATB chorus *a cappella*. Score published in 2000 by G.Ricordi & Co. Ltd [London].

This was written for no particular reason and is one of the few works of mine which I have never heard performed, despite its publication. The piece reflects a consciously different approach from that of both earlier and subsequent works. It owes something to the sinewy, lean and rhythmically energetic style of Tippett in, for example, the opening stages of *The Midsummer Marriage* and the first movement of the roughly contemporaneous Second String Quartet. The latter model is disclosed in the initial octave doubling of soprano and tenor, matched by that of alto and bass. Although such scoring is demonstrably a form of unthinking default mechanism in much sacred choral music of the late nineteen-fifties and the nineteen-sixties, and therefore to be approached with a degree of caution, when deployed sparingly as a foil to denser, richer textures it can still prove effective. Here it diverges quite rapidly into free imitative counterpoint in which the regularity of the notated crotchet beat is regularly interrogated and challenged by conflicting syllabic and rhythmic stresses. Eventually this regularity breaks down and the bar adjusts to one of seven-quaver length, leading to antiphonal exchanges between the two choirs (which have remained undivided up to this point). The texture of the opening serves as a kind of reference point, recurring climactically at bar 49 (Ricordi score, page 15). Thereafter, subdivision of the SATB parts becomes less regimented and more subject to harmonic content, as opposed to being a partial means of dictating it. As a whole, the piece may perhaps lack a wholly personal voice, but it was a worthwhile experiment in the exercise of greater vocal acrobatics paired with reduced chromaticism. The result may be seen as a kind of purgation after some quite florid foregoing works.

A Meditation
1999; *ca* 4 minutes. Privately commissioned for a baptism in Winchester Cathedral. Anthem for SATB chorus *a cappella* with momentary part divisions. Score published 2000 by G. Ricordi & Co. (London). Issued on CD, 2006, by Signum Records, SIGCD 080: Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, conducted by Judy Martin.

This brief piece falls in the same broad category as *O Lord, Support Us all the Day Long*. It draws again upon the sensibility and emotional climate of Byrd's English anthems, this time deploying very little imitative writing but allowing more melismatic effects to burgeon spontaneously in direct response to the text, as at the phrase *'to conceive the Holy Ghost, and to see His Love'* [bars 31-34 of the published score, page 8]. In contrast, stark unison writing is introduced soon after this to evoke *'infinite darkness'*. The effect seeks to mitigate outward drama (which would risk traducing the single, integrated and restrained emotional experience of the piece as a whole), interpreting *'darkness'* instead as an inward emptiness which may be *'unlearnt'* (in response to the next passage of text) by restoration of a chordal texture.

In this piece, as in the Newman setting, divisions are momentary (and affect the treble/soprano line only at the final chord of all). Their use serves either to enable a richness of texture otherwise unavailable, as with the final chord again, or to facilitate a moment such as bar 41 (score, page 9), where the contemplation of *'endless things'* invites a chord perceived to be technically 'irresolute' – and the chord produced in

response admits of six distinct pitches but no doublings. Elsewhere, dissonance is incidental and mild, but tonality freely discursive and flexible despite a preconceived return to the tonal point G.

Even in so short a work as this, prescient appropriation of text from a variety of points within Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditations* (named thus only posthumously) enabled some degree of control over perception of the music as a natural arch and a unified, single utterance; the words had to inform a particular contemplative theme, but at the same time allowed musical responses to occur spontaneously. These could then be noted down, whereupon the verbal text could be assessed more dispassionately for potential continuity, for the degree to which its imagery encouraged a direct musical illustration or 'word-painting', for intrinsic contrast and for the absence of any obviously jarring element in its tone. Discovery of the opening verbal line encouraged an exploration for text which suggested life as a journey of faith, thanksgiving and enlightenment; which contemplated both small human beginnings and intimations of a future; and which (like words of Jesus) identified the childlike intelligence as humanity's truest and best messenger of grace, possibly because we may go whence we came, and thus sense something numinous in our beginning as much as in our departure. Admittedly, thoughts of this order may be experienced and directed purely from a poetically and emotionally educated standpoint, and do not depend intrinsically upon the state of one's own belief, though at the time of composition my own faith was less vulnerable than is the case today.

I Sing of a Maiden that is Makeless
1999; *ca* 4 minutes 30 seconds. Jointly commissioned by the choral foundations of St John's College, Cambridge, and Winchester Cathedral. Carol setting for double chorus *a cappella*. Broadcast on BBC Radio Three by the Choir of St John's College during its Advent service, 1999; performed during the Advent service at Winchester Cathedral; performed in concert in the UK and Belgium, 1999-2000, by the Choir of St John's College.

This work remains unpublished (a score and recording are provided for information). It presents challenges to conductors as much as to singers owing to its flexible deployment of syllabic stresses, which render barlines a mere form of visual punctuation and enable considerable linear independence from the various vocal strands, as in much modern editing of mediaeval scores. Some degree of irregularity in bar length is notationally necessary, though in performance few barlines should make themselves aurally apparent at all. The work is densely textured but this is offset by a light and quite mobile tread. A semblance of the well-known (but anonymous) poem's strophic organisation is preserved in the setting; however, this too is offset by material which evolves and varies on each appearance, preserving some illusion of unifying repetition without recourse to literal recapitulation. In simpler terms this is a device employed also in the setting *Lullay my Liking*, cited below (2005).

A Remembrance
An Invocation
2000; respectively 7'40" and *ca* 7 minutes. Commissioned simultaneously by the Dean and Chapter of Guildford Cathedral, 2000, in celebration of the fortieth

anniversary of the Foundation. Two anthems for SATB chorus (with divisions) and organ. Both performed by the Choir of Guildford Cathedral under Stephen Farr (organist: Geoffrey Morgan), 2001. *A Remembrance* issued on CD, 2006, by Signum Records, SIGCD 080: Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, conducted by Judy Martin (organist: Tristan Russcher).

These two works imposed an obligation to find texts suitable to a particular occasion, though the second was required also to contrast with the first and to reflect in more challenging terms upon the call to spirituality and faith. The first anthem takes as its title the first two words set. Like *A Meditation* (1999), this music sets words chosen from different sections of Traherne's so-called *Centuries of Meditations*, collated and so arranged as to emphasise both the Christian's journey from birth to maturity and a holy sense of place. Traherne enlisted the metaphor of a dwelling place or temple to evoke the whole physical world of humanity; this facilitated a work which implicitly celebrates simultaneously the created order, the Temple of Jerusalem and, by feasible extension, any other edifice designated as a House of God. The Dean and Chapter at Guildford professed themselves extremely pleased by the choice of texts both before and after the first performance. Later, the convergence of this work and *A Meditation* on the CD release by the Choir of Christ Church Dublin led to collective naming of the release as *Meditations and Remembrances*. In the booklet essay for this release I wrote the following:

*Arguably no Christian writer articulates as poignantly as Traherne that sense of Christian faith's journey from cradle to grave and of a spiritual innocence kept pristine by mystical, grateful and often retrospective intimations of a kindly shaping providence. Following Finzi's wise example, therefore, I returned to Centuries of Meditations in order to find something expressive of a particular place dedicated to and beloved of God, such as Eliot evokes [*Four Quartets*] in the much-quoted phrase* 'You are here to kneel / Where prayer has been valid'. *…The music seeks to preserve the sense of a quiet meditative centre despite a few expansive moments, and to maintain some consistency in its deployment of polyphonic vocal freedom against an organ part which remains, so to speak, both discreet and discrete.*[lxvi]

An Invocation has enjoyed less exposure and is a more problematic work to interpret. A member of Chapter at Guildford had apparently expressed an interest in a setting of the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, and eventually I selected lines from the opening of *the Wreck of the Deutschland*, an idiosyncratic and elegiac meditation upon the death in December 1875 of a group of five nuns drowned while reportedly fleeing anti-Catholic legislation in Germany. It is not widely known that the shipwreck occurred close to British shores, though in appalling weather, and that the trapped passengers could see the lights of England. Owing to the elements there was no response to the ship's distress signals (which, in fact, almost no one had seen), a fact which enraged the German government and came close to precipitating war. Terrible scenes had enacted themselves on board as successive lifeboats were swamped, sunk or smashed to pieces. The passengers were mostly German; there were two experienced navigators, one German, one English. Germany accused Britain of delaying for over twenty-four hours before launching any rescue attempt. One hundred and fifty-seven people perished within four miles of the coast. Hopkins was moved to write his poem after reading an account stating that the five nuns remained below deck because there was insufficient space above (where bodies were being

washed up and down the ship). Allegedly they drowned clasping hands, their ringleader crying out ‘O Christ, come quickly!’ until the sea silenced them.

The music resulting from this serves to counterpoint the comfortable certainties of Traherne with restless questioning. Hopkins set out to explore the meaning of the nun’s dying invocation while also envisaging her reception in the afterlife. A score is provided herewith for information, even though the piece has not been published or recorded. It marks a contrast in approach with most of the other music submitted here, responding texturally to Hopkins’s verse in a fitful and varied fashion governed less than usual by linear counterpoint and more by vertical, homophonic effects. Its harmonic language is aptly dense and strenuous, but as a whole the work quickly struck me as unsatisfactory and its choice of text inherently problematic in any case. Hopkins’s subject matter does not preclude a natural luxuriance of style which could in places be taken as more pantheistic than elegiac, and it seems to me now that this music accordingly lacks a clearly identifiable emotional temperature or tone. It has therefore been suppressed hitherto, though it has remained subject to periodic private reassessment and might yet be revised.

The Souls of the Righteous
2000; 9 minutes 30 seconds. Motet for SATBSATB chorus *a cappella* and tenor solo. Privately commissioned as a memorial, to be sung by William Kendall (tenor solo) and the Choir of Winchester Cathedral under Dr David Hill. First performed in May 2000 in the course of worship (evensong); later broadcast on BBC Radio Three *Choral Evensong*. Issued on CD, 2003, by Signum Records, SIGCD 501: Tenebrae, conducted by Nigel Short. Score published in 2005: G. Ricordi & Co. (London).

