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The Early Choral Works of Edward Elgar (1857–1934) in the Context of Late-Victorian British Idealism

Róisín Blunnie BA MA

Thesis presented to the University of Dublin, Trinity College, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2013

Supervisor: Dr Martin Adams

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Summary

This thesis seeks to place the substantial early choral works of Edward Elgar in the contexts of the composer's professional development, his rising reputation, and British cultural identity. This contextualisation is achieved partly by exploring why Elgar chose certain topics for musical setting at this crucial stage of his career, and how he tailored those topics specifically for the choral festival audiences of late-Victorian Britain. Looking briefly at the editorial and compositional methods used in the short oratorio *The Light of Life* (1896), the thesis then focuses on *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* (1896) and *Caractacus* (1898) as manifestations of British idealism and Christian identity at the height of the British Empire.

King Olaf and *Caractacus* promote a muscular Christian ideology capable of providing comfort amid evolving imperial anxiety and religious uncertainty at the *fin de siècle*. The role of the librettist, H. A. Acworth, in the formulation of these ideas is central to the works' didacticism, and his texts are examined as portals to Elgar's musical decisions and to the broader cultural context.

Chapter 1 explores the imperial character of British society in the late-nineteenth century, showing how the ideology and the pervasive public self-image as a superior race, whose duty it was to facilitate the moral improvement of the less fortunate, was reflected in and encouraged by the inclusive muscular Christian discourse of popular literature.

Chapter 2 outlines how Elgar's unconventional musical apprenticeship influenced his development as a composer in the world of the provincial amateur choral tradition, and demonstrates the manner in which he skilfully and pragmatically negotiated a path through the common ground of the dominant religions in his working environment. A brief exploration of the short oratorio *The Light of Life* provides an insight into Elgar's editorial and compositional methods in this distinctive cultural context.

The focus of Chapter 3 is the cantata *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf.* This section explores the highly significant influence of H. A. Acworth on this emphatic musical statement of Christian-imperial ideology. The didactic consequences of substantial alterations made to Longfellow's source text are examined as indicators of cultural priorities on the part of the librettist, the composer, and British society more broadly. A revealing statement of imperial philosophy, written by Acworth and as yet unexplored in the context of Elgar scholarship, is brought to bear on an interpretation of the Elgar–Acworth cantatas for the first time.

Chapter 4 concentrates on the second artistic collaboration of Acworth and Elgar: the cantata *Caractacus*. Like *King Olaf*, the work emphasises a Victorian, Christian heroic ideal, this time in an overtly British imperial context. The chapter examines and contextualises the manner in which the composer and librettist carefully handle problematic aspects of the narrative by identifying with selected characteristics of the ancient Roman Empire and concluding ultimately that the late-nineteenth-century British Empire is morally superior.

Through an analysis of the textual and musical content of these culturally significant cantatas, this thesis argues that Edward Elgar, a pragmatic and self-aware composer, and Harry Acworth, an imperially experienced and highly educated librettist, sought to tap into the cultural pulse of late-Victorian Britain by moulding an ideal view of British imperial purpose and thereby giving the British public the image of empire that they wished to see.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Martin Adams, for his advice, encouragement, understanding and flexibility throughout the course of my studies. His frankly astonishing knowledge of and enthusiasm for a broad range of topics including History, Literature, and Scripture as well as Music provided guidance and reassurance, and never ceased to amaze me. I wish to thank him, too, for his constant support in many areas of my professional journey in recent years, whether connected to or coincident with this project.

My thanks to all the staff of TCD Library (especially Roy Stanley) and the British Library for their unfailing help; to Sue Furlong at the Elgar Birthplace Museum and Archive for her assistance; and to Jonathan Nash of Music Sales for facilitating copyright permission.

My doctoral studies were generously supported by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) and by Trinity College Dublin's Non-Foundation Scholarship and I acknowledge these contributions with gratitude.

I am indebted to Dr. Fionnuala Dillane for her invaluable suggestions and comments, her generosity and encouragement, and her incisive, inspiring scholarship.

Thanks to my former lecturers and colleagues in the TCD Music Department for their support: Simon Trezise, Michael Taylor, Andrew Johnstone, Richard Duckworth, Abigail Chantler, Jacqueline Weber, Evangelia Rigaki, Bernie Sherlock, Kevin Barry, Alon Schab, Dan Shanahan, Seán Doherty. Special thanks to Gráinne Redican for all her help.

I am grateful to Dr. Robert Armstrong of the TCD School of History for his advice and encouragement, and to lecturers of Literary Theory and Victorian Literature in the TCD School of English, whose lectures contributed greatly to this project.

Thanks to all who provided useful feedback and validation at conferences of the SMI and the RMA, and at the Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain Conference. I am particularly grateful to Prof. Julian Rushton for his advice and kind words, for giving me my first publishing opportunities, and for his generosity in sharing unpublished material.

Thanks to all my Hungarian music teachers, at the Kodály Institute and elsewhere, for their invaluable influence on my musical education: Péter Erdei, Zsuzsa Kontra, Katalin Kiss, Roland Hajdú, János Klézlí, Klára Nemes, Zoltán Pad, Sarolta Platthy, Ildikó Herboly Kocsár, Kata Körtvési, László Nemes, Ági Sztana; and to the International Kodály Society and the Arts Council for supporting my studies in Hungary. Thanks also to Marita Kerin and Lorraine O'Connell for their friendship and professional support.

I am grateful to my colleagues and students at Mater Dei Institute for their support and kindness. Thanks especially to the Director, Andrew McGrady, and to Fáinche Ryan, Ethna Regan, PJ Sexton, Sabrina Fitzsimons, Enda Donlon, Elaine McDonald, Sandra Cullen, Mary Coffey, Eoin Tierney, Stephen Stewart, Brendan McDonnell, Will Murphy, Gabriel Flynn, Semra Abdulahovic, Mary Jones, Leeann Lane, Michael Hinds, Muriel

Weelkes, Ciara Kennedy, Deirdre Daly, Paul Hegarty, Paula Kiernan and all the staff for creating the wonderful atmosphere in which I am privileged to work. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the kindness of Donal Hurley, an inspiration and a true gentleman. I'm grateful also to Mr. Brennan of Cradle Cottage, Co. Kilkenny, who by a great stroke of luck donated a store of Elgar books to the MDI Music Department some time before my arrival.

Huge thanks to all the choirs with whom I have been privileged to work in recent times, especially to Trinity Singers for three wonderful years of musical excitement, to Cór Duibhlinne for their kindness, and to the Mornington Singers for their incredible friendship.

Thanks to Eoin Coughlan and Elaine Cormican, and Máire and Michael Coughlan for their great support and incomparable hospitality.

I am hugely grateful to all the friends who helped and encouraged me in the last few months and years, and who took such an interest in the adventures of Edward Elgar. Thanks especially to Amy Prendergast, Alan Smyth, Áine Larkin, Pamela Bourke, Gráinne, Eoin and Rosaleen McNamara, Caroline Fahey, and the O'Donnells; to Aideen Rickard and Brían Merriman, Arthur Parkinson, Elaine Whitehouse, Sinéad Fay, Kerri O'Connell, Anna O'Herlihy, Philip Shields, Lynsey Callaghan, Katie Maher, and Amy Ryan for all their many kindnesses and general choral hilarity; similarly to Fáinche Ní Fhátharta for her genuine excitement when Elgar was mentioned in Coronation Street. Sincere thanks to Eabhnat Ní Fhloinn for twilit Northside pep talks and great advice; and to Áine Jackson for wise words at crucial junctures and top-class Bible Consultancy Services (and to her co-pilot Gerry). Thanks to Rob for tea and *Sacred*, and to the wonderful Muireann Laird; thanks to Anne Maxwell for her constant friendship, support and advice; agus buíochas ollmhór le Clíodhna Ní Fhátharta for immeasurable kindness, generosity and wisdom.

Particular thanks to Dr. Orla Flanagan: colleague, mentor, fellow choral anorak and dear friend, who has been a constant source of support, wisdom, and extremely good ideas, and instrumental in many aspects of my musical and professional development throughout the course of this project.

Finally, thanks to Mam, John, Colm and Ailie for their extraordinary support and kindness.

R. B.
October 2012

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Abbreviations

APG	Association for the Propagation of the Faith
CCCS	Colonial and Continental Church Society
C.I.E.	Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire
CMS	Church Missionary Society
DNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*
ECE	Elgar Complete Edition
edn	edition
G.C.I.E.	Knight Grand Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire
K.C.B.	Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath
LMS	London Missionary Society
repr.	reprint
Rev	Reverend
rev.	revised by
RTS	Religious Tract Society
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
SSPCK	Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge
trans.	translated by
WFCS	Worcester Festival Choral Society
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society

Introduction

> *There is a destiny now possible to us—the highest ever set before a nation to be accepted or refused. We are still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood. We are not yet dissolute in temper, but still have the firmness to govern, and the grace to obey. We have been taught a religion of pure mercy, which we must either now betray, or learn to defend by fulfilling. And we are rich in an inheritance of honour, bequeathed to us through a thousand years of noble history, which it should be our daily thirst to increase with splendid avarice, so that Englishmen, if it be a sin to covet honour, should be the most offending souls alive. Within the last few years we have had the laws of natural science opened to us with a rapidity which has been blinding by its brightness; and means of transit and communication given to us, which have made but one kingdom of the habitable globe.*[1]

Edward Elgar's large choral works of the 1890s are significant historical documents, both in the immediate context of the composer's professional development and rising reputation, and in the broader context of late-Victorian British culture. The present study views these works not merely as precursors to Elgar's later compositional expression,[2] but as substantial, culturally revealing artworks in their own right. Looking briefly at the editorial and compositional methods used in the short oratorio *The Light of Life* (1896), the thesis then focuses on *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* (1896) and *Caractacus* (1898), thus highlighting the creative collaboration of Elgar with his ideologically significant Worcestershire neighbour and librettist, Harry Arbuthnot Acworth (1849–1933), in these two imperial cantatas. The purpose of this study is not to sit in judgement on the ideals and actions of earlier times, but to show how the composer and librettist endeavoured to mould their works for specific performance contexts at this decisive stage of Elgar's career. Bringing together Elgar's unique musical apprenticeship in the world of the provincial amateur choral festival, the complex religious identity of his surroundings, and the wider context of British imperial culture, this study examines Elgar's reasons for

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[1] John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art: Delivered before the University of Oxford in Hilary Term, 1870* (New York: John Wiley, 1870), 28–29.

[2] A view epitomised, for example, by Ian Parrott's observation in relation to *King Olaf* that 'much of the writing generally is prophetic of the greater Elgar to come'. See Parrott, *Elgar*, The Master Musicians series (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1971), 34.

choosing certain topics for musical setting, and how these topics were carefully tailored to conform to a British view of itself as a divinely endorsed, Christian imperial power.

Elgar was a prolific letter-writer, and according to Moore, about 10,000 letters to or from the composer survive.[3] Notwithstanding their quantity, the letters do not by any means facilitate a clear understanding of Elgar's beliefs and attitudes. His attitude to imperialism, in particular, is difficult to ascertain from extant documentary evidence. For the purposes of this study, the question of Elgar's own stance is inconsequential. The pertinent issue is the extent to which he sought to accommodate the prevailing imperial mindset of British society. Similarly, the nature of his personal religious feeling is tangential. In this respect the issue of importance is the manner in which Elgar, as a Catholic, negotiated a compositional career in the highly complex religious culture of late-Victorian Britain by seeking to create works that were acceptable and attractive to a largely Anglican choral festival audience.

This thesis argues that *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* promote a muscular Christian ideology designed to provide comfort amid evolving imperial anxiety and religious uncertainty in Britain at the *fin de siècle*, and that the influence of the librettist in the formulation of the works' moral didacticism is of key importance. As such, Acworth's texts are central to an ideological understanding of the cantatas, and are viewed here as portals to the musical settings and to wider cultural currents. Prefixing an extensive discussion of the cantatas' text and music, and their combined ideological purpose and moral thrust, a document written by Acworth as an introduction to his first publication of Indian poetry (prior to his better-known *Ballads of the Marathas* (1894)) serves as a revealing statement of the librettist's imperial philosophy. The importance of this highly

[3] Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), xv.

significant document for an understanding of the 1890s choral works is explored here for the first time.