Like *Bring Us O Lord God*, this work was a private commission in memory of a person whom I had not known. It came from David Bushnell, who for thirty years had travelled regularly the considerable distance from Folkestone in Kent to Winchester Cathedral to attend Sunday worship and hear the Choir. The sharing of this experience with his wife had come to an end with her death, whereupon he had sold the family home and moved to a flat just outside Winchester Cathedral Close, within whose precincts her ashes had been scattered. The tenor soloist, William Kendall, effected introductions when a wish was expressed to find a composer for a memorial commission. It quickly became apparent that both composer and commissioner had the same text in mind, and a helpful *rapport* was established. David Bushnell specified that he wanted a substantial tenor solo to be included and that he would like this part to be written for and sung by William Kendall (not only a member of Winchester Cathedral Choir but a soloist of international distinction in his own right). Accordingly the setting falls into two balancing halves. The first is exclusively choral. The second amounts to a varied reprise, in which the chorus becomes a wordless melismatic backdrop to the emerging tenor solo line. The soloist’s material forms a kind of conflation of salient features from the foregoing section, with certain momentary but significant harmonic adjustments to the underlying content. At the words *‘utter destruction’* the chorus resumes its contribution to the text with an echo of the soloist’s words. This extended restatement leads cadentially into a spacious Amen, with the tenor soloist initially independent and to the fore but gradually subsumed into a polyphonic climax before the music ebbs gradually away. The work as a whole turns much upon the interval of a rising minor third, which at its first

hearing suggests some kind of polarity between the keys of F sharp minor and A minor. The tonal point A ultimately prevails, but minor tonality is qualified by transposed Dorian modality (embodying an F sharp) and by a final *tierce de Picardie* and resulting C sharp. This scheme is embraced for reasons more architectural than emotional, with final reconciliation of disparate elements emerging (it is hoped) as a form of acceptance. Only a gentle harmonic colouring is attempted of the text's contrast between the unbeliever's perception of *'utter destruction'* and the eternal rest of the departed (*'but they are in peace'*). In studiously avoiding overt dramatic contrasts and aiming instead for a single, seamlessly integrated emotional and contemplative experience, the piece again harks back to Byrd; this and a personal emotional subtext to the work are made explicit in notes which I contributed to the score published by Ricordi in 2005:

*Although a member of Winchester Cathedral Choir myself (1991-2001), sadly I had not had the privilege of knowing Sheila Bushnell, to whom the music is dedicated. This seemed to augment an already daunting compositional responsibility. In the event, two memories guided my response. One was that of the sublime setting of these words in Latin [**Justorum Animae**] by William Byrd, known and loved from the moment when I first encountered it as a chorister at New College, Oxford, in the late 1960s. Though lighting the humblest of candles beside such work, the present setting may at least claim as its point of departure some generalised glimpse into the spiritual and musical sensibility of Byrd. My second prompting, more personal and, in the end, perhaps more pertinent still, is the cherished memory of my own parents. Whatever the merits or otherwise of these compositional results, I hope that a certain authenticity of feeling may be found in them, as happily it was by the commissioner, who has wished to remain anonymous but who welcomed disclosure of so personal a perspective. **The Souls of the Righteous** stands, then, partly as a private tribute to two people known and loved, but primarily –and in some curious sense, more poignantly –to Sheila and to those whom the poet Matthew Arnold identifies for us as*

The friends to whom we had no natural right,
The homes that were not destined to be ours.' [lxvii]

This work was appropriated for more public ends when it was broadcast in 2005 from St Paul's Church, Knightsbridge, London, as part of a Remembrance Day programme of choral works sung by the BBC Singers under Bob Chilcott. In such a context, a communal and civic occasion does not obviate - and, indeed, may fruitfully modify or reinterpret - music conceived with an entirely intimate and personal agenda in mind.

My Song is Love Unknown
2002; 17 minutes 30 seconds. Anthem for SATBSATB chorus, SATB *soli* and organ.
Commissioned for the Southern Cathedrals Festival, Winchester, 2002.
First performed on 19th of July 2002, Winchester Cathedral, by the Choirs of Winchester, Salisbury and Chichester Cathedrals; soloists from Winchester Cathedral Choir; conducted by Dr David Hill; Philip Scriven, organ.
Issued on CD, 2003, by Signum Records, SIGCD 501: Tenebrae, conducted by Nigel Short; Jeremy Filsell, organ. Score published in 2005: G. Ricordi & Co. (London).

This relatively extended work employs a soprano soloist at many points before an Epilogue section in which she becomes part of a solo quartet set in opposition to the double chorus. The text (not specified in the terms of the commission) is that of a hymn by Samuel Crossman (1624-1683), from which one (little-used) verse is excluded. The scale of the setting relates it to four earlier works, *O Merciful Saviour* (1986), *Amore Langueo* (1989), *Turn Our Captivity* (1993) and *Bring Us, O Lord* (1995). However, in *My Song is Love Unknown* text is deployed in an idiosyncratic fashion with particular dramatic ends in mind, and in this respect the work came to be a conscious precursor of the oratorio *The Cloud of Unknowing* (2004-2005), which had begun to suggest itself in general outline by the time I reached the Epilogue of the shorter work.

My Song is Love Unknown begins with a reiterated major third, G above E flat. While the tonality itself was prompted as a small homage to the hymn tune setting of this poem by John Ireland (1879-1962), rhythmically the opening here is a conscious nod towards that of *Tod und Verklärung*, opus 24, the third of the orchestral tone poems by Richard Strauss (1864-1949), first performed in June 1890. Until Strauss reveals C minor as sovereign key in his third bar, all that is heard are the same apparently sighing major thirds sounded at the start of this anthem, albeit in marginally different rhythmic formations. Although this idea occurred merely because I had recently attended a performance of the work while on a choir tour in Germany, the programmatic subtext of a life in retrospect was apposite since *My Song is Love Unknown* commemorated the life and work of Michael Renton (1934-2001), who as a designer, engraver and lettering craftsman had been intimately connected with maintenance of the fabric of Winchester Cathedral since 1994 and who had become a much-loved figure amongst its congregation.

My Song is Love Unknown was the first choral work of mine in which a kind of analytic prior examination of text suggested itself as a compositional strategy offering means of controlling structure. That amounts to a different proposition from *Amore Langueo* (1989), in which the macaronic refrain had been taken as pretext for a more or less constant, seemingly obsessive undercurrent. In *My Song…*, I was struck by jarring contrast between the words *Hosanna* (attending Christ's entry into Jerusalem) and *Crucify*, both emanating from the mouths of a large and jostling throng in which our common humanity in all its fragile ugliness is mirrored. Partly because Ireland's hymn setting has conferred it incidentally, and partly because there is in any case a timeless or perennial verisimilitude to Crossman's poetic vision in this poem, the text here seemed to me to embody a kind of modernity consistent with the geopolitical contortions of a troubled world: trying to envisage the baying mob, it is not hard to find oneself seeing in it the stricken faces of starving Third World refugee parents fighting over food drops, or those of Islamic mourners at the funeral of some innocent victim of terrorism or sectarian violence, the culturally ingrained volatility of their grieving a spark never far from the tinder box of revenge. Despite this, Crossman's vision and the emotional power of the poem are conveyed through the dissenting, pitying voice of a solitary bystander, who, at worst, inveighs against violence in the silence of his or her own heart, or, at best, actually dares to protest aloud and to shame an inimical, outnumbering will. Nowadays we could interpret such will as the 'law of the jungle', or of military dictatorship: the solitary pacifist standing in the path of a tank in Tiananmen Square during the Beijing popular uprising of 1989 comes readily to mind. Such an image is arresting in the broad cultural terms of Christianity through

the familiarity of its resonance, whether or not one happens to believe in the birth, death and resurrection of a Christ figure; the gentle reproach of the 'lamb to the slaughter' speaks on either level, and, if neither is actually proven by consistency with the other, nonetheless there is a universality to be tapped in the setting of such a poem as Crossman's. The possibility of failing in the attempt is accordingly daunting, and it is in creative contexts such as this that one begins to discern what an underlying artistic *morality* might actually come to mean.

In mundane technical terms, my response to these considerations enlisted help from an unlikely source: the word-setting of Verdi in his Requiem Mass and in various operatic contexts. Italian itself is amenable to a whole range of flexible elisions which may be deployed expediently according to the ideal marriage of verbal and musical image. At the same time, the *bel canto* tradition admits of rests within words, syllabic repetition, *recitative*, various forms of dramatic hiatus and a kind of emotional onomatopoeia to which English seldom extends (though it is interesting that a composer like Finzi was able to ally himself specifically in these word-setting terms to the *mélodie* tradition of Fauré and his contemporaries, thereby separating himself from most of his coeval compatriots).

My intention was to allow the word *Crucify* to originate prematurely (in Crossman's terms) and almost inaudibly beneath the *Hosanna*-led public atmosphere of the entry into Jerusalem. This was done by breaking the word up into its constituent syllables, then looking for coincidences of hard consonant (as between 'Crucify' and 'Christ', where there is actually a shared double consonant) or vowel-based assonance between this and the principal narrative text of the moment. Accordingly the initially discreet chordal interpolations of *Crucify* from tenors and basses have the character of mere 'orchestrational' embellishment at first, though soon they advance momentarily into the open and are fleetingly heard for what they are. This sets the scene for a lengthy paragraph, the nature and unfolding of which were already clear in general outline even as the word-based idea was emerging, and were actually leading the train of thought. It is in this way that it may become possible at times to develop simultaneously a viable musical structure (worthy of the name) and a textual response which both serves and is served by it; furthermore, to do so without forcing one consideration upon the other. Whether or not this composition may be judged successful *per se*, the empirical value of writing it seemed subjectively proven when I came to work on *The Cloud of Unknowing*. The word *Crucify* served as a catalyst for textural 'confrontation' within the music, rising exponentially above *Hosanna* and 'overpowering' it in a way which seemed to illustrate a truth about the perennial fickleness of human nature. A sense of balance in this proposition is attempted later, not so much in terms of the music or its structure as in those of recurrent extra-musical truth, when an ostensibly calm Epilogue is fleetingly disrupted by a single retrospective, tonally dissenting *Crucify* from tenors and basses.

The features described hitherto are subsumed into a framework discursive enough to allow necessary freedom of response to text and passing image, but also rooted in the broad contours of ternary sonata structure. After turbulent central climaxes an organ interlude allows the music to become calm once more, ushering in a recapitulation of the work's initial choral entries (this time 'orchestrated' for the full chorus complement instead of just its upper voices). This diversifies into a series of exchanges between a solo quartet and the double chorus. Imitative polyphony is kept

to a minimum prior to this point, in order for the Epilogue to convey a kind of contemplative flowering, and for a moral conclusion in the text to be mirrored by the point or period of greatest textural weight and substance in the span of the music. The notion was informed by a visual metaphor of comparable intent: many cathedral buildings achieve it in the 'counterpoint' of rose window (light) and nave or transept (solid permanence), while the restored Burgundian Basilica of the Madeleine at Vézelay memorably vindicates a deliberate parsimony with the daylight in its Romanesque nave by positively flooding its Gothic choir and high altar through clear glass.

The Epilogue embodies some tonal disagreement between the areas of E flat major (the overarching tonality of the work as a whole) and B minor, a divergence hinted at in the first organ pedal entry of the piece, and also in the B minor starting point of a pivotal central passage (*They rise, and needs will have / My dear Lord made away*). Awareness of approximation and illusion in past forms of recapitulation, such as Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy, assisted here, as did certain of Beethoven's unexpected *coda* extensions, such as the early C major Sonata, opus 2, no. 3, first movement. I sought to treat recapitulation as a revisiting but also an implicitly open-ended extension of former material, encouraging contemplation of what has been heard (both musically and verbally) after it ceases to be so.

Development processes rest primarily upon three very simple cells of material: The rising minor third interval heard repeatedly at the outset, a downward four-note scale occurring immediately afterwards and the interval of a descending perfect fourth. All these undergo further use in the Epilogue and are the basis of a kind of metamorphosis as the melodic contours arising from them find new harmonic contexts or begin to lead in fresh directions.