The British cultural identity and lofty imperial purpose espoused in *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* is also given expression through the influential genre of adventure literature, where a belief in British racial superiority, and binary oppositions of good and evil, fortunate and unfortunate, superior and inferior are prevalent, fuelled by, and fuelling, contemporary imperial ideology. This thesis argues that, in a manner similar to that used in adventure literature, Elgar and Acworth emphasise not only the muscular Christian character of empire, but particularly the cross-denominational nature of that character, thus conforming to the dominant imperial self-view and simultaneously reaching out to as broad an audience as possible.

Differences between *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* reflect the rapidly evolving imperial discourse of the *fin de siècle*. In both works, heroes are carefully moulded to provide reassurance about imperial motivations, and muscular Christian duty is emphasised: in *King Olaf* by augmenting the source text; and in *Caractacus* by inserting a Christian theme where none existed. This thesis will argue, however, that the later cantata presented a much greater narrative challenge, particularly for Acworth, as anxieties concerning imperial superiority and security intensified in society and impinged on the British self-image as a morally admirable, benevolent facilitator of global improvement. In seeking to understand the controversial ending of *Caractacus*, this study places the cantata in the context of depictions of this and other apparently incongruous celebrations-in-defeat in a variety of art forms. In particular, a revealing parallel is drawn between Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus* and precursors in Victorian melodrama, and in poetry, where William Stewart Ross's 'Caractacus the Briton', previously unexplored in Elgar scholarship, offers a significant comparison.

Literature Review

In his 2007 article 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute: Themes and Variations', Julian Rushton provides a helpful and enlightening summary of trends and issues in Elgar scholarship throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Guided initially by Rushton's article, this section will note briefly the principal contributions to Elgar scholarship of the early to mid-twentieth century, before moving to the crowded and highly diverse field of more modern literature on the composer and his world. Rushton draws attention to a major—and enduring—undercurrent of Elgar studies: since the earliest writings on this complex personality, a tendency to champion the cause of the composer has played a significant role in defining the tone of biographical works:

> Elgar's earliest biographers were properly constrained by the tact appropriate for a living subject, or his remaining contemporaries. Biographies written in his first years of fame possess less scholarly than documentary interest, and were designed partly as propaganda for the cause of (in Richard Strauss's words of 1902), 'the first English progressivist'.[4]

While notable changes in style and structure are evident in the numerous twentieth-century monographs devoted to Elgar, a recurrent theme is a desire to find the 'real' Elgar, an attempt to ascertain and understand the feelings, struggles, opinions and attitudes of this elusive persona. As Rushton points out, 'Elgar's eminence was sufficient for the first substantial literary and scholarly biography to appear in his lifetime, in two volumes, by Basil Maine'.[5] Maine's study emphasises the composer as an autodidact, stating that in his youth and early career, 'Edward Elgar's best teacher was Edward Elgar'.[6] Thus, Maine, writing shortly before the composer's death and following a pattern

[4] Julian Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute: Themes and Variations', in *Elgar: An Anniversary Portrait*, introduced by Nicholas Kenyon (London: Continuum, 2007), 36–47 (36).
[5] *Ibid.*, 36.
[6] Basil Maine, *Elgar: His Life and Works*, 3rd edn (Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1973; orig. publ. 1933), 9.

established by his earliest biographer, R. J. Buckley,[7] presents unquestioningly aspects of the self-image that Elgar promoted in press interviews throughout his life.

Following the publication of Maine's study, Elgar scholarship, like Elgar's reputation and music, experienced a period of decline until the mid-1950s, and Rushton outlines the role of Diana McVeagh and Percy Young in re-energising the field, noting the structure of their respective publications:

> The major contribution to his subsequent revival was through performance, but musical criticism and biography played their part. Particular credit must go to the first modern biographical and (still more importantly) musical studies, by Diana McVeagh and Percy M. Young, both published in 1955, and each consisting of a relatively concise biography followed by studies of the works, organized by genre.[8]

Even in these early biographies, different perceptions of Elgar come forth that suggest that his public image was to some extent crafted. Rushton states with regard to Young's publication:

> While thoroughly researched, it has little in the way of interpretation. Perhaps it was too soon, with too many of the composer's acquaintances still living, for the author to get behind the public persona.[9]

Rushton asserts that McVeagh's publication holds greater significance in the context of Elgar scholarship as a whole, due to its stronger musical focus:

> McVeagh's book is weighted more heavily [than Young's] towards the music, and for that reason may be considered one of the main foundation-stones of modern Elgar studies.[10]

In appraising McVeagh's contribution, Rushton again alludes to one of the major issues with Elgar biographies throughout the century:

---

[7] R.obert J. Buckley, *Elgar* (London and New York: John Lane, 1905).
[8] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 37. See Diana M. McVeagh, *Edward Elgar: His Life and Music* (London: Dent, 1955); and Percy M. Young, *Elgar, O. M.: A Study of a Musician* (London: Collins, 1955).
[9] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 37. Young also edited *Letters to Nimrod from Edward Elgar,* published with insightful commentary in 1965. This remained a key documentary source until later, more detailed editions appeared in the 1980s. Percy M. Young (ed.), *Letters to Nimrod from Edward Elgar: 1897–1908* (London: Dobson, 1965).
[10] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 37.

> McVeagh is no hagiographer; she is not afraid to discriminate between what she perceives as strong and weak.[11]

The same objectivity was not as evident in substantial publications in the decades that followed.

Major Elgar biographies by Michael Kennedy (1968) and Jerrold Northrop Moore (1984) are different from each other in many respects, but have in common a love and admiration for their subject, and a similar belief that childhood and landscape constitute two of the principal influences on Elgar and his music. In the preface to the third edition of his *Portrait of Elgar*, Kennedy acknowledges his own shading of and fondness for the topic, as he explains his title and his approach thus:

> I chose the title *Portrait of Elgar* to emphasize that this is not an official biography nor [*sic*] an analytical study of the music. It is my attempt to paint, in words, his portrait. A portrait should be a recognizable likeness of the sitter, as I hope this is, and it also reflects the painter's own view of and approach to the subject. So although I hope this book is factually as accurate as I can make it and is therefore a true likeness in that respect, it still is the portrait I want to draw of the composer whose music has occupied a paramount place in my life.[12]

Kennedy highlights repeatedly the influence of childhood environment and of landscape both on Elgar personally and on his music, stating for example that:

> He was particularly responsive, as was to be shown in his music, to topography, to landscape, and to the countryside in all its moods; and as he had a remarkable memory, these early impressions made an indelible mark on his personality.[13]

Kennedy is confident, too, that the roots of Elgar's apparent fascination with nobility may be found in his early life:

> Edward showed an early brilliance as a pianist, especially in the art of improvisation, and William Elgar liked to show off his son's talent to his clients, taking the boy with him to the gentry's houses and encouraging him to display his prowess on the newly-tuned instrument. It seems to be

---

[11] *Ibid.*, 37.
[12] Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 9–10.
[13] *Ibid.*, 19.

> incontrovertible that Elgar's yearning to be 'a gentleman' derived from these expeditions with his father.[14]

It is clear from Kennedy's writing not only that he admires his subject greatly, but that he is willing to accept unchallenged the self-image put forward by Elgar of himself as a young man:

> Yet the boy's looks defied his physical prowess, for he would ride the Malvern Hills bareback, saving himself from death on one occasion when his horse bolted.[15]

Similarly, Kennedy seems to relay without question the composer's own version of his struggles in the 1890s:

> The years 1889 to 1899 are the most important in Elgar's life. In this decade he went from obscurity to fame, by way of cruel discouragement.[16]

As Rushton states, Kennedy's book lacks 'the kind of analysis that can only be supported by extensive music examples', and 'is analytical mainly in human terms'.[17] Throughout *Portrait of Elgar*, the author tries to see things from Elgar's perspective, to understand his mind and his personal feelings. Here, for example, he comments with apparent certainty on Elgar's mindset during the 1890s:

> His only ambition was to write great music, but he knew that teaching and playing would never provide him with the money and leisure he needed to be able to compose. He had further complicated this psychological turmoil by marrying a woman who belonged to the social class which was divided from the tradesman's class by a gulf unimaginable today.[18]

In a similar manner, when discussing Elgar's brief foray into the legal profession, Kennedy speculates with regard to the young man's thought processes:

> We can be sure that, while he had been in the dead end of [solicitor William] Allen's office, he had pondered ways of achieving the enormous ambitions he cherished.[19]

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[14] *Ibid.*, 19.
[15] *Ibid.*, 22.
[16] *Ibid.*, 44.
[17] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 38.
[18] Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 53.
[19] *Ibid.*, 22.

Rushton draws attention to Kennedy's structural approach, which constitutes a departure from McVeagh, Young and other precedents:

> Rather than a 'life then works', Kennedy adopts a structure in which comments on the music are built into the chronological narrative.[20]

In addition to this structural innovation, Kennedy sheds important light on the complexity and inconsistency of Elgar's personality and persona(s), and comments on corresponding inconsistencies in his music, as Rushton explains:

> Kennedy's main achievement was to shine a sympathetic but unsparing torch onto Elgar's crotchety personality. Mood swings are abundantly documented in his letters, and Kennedy carefully evaluates their contexts and causes; and he examines the mood swings within the music itself. An Elgar emerges whose major works are complex, like the man himself.[21]

It is noteworthy that, in his overview of the many, varied approaches to and perceptions of Elgar in all the major biographical literature up to his time of writing in 2007, Rushton concludes that Kennedy's analysis of Elgar is one that stands out:

> Kennedy's version of Elgar, even if it may be modified, is likely in large part to endure, for it is a rounded view of a late romantic and early modernist composer at the heart of European musical developments, and a man whose inner life was often at odds with a carefully constructed public image.[22]

Kennedy's commentary in relation to *Caractacus* is revealing of his own priorities in interpreting Elgar. In *The Life of Elgar*, his shorter work of 2004, Kennedy emphasises the influence of place and landscape on the composition of the 1898 cantata. Noting that Elgar moved to Birchwood Lodge in that year, Kennedy asserts that:

> It provided the solitude and quiet he needed to work and he loved the birds and animals in the woods. He was never happier than at Birchwood, and its atmosphere is reflected in *Caractacus*, which is predominantly pastoral.[23]

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[20] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 38.
[21] *Ibid.*, 39–40.
[22] *Ibid.*, 40.
[23] Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 57.

Though Kennedy refers in the same study to the 'evangelistic paternalism of the British Empire' put forward in the final chorus of *Caractacus*,[24] overall he seeks to deflect focus from the imperial final chorus, and to concentrate instead on other aspects of the work, particularly the associations with the English countryside.

A similar attitude to *Caractacus* is put forward in the writings of Jerrold Northrop Moore, who likewise draws attention in a rather pointed manner to the pastoral aspects of the work:

> The best sections of *Caractacus* are those which show the landscape itself—in its night-time mystery at the opening, or the pastoral 'Woodland Interlude' evoking a forest near the Severn at dawn [...]. Whether *Caractacus* was the right subject for Elgar can be debated, but he would never have thought of it if not for its landscape.[25]

The centrality of Moore in Elgar scholarship is difficult to overstate. Kennedy, for example, in introducing his new edition of *Portrait of Elgar* in 1987, acknowledges the considerable influence of Moore's contribution:

> This third edition of *Portrait of Elgar* incorporates corrections and additional information made available by the publication in 1984 of Dr Jerrold Northrop Moore's magnificently documented *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*. No future writer on Elgar can fail to take his cue from the wealth of detailed research which Dr Northrop Moore's book represents.[26]

Matthew Riley, though he criticises much about Moore's approach, similarly acknowledges his substantial input in modern Elgar studies:

> Jerrold Northrop Moore's work on Elgar is a central focus for the popular Elgar revival in the UK and elsewhere, and has provided a foundation for the welcome growth in academic study of Elgar over the last decade.[27]

Rushton concurs, asserting that Moore's work on Elgar is comparable to the 'scholarly landmarks' undertaken by Alexander Wheelock Thayer on Beethoven and Ernest

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[24] *Ibid.*, 56. See below for a further discussion of Kennedy's view.
[25] Moore, *Spirit of England: Edward Elgar and his World* (London: Heinemann, 1984), 107.
[26] Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 9.
[27] Matthew Riley, 'Review of *Elgar: Child of Dreams* by Jerrold Northrop Moore', *Music and Letters* 88/2 (2007): 382–84 (382).