Jesu Dulcis Memoria.
2002; 4 minutes 50 seconds. Short motet for SATB chorus *a cappella* and soprano solo. Commissioned by Oxford University Press for *Cantica Nova*, a new anthology of sacred Latin settings. Issued on CD, 2006, by Signum Records, SIGCD 080: Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, conducted by Judy Martin. Score published in 2004: Oxford University Press.

This little piece offered considerable contrast with *My Song is Love Unknown* and makes no attempt to extend trains of thought pursued in the larger work. It approaches the strophic verbal form (the original Latin-text model for *Jesu, the Very Thought of Thee*; 1990, *q.v.*) as a basis for free variation, with the initial monody giving rise to various extensions and developments. In due course a canonic exchange is heard between the chorus and a soloist, and at this point the harmonic language both softens somewhat and becomes briefly more openly contemporary in sensibility. The harmonic language is so calibrated as to suggest immersion in mediaeval harmonic and contrapuntal tradition without wholly embracing its rules, though there remains a certain rigour in what is and is not admitted here. Occasional strings of parallel fourths consciously evoke vestiges of *organum* which endured in mediaeval music long after the 'foundation' lines which had given rise to them as overtones had found their independence. With one or two judicious and non-contrapuntal exceptions, parallel fifths are avoided.

A Hymn to the Virgin.
2002; 4 minutes 30 seconds. Short votive motet for SATB chorus *a cappella* with cadential divisions. Score published in 2004: Oxford University Press Ltd. A performance by the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, under Timothy Brown, is available as part of a promotional CD commissioned by OUP.

This brief work again responds strophically to a text in that form. Its three verses comprise a largely homophonic statement of material, a verse in which tenors present the strophic melody against a wordless accompaniment (with free elements of fragmentary imitation, as if in response to an unusually mobile *cantus firmus*), and a final setting in which thematic material is deployed canonically among all voices before the substance of the first verse is modified and marginally extended. In terms of its concision the piece afforded a salutary challenge and discipline after the scale of *My Song is Love Unknown*, and also afforded a pragmatic means of keeping a flicker of compositional thought alive during an administratively taxing professional period.

Ubi Caritas et Amor, Deus ibi est.
2002. Short motet or introit for SATB chorus *a cappella* with brief cadential divisions. Score published in 2004: Oxford University Press Ltd.

This slight piece was privately commissioned for an anniversary blessing on a longstanding marriage, the text being specified. It has been sung in the course of worship, not least at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, where it features regularly as a communion anthem. It is homophonic in texture and seeks to make its modest effect through harmonic inflection of a simple melodic foreground. Its inclusion here serves principally to offer a view of something poles apart from the larger works and of a creative response to the need for concision.

Mass in Five Parts.
2004; 24 minutes. Setting of *Kyrie Eleison*, *Gloria*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei* for SSATB chorus *a cappella*. Commissioned for London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, St Pancras' Church, May 2004. First performed (liturgically) 2004 by the Festival Choir of the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, conducted by Christopher Batchelor. Issued on CD, 2006, by Signum Records, SIGCD 080: Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, conducted by Judy Martin.
This work was commissioned for a small but highly accomplished choral ensemble, with the SSATB deployment specified within the terms of the contract. In the event it provided a salutary discipline, since ideas initially insisted upon a six-part texture which was unavailable, so especial care had to be taken in moulding these thoughts until imitative counterpoint based upon them could attain the necessary rigour and density, and also until more homophonic passages could balance linear thinking with a convincing harmonic vocabulary. As an *a cappella* work, the Mass presented particular challenges (cited already in the context of earlier reflections) in the conception of a contrapuntal style which mirrored both the sensibility and, to a significant extent, the technique of sixteenth century English and continental models, but which yet rested upon a contemporary harmonic idiom of its own.

The influence of the sixteenth century is perceptible in the outward forms of this Mass: the *Kyrie* is a tripartite setting, contrapuntal in style and including a central passage scored only for SSA, in contrast with the more florid outer sections.

The *Gloria* embodies some influence from Nielsen's harmonic language amidst its neo-mediaeval formulations, includes a form of brief recapitulation and then launches into a highly rhythmic final section. Here the ensemble is treated initially in a homophonic, quasi-instrumental, chordal fashion, influenced significantly by the final movements of Frank Martin's *Petite Symphonie Concertante* and his Concerto for seven wind instruments, percussion, timpani and strings. However, this writing generates intensive counterpoint and a kind of modified 'hocketing' derived from mediaeval practice.

The *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* are thematically linked in some respects (notably the *reprise* of the *Osanna* section, heard first as an exultant climax and then as an evanescent echo), but separated from one another as befits their normal liturgical use. The *Osanna* struck me later as sounding more like Britten than anything else I had yet written, though at the time of writing there was no conscious influence, and in general I have never warmed to Britten's liturgical music as much as to his more idiosyncratic choices of sacred (or other) text, sometimes finding the former contrived, even arch in their conscious adroitness. A visual image of dancing snowflakes came to me when I was fashioning the 'echo' *Osanna* for the conclusion of the *Benedictus*, and is reflected in the complementary lightness with which this section harks back to the end of the *Sanctus*. While the unity of material pays lip service to sixteenth century models, many *Osanna* sections within that tradition where homophonic passages with the *tactus* subdivided into brisk triple time; so here there is some degree of conscious divergence from precedent.

The *Agnus Dei* observes textual convention by falling into three sections, each beginning with the same material. This, however, ascends in pitch with its first and second recurrence, increasing in urgency until the final stages, where *dona nobis pacem* becalms the music and there are a few oblique references to the music of the *Kyrie*. Midway through the *Agnus Dei* there are fleeting (perhaps unexpected) references to chorale material heard in the Fourth Symphony of Bruckner, whose symphonic style came to mind because its very personal order of slow but inexorable momentum (as well as its devotional tone) seemed to offer a helpful focus for this movement.

Despite commercial recording of the Mass in October 2005 and issue the following year, I am no longer wholly satisfied with the *Agnus Dei*, feeling that the final section reaches its definitive climax too soon and then rises to another which is less convincing. Nonetheless, it is worth bearing in mind the obvious fact that sixteenth-century models for a work of this kind were all conceived exclusively for liturgical use; and that, in following this precedent, I was conscious that a festival occasion might entail a large congregation and a lengthy Communion. It therefore seemed judicious to allow the *Agnus Dei* greater space than the preceding movements, even though, in the event, its contiguous internal proportions seem, at best, to lack inevitability; at worst, to result in a final section that outstays its material and its welcome. This was empirically valuable, even if also a case of wisdom after the event, and relates to the challenge (mentioned earlier) of reconciling the music to a

five-part texture when six would have been more natural and more amenable to the type of counterpoint intended. An SSATB deployment can easily come to feel top-heavy and to lead to consistently high *tessitura* in the bass and tenor parts, especially at climactic moments, since lack of natural density in the sonority may seem to require compensation through narrowly concentrated vertical spacing. This is another area in which the example of continental sixteenth century composers brings its own special problems, owing to their tendency towards deployment of thirds in the alto or soprano lines. In contrast (though more in his 'Anglican' works than in his three continentally-inspired Masses), Byrd regularly explored darker, less ethereal textures driven by the placing of thirds in the tenor or even an upper bass register, an added resource which facilitates greater textural variety overall. Stravinsky, who composed two voices of his own in completion of a partially extant motet *a sette* by Carlo Gesualdo (and did so avowedly on his own creative terms, rather than merely as a conventional editor with a reconstructional brief), is on record as commenting to Robert Craft that Gesualdo's madrigals *'are almost always top-heavy and even in the motets and responses the bass rests more than any other part'*. He observes also that the bass line (by Gesualdo) in the motet at issue is unusual in Gesualdo's work for being of what he neatly calls *'bass-ic'* importance. He adds that *'my* [own] *musical thinking is always centred around the bass (the bass still functions as the harmonic root to me even in the music I am composing at present)'*. [lxviii]

How literally one should take Stravinsky's use of the term 'root' is open to question. However, in its slightly more generalised sense this self-diagnosis certainly applies to my own *Mass in Five Parts*, and is naturally to be expected in any music conscious that its polyphonic ancestry reaches back (via a slow pendulum swing of technique) to *organum* and the sense of added parts as intrinsically parallel overtones to a sequence of 'fundamentals'. Interestingly, however, such parallelism surfaces again in the musical language of Puccini, where it is capable of achieving precisely that implicitly weightless kind of sonority and direction which *organum*-derived thinking might seem to obviate. In a celebrated case such as *Un bel di vedremo*, from *Madama Butterfly*, this singularity is explained when one notes that the octave parallelism of top and bottom is not matched by a consistent interpretation of the heard melodic pitch at the bottom as root of the chord: the triadic formulations in the middle of the texture serve regularly to reveal the melodic 'nodes' beneath as supporting the triadic second inversion rather than its root form, or else complicating the issue through suspension or passing dissonance: an effect encountered not infrequently in the music of Ravel, too (a conveniently concise example being his part song, *Trois Beaux Oiseaux de Paradis*). It is intriguing to reflect that something of the same kind is already implicit in the radically idiosyncratic thinking of a composer such as Gesualdo, and that (along with his audacious use of dissonances of the second and seventh) this reaches a significant distance into the twentieth century, *pace* Stravinsky. Its value may indeed be limited for a composer whose sovereign concern is imitative polyphony (Stravinsky was at pains also to point out that Gesualdo may frequently operate at a considerable remove from counterpoint, achieving his effects through a texture of stark simplicity allied to highly unexpected enharmonic twists or pivotal turns). However, one's available range of textural method and resource is greatly enhanced by consideration of such contrasting means and ends. In having to write for SSATB *a cappella* for the Mass, I was compelled also to reflect upon these issues, and the resulting work continues still to yield up instructive reflections to be revisited in works yet to come.

The Cloud of Unknowing
2004-2005; 90 minutes. Oratorio for SATBSATB chorus, tenor solo and organ.
Commissioned with funding from the Performing Right Society for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Vasari Singers.
First performed on 13th of May 2006, as part of the final concert in the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, St Pancras' Church, London, by James Gilchrist, tenor solo, Jeremy Filsell, organ, and the Vasari Singers conducted by Jeremy Backhouse.
Issued on CD, September 2007, by Signum Records, SIGCD 105: performers as above.

This very large work was already implying itself as a natural sequel to *My Song is Love Unknown* when that composition was nearing completion early in 2002. I began to realise that I needed to do in choral terms something comparable with what I had done in those of solo organ music, where a succession of works had led eventually to the five-movement Passion Symphony *Christus*, a piece lasting just over two hours. In both contexts, treatment of universal human concerns demanded immensity of scale as a kind of natural metaphor for some of the most challenging areas of human experience. In the case of *Christus*, the same kind of metaphorical aptness applies also to the virtuosity which the work demands, though its formidable technical demands are never an end in themselves but, rather, an intrinsic aspect of the necessary musical language and expression, recognised as such in advance, yet still a means to the articulation of something greater than the piece itself.

The circumstances of this commission were initially problematic. The Vasari Singers wished to commission ten composers to write one choral work each, and were initially seeking from me a work of some twenty or twenty-five minutes' length. A piece of this scale is perhaps more likely than most to avoid being 'through-composed' and, in the event, *The Cloud of Unknowing* started life in the middle, with a setting of the twenty-third Psalm, *The Lord is my Shepherd*. Barely had I begun this, however, when the grievous events of Beslan, a previously unheard-of corner of Northern Ossetia, began to be reported to the wider world. Fortuitously I had set the opening verse of Psalm 23 for women's voices only (SSAA). I now realised that it would be virtually impossible to continue with this music without its embodying some form of direct response to the harrowing images of maternal grief daily visible on the television screens of the West; and that, as such, the choice to deploy only women's voices now carried a particular resonance.

At this stage I was largely unaware how the rest of the work might ramify, but I sensed early on that what I had begun formed a central interlude in something potentially very much larger. I began to research texts. Since I already intended to set the whole of Psalm 23, any further text was bound to come from some other source, and I soon recognised that a 'mosaic' approach to the complete *libretto* of the work was both necessary and desirable. Text from the late Cretan poet Odysseus Elytis came into the picture early on, being something which I had considered for use and eventually rejected when composing the oratorio *A Song on the End of the World* for the Three Choirs Festival in 1999 (*q.v.*, above). The notion of entwining this with words from Psalm 90 was established at this point too (perhaps prompted in part by a memory of singing the treble solo part in the setting of these words by Vaughan Williams while I was still a chorister at New College, Oxford).

By now it was apparent that I had the makings of an opening to the work, and of a middle. The problem was that the process of musical and verbal escalation from one to the other already implied daunting scale. In a mood of something like denial I continued writing, conscious of the clock ticking. Eventually I could no longer ignore not only the scale of the journey from opening to central passage, but also an implied balance to this in the latter stages of the work. I knew that the final section would need to be a form of moral epilogue capable of drawing all foregoing strands together, but not (until very much later) of what this would consist, either musically or verbally.

In due course I went to see the conductor of the Vasari Singers, Jeremy Backhouse, and made a clean breast of the problem: the Kraken-like work which they had awakened with this commission had come to the surface as a thing of intractable hugeness. It could neither easily be laid on one side and replaced in the remaining time by something of more manageable scale, nor compressed into the prescribed limit of duration without sacrificing the entire conception. I was exceedingly apprehensive as to the response I might receive.

In the event, Jeremy Backhouse behaved with extraordinary sympathy and patience, declaring that he was excited to have set in train something which so clearly gripped me with a sense of urgency, and that he was only too happy to wait beyond the prescribed date for a much-expanded work. The matter was put to the trustees of the Vasari Singers and approved. The group pressed ahead with a recording of the other commissioned works and entered into further dialogue with Signum Records regarding a later recording devoted entirely to an isolated longer work of my own.

What remains to be said in a narrative way about *The Cloud of Unknowing* is perhaps expressed best and most succinctly (owing to the salutary Procrustean effect of an inflexible word limit) in the notes which I later contributed to the booklet accompanying the CD release in 2007. These articulate what needs to be stated regarding the work's humanitarian instincts, and also something of the pass to which my beleaguered religious intimations and instincts had come by 2004-5, when the piece was composed. I therefore offer this essay more or less in full here:

The path to this work has been a long one.

Over many years I have sought to harness words to an overarching structural design without sacrificing their sovereignty within it. This has now led through several choral works of increasing scale to ***The Cloud of Unknowing****, the furthest I can go in one particular direction, just as a parallel journey led to an immense Passion Symphony for organ solo [****Christus****,1986-90] and similarly suggests a phase completed.*

In ***My Song is Love Unknown*** *(2002) I had the idea of altering sequence in the hymn text by Samuel Crossman, so that conflict between* Hosanna *and* Crucify! *might serve by juxtaposition to make a point about perennial human nature, with Hosanna at first confidently affirmative - but then losing heart before the outnumbering insistence of* Crucify! *Later, an unusual King's Singers commission enabled me to meditate on the*

Gunpowder Plot using a mosaic of texts. Such an approach persisted in The Cloud of Unknowing.

On a personal level, this music confronts a mid-life ebbing of faith. Scientific rationalism divests the universe of its mystery and shrinks our human place in the scheme of things (if scheme it is); while the state of the world suggests either a suffering God, powerless to intervene in human misery, or a malignly indifferent one - if any. In response, some have sought a kind of sense in 'the suffering God' within his own creation, and in a Crucifixion perpetually re-enacted within the atrocities of successive ages. If such thinking has made a difference to me personally, this is thanks less to any certainty in the resurrection than to a more humanistic perception of Christ on the Cross as that mysterious figure, Everyman. The media bombard us with images of suffering too large to absorb, and in a sense it is easier to be moved to tears by the plight of a single child in the Third World or Bosnia than to be touched in the same painful way by the plight of a nation or, as it sometimes seems, an entire continent. That may be why some have railed against any artistic 'response' to the Holocaust, since the assumption that one can encapsulate something beyond true understanding arguably carries its own moral irresponsibility and hurt. Yet, others insist that the world remember atrocities and bear witness. I can say only that what has nurtured me on a broadly Christian path is more the blessing of a close and happy family than any tradition itself; therefore a related respect for the individual sanctity of life in others and a worldly-wise humanitarian conscience seem to offer the first and second steps towards any faith, however tentative.

If a commission lent this sharper focus, so did world events. What became ***The Cloud*** *started in the middle, with Psalm 23. This was a response to the tragedy of Beslan, Northern Ossetia, in September 2004, when Chechen separatists barricaded themselves and more than 1,200 hostages into a school. Of the 344 eventual dead, 186 were children. While a compositional response can fairly be derided as futile, sometimes those of a creative bent may feel the need to bail out the sinking ship of common humanity with whatever tiny, unavailing bucket they have been given, if only because not to do so seems rather worse. After harrowing images of maternal distress seen at the time, it was natural to set the whole Psalm for women's voices only. Soon I realised that I wanted this to follow the central climax of a much larger work and offer sanctuary from it. Accordingly the setting here emerged in fairly anodyne harmonic terms, since much of its eventual effect would rely upon juxtaposition and contrast.*

The Cloud of Unknowing *opens with a sombre organ introduction. The first choral entry evokes a kind of Eden . Lines from Psalm 90 interact with passages from* ***Heroic and Elegiac Song for the Lost Second Lieutenant of the Albanian Campaign, 1945****. This poem by the late Cretan poet Odysseus Elytis is an almost tribal eulogy, its pathos derived from contrast between the happy intimacy of a soldier's village origins and the futility of random extinction on a battlefield. A tenor solo is introduced, leading to the premonition 'something evil will strike'.*

The soloist typifies a deliberate tendency for identities to blur at particular moments throughout the work. At various points he will assume the guise of prophet, reluctant soldier, Christ figure or worldly Everyman. In essence his is the voice of human conscience, frequently drowned but still insistent amid the sound and fury of war. His

vision of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse launches an immense process leading right to the central climax of the work.

After the onset of an agitated Allegro this text alternates with words by William Blake which uncomfortably locate the roots of evil in every human heart. The vision of Death, the last Horseman, is an enervated whisper. A rhythmic tramping arises from the depths, evoking the mobilisation of an implacably hostile force. The music suggests an inexorable army on the march by allowing syllabic stresses to ride roughshod over conventional expectation. A free approach to text highlights 'shall' [march every one on his ways] and 'shall ***not****' [break their ranks]. Eventually, like some culinary reduction, this 'boils down' to the single word break, inhumanly repeated over organ trills.*

In a quieter section, laments of the oppressed give ground to a single voice from within the chorus, tremulously questioning 'who will rise up with me against the wicked?'. This elicits a casually indifferent statement of murderous intent: 'yea, our God shall destroy them'.

The soloist – increasingly an impotent intercessor for peace – now admonishes warring humanity with words from a French poet, René Arcos, who survived the Great War: 'the dead are all on the same side'. In response the hostile marching returns. Two sides are now in direct conflict, one inexorable, the other bent upon its annihilation. One faction (by now clearly representing the contemporary West) utters self-righteous pronouncements suggestive that any atrocity is sanctioned by certainty of God on its side: an entirely deliberate indictment of two modern governments for a grievously misguided conflict. Implacable mutual opposition is again embodied by antiphonal use of 'shall break' [my arms shall break even a bow of steel] and shall ***not*** *break' […their ranks]. Both sides ignore the despairing soloist. As before, the process attenuates to the monosyllable'break'. The spectre of the prophetically envisaged final Horseman returns. His name this time precipitates uproar.*

A headlong climax enlists that (marginally altered) 'taboo' verse from the Psalms which glories in dashing the foe's children against the stones. An extended organ interlude finally recedes from the noise of battle into remote stillness. The soloist, reluctant participant in all that has gone before, sings words written by the Great War poet Wilfred Owen in a letter home to Osbert Sitwell from the trenches. Owen likens the individual men in his command to the suffering Christ; himself to Judas. This leads into Psalm 23.

With the second half of the work battle returns, but the perspective is now that of Elytis, akin more to the telephoto lens of modern journalism in the field than to the ageless hostilities addressed earlier. 'Something evil will strike' recurs as a ghostly echo, reaching sudden consummation in a single gunshot. Elytis now strikingly conjures pathos by matching the tragedy of spent life to ostensibly whimsical imagery. When the chorus re-enters, words from Christ's final moments follow Owen's cue, subsuming the anonymous, solitary death of the unknown soldier into the archetypally lonely, forsaken death of the Cross. This seems to be the intention of Elytis, too: 'The love inside him was such, The whole world emptied with that very last cry'. His image of 'one moment deserting the other' is met here with a progressively still organ solo, its note values extending as the pitches of melody and harmony gradually part

company. Ensuing music sets lines by the 17th century mystic, Thomas Traherne. 'Who art Thou?', addressed to the crucified Lord, is answered instead by the slain soldier (in a line of Owen made musically famous by Britten in his War Requiem, and one from Arcos): 'I am the enemy you killed, my friend. The dead are all on the same side'.

The remaining music is a kind of moral epilogue. Despite providing the work's title, the text here was the last thing to fall into place. Conceiving a textual 'mosaic' is a matter less of lighting on things and recognising one's wish to set them, more of knowing what one hopes someone has said and then tirelessly searching. The enigmatic mediaeval tract entitled The Cloud of Unknowing *was a late, stray idea which I almost failed to follow up. Written during the last quarter of the fourteenth century in the dialect of the East Midlands , it is believed to be the work of a Carthusian monk who took pains to hide his identity. Although addressing a specific form of religious contemplation (held then to unite the Christian soul with the being of Christ), the author was intent upon linking this with an active charitable compassion for others. Certain passages strike the modern reader through their worldly note of humanitarian engagement. These provided the summing-up which my own (as yet unnamed) Cloud required.*

The Epilogue starts much the same as the work's opening, offering a semblance of symphonic recapitulation. An arioso tenor solo follows, emphasising the poignant brevity of earthly opportunity to be a force for good. Again the chorus returns to Psalm 90. Its earlier music provides a backdrop to the true heart of the soloist's message for the modern world, leading to the exhortation '…lift up thine heart with a blind stirring of love; for if it begin here it shall last without end'. The chorus reiterates this text, inexorably expanding it in imitative polyphonic style. An immense climax is sustained into a prolonged Amen, which subsides until the soloist is heard intoning 'farewell', as if emerging against the flow of some great retreating procession. His valedictory blessing leads back to undespoiled Eden . The chorus returns (Elytis): 'the whole world emptied with that very last cry'. In response, the soloist's last utterance is a desolate echo from the Cross at Calvary . A final Amen fades ever further into the distance before a prolonged and mysterious organ chord enfolds all in its own seemingly eternal cloud of unknowing.