Newman on Wagner.[28] Rushton also sees an enduring quality in Moore's major contribution to Elgar biography, stating that:

> It is likely to remain standard because of its almost day by day reconstruction of what was going on in Elgar's life.[29]

In addition to his highly detailed biography, Moore also edited four volumes of Elgar's letters with substantial commentaries,[30] as well as publishing shorter monographs for a general audience.

Rushton points out that, like Kennedy, Moore follows a chronological format in his biographical writing, and refers to some of the criticisms that have arisen in relation to Moore's major biography, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*: 'Musicians have detected some naivety, and perhaps optimism, in pointing up connections between works', though, as Rushton asserts 'the depth of his musical engagement is not in doubt'.[31] Riley is much more direct in his criticism, stating for example that:

> Moore does not submit his sources to rigorous analysis or subject Elgar's utterances and attitudes to sustained historical contextualization.[32]

Moore, in his various biographical works and sketches, appears to place a much stronger emphasis on childhood and landscape as compositional influences even than Kennedy. Riley ridicules some of Moore's claims in this regard, including the latter's idea that Elgar's time living in the Worcester village of Broadheath was a formative musical influence, despite the fact that he was less than two years old at the time:

> Moore believes that Elgar's infancy in a cottage (now the Elgar Birthplace Museum) at the hamlet of Broadheath in the Worcestershire countryside was a critical factor in the shaping of his adult consciousness and music. The poetic, imaginative sensibility of his mother and her religious attitude to the natural world around Broadheath left an indelible, albeit only half-

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[28] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 40.
[29] *Ibid.*, 40.
[30] Moore (ed.), *Elgar and his Publishers: Letters of a Creative Life*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); Moore (ed.), *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime*, Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Moore (ed.), *Edward Elgar: The Windflower Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).
[31] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 40.
[32] Riley, 'Review of *Elgar: Child of Dreams*', 382.

> conscious, impression on her son. Since the Elgar family moved back to Worcester before Edward was two years old, the Broadheath idyll was always for him an alluring memory (or quasi-memory), and his creative life plays out a quest to recapture or reinvigorate it through both memory and music.[33]

Riley concludes that this kind of dreamy speculation has no place in modern Elgar scholarship, arguing that Moore's account

> generates a mythic narrative in which Elgar, the artist-hero, embarks on a quest to recover a lost Eden. This is the kind of narrative that we might expect from a picturesque nineteenth-century biography with an overtly idealistic, moralizing or nationalist agenda, but not from a twenty-first-century author.[34]

Riley is in no doubt regarding the principal compositional influence on Elgar, from Moore's perspective:

> For Moore, seemingly, all Elgar's *musical* influences, from both childhood and adulthood, pale into insignificance in comparison with landscape.[35]

The somewhat misplaced wistfulness of Moore's approach is challenged in this respect by Rushton, who refutes Moore's claim that the countryside profoundly and overwhelmingly dominated Elgar's compositional inspiration:

> None can doubt Elgar's love of the vale of the Severn, the Malvern hills, the trees that make up an English landscape [...] But Elgar's ambience included townscapes: when young he lived mainly in Worcester, not at his birthplace Broadheath; subsequently he lived in Malvern, Hereford and London. [...] When young he visited London assiduously, educating himself by attending concerts.

Rushton concludes, therefore, that in contrast to Moore's fundamental assertion of Elgar's musical influences, 'the urban Elgar is no less essential than the pastoral'.[36] Moore, then, sees Elgar as an inspired genius, while Rushton, by contrast, puts forward a more practical understanding of the composer's craft.

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[33] Riley, 'Review of *Elgar: Child of Dreams*', 383.
[34] *Ibid.*, 383.
[35] *Ibid.*, 384.
[36] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 40–41.

While acknowledging the significant contributions of Kennedy and Moore to the documentary foundation on which the present study is based, this thesis differs fundamentally from the approach of both authors, and particularly from that of Moore. As noted above, both Kennedy and Moore concentrate very much on what Elgar himself thought and felt, or may have thought and felt, about a range of subjects, including his own struggles and perceived rejection. A major point of divergence is the basic understanding of Elgar's compositional process at this stage of his career. This thesis moves away from a fascination with the personality and genius of the composer to concentrate on the specific cultural context of Britain in the late 1890s and how Elgar sought to cater for it in a determined and largely deliberate fashion. Without denying the plausibility of childhood and landscape as musical influences, this thesis focuses on the role of the cultural forces of Elgar's time, of his audience more than of himself, in focusing his compositional priorities. To put it crudely, Moore seeks to understand Elgar from the inside out, while this thesis endeavours to view his musical decisions from an external, more dispassionate perspective.

Moore's near-obsession with Elgar's biography and its alleged correspondence with details of the music is pursued to a somewhat far-fetched extent in his discussion of the composer's choice of an excerpt from Longfellow's *A Musician's Tale* for the North Staffordshire Festival of 1896, Here, Moore finds a resonance for Elgar's own life in Longfellow's character:

> Like Edward himself, Longfellow's Musician is a violinist. He is also a Norseman: so if 'Elgar' was really 'Ælf-gar' or 'fairy spear', here was another likeness.[37]

Moore takes this unlikely analogy to the extreme as he continues to infer a protracted similarity between Elgar, the struggling Catholic outsider, and King Olaf himself:

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[37] Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 183.

> The setting for this saga was something like the old chivalric world of Froissart and The Black Knight. And the saga hero offered his identity to Edward in other ways. First, he was an exile in his rightful kingdom, and his young life gave heady example: from obscurity he journeyed to triumph, vanquishing all who stood in his way. Then Olaf—alone among Norse saga heroes—was a Christian: it had been the faith of his own choosing, and it guided his actions. Yet here was also a mirror of Edward's uncertainty: for as Olaf grew older, he found his triumph in the world only fleeting despite his faith. And there was a final suggestion. Olaf was attracted to women; but each of the women he cared for betrayed his vision, and the last of them accomplished his death. At the end there was only the hero's mother to witness the faith by becoming a nun.[38]

Moore's comparison here surely stretches the boundaries of credibility. Chapter 3 of this thesis explores in detail the probable reasons for Elgar's choice of topic at this time, and his treatment of Longfellow's text (edited and abridged by the librettist Harry Acworth), arguing that the work was carefully designed in a manner saturated with the ideals of a benevolent late-nineteenth-century Christian-imperial power.

In a review of recent publications in Elgar scholarship, Heather Wiebe comments on the broadening of scope and diversity of focus, noting particularly the

> ambitious studies by new figures in the Elgar world, studies that struggle to move away from the established terms of Elgar's popular reception and beyond scholarly approaches that have been similarly persistent.[39]

Wiebe outlines the significance—and potential—of such new paths as a means of questioning and diverging from existing, entrenched, perhaps somewhat tired opinions:

> This new body of work can be welcomed for its attempts to challenge and complicate a stubbornly hegemonic—not to say complacent—set of views.[40]

Most likely spurred on by the Elgar anniversary year of 2007, a substantial amount of new literature on Elgar has appeared in recent years. As these many new books and

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[38] *Ibid.*, 184.
[39] Heather Wiebe, 'Reviews of *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar* by Daniel M. Grimley and Julian Rushton; *Edward Elgar and His World* by Byron Adams; *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination* by Matthew Riley; and *Edward Elgar, Modernist* by J. P. E. Harper-Scott', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 62/1 (Spring 2009): 231–43 (232).
[40] *Ibid.*, 232.

articles are simply too numerous to explore in detail or even to summarise here, this section will discuss only those publications and themes most pertinent to the present study. A striking feature of much of this new literature is its acknowledgement of the complexity involved in understanding Elgar's attitudes to contested topics such as empire and religion, and the recognition that more than one interpretation of these may be valid. In his *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, for example, J. P. E. Harper-Scott lays out the complexity of assessing Elgar's imperial stance through his music:

> Many (though not all) of Elgar's imperial moments are coloured by a flighty kind of ambiguity that it is not always possible to resolve, and which it would therefore be foolish to pronounce definitively upon.[41]

In relation to one of these 'imperial moments', the closing chorus of *Caractacus* (discussed in detail in Chapter 4), Harper-Scott outlines the difficulties evident in existing literature with regard to pinpointing the "correct" interpretation:

> The potential for disagreement within the circle of Elgarians is so intense that Michael Kennedy's discussion in his recent *Life of Elgar* [...] actually espouses two critical positions. A few pages after hinting that Elgar's finale may be ironic (i.e. obscurely anti-imperial), he comes down firmly against those, including himself in his *Portrait of Elgar*, who wish to defend Elgar against charges of jingoism.[42]

Continuing his discussion of this controversial point in the cantata, Harper-Scott cautions that 'we must always be receptive to what could be a cunningly disguised irony',[43] before revealing that he himself keeps an open mind about the meaning of the work's notorious final scene: 'On balance, the imperial interpretation of the scene is a little stronger than the anti-imperial one'.[44] He roots his observations in the musical details of the *Caractacus* epilogue, outlining a corresponding ambiguity to that of the text:

> Elgar's thematic and structural technique creates a kind of ambiguity which is grist to the mill of the anti-imperialists.[45]

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[41] J. P. E. Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 17.
[42] *Ibid.*, 15. See Kennedy, *Life of Elgar*, 56; 58.
[43] Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, 17.
[44] *Ibid.*, 18.
[45] *Ibid.*, 16.

Again referring to the finale of *Caractacus*, Harper-Scott considers the extent of Elgar's imperial agenda at this point of the work and suggests—significantly in the context of this thesis—without elaboration that the composer had the ideological interests of his audience at heart:

> Whether or not he intended ambiguous presentation of pro-/anti-imperialist views, Elgar certainly had a genius for giving people what they wanted on occasions like this.[46]

In his article 'Functional Music: Imperialism, the Great War, and Elgar as Popular Composer', Charles Edward McGuire also outlines the difficulty of isolating Elgar's attitudes, particularly to topics such as empire, from their considerable ideological and critical baggage:

> Accepting Elgar's complex and often contradictory character transcends the binary oppositions (jingoistic versus rationally imperial; abstract versus functional music; and elite versus popular music) of most criticism of his work. [...] We are so used to the final images of Elgar—the overstuffed, philistine Colonel Bogey—that an adequate understanding of the composer's challenging rise to fame is nearly impossible within current discourse.[47]

The contentious topic of imperialism looms large in Elgar scholarship. In their introduction to the 2004 *Cambridge Companion to Elgar*, Daniel Grimley and Julian Rushton provide some context for this difficult subject:

> Imperialism as a concept first entered political discourse in Britain in the 1870s, and became widespread by the 1890s when it became associated with military and economic expansion and defence, fuelled by the growth of global trade.[48]

Referring to overtly imperialist repertoire such as the *Imperial March* (1897), the *Coronation Ode* (1902) and *The Crown of India* (1911), Grimley and Rushton assert that,

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[46] Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist*, 17.
[47] Charles Edward McGuire, 'Functional Music: Imperialism, the Great War, and Elgar as Popular Composer', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar*, Daniel M. Grimley and Julian Rushton (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214–224 (215–16).
[48] Grimley and Rushton, 'Introduction', in *Idem* (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar*, 1–14 (11–12).

although Elgar himself was not directly associated with any imperial institution as such, his music nonetheless

> supported the institutionalisation of an imperialist culture through a series of works written for ceremonial occasions that celebrated the idea of empire.[49]

As Riley outlines, Elgar's association with empire has had a dramatic effect on his public reception since his death:

> It is [...] widely understood that, while the link with imperialism may have helped Elgar's career, it dealt a serious blow to his posthumous reputation. The fierce reaction of intellectuals after the Great War against the imperialism of the previous generation hastened the waning of Elgar's star in the eyes of the musical opinion-formers.[50]

As Rushton points out, it is likely that the issue of Elgar's own attitude to empire will continue to engender debate for some time:

> The argument about Elgar's imperial commitment, fuelled by *The Banner of St. George* and the closing pages of *Caractacus*, may never die.[51]

The difficulty of ascertaining Elgar's opinion in respect of empire is alluded to by Rushton as he admits that the composer may or may not have prioritised commercial concerns with his obviously imperial output:

> His most overtly imperialist work, *The Crown of India*, may be representative of his views or merely an opportunity, thanks to the music hall, to make a better income than he could with better works.[52]

Elgar's attitude cannot reliably be measured on the basis of direct contact with imperial territories, for, as Rushton points out, the composer 'was much travelled, but not to any part of the Empire'.[53] In a similar discussion, historian David Cannadine concludes that the composer was not strongly imperialist, noting 'Elgar's essential lack of interest in the British Empire' and asserting that the composer's 'interest in Britain's overseas

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[49] *Ibid.*, 11–12.
[50] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 152–53.
[51] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 39.
[52] *Ibid.*, 39.
[53] *Ibid.*, 39.

dominions and possessions and his direct, personal impact on them, were both negligible'.[54]

As will be discussed in Chapter 1, the definition of imperialism is crucial to any argument concerning the influence and prevalence of imperial ideas. This thesis, following the lead of the University of Manchester's wide-ranging Studies in Imperialism series, adopts a broad definition of the term, meaning that direct experience of the British Empire was not necessary to interact with imperialism or hold imperialist views: rather, an acceptance, whether passive or active, of a general belief in the superiority and advisability of British rule over foreign lands was enough to constitute an imperial outlook. Within this framework of understanding, the present study regards late-Victorian Britain as a thoroughly imperial society (as argued in Chapter 1) in which Elgar sought to appeal to a festival audience familiar and comfortable with the idealism and benevolence promoted in contemporary literature, art and theatre. In this contextual examination of Elgar's early choral works, the composer's personal views are not deemed to be significant. Turning away from the tendency in Elgar scholarship to focus on what the composer himself felt or believed, this study instead views his choral music of the 1890s through the lens of a broader imperial culture, looking particularly at the desires and expectations of the choral festival audience. In doing so, the thesis seeks to avoid projecting the standards and judgements of later eras onto the actions and attitudes of the late-nineteenth century, thus adhering to a useful guiding observation from Rushton:

> Commentary on Elgar, and others, from perspectives opened up by, for instance, Edward Said, can produce valuable insights so long as it avoids the 'holier-than-thou' postures (whatever their ideological basis) that can disfigure 'new' musicology.[55]

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[54] David Cannadine, 'Orchestrating his Own Life: Sir Edward Elgar as an Historical Personality', in *Elgar: An Anniversary Portrait*, introduced by Nicholas Kenyon, 1–35 (25).
[55] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 39.

Central to this thesis is the understanding that the 1890s constitute a unique and particularly revealing period in Elgar's career precisely because he began the decade as an unknown Worcester musician and finished it as something akin to a national bard, and that in the intervening years he tried very hard indeed to please as many people as possible with works such as *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*.

Michael Pope's article '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition' surely constitutes the most substantial study of Elgar's 1896 cantata to date. In seeking to situate *King Olaf* in a line of compositional development and to regard it as a mature, professional work, Pope convincingly challenges the view that

> all the choral works Elgar composed before *The Dream of Gerontius* are precluded from recognition as significant works of art, since they fall within a period described as his apprenticeship, a stage which allegedly lasted until 1898, when he was forty-one years of age.[56]

Pope lays bare the fact that much of the attention accorded to the music of Elgar in scholarship and performance is directed at works dating from 1899 onwards, as he tackles

> the general underlying assumption that our native genius for music departed in the eighteenth century, and did not reappear until 19 June 1899, when Edward Elgar, so we were told, made a sudden leap from a state of prolonged apprenticeship to one of international excellence, with his Variations on an Original Theme, op. 36.[57]

Pope sets out to challenge what he sees as unfair, enduring criticisms of *King Olaf*, stating his intentions thus:

> The purpose of this essay is to question some of the premises of past critical censure, and to look afresh at the place the work occupies in the English choral tradition.[58]

In reclaiming *King Olaf* and placing it in Elgar's mature *œuvre*, Pope also endeavours to situate the work within the historical development of English choral music more broadly,

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[56] Michael Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', Raymond Monk (ed.), *Elgar Studies* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990), 46–80 (46).
[57] *Ibid.*, 47.
[58] *Ibid.*, 46.

particularly by understanding it in the context of the English Romantic cantata. He outlines the social background to the rise of this genre in the nineteenth century:

> The fuller development of the cantata in England sprang from the results of industrialization. The increasing number of people changing from a rural to an urban life, and their desire to sing with others as a means of expression and recreation, led to the formation of many new choral societies.[59]

Pope also explores aspects of the English choral tradition, which played a defining role in the direction of Elgar's career, and which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2 of this study:

> The Sight-Singing movement of the 1840s, in which a distinguished Worcester-born musician, Dr John Hullah, played an important role, enabled thousands of singers to learn their part in choral music by reading rather than by ear. More concert halls were built, more public concerts were given, and less expensive editions of music began to be published.[60]

In addition to his social and musical contextualisation of *King Olaf*, Pope considers the representation of the eponymous hero relative to the account of his adventures given in Samuel Laing's translation of *Heimskringla*, by the Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson, and concludes that:

> A sense of historical perspective is particularly necessary in the case of *King Olaf* since we have sometimes been told that the principal character lacks consistency.[61]

To Pope's recognition of the social, musical and educational importance of the amateur choral tradition, the present study adds an investigation of the artistic and moral expectations of that world, and assesses its role in determining the musical and didactic content of Elgar's cantatas of the 1890s. This thesis is founded on the idea that much about Elgar and Acworth's protagonist may be explained by the desire of composer and librettist to present a Christian hero for late-Victorian, imperial Britain. The thesis thus

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[59] *Ibid.*, 53.
[60] Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 53–54.
[61] *Ibid.*, 62.

endeavours to add a late-nineteenth-century socio-cultural perspective to Pope's historical approach.[62]

This thesis follows Matthew Riley in grouping *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* together as settings of imperial confrontation. In his 2007 monograph *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, Riley outlines the significant consequences of setting such encounters at a removal in time:

> These works stage scenarios of colonial encounter and conquest, taking place in medieval Norway and ancient Britain respectively. They are at times disturbing, on account of their easy accommodation with comfortable Victorian assumptions about the benevolence of imperial power. Yet the cloak of antiquity means that Elgar does not have to eliminate all complexity from the relationships between coloniser and colonised.[63]

Riley explains that the delineation of superior and inferior is not entirely clear, and elements of each may be heard, admired, or criticised in turn:

> Unlike the masque *The Crown of India* (1912), it is not a prerequisite here that the expansionist power should be eulogised without qualification. The colonised party may be given a chance to speak. In this way, competing concepts of national identity in the late-Victorian period are personified and made to interact in a drama.[64]

Like Riley, the present study views *King Olaf*, as much as the more obvious *Caractacus*, as a statement of British imperial superiority over foreign natives. Riley's application of an idea, founded on the theories of anthropologist Renata Rosaldo, that imperial powers can experience regret in the form of 'imperialist nostalgia' or mourning for a destroyed and thus unattainable cultural state, leads to the possibility that in settings of colonial encounters, selected characteristics of both the coloniser and the colonised could be attractive for Elgar's audience. In other words, as Riley states, 'the distinction between

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[62] Pope's article, and particularly its appreciation of the cultural significance of the librettist, Acworth, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.
[63] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 154.
[64] *Ibid.*, 154.

self and other is blurred'.[65] This interpretation is particularly important in the context of *Caractacus*, where Rome is at times presented as the enemy, and at times as an admirable imperial ruler, and is discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. Its application to *King Olaf* is less clear, however. Riley's argument in this respect is based on two premises; first, that Olaf is not an out-and-out admirable Victorian hero (that is, he is not to be viewed entirely as an ideal British champion); and second, that if he is to be viewed as a pseudo-British hero, then Elgar notably refrains from assigning him 'any music in his grand, expressive idiom'.[66] Michael Pope offers a discussion and satisfactory explanation of the first point, based on a detailed exploration of historical convention and sources.[67] Riley's argument is in any case weakened by the cantata's transformation of Olaf's character in his operatic meeting with another love interest, Thyri (in No. 14; see Chapter 3, p. 136) and the deliberate excision of virtually all gratuitously violent episodes involving the king; in addition, Olaf's adversaries have little to recommend them. The second point may be countered with the suggestion that the sailing motif (see Ex. 3.6) may be regarded as fulfilling this musical role, celebrating the expansive but benevolent progress of the maritime adventurer, so familiar from imperial adventure literature.

This study, therefore, embraces certain aspects of Riley's work, but contests others. In relation to *King Olaf,* Chapter 3 builds on Riley's important point that the libretto clearly emphasises the contrast between the violent pagans and the peaceful Christians. Riley makes this observation in the context of the work's first scene, 'The Challenge of Thor' (No. 2). The present study applies it to other sections of the cantata, most notably the highly significant, ideologically charged Conversion Scene (No. 5). Similarly, in the context of 'The Wraith of Odin' (No. 9), Riley makes an important observation in relation to the British referential role of the hero:

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[65] *Ibid.*, 155.
[66] *Ibid.*, 157.
[67] See Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 68–70.

> Olaf, having started the cantata inside the narrative frame, has now, as it were, broken through to join the audience, no less entranced than they by the grandeur and exoticism of the ancient poems. Such feelings have become available to him because he has become a force of modernity: goal-directed, Christianising, politically unifying.[68]

Olaf is certainly Christianising, and certainly unifying, though this thesis argues that he is more religiously rather than politically so. Riley does not elaborate on his observation and applies it only in the context of 'The Wraith of Odin'. Chapter 3 of this study argues that it is rather No. 5, the Conversion Scene, that features Olaf is at his most representative of the ideal, Christian, Christianising, and unifying Victorian imperial hero, engaged in the act of conversion, an activity that appealed right throughout the spectrum of British Christian denominations. Five pages of Riley's book are devoted to Elgar's earlier cantata, (pp. 155–59) with two of those dealing with a specific scene, 'The Wraith of Odin'. Chapter 3 of this thesis provides the first extended discussion of Elgar and Acworth's *King Olaf* as it relates to the cultural context of late-Victorian, imperial Britain, both real and fictional. Focusing on key dramatic moments the Conversion Scene, the Death of Olaf and the Epilogue, the chapter explores the work as an emphatic statement of benevolent imperialism, carefully designed to appeal to a specific audience at a specific moment in British imperial history.

In recent years, the predominantly British base of Elgar scholarship has broadened and international scholarly interest in Elgar's music and context has taken hold. This change has resulted in new analytical perspectives, and in diverse challenges to prevailing views. A major contributor in this respect, and a major influence on this thesis, is the American musicologist Charles Edward McGuire. Two recent articles by McGuire offer significant reappraisals of longstanding perceptions of Elgar and his music, in two discrete areas: Catholicism, and *Caractacus*.

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[68] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 159.