This work stands at some distance from the conventions of Anglican worship, the forbearance for which it calls being humanist in essence before it is specifically Christian or devotional. I had wished to write something of this kind long before the Iraq war and its aftermath lent their particular focus. In the event, the music espouses that same 'need to bear witness' articulated by surviving members of the Jewish faith after the Holocaust, but emanating since from innumerable other conflicts. Such witness chooses here to embrace innocent victims from all faiths and ethnic strains, be they of Muslim, Jewish, Christian or any other persuasion.

A postscript is in order. During July 2005 Jeremy Backhouse told me that the work's première would take place in 2006 at St Pancras' Church, London. Barely twenty-four hours later, a terrorist bomb detonated on a bus brought carnage to the steps of that building, plunging many into unimaginable horrors. The eventual first performance of The Cloud *was attended by some who had been caught up in the tragic events of '07/07'. While it is mistaken to view the music as a reaction to that*

event, which its final completion succeeded by exactly one week, such happenings offer melancholy confirmation of an enduring darkness at the heart of man, and of his capacity for acts of atrocity alongside selfless heroism. For as long as mankind continues to crucify its messengers of peace, it will fail to see the instruments of salvation which may always have lain in its own hands. Notwithstanding those who would decry bailing out humanity's sinking ship through the exercise of artistic expression, the contemporary individual spared terror and suffering at first hand can neither turn away nor remain immune to words written by a surviving Polish Second War poet, Jerzy Ficowski, which resonate still as our world attempts today and tomorrow to rise above the mortal tide of its own suffering:

'I did not manage to save
A single life

I did not know how to stop
A single bullet…
I run

To help where no one called
To rescue after the event

I want to be on time
Even if I am too late…'

[Translated by Keith Bosley, Krystyna Wandycz]

The Cloud of Unknowing is dedicated to my wife, but also bears the inscription

'In memoriam: Margaret Hassan
and all innocent lives lost in or beyond Iraq.'

Invocation of one of Iraq 's more grievous individual losses is emblematic, and made without permission; the sentiment behind it one of personal revulsion at the hollow eulogies of western leaders mired in blood no less than those they would condemn.

What this essay does not say is that the lengthy climactic passage in the Epilogue had been anticipated with considerable apprehension ever since composition of the principal climax in *My Song is Love Unknown*. The sense of symphonic recapitulation is all the more necessary in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, and the artistic consequences of failure large enough to sink the entire enterprise. More daunting even than this was the necessity to conceive a greatly sustained paragraph of intense imitative polyphony, deliberately withheld until this moment and again deployed to mirror the visual metaphor of Vézelay, which was cited above when discussing the Epilogue section of *My Song is Love Unknown*. After many rejected drafts and tearings-up, this passage of the work at least satisfies my own critical scrutiny and offers the kind of culmination which I had long known to be essential, but which I had been uncertain of achieving. With the end of this work comes also the closure of a sequence and process of composition spanning many years. This is the case musically and technically

because of the sheer *ne plus ultra* scale of *The Cloud*. In those more nebulous terms of the human spirit and of religious belief or otherwise, the music may also come retrospectively to represent a personal falling silent in the face of human doubt, though I continue to compose lesser sacred choral works upon demand. Returning to Larkin as quoted at the outset, one may confess the reverence to be simply too awkward, the machinations of established religion simply too uncomfortable, for one's 'compulsions' still to be *'recognised and robed as destinies'*. In the final section of this thesis, therefore, the necessarily personal reflections which I wish to advance dwell a good deal upon an autobiographical past and a journey travelled to the present. The future is an Ivesian unanswered question and, as such, more likely than any comfortable certainty to inspire further articulations of a personal and internal shifting sea of faith, hope and doubt.

4: Conclusions:

I have referred already at some length to the 'chorister experience' which I perceive to be the root of my identity today as a composer. I have also touched upon the essentially conservative nature of Hofmannsthal's 'true imagination', and this historically and culturally retrospective notion sits naturally alongside the formative experiences of the early musical education which I was fortunate to undergo. In the final section of this dissertation I will dwell further on these issues and others, necessarily drawing upon autobiographical reflections in the process and attempting to locate the adult self to whom, proverbially, the child was father.

In a booklet essay from which I have already quoted, for the CD *Meditations and Remembrances* in 2006, I offered the following somewhat confessional reminiscence, the expression of which needs no amendment. Again it refers to chorister years at New College, Oxford:

Homesickness was seldom far from those chorister years. Sunday evensong concluded with the sublime Amen *from Byrd's* O God, whom our offences have justly displeased*. For God I substituted the equally terse nickname of our formidable headmaster (loved and feared like any deity), and still trembled suitably in my weekend shoes. More poignantly, as it now seems, I thought of my parents. With the later passing of both and of a childhood's home, the thread of a 'homesickness' of the spirit takes on the metaphorical resonance of some inarticulate apprehension of faith – of actual 'homing' like some migratory bird (or Byrd?), as rites of passage carry one further into – and, one day, beyond – life. Both verbally and musically Campion conveys this as succinctly as anyone in his* Never weather-beaten sail... *But it is to Byrd, that venerable, artistically transcendent and yet vulnerably human face of an enduring Englishness, that I return; never more so than since 1995, when the sudden death of my mother preceded the birth of my first child by five months. In her awareness of another grandchild destined to be forever unseen, I like to fancy that some momentary clasp of fingers took place before me; that we shall go whence we came and, ultimately, that the newborn will prove to have been our clearest messengers of grace in what Yeats dubbed the uncontrollable mystery. It is for reasons such as these that the sensibility of Byrd has remained a guiding kindly light,*

however far short may fall the compositional 'hints and guesses' on this disc of lighting even the dimmest candle beside him.[lxix]

If these sentiments nowadays seem to smile a little overmuch in the face of doubt, nonetheless they encapsulate something of the mystery both of memory and of a certain fruitful restlessness in the interior life of the spirit -which seeks ever to recapture and embrace again a kind of remembered state of grace, rooted in childhood innocence. Muir believed that we begin to die when we stop remembering, but noted also how our memories are real *'in a different way from the things we try to resuscitate'* [lxx], just as Eliot observed that *'...approach to the meaning restores the experience / In a different form'* .[lxxi]

For the trained musician, the condition of innocence may be of as much a technical as a broadly human kind. What seasoned teacher and thinker in music can switch off the dispassionately observant area of the brain that registers structural norms or digressions, assimilates harmonic events as if by inner dictation and sees (in a crucial sense, *disablingly*) past transient, elusive wonder into method, dialectic and knowing technique? My own earliest memory of any music is of an ancient 78 r.p.m. record, played on an almost equally antique radiogram in my family home in what may have been approximately the spring or summer of 1958. I lay in my pram and paid no conscious heed –and yet I know, and have known now for many years, that the music was a particular sonata for violin and continuo by Händel. I must have been able to find this out without recourse to the printed score, and I have avoided looking at it on the printed page or actually listening to it ever since, even though this makes little difference: were I to hear it played outwardly, as opposed to silently in the aural memory of the brain, or what the poet John Burnside has so evocatively called *'a room at the end of the mind'*, [lxxii] the aura of the unexplained would begin to fall away for ever, and the core of what was 'said' would reach me only through a glass darkly, no longer with the face-to-face immediacy of childhood innocence. As it is, nothing remains wholly preserved against the fatal intrusion of schooled technical and analytical awareness, and such mystery as this music now possesses is caught up more in the abstraction of my dimly remembered, partially reinvented past than in the actuality of a slender movement by a great Baroque composer.

It is not only tantalising, but also arguably instructive to build upon this image of searching back as a valid metaphor for the wider, more grievous forms of lost human innocence: we see them on our television screens and in our newspapers in the faces of the stricken and the dispossessed, fighting for food dropped from helicopters or for places on overcrowded escape vehicles, and in the eternal cycles of sectarian hatred, ethnic vengeance and hysterical grief accompanying riots, insurrections and the burials of iconic statesmen or, for other reasons, children. The search for what is redemptive reaches naturally back, often desperately, into a past before Arcady or Eden was despoiled, and is as real and urgent today for the lost soul of the earth itself as for the solitary individual. Muir, cited many times already, wonderfully captures the Christian's hard-won hope in this, if not fully the agony, in his celebrated poem, *The Transfiguration*:

But he will come again, it's said, though not
Unwanted and unsummoned; for all things,
Beasts of the field, and woods, and rocks, and seas,

And all mankind from end to end of the earth
Will call him with one voice. In our own time,
Some say, or at a time when time is ripe.
Then he will come, Christ the uncrucified,
Christ the decrucified, his death undone,
His agony unmade, his cross dismantled –
Glad to be so – and the tormented wood
Will cure its hurt and grow into a tree
In a green springing corner of young Eden,
And Judas damned take his long journey backward
From darkness into light and be a child
Beside his mother's knee, and the betrayal
Be quite undone and never more be done. [lxxiii]

Having explored the Crucifixion myself many times through composition and the collation of texts, I have sought to view it as both an icon of perennial human atrocity, to be seen re-enacted in the privations of successive ages before and since, and a prism through which the sanctity of every individual human life may be apprehended. It was therefore gratifying to read the words of a critic who recently stated that *The Cloud of Unknowing* offered *'a humanistic interpretation of the Crucifixion as a symbol of the persistent suffering of Everyman tenable for people of all faiths and none'*. [lxxiv] Muir's vision is consistent with this too in its refusal to detach the forging of a vision of hope from the actual state of a real and contemporary world. The winding-back of the spool of history, bringing with it a redemptive possibility that all might have unfolded differently and for the greater good, not the greater evil, sits alongside the disquieting quantum discoveries of Erwin Schrödinger, who said later of his work that *'I don't like it and I'm sorry I ever had anything to do with it*' [lxxv] (perhaps overlooking the likelihood that, in a parallel universe, he had played no part in it after all). However, the distinction between 'uncrucified' and '*de*crucified' (in the hands of a poet as accomplished as Muir, no mere filling-out of metre) makes explicit a preoccupation with the unravelling of events back to their source, rather than with any mere idle wish that they had never happened; of 'un-becoming' as 'actively' redemptive in itself, in contrast with the passivity of *non*-events, which teach us nothing and therefore bring in their wake no *'green springing corner'* of fresh hope for mankind. At the same time, however, Muir emphasises the God who must be *summoned*, and who will not respond until all humanity is heard as one in its plea that he do so. Here, the ostensible solidity of Muir's faith belies itself, the empirical unlikelihood of such an event being impossible to ignore beneath what had seemed a voice of hope.