In 'Measure of a Man: Catechizing Elgar's Catholic Avatars', McGuire revisits Elgar's relationship with Catholicism, viewing the religion not only as a faith, but as a distinctive culture in which Elgar was steeped for much of his life; and he challenges what he regards as inaccurate or even manipulated views of the composer's religious identity.[69] Observing that sources show a tendency to skirt the deeper implications of Elgar's Catholicism, he argues convincingly that, in his later life, Elgar's religious identity 'was defused enough by his fame that he could be seen not as Catholic but as a sort of Pan-Christian' and asserts that this perception 'both oversimplifies and undervalues [Elgar's] Catholic influences'.[70] McGuire shows that efforts to revise Elgar's religious identity are tied to a more general attempt (noted above) to safeguard the composer's reputation in the twentieth century:

> The popular negating of Elgar's Catholicism both at his death and today serves an obvious end: it makes Elgar's music safer, more palatable for a British audience. In essence, it creates an avatar for Elgar as the 'essentially English composer' beyond the reach of any of the complicating factors of partisan religion.[71]

McGuire's approach in this article is founded on the exploration and deciphering of 'avatars'. In a manner that points to the layers of complexity involved in deconstructing Elgar and his public image, McGuire explains that:

> An avatar is the embodiment of an archetype. As a manifestation of a symbol or a motif, it is akin to both an interpretation (when applied to an individual from an external person or source) and a disguise (when applied to an individual by him- or herself). The avatar might be built from certain elements of the individual, refracted and interpreted to point toward a specific meaning, or it might be an honest representation of that individual.[72]

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[69] McGuire, 'Measure of a Man: Catechizing Elgar's Catholic Avatars', in *Edward Elgar and His World,* Byron Adams (ed.), (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), 3–37. Rachel Cowgill has also addressed Elgar's Catholicism in a recent article, but hers is a study of Elgar's later career. See Cowgill, 'Elgar's War Requiem', in *Elgar and His World*, 317–62.

[70] McGuire, 'Measure of a Man', 6.

[71] *Ibid.*, 7. This line of thought bears a striking similarity to Elgar and Acworth's own late-Victorian hero, Olaf who, this thesis argues, is carefully designed to rise above denominational division and appeal to all sections of British Christian society. See Chapter 3.

[72] *Ibid.*, 7.

Elgar's beliefs, according to McGuire, 'were fluid throughout his life', and for this reason, McGuire argues, 'he created a set of multiple avatars to facilitate self-representation'.[73] In the period of greatest relevance to the present study, Elgar was visibly, publicly Catholic, manifesting what McGuire refers to as the 'Publicly Faithful' avatar in the following three ways:

> By attending mass, by publicly proclaiming himself a Catholic in interviews and compositions, and by complaining to friends and intimates about the anti-Catholic prejudice that he experienced repeatedly.[74]

McGuire contextualises this public Catholic identity by providing a brief outline of Catholicism in nineteenth-century British society. Here, he notes the principal areas of interdenominational strife:

> After centuries of prohibition, the reestablishment of the Catholic hierarchy in England in 1850 turned what had been a 'mission church' in England into a permanent one, with dioceses, parishes, and typical church organizational structures, including the presence of permanent bishops and cardinals. This event, along with the 1869–70 doctrines of papal infallibility [...] and the immaculate conception [...] caused a great deal of Protestant protest and even riots against Catholics, and remained a constant problem within England until the mid-1870s.[75]

McGuire relates this backdrop to Elgar's life by outlining the principal categories within English Catholicism and how they impinged on the composer's world:

> During Elgar's life, the three major groups of English Catholics—the old Catholics, including the family of his boyhood friend Hubert Leicester; the converts to Catholicism, including his first teacher, Caroline Walsh, and his own mother, Ann Elgar; and Irish immigrant Catholics—held a constant, often rancorous conversation about the direction the English Catholic Church should take. Elgar experienced directly the first two of these three groups.[76]

As stated previously, Elgar's own views on religious faith are not known in any detail, and certainly not with any consistency. However, McGuire is strongly of the opinion that

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[73] *Ibid.*, 8.
[74] *Ibid.*, 21. The section of McGuire's article dealing with the 'Publicly Faithful' avatar refers to the period 1889–1905.
[75] *Ibid.*, 9.
[76] *Ibid.*, 9.

the deep and deliberate nature of his Catholic schooling, his life in Worcester, and his religious environment more generally, means that Elgar's Catholic identity constituted a major influence on his cultural experience:

> Faith, of course (or lack of it), is not the point. Even if Elgar's faith was 'never that strong' the experiences he had as a Catholic youth and a composer rising to fame affected his compositional output, his relationship with others, and, in short, his whole life. No matter what the state of his faith, Elgar was—and remained—culturally Catholic.[77]

McGuire states that the purpose of his essay is

> to trace Elgar's history of, and responses to, Catholicism against the backdrop of Catholic history in Great Britain throughout his life, from 1857 until 1934.[78]

Taking account of McGuire's observations on the composer's cultural Catholic identity, the religious concern of this thesis is rather to trace Elgar's responses to the largely Anglican (though complex) world in which he sought (successfully) to establish himself as an acceptable and admired artist. In an effort to sketch Elgar's working environment and the complexity of contemporary religious boundaries, the thesis delves more deeply into the unease surrounding Catholicism, especially the contentious areas of conversion, and the perceived conflict of simultaneous loyalty to Britain and to Rome. The purpose of this investigation is to show the skill with which Elgar manoeuvred as a Catholic composer, from a mixed marriage, working in the predominantly Anglican religious environment of the 1890s choral festival, and to examine how his unusual—perhaps unique—circumstances influenced the compositional decisions and ideological characteristics in respect of *The Light of Life*, *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*. In addition, the thesis considers the related area of the endurance of religion in Elgar's Britain, despite the seemingly conflicting progress of science, and finds a possible explanation for this

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[77] *Ibid.*, 7. This mention of a faith 'never that strong' refers to a biographical summary on the website of the Elgar Society at the time of McGuire's writing.
[78] *Ibid.*, 8.

anomaly in the feats of 'popularisers of science', who succeeded in marrying scientific knowledge with Christian theology for a wide audience.

Referring to Elgar's early life, McGuire argues that the strength and precise details of Elgar's own religious faith are, culturally, insignificant. For McGuire's purposes, what mattered was not what the composer himself thought, but how he was viewed and categorised from without:

> Whether or not Elgar had a strong faith during this period is inconsequential, because the ritual identifiers that marked him as a Catholic were always present and easily apparent to those around him.[79]

This thesis, as mentioned above, also regards Elgar's own religious beliefs as inconsequential, but for a different reason. For the purposes of this study, the area of focus is not Elgar himself, but his context, and, more specifically, his audience: those who attended and sang in the choral festivals, the conductors, the reviewers, and, ideally, the nation more broadly. In arguing that Elgar's works are tailor-made for these stakeholders, this thesis concentrates on *their* views and expectations, on their definitions of acceptable and admirable, on their need for reassurance and conformity, and ultimately on how Elgar addressed these views, expectations, definitions and needs in his music.

A second article by McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*: the Druids, Race, and the Individual Hero' also informs the approach of this thesis.[80] This article is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, but it is helpful to state McGuire's aims here. McGuire observes that commentators on Elgar focus, perhaps excessively, on the attitudes, however elusive, of the composer himself, to the exclusion of other interpretative possibilities, with the result that he alone is held responsible for controversial aspects of his output:

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[79] *Ibid.*, 12.
[80] McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*: the Druids, Race, and the Individual Hero', in *Elgar Studies*, Julian Rushton and J. P. E. Harper-Scott (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 50–77.

> Issues of imperialism, characterisation, and patriotism, whether objectionable to our later mores or not, are laid solely at the feet of Elgar.[81]

Outlining his belief that cultural factors external to Elgar's personality and attitudes have a valuable role to play in shaping an understanding of his creative circumstances, McGuire argues that scholars should

> locate Elgar and his compositions within this larger world, instead of relying solely on his personal biography to provide all of the answers.[82]

McGuire observes further that 'scholars and enthusiasts both continually try to remove Elgar from aspects of the world around him', with the result that these 'limitations of context [...] greatly simplify Elgar's role and the role of music in the web of late Romantic culture.[83] A contextual understanding of Elgar's early choral music is particularly important with regard to the contested ground of imperialism. As Rushton and Harper-Scott explain in their preface to *Elgar Studies*, McGuire's essay

> makes a powerful case for the serious contextual study of Elgar and Empire without theoretical bias, and of the significance of the texts of the choral works, too readily neglected, apologised for, or dismissed as fustian.[84]

Elsewhere, Rushton suggests that, while this type of contextual approach may not be universally popular in the realm of music scholarship, it is certainly a valuable and fruitful direction in Elgar studies:

> While some may consider ill-advised the recent tendency towards wide-ranging investigation of cultural issues apparently peripheral to the job of musical composition, it has engendered more in the way of insight into the man Elgar and, especially, his music than any number of attempts to grasp the slippery, and in my [Rushton's] view chimerical, mystery of the enigma of the *Variations*'.[85]

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[81] *Ibid.*, 74.
[82] *Ibid.*, 74.
[83] McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*', 74.
[84] Rushton and Harper-Scott, 'Preface', in *Idem* (eds.), *Elgar Studies*, viii.
[85] Rushton, 'Elgar's Biography, Elgar's Repute', 45.

This thesis draws extensively on literature from outside the realm of music history. In particular, imperial adventure literature is used as an indicator of late-Victorian cultural, political, religious and didactic priorities. Primary sources located via the Nineteenth-Century British Library Newspapers database provide illuminating documentary evidence regarding British society in Elgar's time, and literature from the disciplines of imperial and historical studies extend the scope of this investigation into external influences on the compositional decisions that characterise Elgar's substantial and distinctive choral works of 1896 and 1898.

CHAPTER 1
EMPIRE AND SOCIETY IN LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

> *And this is what she must either do, or perish: she must found colonies as fast and as far as she is able, formed of her most energetic and worthiest men;—seizing every piece of fruitful waste ground she can set her foot on, and there teaching these her colonists that their chief virtue is to be fidelity to their country, and that their first aim is to be to advance the power of England by land and sea.*[1]

The British Empire of the late-nineteenth century still constitutes a divisive topic, that is difficult to explore because of its complex associations and abundance of ideological baggage, and imperial scholarship has featured heated debate and much revisionism, especially in recent years. The debate has many layers, depends much on the ideological context of each individual commentator, and reveals a distinct gap between the topic of Britain as an imperial government, and that of Britain as an imperial society. It is clear that empire meant different things to different people, and that this lack of agreement fundamentally affects our modern perception of imperial sentiment. For some, empire concerned trade; for others, conquest or personal aggrandisement; while others again viewed the empire as a humanitarian force for good, for the moral and religious improvement of the world. For some, it provided a career or a calling; for others it provided the answer to over-population and fear of famine. The aspect of relevance to this study concerns the extent to which, and the ways in which, support of empire—for whatever reasons—was intrinsic to British public opinion.

Empire and the British Public

Robert H. MacDonald outlines the sheer size and influence of the British Empire, and points out the large-scale colonial activity of the late-Victorian era:

> In the last thirty years of the nineteenth century the British Empire increased enormously in size. To name only its major acquisitions, in

[1] John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art: Delivered before the University of Oxford in Hilary Term, 1870* (New York: John Wiley, 1870), 29.

> Africa Britain gained control over Egypt and the Sudan, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Uganda and Kenya, South and North Rhodesia, Bechuanaland, Nyasaland and Somaliland. In Asia, Britain took possession of part of New Guinea, and indirectly, of Sarawak, besides consolidating its authority over Burma and Malaya. Together with the old settler colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, and the subcontinent of India, by 1900 the Empire covered a fifth of the world's land surface, and exercised authority over a quarter of its population.[2]

The extent to which the empire and imperialist tendencies were matters of popular concern in nineteenth-century British society has been the subject of considerable debate in recent years and remains contentious among historians of various disciplines. The position of commentators on this topic appears to depend largely on differing interpretations of the word 'imperialism'. Some adopt the view that cultural awareness of and general support for ideas of British superiority and righteousness constitutes an imperial outlook, while others argue that a tangible engagement with the reality of empire, such as direct experience of the colonies or an identifiable government policy of colonial expansion, represents a better definition.