For the convinced Christian, what his own belief entails must stand or fall upon belief in the Resurrection. For the restless sceptic (*malgré lui* or otherwise), the insuperable difficulty of accomplishing such a leap of faith in the face of a post-quantum cosmos of non-linear time must lead him to adopt an outlook whereby nuggets of hope, comfort or a qualified order of faith in *some*thing divine and superhuman are plucked as unhoped-for treasures from the teeth of an unfriendly reality (though, post-quantum, even this word is fraught with difficulty). These may acquire the patina of something transcendent, or numinous, and may elevate his gaze beyond the surface of 'normal' human life towards whatever lies 'beyond'. The 'beyond' in question,

however, may turn more upon the spiritual inwardness of living in the here and now (perhaps what Traherne termed *'the unsearchable extent of your own soul'*) than upon an idea of 'eternity'. Eternity itself is a concept which most Christians are probably content to regard as sufficient unto the day, since it is by definition beyond mortal comprehension, is nowadays confounded anyway by the notion that we already inhabit an infinitesimal corner of a non-linear time 'envelope', and can rest only upon faith as conjecture, not on hard scientific evidence. In this sense, a thirst for transcendence which looks spiritually 'inwards' more than temporally 'beyond' represents a kind of importing of some expediently adapted 'afterlife' concept into the lived present. This much seems implicit in the stance of some who have actually done much to *'confirm and strengthen in all goodness'* those around them seeking to further their own Christian journey. In an e-mail, Richard Holloway (who had stood down as Bishop of Edinburgh and Primus of the Scottish Episcopalian Church in 2000) wrote that

I am now reasonably happily back with church-going, now that I see religion as an art form that carries enduring meaning, not as a quasi-science that explains factual truth; and I suspect that you are somewhere in that same space. This means, of course, that worship has to carry some beauty and suggest mystery, but there are places where those things can still be found. [lxxvi]

Similar sentiments have been expressed publicly by both Holloway himself and the composer John Rutter, who disowns any Christian conviction (and has not been drawn to one in search of consolation since the tragic death of his son in 2001), yet sees in the forms of Christian worship and the beauty of its liturgy a source of numinous inspiration and, on the basis of broadcast interviews, appears to be at one with Lord Winston (quoted earlier as stating that Judaism's observances enabled him to lead a better life).

Nowadays I see my output of sacred music in a shifting light, aware that what prompted much of it has changed for ever, if not necessarily for good. The state of grace or of innocence mentioned above reaches back into the secure beginnings of a happy upbringing, but also into earliest musical experiences. Taken together, these serve to inform what the quoted essay on *The Cloud of Unknowing* called *'a related respect for the individual sanctity of life in others and a worldly-wise humanitarian conscience'*. The Crucifixion (revisited in several of these works) moves me nowadays less with respect to the ineluctable cost of a Resurrection in which I struggle to believe, and more in the worldly terms of earthly Everyman, separated again and again down the centuries from his kind and bereft of human compassion through the final long hours of an unspeakable suffering taking any number of grievous forms. Arguably this renders it easier, not harder, to be moved similarly by the recumbent lonely form shivering in a sleeping bag on a deserted nocturnal London street, the isolated prisoner drifting ever further from roots and identity in a cell at Guantanamo or blank confusion and misery etched into in the eyes of a Third World refugee child. Here, along with an ebbing of the sea of orthodox Christian faith, paradoxically one finds *'the eternal note of sadness'* so hauntingly discovered by the poet Matthew Arnold in the windblown darkness of Dover Beach:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. [lxxvii]

I think it can be no accident that, like composers before me, in sifting and classifying my apprehensions of music by others I have applied a personal 'doctrine of the affections' to the various keys made available within conventional tonality, and that to me the key of E major has long been associated with benediction and a certain 'state of grace', rooted in a kind of accepting familial sadness for humankind and for the despoiled sanctity of life, which perhaps, just perhaps, really does trace its origins to the lonely figure on the cross at Golgotha, but which certainly leads personally back to the cradle. One finds it, I think, in the E major Fugue from *Das Wohltemperierte Clavier* [Book II] by Bach, in Händel's aria *I Know that my Redeemer Liveth*, from the final part of *Messiah*, and in the Variations ending Beethoven's Piano Sonata opus 109. It is perhaps more the idea of E major than its actuality that embodies this, since the vagaries of Baroque pitch place two of these examples a semitone or so lower. By the same token, though, conversely that phenomenon also brings into the frame the slow movement of the Concerto in D minor for two violins and strings, BWV 1043, by Bach. On a humbler plane, but one which has meant something strong and enduring for me personally, the very first piece of music I ever sang as a very junior chorister was another which graced E major with a particular elusive sanctity of its own. This was an anthem by the incorrigibly self-effacing composer Sir William Harris, whom a year or two later I heard speak with unforgettable wit, grace and humanity (just before Sir Adrian Boult) at a commemorative concert for Sir Hugh Allen in the Royal College of Music. The text set in its highly memorable principal melody was an injunction embodying the entire issue at hand:

Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees.
Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come… [,] he will come and save you. [lxxviii]

It can hardly be an accident that almost the last text which I have set to date, in the climactic stages of the Epilogue in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, seems a direct continuation of this:

For if it begin here, it shall last without end.

I have devoted considerable space to examining on a technical and empirical level how I came to be a composer and, to some extent, why. The remainder of this dissertation now makes an attempt to explain specifically why I have continued to write 'sacred' choral music in the face of personal doubts which far outweigh certainties and certainly fail to amount to anything one might term a 'faith'.

I have referred to that 'homesickness' of the spirit which seems still to arise from earliest memories of my childhood beginnings in music as a boarding chorister away from my family, and which acquired a kind of metaphorical resonance later on in deeper spiritual terms. In a post-modern musical age, where extremes of consonance and dissonance may co-exist within one musical canvas, let alone across the *oeuvre* of a single composer, the innate 'conservatism' of the imagination which was my own fulfilment of Muir's view sprang directly from the nature of what I experienced in music as a chorister. It is therefore to that, at the same time as to fond memories of a childhood's happy, close-knit and broadly Christian home, that I return, and the two are effectively inseparable. One of these armed me with an enduring sense of my own good fortune and of a kindly guiding providence, as well as with some kind of sensitivity to the dispossessed and brutalised or to the vulnerable and isolated of these shores and beyond. 'Sanctity' of individual human life may be apprehended in a sense no less valid and real for eluding any specifically Christian field of vision, and an Aristotelian ethical view would have argued the moral superiority of a selfless, altruistic act committed for the good of another (or others) *without* any concomitant hope of reward in some unearthly afterlife, just as the charitable precepts of Judaic *tzedakah* accord higher value to those acts carried out unattributably and by conscious but benign stealth. At the same time, the Everyman figure on the cross at Golgotha echoes down the centuries, on the battlefields and in the death camps or broken cities of the earth, and is culturally embedded so deeply in our consciousness, or else so palpably present, that the actions of Simon of Cyrene in carrying the cross of Jesus (*pace* the Gospels of St Matthew, Mark and Luke), whether under *duresse* or not, begin also to resonate with a simple humanitarian urgency and immediacy not attributable 'merely' to religious intimations. Metaphor falls upon metaphor as one seeks to make one's own sense of this, and one to which I have already referred as a musician is that numinous strangeness which occurs when one's completed work, become 'other' and seemingly returned whence it came, 'stares' back at one with a kind of recognition, just as the eyes of the rescuer and the rescued or the comforter and the one who despairs may awaken an intimation of something far deeper and more knowing than the silence of either's heart. Something of the same 'compact' may attend also the departure of the dying, as so poignantly captured in the final and unfinished poem by Dylan Thomas, one of a number written in memory of his father:

The rivers of the dead

Moved in his poor hand I held, and I saw
Through his faded eyes to the roots of the sea.
Go calm to your crucifixed hill, I told

The air that drew away from him. [lxxix]

Undoubtedly the loss of my own parents in 1983 and 1995, both peacefully but somewhat prematurely, deepened a wish to engage with issues not only of a possible 'world beyond', but also of the senseless waste of life through inhumanity and violence. This has added to my sacred choral music a clearer intent to conjure pathos from collations of text and from the music which this calls forth. Such a path enables one's personal experience of loss to lend its own (admittedly limited) weight of perception to what, in humanitarian terms, necessarily remains intuited or indistinctly, indirectly glimpsed: the stares through the wire of captives at Auschwitz in grainy, sepia photographs; art imitating life, as in the frieze or 'stela' from the Buchenwald Memorial which graces the CD cover of *The Cloud of Unknowing*; children assisted by the Red Cross or *Medicins sans Frontières* in the field today; the person to whom one gives one's change on a cold London street.

Indirectly, this returns me finally to Hofmannsthal and to the meaning of his 'conservative' imagination. I have referred to the capacity of much music in this 'post-modern' age to embrace and synthesise the ostensible polar opposites of triadic consonance and astringent dissonance. Within this lies an acceptance of the need for diametric oppositions in the natural order of things; and such acceptance, embodied also in aspects of the elusive but profound Taoist belief system and philosophy, legitimately extends to a wider 'counterpoint' between uncompromising modernism and eclectic, consciously retrospective 'conservatism' in the works and respective outputs of composers (or other artists) as a whole. Herein lies a kind of moral and spiritual compass, whereby humanity's experiential spectrum is perceived and a kind of 'integrity' of opposites is understood. The potentially harsh ear, implacable eye, rude hand and angry shout of modernism depend for their abrasive impact, and often for the verisimilitude of a certain honest, necessary 'ugliness', directly upon the counterpoise of a milder, older, more 'ancestral' voice, recognised by Muir, Spender, Hofmannsthal, Eliot and many others. In this latter voice, whether it be apprehended through prose, verse, painting, music, architecture or figurative art, the looking of truth *'in the eyes'* [Shostakovich] need not find less acute expression. Rather, it may discover a kind of qualified redemption through reaching back more consciously to the roots of modern humanity's 'civilisation', and (for all that it may have precipitated endless conflicts and catastrophes down the centuries) towards what is enduring, good, true and (to appropriate Ruskin from *Sesame and Lilies*, as quoted at the end of Elgar's *Gerontius*) 'worth our memory'. It was perhaps to work of this stamp that the pianist Hamish Milne referred when, writing of the composer Medtner, he suggested: *'It is surely time to abandon the argument whether his gaze was backward or forward and to accord him the more highly prized epithet - timeless'.* [lxxx]

Artistic thinking and expression of this order may be decried by some, as Medtner's has been, as an anachronistic retreat into some poetic Arcady; but Medtner's music has been demonstrated to represent a direct personal response to an unreliable, perilous and inimical world around him. At the same time, its virtues are sobriety, honesty of means and purpose, changeless consistency and a Platonic devotion to the spiritual consolations not only of finished art itself, but of the patient, quiet industry attending its intellectual pursuit. It would be hard to find a more fitting or reassuring metaphor in music for the human forbearance, simple piety and humble openness to truth which the modern world so sorely needs. If we apply Hofmannsthal's 'conservatism' to these attributes, we may readily see how the epithet fits in wider or more ambiguous terms than might have been anticipated: for such music is not merely

'conservative' in some reactionary sense of the word; instead, it is an expression through art of those virtues, values and redemptive currents of feeling and wisdom which must be held fast, at whatever cost, for the future survival, greater good and spiritual growth of mankind. As Moltmann has written,

He who loves wisdom, through the eros *for wisdom which has taken hold of him, himself becomes wise. Thus pure contemplation indirectly bestows participation in, and likeness to, what is contemplated. The steps by which it is imported can here only be the likenesses of God in nature, history and tradition, which indirectly reflect and reveal something of God himself –* e.g.*, his works in creation and history, in men and ideas which have been conformed to God. The principle of knowledge prevailing here is that of analogy….* [lxxxi]

In a typically combative article written for *The Times* in 1983, Bernard Levin denounced a very different composer, Anton Webern, comparing his music's progress through Europe with an influenza epidemic and claiming that such work arose as

a direct consequence of the sickness in the artist's soul, a sickness which denies the duty which he previously shouldered uncomplainingly from Giotto to Picasso, from Monteverdi to Britten, from Rabelais (or Homer if you like) to Thomas Mann, from Aeschylus to Chekhov.