Historian John MacKenzie explores some of the problems inherent in situating the empire in British historical study:

> There has long been, among British historians, an apparent desire to separate domestic British history from that of its empire. Such scholars, often occupying the political spectrum from both left and right, have considered empire to be an inconvenient aspect of the British past and one from which the British public could somehow be absolved.[3]

In other words, the discomfort of historians working in ideologically changed times has significantly affected the nature of historical study surrounding the nineteenth-century empire. MacKenzie advocates a new approach to the study of imperial culture, believing

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[2] Robert H. MacDonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism: 1880–1918,* Studies in Imperialism Series (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 2.
[3] John M. MacKenzie, 'Passion or Indifference? Popular Imperialism in Britain: Continuities and Discontinuities over Two Centuries', in *Idem* (ed.), *European Empires and the People: Popular Responses to Imperialism in France, Britain, The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy*, Studies in Imperialism series (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2011), 57–89 (57).

that territorial developments abroad must have had far-reaching cultural implications at home:

> It would be surprising had possession of a vast Empire left the cultures of the metropolitan state virtually unaffected. Yet historians have largely ignored such concerns until recently, for several reasons. Researchers have usually been devoted to official archives, and sources derived from the public records are relatively silent on cultural matters, even if their originators were inevitably influenced by such contexts. Secondly, historians have been more interested in cultures of dissent rather than conformity.[4]

MacKenzie first put forward his argument for the cultural ubiquity of British imperialism in his 1984 study *Propaganda and Empire*, and more recently has asserted that he has had 'no reason to revise the interpretations unveiled in that book', and, moreover, that

> the conviction that popular imperialism was an abiding factor in British society has been confirmed by many subsequent studies and by the extension of the focus of the research.[5]

In an editorial capacity, MacKenzie has presided over extensive research into a wealth of cultural strands, all published in the University of Manchester's Studies in Imperialism series, which carefully paint a broad but detailed picture of imperial influence on British popular culture, and of popular cultural influence on imperial idealism. MacKenzie's work makes it clear that the topic of empire was in demand across a range of media:

> The fact is that imperial events slotted into an exciting adventure and militarist tradition which translated readily into other media, not just the stage and the press, but also popular literature, painting, prints, statuary, memorials and music.[6]

The various volumes of the Studies in Imperialism series reinforce the view that British society was awash with a cultural awareness—and a cultural celebration—of imperialism and a general belief in British superiority. Jeffrey Richards, for example, states in his contribution to the series that, at the time of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897,

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[4] John M. MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', in *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Vol. III: The Nineteenth Century*, Andrew Porter (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 270–293 (271).
[5] MacKenzie, 'Passion or Indifference?', 58.
[6] *Ibid.*, 58.

'every aspect of popular culture contrived to instil pride in the British imperial achievement'.[7] In his 'Introduction: Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth Century', part of *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, Andrew Porter argues similarly that:

> The possession and expansion of an Empire also markedly influenced Britain's 'cultural'—that is, social, institutional, religious, and intellectual—development and her citizens' view of the outside world.[8]

Patrick Brantlinger, in his examination of empire and literature, also asserts that the empire was a significant cultural force in nineteenth-century society:

> Imperial discourse, like the actual expansion of the Empire, was continuous, informing all aspects of Victorian culture and society.[9]

Studies advocating this broad cultural approach to the nature of imperialism present substantial evidence from many aspects of art and life to suggest that there was widespread popular awareness and support, whether active or benign, of the empire in British society in the late-nineteenth century. A crucial feature of this argument is that personal experience of empire was not necessary for one's mindset to be affected by imperial discourse: a conception of imperial space, its racial hierarchies, its adventures and exoticism, was formed for the metropolitan population by the presence—whether overt or subtle—of empire-related ideas, descriptions and images in literature, in art, in the media, and in public spaces. In his study of imperialist ideas in juvenile literature, Richards asserts that such imperialist ideas were comprehensive in public consciousness:

> From the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth imperialism was the dominant national ideology, transcending class and party divisions. Britain was saturated in the ethos and attitudes of empire. They infused plays and books and later, films. They informed school

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[7] Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876–1953*, Studies in Imperialism series (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), 2.
[8] Andrew Porter 'Introduction: Britain and the Empire in the Nineteenth Century', in *Idem* (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume III*, 1.
[9] Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism: 1830–1914* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), x.

> textbooks. They inspired painting, prints and engravings. They filled newspapers and magazines. They figured in advertising and packaging.[10]

Similarly, MacDonald argues for the social ubiquity of imperial ideas, and suggests that the promulgation of imperial ideologies formed part of a deliberate campaign:

> All classes were touched, one way or another, by this programme of conscious propaganda, as patriotic history became an accepted and familiar element of popular culture, an everyday feature of entertainment at both ends of the social scale.[11]

Heidi J. Holder points out that illustrated newspapers were especially influential in this regard, bringing 'the Empire, and the heroic deeds of its army, into the homes of middle-class Britons',[12] while MacKenzie makes a similar claim for the importance of visual depictions of empire, noting that 'imperial paintings represented a significant strand in British popular art until the early twentieth century', with George William Joy's representation of General Gordon's death at Khartoum, *General Gordon's Last Stand* (1885), proving particularly popular.[13] In the late-nineteenth century, the exhibition of exotic animals and peoples was widespread, and painted panoramas, dioramas and cosmoramas were shown throughout the country.[14] Representations of India featured spectacular symbols of British power on the subcontinent, and Breandon Gregory explains that such imagery

> was communicated to the British at home through the engravings of pictorial journals like the *Illustrated London News,* photography, paintings, illustrated books, and advertisements.[15]

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[10] Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature,* Studies in Imperialism series (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989), 2.
[11] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 61.
[12] Heidi J. Holder, 'Melodrama, Realism and Empire', in J. S. Bratton, Richard Allen Cave, Breandan Gregory, Heidi J. Holder and Michael Pickering, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790–1930*, Studies in Imperialism series (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1991), 129–49 (139).
[13] MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', 274. The painting is discussed in more detail below, and may be viewed at 'General Gordon's Last Stand', <http://www.britishempire.co.uk/art/joygordon.htm> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[14] MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', 274.
[15] Breandon Gregory, 'Staging British India' in *Acts of Supremacy*, Bratton et al, 150–178 (151).

Gregory describes the Empire of India Exhibition, presented by the impresario Imre Kiralfy at Earls Court in London in the summers of 1895 and 1896, and particularly a play entitled *India,* written by Kiralfy and featuring a cast of thousands. On the basis of the number of shows, newspaper reports and venue capacity, Gregory estimates that at least 1.5 million people attended the play and 12 million visited the Exhibition. He points out that 'the socio-political implications of so many people being exposed to such imperial propaganda would have been considerable'.[16] MacDonald notes the Earls Court Exhibition of 1899, which featured

> a Cairo bazaar, a "Kaffir" village, and, in a section labelled 'Savage South Africa', mounted a re-enactment of Major Alan Wilson's *Last Stand* against the Matabele.[17]

Even if such events did not have a profound propagandist effect on every visitor, they created and cultivated an image of the empire, an imagination of the distant place over which Britain enjoyed a military and moral superiority, or at least a reputation thereof. As Gregory states,

> British imperialism depended on display, on multifarious theatricality, but the sub-text of this theatre, comprehensible to Britons and Indians alike, was that western civilisation, exemplified by British culture, was intrinsically superior.[18]

In his study of visual depictions of empire, James R. Ryan explores the role of maps in aiding the public imagination of imperial size. He notes that 'The Imperial Federation Map of the World' was published as a colour supplement in the *Graphic* in 1886. This map 'used Mercator's projection—which tended to exaggerate the relative size of Britain—and charted the growth of Empire over 100 years'.[19] The Howard

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[16] *Ibid.*, 153.
[17] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 61.
[18] Gregory, 'Staging British India', 176–77.
[19] James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion, 1997), 20.

Vincent Map of the British Empire, published in 1886, was 'six foot square' and was, Ryan states:

> Clearly designed, as contemporary advertisements declared, 'to show the British People, in all Public Institutions, Free Libraries, and Schools, what the BRITISH EMPIRE is, and its great commercial value to the MOTHER COUNTRY'.[20]

Ryan points out that these maps 'proved popular and a number of subsequent editions were produced'.[21]

MacDonald draws attention to ABCs for children that show the promotion of the imperial theme in another, related, context. Mary Frances Ames's *An ABC for Baby Patriots*, published in 1899 (a year after the première of Elgar's *Caractacus*), contains the following verses, which admire not only the extent of the empire, but the character of the imperial ruler:

> E is for Empire
> Where sun never sets;
> The larger we make it
> The bigger it gets.
>
> D is the daring
> We show in the field
> Which makes every enemy
> Vanish or Yield.
>
> W is the word
> Of an Englishman true;
> When given it means
> What he says, he will do.[22]

From Thomas Stevens's *Babes of the Empire: an Alphabet for Young England* (1902), MacDonald quotes the following verse:

> Babes of the Empire where the sun never sets,
> Yours is the manfullest banner unfurled!
> Yours is the proudest of all alphabets,
> Babes of an Empire as wide as the world.[23]

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[20] *Ibid.*, 21.
[21] *Ibid.*, 72.
[22] Cited in MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 8.
[23] Cited in MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 9.

MacDonald also notes that poetry, more generally, provided compelling literary representations of military events:

> Poetry kept up with the progress of the Empire: Alfred Austin composed an ode on the Jameson Raid, Conan Doyle wrote 'The Song of the Bow', and A. C. Benson 'Land of Hope and Glory'. C. R. Low, a prolific writer of patriotic history, attempted a single-handed monument to the nation, publishing in 1892 *Cressy to Tel-el-Kebir*, a poem that took over three hundred pages to describe the battle scenes of five and a half centuries.[24]

These joined high-profile poets such as Alfred Tennyson (1809–92) and Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) in addressing imperial issues. MacDonald comments on the power of such poetry to illustrate an imperial occurrence:

> Poetry transformed the everyday: a journalistic account of the bombardment of Alexandria (1882) could be heightened and given a patriotic context by a verse from Campbell.[25]

In the theatre, too, there is evidence that imperial themes were present and enthusiastically received in the late-nineteenth century. A performance of the musical *An Artist's Model* at Daly's Theatre, London, in January 1896 (the year of Elgar's *King Olaf*) elicited the following report in *The Times*:

> During the first part of the play every reference made to the Transvaal was the signal for loud outbursts of applause, the name of the German Emperor being loudly hissed and hooted, while cheer after cheer greeted the names of the Queen, Dr. Jameson, the Chartered Company, and Mr. Chamberlain. Several times cries of 'Three Cheers for Dr. Jameson' and 'Groans for the Kaiser' were raised in the gallery and responded to.[26]

MacDonald states that 'the imagery of military glory pervaded popular culture'.[27] In an example of particular relevance to the cultural context of Edward Elgar, David Cannadine

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[24] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 60.
[25] *Ibid.*, 60. The poet referred to is the Canadian imperialist Church of England clergyman William Wilfred Campbell (1860–1918). See Boone, Laurel, 'Campbell, William Wilfred', *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=7268> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[26] 'London Audiences and the Transvaal Crisis', *The Times*, 13 January 1896.
[27] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 94.

notes that the Worcester Regiment served in parts of the empire such as India and South Africa, with military parades 'a regular feature of city life' in Worcester.[28]

MacDonald is forthright in his view that empire was prominent in the public consciousness:

> By the 1890s, it is clear, British society was saturated with nationalist and militarist ideas. The Queen and the army were moved to the centre of the imperial stage, a cult of heroes and a heroic national history was celebrated in popular literature and had infiltrated school textbooks, and the music-halls exploited patriotic sentiment in songs and tableaux.[29]

Richards notes that the effect of such imperial ideas was increased by significant developments in nineteenth-century publishing and readership:

> The impact was arguably greater than that of any previous dominant ideology because its pre-eminence coincided with the rise of the mass market and the mass media.[30]

In the world of advertising, imperial imagery was used to promote products from soap to chocolate, tobacco, tea and coffee. According to MacKenzie, this may be taken as confirmation that the empire was held in a positive light by the general public:

> No company is going to link its name to an ideology which its customers will find inimical. Such advertising campaigns were based on the notion that images of empire and of imperial 'others' were sufficiently appealing that they helped to sell products.[31]

MacKenzie also suggests that 'emigration recruiters' may have played a part in creating a positive popular impression of the empire, as they tried to entice struggling, dissatisfied or unfulfilled Britons to a better life in the colonies:

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[28] Cannadine, 'Orchestrating his own Life', in *Elgar: An Anniversary Portrait*, introduced by Nicholas Kenyon), 9.

[29] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 2. MacDonald seems to use 'nationalism' and 'patriotism' interchangeably in relation to this period. The question of their difference was raised shortly afterwards, by G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), in his essay 'A Defence of Patriotism', published in 1901. Chesterton views nationalism as an attitude of 'my country, right or wrong', while patriotism is 'the ancient love of country'. See G. K. Chesterton, 'A Defence of Patriotism', in *The Defendant* (1901), full text available at Project Gutenberg, <http://www.cse.dmu.ac.uk/~mward/gkc/books/The_Defendant.html#A_DEFENCE_OF_PATRIOTISM> [accessed 23 October 2012].

[30] Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature,* 2.

[31] MacKenzie, 'Passion or Indifference?', 75.

> In the nineteenth century, recruiting agencies and their agents were widespread phenomena. Lectures were given throughout the country and were well attended. Leaflets were issued. Newspaper articles were common and advertisements appeared not only in the public prints, but also in shops.[32]

In their detailed study of migration in the empire, Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine outline the tangible effects of such recruitment drives:

> The British did not acquire one quarter of the planet's land surface without stocking much of it with migrants. An empire-wide census in 1901 concluded that 2,786,650 'Natives of the United Kingdom' were living overseas in other parts of the British Empire.[33]

Migration was marketed as an attractive career option for skilled workers who could run the commercial and administrative business of the colonies, but also, as Harper and Constantine state, as a destination for those with poor prospects at home:

> To some UK philanthropists, the colonies of white settlements appeared low in population and high in opportunities for the poor and unfortunate in the UK who were stuck in a society which seemed overpopulated and intensely and damagingly urbanized.[34]

This led to the establishment of 'several philanthropic emigration schemes which were intended to provide not just new lives but better lives'.[35] MacKenzie concludes that 'few can have been unaware' that the opportunities for migration/emigration were available, 'even if only a minority, albeit a large one, took them up'.[36] 'Among the majority who stayed at home', he argues, 'almost everybody must have had relatives who migrated overseas. Countless letters were exchanged'.[37] This awareness of empire among the metropolitan population was reinforced by the presence of empire, often in an understated

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[32] *Ibid.*, 62.
[33] Marjory Harper and Stephen Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, Oxford History of the British Empire companion series (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3.
[34] *Ibid.*, 7.
[35] *Ibid.*, 7. The empire was promoted specifically as a destination for single or widowed women. For a discussion of this, see Harper and Constantine, *Migration and Empire*, 212–46.
[36] MacKenzie, Passion or Indifference?, 62.
[37] *Ibid.*, 62.

manner, as a backdrop to the nineteenth-century domestic novel. Here, MacKenzie argues:

> Empire becomes a sort of background noise, a presence which received regular allusions because of the exploits of characters, but which, it can be argued, is not necessarily central to plots. Nevertheless, fortunes are made in the empire; characters go there and return; fabulous jewels emanate from imperial places, and surprising (but usually distant) events can occur. The implication that the empire is an everyday phenomenon which can influence, for good or ill, the lives of the central characters of plots is seldom far away throughout nineteenth-century literature.[38]

Thus, MacKenzie attests, as in many of his writings, the idea of empire was very much embedded in public consciousness, in many different ways and at many different levels, and was widely regarded as a positive thing.

The Opposing View

In contrast to the writers mentioned above, a number of contemporary historians oppose the idea that empire was an all-pervading cultural element. Bernard Porter, for example, has claimed strongly and repeatedly that Britain was 'generally a *less* imperial society than is often assumed'.[39] Porter is critical of the belief that British culture was suffused with imperialism, arguing, for example, that the deeply entrenched class system disallows the ascription of any cultural idea to British society in its entirety, as the strata of that society were simply too diverse to occupy a single stance. He questions recent trends in historical and cultural studies, suggesting that it is fashionable for certain disciplines to attach themselves to imperialism, and warning that 'people who look for things sometimes find them when they are not there'.[40] He takes 'the MacKenzie school' to task:

> The MacKenzie school tended to assume that [imperialism] must have been overwhelming because there was so much of it; an alternative

[38] *Ibid.*, 69.
[39] Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), xv.
[40] *Ibid.*, 7, 13.

> reading, however, might be that it could not have been all that persuasive, if the propagandists felt they needed to propagandize so hard.[41]

Porter offers an alternative explanation for the prevalence of imperial topics in the arts, raising the possibility that the cultural impact of empire has been overestimated:

> Novelists and other artists, even great, timeless ones, certainly cannot be divorced from their surrounding cultures. But they may not reflect the *majority* culture of a place or time. If they did, they might not be so timeless, or so great.[42]

In general, however, Porter simply urges caution in assessing the breadth and depth of imperial ideology in nineteenth-century society, and he clearly states that his scepticism applies only to the early and mid-nineteenth century:

> After that things changed radically. The empire came under serious challenge, and as a result required—certainly in the opinion of its keenest champions—a more wholehearted domestic commitment.[43]

Musicologist J. P. E. Harper-Scott joins Porter in claiming that imperialism in British culture is overstated. However, like Porter, he concedes that in relation to the end of the nineteenth century, this view no longer applies.[44] It is clear that the definition of 'imperialism' used by Porter and Harper-Scott is much more literal than that employed by what Porter terms 'the MacKenzie School'. For example, in support of his argument that British society was not in fact flooded with imperial feeling, Porter states that:

> Few Britons—unless they were professionally engaged there—went to the colonies simply to visit, or to keep in touch with relatives abroad.[45]

Thus, Porter regards personal contact with the empire as a valid, even essential indicator of imperial outlook.

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[41] *Ibid.*, 6.
[42] *Ibid.*, 135.
[43] *Ibid.*, 18.
[44] J. P. E. Harper-Scott, 'Elgar's Deconstruction of the *belle époque:* Interlace Structures and the Second Symphony' in *Elgar Studies,* J. P. E. Harper-Scott and Julian Rushton (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 177. Harper-Scott's discussion of imperialism is carried out in the context of Porter's argument and refers thereto, rather than to the topic more broadly.
[45] Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists,* 29.

The title of Porter's study, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, refers to a statement by the nineteenth-century historian J. R. Seeley (1834–95) in a collection of lectures given at the University of Cambridge and published in 1883 under the title *Expansion of England*. Here, Seeley remarks on the lack of public discussion regarding the expansion of the English state overseas in the eighteenth century:

> There is something very characteristic in the indifference which we show towards this mighty phenomenon of the diffusion of our race and the expansion of our state. We seem, as it were, to have conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind.[46]

Porter's choice of title supports his own view that Britain cannot be called an imperial society because, as Seeley seems to say, it did not have an overt and publicly discussed policy of overseas conquest. It could be argued, however, that Seeley's is a thoroughly imperial document in the sense that it takes for granted the superiority of English government (though he has reservations about colonial rule in India) and the right to apply it beyond the English state, and that, consequently, Porter's title is somewhat misleading. Seeley's reference to 'absence of mind', when read in context, is not synonymous with the accidental acquisition of overseas territories, but rather suggests a lack of public and political commitment regarding the practical details of imperial expansion. This is borne out in statistics of territorial acquisition presented by Davis and Huttenback in their study of the economics of empire:

> It is a testimony to the degree to which imperialism had developed a mindless drive of its own that far more territory was added to the British Empire during the administration of the anti-imperialist Gladstone than during the government of the expansionist Disraeli. The Liberals added territory at a rate of 87,000 square miles per year in contrast to the Conservatives' paltry 5,300.[47]

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[46] J. R. Seeley, *Expansion of England: Two Courses of Lectures*, 2nd edn, repr. (London: MacMillan, 1914), 10.

[47] Lance E. Davis and Robert A. Huttenback, *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire: The Economics of British Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10–11. The period in question is from 1872 until The Siege of Mafeking (October 1899–May 1900).

Seeley's famous reference to 'absence of mind' was itself challenged by the early questioner of imperial practice, J. A. Hobson (1858–1940), who wrote that empire

> was in actual history mainly the accumulation of quite clearly conceived pieces of political power, personal prestige, and trading profits. There was no absence of mind in the makers of its several parts, or even in the gradual bringing together and extension of these parts.[48]

In his survey of critical attitudes to empire, Gregory Claeys points out that, according to Hobson's view, 'creating and enlarging the empire [...] had been in *someone's* interest [...] if not the nation's as a whole'; but Claeys also notes that:

> By the time Hobson intervened in [the imperial] debate, during the Boer War, the nation's mind had become very much concentrated on the issue [of empire].[49]

In any case, Hobson's criticism is directed at the individuals involved in imperial expansion for commercial gain, and at the continued retention of the empire, not at the idea that a general culture of empire existed in British society. The juxtaposition of the views of Seeley and Hobson demonstrates the multi-layered complexity of the imperial argument, and highlights the gulf between the commercial, political and geographical particulars of empire, and the general attitude of the British public to the nation's overseas territories.

Bernard Porter follows Seeley in observing that Britain's was not necessarily a stated imperialism, that in society 'the word itself was hardly ever mentioned'.[50] Porter's argument rests on his claim that the word imperialism 'implied conquest, control and exploitation'.[51] Thus, it becomes clear that the principal difference between the view of

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[48] J. A. Hobson, 'Social Thinkers in Nineteenth-Century England', *Contemporary Review*, 137 (1930), 457; cited in Gregory Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850–1920*, Ideas in Context series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1.

[49] Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 1. Claeys's emphasis. Hobson's seminal work on the topic, *Imperialism*, was published in 1902.

[50] Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 94.

[51] *Ibid.*, 94. Claeys challenges the accuracy of Porter's stance on imperial culture. While accepting that Porter's analysis is 'admirable' and 'valuable', Claeys argues that it is 'relatively narrow in scope', and that 'its account both of the origins of the explanation of empire, and especially the focus on finance capitalism,

Bernard Porter and the view of John MacKenzie et al is largely one of definition. The former regards 'imperialism' as a concrete policy of subjugation, while the latter takes a much broader view, regarding imperialism as an attitude of superiority, whether military, moral, ideological, intellectual, or any combination of these, over people of another land and/or race. If the latter definition is accepted, then certainly it is difficult to deny that the flood of evidence presented in the Studies in Imperialism series and elsewhere suggests a pervading imperialist mindset, whether active or passive, in late-nineteenth-century British culture.

Nevertheless, the complexity of understanding a public mentality from a distance of over a hundred years must be acknowledged. As MacDonald points out, the discourse of empire is inaccessible from this distance, and complete objectivity is effectively impossible:

> A sense of the spoken language of empire is now impossible to retrieve—though a few historic recordings exist—and the visual record that remains is limited. [...] The written account is immense, and here one runs the ever-present and inescapable risk of selective reporting, where the need of the modern writer to create order itself becomes a construction of reflecting the impossibility of commenting on everything.[52]

Patrick Brantlinger refers to the same difficulty, and calls for the setting of parameters for our understanding of the concept of imperialism:

> Does imperialism refer only to formal acts of territorial aggrandizement by the state, or does it refer also to an ideology or range of ideological positions, from militant jingoism shading off into vaguer sentiments of patriotism and racial superiority?[53]

The deluge of evidence provided by writers who accept the existence of a prevalent imperial culture in late-nineteenth-century British society points to the presence and prominence of at least these 'vaguer sentiments of patriotism and racial superiority'. This

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and of the emergence of stringent criticism of empire from a moral perspective, is accordingly limited'. See Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 2.

[52] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 3.