Levin aphoristically contended that *'all life, and therefore all art, strives towards harmony'*, and concluded with a personal articulation of what he conceived to be

the artist's duty: to face the void without flinching, to declare that the world will yet be saved, and to weave their single strand of the great rope – made of form and meaning equally – that holds the universe together.

Earlier in the same piece, he had lamented that few contemporary artists could conceive beauty by refining an ugliness which first they must face fair and square, and that *'so much of modern art is a reflection of the fact that so many artists have ceased to be capable of that dual vision'*. Levin's view puzzlingly fails to take into account that experience filtered in so anodyne a fashion would deprive us of the chance to partake of its true nature and message ourselves; and that the passage of time may obscure what in late Beethoven might have communicated to its first audiences as a deliberately 'unrefined' ugliness within the terms of its present.

A few years later and in the same columns, offering an elegy for the plight of the Kurdish peoples in the Middle East, Levin wrote as follows:

Almost all of the time, almost all of us are impotent to change the course of history. But unless we practise an unwavering solipsism (it is possible), we are, for good or ill, members one of another. Why do we mourn beside the graves of our loved ones, though we know they cannot hear us? …Why did the Creator give us pain? Because all flesh is *as grass; and the only way to cheat death (unless you can write the Ninth Symphony) is to touch, metaphorically or literally, another hand, before passing on into the night*.

Levin fails to appreciate that at times the artist's purpose is precisely – and urgently – to render the duality of beauty and ugliness (in life, as in art) nakedly apparent to its recipient, leaving at least a part of the refining process to him, not to some prior act and process of creation. In ascribing a 'sickness' of some neurasthenic, expressionist kind to Webern the man, he fails also to consider that what he himself interpreted thus may have signified to Webern (and others) through the calibrations of some quite other emotional currency, just as the microtones of much Asiatic classical music may torment western ears but convey contemplative serenity and fulfilment to those culturally at one with them; not only this, but he also sidesteps the reported dictum of Shostakovich, quoted earlier, that the artist should be able to *'look truth right in the eyes'*, no matter in what form it gazes back at him.

There can be no 'right' answers to the question of how a composer's voice registers with different listeners: harshness is not the same as modernism, and may alienate even if the terms in which it is conveyed are in some respects already familiar and not intrinsically new. Robin [not Richard] Holloway has written of Shostakovich as *'battleship grey'* and *'set in Soviet cement'*, finding the grimly paraphrased human realities of his symphonic output *'all rhetoric and coercion'*. In an egregiously memorable damnation he likens comparison of Shostakovich's string quartets with Beethoven's to *'comparing a housing estate to the Acropolis'*. [lxxxii] Yet it appears unlikely that he would concur with Levin's notion of an artist whose task is to *'declare that the world will yet be saved'*. Instead, singling out Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony as an isolated success on its own grim terms, Holloway makes this exacting and profound observation concerning the moral duties of the composer as artistic mouthpiece for unpalatable truths:

A good performance 'in the flesh' [of the Fourteenth Symphony] *vindicates every jot of Shostakovich's habitual harshness, meanness, over-emphasis. The nakedness of its desolation, the ferocity of its anger, truly 'make the flesh creep'; they could not have been effected by any other means. Here, at least, is necessity and a Shostakovich-shaped niche. Once only: a triumph of purposeful exiguity; but to do it again and again, as in the subsequent late works, exploits the audience's willingness to endure a hairshirt for the good of the soul, just as much as it demonstrates the artist's compulsion to repeat himself with an ever-decreasing formal and expressive range.*

The terrible nature of Shostakovich's circumstances mustn't prevent a balanced response to his actual notes. If it does, emotional blackmail is committed, which for all its rewards involves illusion and delusion – a flattering identification with suffering heroism, a holier-than-thou priggishness in the rush to empathise with oppression. To deplore this is to risk appearing stony-hearted. But what else is there to go on, in works of art, but their artistic workmanship – in music, the actual notes? All human experience can be encompassed and expressed in music's actual notes, when they show themselves to be capable of containing what's entrusted to them. Chez *Shostakovich …the intrinsic quality of most of the* oeuvre *is not strong enough to carry the weight currently put on it –which suggests in turn that what is required of it is lightweight too, underneath the heavy appearance to the contrary.* [lxxxiii]

Levin writes hyperbolically and somewhat absurdly about what supposedly *'holds the universe together'*. However, in his later piece he touches movingly upon the same human concerns as Arnold and, in doing so, articulates at least some of the perennial

purposes in all serious artistic endeavour which arise both from Hofmannsthal's contention that the true imagination must always remain 'conservative', and from Muir's exploration of that remark. If one were to adapt Levin to the extent that the artist *may* be concerned with declaring that 'the world *may yet* be saved *if…*', then this would go to the heart of my own preoccupations within my choral music, at least at the point to which these have now led me. Here, one returns to the notion of Wilfred Owen that the poet's task is to *warn*. In an age which has brought terrorism onto western streets and fear of the unknown or unseen into the midst of urban, civilian populations, legitimacy is conferred upon honest attempts at humanitarian expression by the artist who has never had to endure personal experience of the battlefield. He cannot be said to 'talk down' to an audience now confronting its own chilling familiarity with present danger, and perhaps discovering a resurgent need to embrace artistic statements as but one means of transcending atrocity and human confusion through hard-won dignity and restraint. Perhaps that condition would have been recognised by T.S.Eliot when he invoked

A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything),

and again, actually a moment earlier, in the potent mystery of the lines

We die with the dying:
See, they depart, and we go with them.
We are born with the dead:
See, they return, and bring us with them. [lxxxiv]

In Richard [not Robin] Holloway's words (borrowing from Kierkegaard), *'the trouble with life is that we understand it backwards, but have to live it forwards'.* [lxxxv] The logical conclusion of such a notion must be that a kind of incidental equation occurs wherein birth and death acquire something of the *same* experiential significance or epiphany, while past and future are *both* a kind of terminus. Here it becomes easy to understand why memory and intimations of an uncertain future are so inextricably linked in the sensibilities of artists, why the present can be transfigured as a kind of anticipated retrospection, and why, in seeking to articulate in these pages the place, purpose and future path of my efforts as a composer, I have found myself compelled to reach historically as well as autobiographically back. In his poem *Merlin*, again concerned with 'un-becoming', Muir envisages a future seemingly rescued and redeemed only by retrieving and healing a fractured past, calling to mind again the quantum-inspired conundrum of hypothetically visiting history and materially affecting its course in such a way as to eliminate the possibility of our own present existence. The poet asks, will there ever be

… a runner who'll outrun
Man's long shadow driving on,
Break through the gate of memory
And hang the apple on the tree?. [lxxxvi]

While close to Eliot's final discovery in the *Four Quartets* that

...the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning,

Muir's vision embraces redemption with a hunger readily apprehended by any reader, *'of all faiths and none'*, as the quoted critic of the *Sunday Times* had it. The voice of this poignant -but also implacably urgent -inner prompting towards a redemptive repossession of the 'what might have been' in human experience surely has everything to do also with the state of the modern world and the darkest recesses of the twentieth century; in particular with the Holocaust, which led to the harrowing words of Jerzy Fikowski, quoted already in concluding comments on *The Cloud of Unknowing*:

I run

To help where no one called
To rescue after the event

I want to be on time
Even if I am too late...[lxxxvii].

In this respect Muir's voice is not only a devout (if pained) one, but a committedly political and humanitarian one also, honed by the privations of a harsh childhood and of formative years uprooted from his Orcadian beginnings and plunged into the brutal realities of industrial Glasgow. It is intriguing that Muir later wrote (of industrialism) that

...a historical process incarnated in the flesh and blood of whole peoples cannot stop until it has worked itself out. ...It is our chief earnest of the future, and the whole problem of the future centres in it. ...The main battle of the present is being fought out in it [*i.e.*, in the future]. [lxxxviii]

There is no sense here of a poet so wedded to an abstract notion of contemplative past and future as to lose his grasp on the immediacy or practical realities of his own time. A voice so firmly rooted in mundane realities carries a salutary message, especially in an age when, to return to my first comments, 'churchgoing' seems more and more to become Larkin's wry 'church going'. The established Church of England, among others, has been slow, timorous or both about expressing itself and its convictions in political terms, and has probably thereby invited the slapping-down which its occasional forays generally receive from actual politicians, most of them steeped in the contemporary notion that Whitehall administrators *de facto* know and understand more than experts trained in particular fields.

In a critical deconstruction of the German thinker Oswald Spengler (by then already damaged by reception of one of his last books, which appeared – in a poor translation – to prophesy two centuries of world wars), Edwin Muir made one observation which serves helpfully to draw the strands of this dissertation together in a final statement of personal stance and intent:

Now it seems to me that we are seeing today a fight between …two views of life: the religious view, which is also that of the artist, and the historical view. The virtue of the first – not its supreme virtue, which is its truth, but its relative pragmatic virtue – is that it gives meaning to the actual life we live, and accounts to us for ourselves.[lxxxix]

These words were written in 1949, when the great shadow of a particular world war still lay heavily over very recent memory and its aftermath of upheaval and change had barely begun. In the event, Spengler may not have been so far wrong: taking stock of the number of conflicts enacting themselves today in both largely-forgotten and highly visible corners of the earth, it is not hard to imagine them working much like growing conurbations, which spawn suburbs until these overlap one another and another metropolis comes into being. Sooner or later, a new order of contagion or pandemic of conflict seems almost certain to occur, drawing all wars into one. Nuclear proliferation, global warming and demographic displacement, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the ineluctable human undercurrent of material, environmental and economic injustice and envy conspire to make this appear all too likely. A church which puts its head in the sand and fails to address the needs and questions of its anxious people serves little purpose. The need to carve out one's own salvation has seldom appeared more pointed, nor that expression more apt.

Moltmann's words on contemplative wisdom and on the nature of goodness posit God as their source. His contention is comforting even if one chooses to abjure the name of God, feeling compelled by doubt to embrace instead a belief and trust in the redemptive force of something in humanity, or providence, or both, that remains innately noble, affirming and positive in the face of all the world's tribulations and atrocities.

Hofmannsthal's or, more particularly, Muir's 'conservatism' is consonant on many levels with my own experience and development, and susceptible of a variety of interpretations. The nature of my earliest musical education predisposed me to a certain type of musical conservatism. The established Church today perpetuates a conservatism of its own in which music such as mine may well find a sympathetic audience, though accelerating erosion of the collegiate and cathedral choral foundation increasingly renders liturgical or devotional use of such work unfeasible and militates in favour of public performance by the ablest professional or amateur concert choirs.

Muir's Christian realism offers a potent and durable stimulus to creativity, and a focus upon positive speech and action for all concerned about the future direction of a troubled world. His redemptive 'unmaking' of the past informs the potential future of good embodied centuries earlier by the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*:

For if it begin here, it shall last without end.

In addition, Muir's comment on the difference between skill and craft offers a salutary image for any artist concerned to sublimate technique in the interests of fashioning something honest, true and strong:

[Technique] *...always gives me a slightly bewildered feeling; if I can translate it as skill I am more at home with it, for skill is always a quality of the thing that is being said or done, not a general thing at all.* [xc]

This accords with Moltmann, in that if what is being said is in essence and in intent an aspect of a supposed divine being, then the skill involved comes of and from that being, engendering a form of 'theology' in the rendering back of that which it has been given to one to feel and articulate.

Above all, my attempts to 'compose myself in the 21st-century Anglican Church' are expressions of a depth of doubt which both interrogates and validates all efforts to feel my uncertain way forward into anything resembling fresh beginnings of faith. At the same time, they are no longer *in* the Anglican Church at all, but have progressively transferred themselves from Larkin's *'accoutred frowsty barn'* to places where prayer may still (*pace* Eliot) 'be valid', and where also the surprise of the unlooked-for may ambush doubt with a sudden sense of the *'uncontrollable mystery'* of things. I readily confess that my doubts have their own ambiguity: as in Levin's image, I utter words at the grave of my parents though they are not there, and I find myself minding when my twelve-year-old son (despite a keen interest in comparative religion and ethics as purveyed at school) professes disengagement from Christianity. In these the 'want-to-want-to-want-to-believe' proposition advanced by Archbishop Ramsey stands vindicated.

My musical journey in the works submitted here is punctuated by expedient responses to commissions and external briefs, but represents a broadly consistent passage of discovery away from the established Church and towards a position from which to look back at the forms of worship and of religion, like Richard Holloway has done, *'as an art form that carries enduring meaning, not as a quasi-science that explains factual truth'*. Despite this, and even were I to transfer my entire field of enterprise into the concert hall through ostensibly secular works for chamber and orchestral forces (as I now intend to do), it would be impossible to elude the central question which impels me to write anything at all: is there a presence beyond? If so, is Moltmann correct, does the presence stare back at me in the performative recreation of my finished work, and am I thereby shaped a fraction more closely than before in a divine image? Merleau-Ponty refers to the moments of existence as one's *'total being'*

...the significance of which I am entitled to make explicit in various ways, without its ever being possible to say whether I confer their meaning upon them or receive it from them. I am a psychological and historical structure, and have received, with existence, a manner of existing, - a style. All my actions and thoughts stand in a relationship to this structure, and even a philosopher's thought is merely a way of making explicit his hold on the world, and what he is. ...This significant life, this certain significance of nature and history which I am, does not limit my access to the world, but on the contrary is my means of entering into communication with it. [xci]

Earlier in the same work, he observes that

The thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually 'in itself' because its articulations are those of our very existence, and because it stands

at the other end of our gaze or at the terminus of a sensory exploration which invests it with humanity. To this extent, every perception is a communication or a communion, a taking up by us of some extraneous intention…. [xcii]

Do we indeed confer or receive meaning – or both? Is it then in some such sense that the end of composition may become a form of prayer in itself and despite itself, even if it is a prayer - like all prayers - terminating perpetually in an infinite question mark? As a fellow composer, and trained theologian, Peter Bannister, put it very recently in a public lecture,

'…music is irreducible to a different conceptual meaning. Because of its lack of 'truth', our inability to say what's going on in music mirrors our inability to say what's going on with God'. [xciii]

Amid my own doubts I remain convinced that doubt itself is a creative state of being and a necessary path. In the words of Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks,

If we were able to see how evil today leads to good tomorrow …we would understand justice but at the cost of ceasing to be human*. We would accept all, vindicate all, and become deaf to the cries of those in pain. God does not want us to cease to be human, for if he did, he would not have created us.* [xciv]

One's 'cloud of unknowing' is a necessary condition. It is no accident that text from this tract eventually became a central aspect of my most recent work. In that context, and *à-propos* the state of a struggling world, a sentence written in notes for the work's recording is worth quoting again:

While a compositional response can fairly be derided as futile, sometimes those of a creative bent may feel the need to bail out the sinking ship of common humanity with whatever tiny, unavailing bucket they have been given, if only because not to do so seems rather worse.

'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made' said Immanuel Kant. [xcv] For the composer, yesterday, today or tomorrow, the only course possible is to work in the knowledge that his imperfect art is the perfect reflection of Kant's imperfect humanity, and to clasp other hands in the darkness. In concluding his monumental *Phénomènologie de la Perception* as the Second World War ended, Merleau-Ponty cited the words of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry:

Man is but a network of relationships, and these alone matter to him. [xcvi]

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Notes:

[i] Philip Larkin: *Church Going,* stanzas 1 & 7, from the collection *The Less Deceived* : Marvell Press, 1977 (pp. 28-29); first impression: Marvell Press, October 1955.

[ii] Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: *The Phenomenon of Man* : English translation: William Collins, Sons & Company, Ltd, London, and Harper & Brothers, new York; both 1959. 11th impression in Fount Paperbacks, March 1986 (pp. 36-38).

[iii] John Polkinghorne: *Belief in God in an Age of Science* : Yale University Press, 1998; Yale *Nota Bene* Books, 2003 (p.80).

[iv] *Ibidem* (pp. 80-83).

[v] Richard Holloway: *Doubts and Loves: What is left of Christianity* : Canongate Books, Ltd, Edinburgh; new impression: Canongate, 2005 (pp. 111-112).

[vi] *Ibidem* (pp. 5-6).

[vii] Cited as the composer's favourite piece of advice in Imogen Holst: *The Music of Gustav Holst* : London, Oxford University Press, 1951 (p.73); also letter from Holst to W.G.Whittaker, 1921, and elsewhere.

[viii] *Testimony: the Memoirs of Shostakovich* , related to and edited by Solomon Volkov : paperback edition: Faber & Faber, Ltd, London, 1981 & 1987 (p. 139).

[ix] Michael Ramsey: *The Christian Priest Today* : new edition : SPCK, 1972; revised edition: 1985 (p.14).

[x] Holloway: *ibidem* (p.7).

[xi] s.l. Quoted by Robert Simpson in a lecture on Carl Nielsen, BBC Radio Three, 1987. A similar statement, *'Music is life and, like life, unquenchable'*, occurs as a superscription to Carl Nielsen: *Levende Musik* : translated from the Danish by Reginald Spink: Wilhelm Hansen, København [Copenhagen], 1968.

[xii] Robert Browning: *Porphyria's Lover* : London, 1868. Edition of 1898: Smith, Elder & Co., London (two volumes: vol. I, p.434).

[xiii] François Marie Arouet [Voltaire]: *Epîtres*, xcvi [1768]: *A l'Auteur du Livre des Trois Imposteurs. Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire,* ed. Louis Moland. Garnier, Paris, 1877-1885, tome 10 (pp. 402-405).

[xiv] Wilfred Owen: quoted in C.Day Lewis [ed.]: Introduction to *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen* : Chatto & Windus, London, first edition 1963; 1974 edition (p. 23).

[xv] Jürgen Moltmann: *Der gekreuzigte Gott*: transl. R.A.Wilson & J.Bowden as *The Crucified God* : SCM Press, London, first British edition 1974. SCM edition of 2001 (p.287).

[xvi] Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians: II, xii: 9,10.

[xvii] *The Cloud of Unknowing* : these extracts collated from chapters 3, 4, 9, 12, 21, 38, 42 and 75. This version: Evelyn Underhill, working from British Museum Ms. Harl. 674; published John M. Watkins, London, 1922.

[xviii] Isaiah Berlin: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* : first UK edition John Murray, Ltd, London, 1990. Fontana Edition (ed. Henry Hardy): London, 1991 (pp.26-27). Immanuel Kant: *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbűrglicher Absicht* (1784).

[xix] Holloway: *ibidem* (pp. 54-55).

[xx] Francis Pott: *Meditations & Remembrances* : sacred choral works sung by the Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin, conducted by Judy Martin. Signum Records, SIGCD 080, recorded October 2005; released June 2006.

[xxi] Quoted by Edwin Muir in *Edwin Muir: Selected Prose*, edited with a memoir by George Mackay Brown: John Murray, Ltd, London, 1987 (p. 69). Source of original: Hugo von Hofmannsthal: *Das Buch der Freunde* (1922); *op. posth.* Published by Insel-Verlag edition of 1949 (*inter alia*), Wiesbaden/Heppenheim (p.46).

[xxii] *Ibidem* (pp.70 & 73).

[xxiii] David H. Miles: review of Hermann Rudolph: *Kulturkritik und konservative Revolution: Zum kulturell-politischen Denken Hofmannsthals und seinem problemgeschichtlichen Kontext* . Review published in *The German Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 2 , March 1974 (pp. 280-283).

[xxiv] Willa Muir: *Belonging: a Memoir* : Hogarth Press, Ltd, London, 1968 (p.98).

[xxv] *Ibidem* (p.219).

[xxvi] Edwin Muir: *Collected Poems 1921-1958*: Faber & Faber, Ltd, London, 1960 edition (pp. 187-188).

[xxvii] Cited in Freda Constable: *The England of Eric Ravilious* : Scolar Press, 1982 (pp. 37-38).

[xxviii] Edwin Muir: *ibidem* (p.73).

[xxix] Stephen Spender: essay, *Inside the Cage*, from the critical volume *The Making of a Poem*. Quoted in Muir: *ibidem* (pp.71-72).

[xxx] Letter from E.J. ['Jack'] Moeran to Harriet Cohen, quoted (without date) in *A Bundle of Time: the Memoirs of Harriet Cohen* : Faber & Faber, Ltd, London, 1969 (p.261): *'…most of my own piano music is complete tripe and I wish it were not published. One of the exceptions is* The Lake Island*, for which I still have a great affection'.*

[xxxi] Recorded discussion between Vernon Handley and Andrew McGregor: *Arnold Bax: Complete Symphonies*: Chandos Records, Chandos 10122 (issued 2003).

[xxxii] *"Mais est-ce qu'il ne vient jamais à l'idée de ces gens-là que je peux être 'artificiel' par nature?"* Oral reply to Calvocoressi's suggestion that some thought Ravel's music artificial; quoted in M.D. Calvocoressi: *Musicians' Gallery* : Faber & Faber, Ltd, London, 1933.

[xxxiii] Robin Holloway: *Haydn: the Musician's Musician*, from *On Music: Essays and Diversions* : Claridge Press, Brinkworth, Wiltshire, 2003 (pp.10-13).

[xxxiv] Carl Nielsen: *Symphony no.4: Det Uudslukkelige* [The Inextinguishable]*, opus 29* : copyright 1916 / 1944: Wilhelm Hansen Edition, no. 1843 [Leipzig].

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[xxxviii] *Ibidem* (p.44).

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[lxxviii] Isaiah, 35, vv. 3-4.

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