[53] Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, x.

is enough to place the art works of the late-nineteenth century, including the early choral works of Edward Elgar, in a context of public imperial ideology. On foot of his extensive study of literature and imperialism, Brantlinger concludes that:

> It was good to be British and on top of the world, a member of the most enlightened, progressive, civilised race in history, and to most Victorians and Edwardians it would have seemed crazy to deny it.[54]

A Change at the *Fin de Siècle*

Even those sceptical of the view that British society was predominantly imperial agree that the last decade of the nineteenth century was a highly significant time in the history of the empire, featuring a complex combination of national confidence and apprehension. In 1897 the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, on the throne since 1837 and Empress of India since 1876, brought outpourings of official, public, and artistic celebration. The widespread excitement surrounding the jubilee is recorded in newspaper reports such as this from *The Times* of 31 March 1897:

> In less than three months from the present time the whole Empire will be engaged in celebrating the diamond jubilee of the Queen. It is the desire of all Her Majesty's subjects that this great occasion, unique in the annals of our history, should be commemorated with a pomp and magnificence worthy of the Queen and worthy of her people.[55]

Celebrations took place throughout the country, and this description of decorations in Sheffield gives a flavour of the spectacle:

> None but those who have been within the limits of Sheffield to-day and yesterday can realise the intense feeling of excitement which has pervaded the community and the neighbourhood, and even those who know Sheffield best can hardly have recognised that usually grimy city in its gala dress of yesterday and today.[56]

Such reports suggest a great visual demonstration of national pride, celebration and confidence at this time of immense British geographical influence. MacKenzie goes so

[54] *Ibid.*, 14
[55] 'The Diamond Jubilee Decorations', *The Times*, 31 March 1897.
[56] 'The Queen's Visit to Sheffield', *The Times*, 22 May 1897.

far as to assert that 'with the great climax of the Diamond Jubilee in 1897, Queen Victoria came to represent an incarnation of Imperial Britannia herself'.[57] Claeys states similarly that imperial feeling reached its zenith around this time:

> With the Jubilee celebrations of 1897, the reconquest of the Sudan in 1898 and the Boer War of 1899, imperialist sentiment reached a crescendo of popular enthusiasm.[58]

However, the rise of imperial and commercial competitors such as France, Germany and the United States in the late century represented a growing threat to British dominance. As Edward Berenson puts it:

> By the 1870s, the United States had surpassed Britain as the workshop of the world, and before long the new German empire would as well. Both of these newcomers developed strong banking systems and powerful navies, and both would challenge Britain's domination of world markets.[59]

Intense colonial rivalry, particularly in Africa, combined with the constant threat of a major clash of European powers and defeats such as the Jameson fiasco of 1895–96 brought colonial affairs front and centre in British public consciousness, eliciting a collective British imperial anxiety and an upsurge of patriotic feeling.

One event in particular caused a huge increase in news coverage of the empire and in the interest of the British people in military activities abroad in the late-nineteenth century. This was the death and subsequent mass glorification of General Charles George Gordon (1833–85), who was killed at Khartoum in January 1885. The monumental effect of Gordon and the Gordon story on the state of British popular imperialist ideology is summarised in MacDonald's observation that

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[57] MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', 290.
[58] Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 3.
[59] Edward Berenson, *Heroes of Empire: Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press: 2011), 86. Berenson's view of the order of competing nations—and particularly the timing of their respective industrial ascents—is just one interpretation. Nevertheless, the point still stands, as the fear of being overtaken by other countries was enough to bring forth a rise in British national feeling.

> Imperialists dated 'the Great Awakening' to the years just after the death of General Gordon in Khartoum in 1885, when they believed the nation arose from its lethargy to accept its moral destiny.[60]

The story of Gordon, then, is directly linked to the rise of popular imperialism in the late-nineteenth century, a time the British people looked to their heroes for inspiration, moral justification, and ideal representations of national identity. MacDonald notes the importance of Gordon as an imperial hero not only of his own time, but for decades after:

> There was one hero above all others for the late Victorians and Edwardians, whose story was not only inspirational, but whose life seemed to answer most of the moral ambiguities in the imperial programme. This hero was General Charles Gordon.[61]

Part of Gordon's wide appeal seems to have rested on the fact that he was both a military aggressor and a devoted Christian: a man of war and a man of peace. In his *DNB* article on Gordon, Richard Davenport-Hines outlines the hero's idiosyncratic Christianity:

> His religiosity did not become pronounced until 1862, when confinement in a sick-room with mild smallpox drove him to sacred meditations. Thereafter Gordon remained a deeply committed Christian who saw himself as living each day in the hands of God. He came to see his life as a fight for the gospels. Despite his vanity he strove from the 1860s to accomplish that resignation of self which he conceived to be the highest Christian duty.[62]

Gordon seemed, therefore, to embody the imperial contradiction of the Victorian age, as MacDonald explains:

> In his person Gordon carried—and as symbol sought to resolve—the tension between evangelical morality and military spirit; he could be all things to all men: a saint to the pious, a man betrayed to the jingo. To both moralist and patriot his example was an answer to a society that did not always agree that what it was doing was right, and in which the imperial cause sought to either silence or co-opt the voices of doubt and opposition.[63]

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[60] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 4.
[61] *Ibid.*, 83.
[62] Richard Davenport-Hines, 'Gordon, Charles George (1833–1885)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.elib.tcd.ie/view/article/11029?docPos=5> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[63] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 83.

Gordon was a popular celebrity long before his death amid chaos and confusion at Khartoum, and the public anger at the perceived abandonment that led to his demise is evident from the rebranding and vilification of W. E. Gladstone (1809–98), the Grand Old Man (G.O.M.) of British politics, as the Murderer Of Gordon (M.O.G.).[64] This anger may be seen, for example, in the reaction of the scientist Thomas Henry Huxley (1825–95), who wrote of Gordon's character in a letter to his friend, the soldier and educationalist John Fretcheville Dykes Donnelly (1834–1902) shortly after receiving the 'hideous news' of the hero's death:

> Of all the people whom I have met with in my life, he and Darwin are the two in whom I have found something bigger than ordinary humanity—an unequalled simplicity and directness of purpose—a sublime unselfishness.[65]

Huxley's frustration at the government's apparent political dithering prior to Gordon's death is evident in the same letter:

> I shall be curious to see what defence the superingenious Premier has to offer for himself in Parliament. I suppose, as usual, the question will drift into a brutal party fight, when the furious imbecility of the Tories will lead them to spoil their case. That is where we are; on the one side, timid imbecility 'waiting for instructions from the constituencies'; furious imbecility on the other, looking out for party advantage. Oh! for a few months of William Pitt.[66]

Davenport-Hines observes that the fact and the nature of the hero's death far outweighed the concomitant fact of British military defeat:

> The fall of Khartoum was a military setback and an injury to prestige, but insignificant compared with the import of Gordon's sacrifice.[67]

From this public fascination with the death of Gordon grew a part-factual and part-legendary image of the fallen Christian hero. Gordon's character was widely celebrated and he became—and remained—as MacDonald states, 'a potent symbol of the Victorian

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[64] *Ibid.*, 84.
[65] T. H. Huxley to John Donnelly, 16 February 1885, 'T. H. Huxley: Letters and Diary 1885', <http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/letters/85.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[66] Huxley to Donnelly, 16 February 1885.
[67] Davenport-Hines, 'Gordon, General Charles', *DNB*.

Christ, manly, chivalric, devoted to duty, misunderstood, betrayed, and sacrificed'.[68] Berenson notes that many thousands of Gordon portraits were sold, and 'more than seventy biographies' were published within months of the soldier's death,[69] suggesting not only an immense emotional reaction to the event, but also a widespread commercial desire to give the people what they wanted. In these biographies, MacDonald asserts, 'Gordon reached sainthood', with the result that 'a legend of his exemplary life and extraordinary heroism formed almost instantly'.[70]

Fin-de-siècle imperial ideologies seemed to coalesce around the figure of General Gordon, as the aforementioned external threats to British economic and military prowess left the public in need of a reassuring self-image. We can find evidence of the continued mass admiration for Gordon's character in accounts of dramatic settings of his adventures and downfall. The *Era* of 18 June 1898 presents a summary of recent provincial theatricals, referring to the play *At Duty's Call* by Fred C. Harcourt. This story of treachery in the empire, presented at the Theatre Royal in Ashton-under-Lyne, outside Manchester, was given in June 1898, just a few months before Elgar's *Caractacus* was performed in Leeds. The report suggests not only that the story of Gordon was still very much in the public consciousness, but also that the heroism of the defeated soldier was much admired:

> To Mr Stafford Smith is intrusted [*sic*] the character of the military hero General Gordon, and the dignity and courage as well as the justness and generosity of the soldier are ably portrayed.[71]

The same play had been given at the Gaiety Theatre in West Hartlepool in September 1894, where, according to the *Northern Echo*, 'the hearty applause that greeted the

[68] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 85.
[69] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 117.
[70] MacDonald, *Language of Empire,* 84.
[71] 'Provincial Theatricals', *Era*, 18 June 1898.

production showed that it still has a firm hold on public favour'.[72] The *Glasgow Herald* mentions a run of Harcourt's play at the Greenock Theatre Royal in Scotland in November 1895, referring to it as 'the great military drama', and also noting that 'the play has been seen before at the same theatre, and the audience last evening testified to its popularity'.[73] Performances are also recorded at the Queen's Theatre in Manchester in the same month,[74] suggesting that the play reached a wide audience in many parts of the country. In a literary context, Gordon features, for example, in Arthur Conan Doyle's short story *The Adventure of the Cardboard Box*, published in the *Strand Magazine* in 1892. Here, Sherlock Holmes observes that the thoughts of his colleague, Dr Watson, have been inspired by an image hanging on the wall:

> Then your eyes fixed themselves upon your newly framed picture of General Gordon, and I saw by the alteration in your face that a train of thought had been started.[75]

Thus, the story of Gordon was alive and well, and attracting widespread interest, into and throughout the 1890s.

The longstanding appetite for artistic recreations of Gordon is not surprising, given the deep impression that his plight made right across the British public. Berenson notes that his death provoked a strong reaction from diverse sectors of society:

> The announcement of Gordon's death produced an outpouring of public grief unlike anything in recent memory. From one end of the political spectrum to the other, journalists, clergymen, schoolmasters, and many others manifested sorrow and regret, while the moderates and conservatives among them flashed with anger, bitterness, and wounded pride.[76]

Berenson observes that one of the most effective artistic responses to Gordon's death was the display of his likeness at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. Between 1885 and 1901,

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[72] 'The Drama and the Stage', *Northern Echo*, 25 September 1894.
[73] 'The Theatres', *Glasgow Herald*, 3 December 1895.
[74] 'Amusements in Manchester', *Era*, 30 November 1895.
[75] Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: XIV: The Adventure of the Cardboard Box', *Strand Magazine*, 5 (January 1893): 61–73.
[76] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 83.

Berenson states, the museum exhibited eight panorama scenes, all of which depicted imperial events, and three of which concerned Gordon. One of these reproduced Joy's famous painting *General Gordon's Last Stand*, and remained in situ for almost half a century. Significantly, Berenson notes that this particular depiction of Gordon's final moments

> emphasized the religious, spiritual quality of Gordon's (and England's) imperial mission, depicting Gordon as a Christian hero-martyr who had succumbed bravely and without resistance to the Islam hordes.[77]

Berenson points out that it was 'much more likely that Gordon died a soldier's death, fighting ferociously before Mahdist soldiers cut him down', but that 'the desire to portray him as a transcendent, Christian knight required beatific passivity in the face of Islamic violence'.[78]

MacDonald draws attention to the symbolism of Gordon's stance in the panoramic representation of Joy's painting:

> As an argument for the re-entry into the Sudan the sign could not be clearer: as Gordon towers over the Madhists [*sic*], so civilisation rises above savagery.[79]

MacDonald notes that the Wax Museum's imperial panoramas were 'seen by hundreds of thousands of paying customers', and points out that this 'is itself an important fact in the history of popular imperialism'.[80]

Amidst these various explanations of Gordon's greatness, some of the central driving forces behind his Messianic reputation might have been lost. The most straightforward reading of a number of written sources from the years after his death raises the possibility that one of the main reasons why Gordon struck such a chord with the British public is that he was regarded simultaneously as a saintly hero and as one of

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[77] *Ibid.*, 118.
[78] *Ibid.*, 118.
[79] MacDonald, *Language of Empire,* 97.
[80] *Ibid.*, 94–95.

themselves. He was Christ-like in reaching the rich and poor alike—a British mortal doing his best to improve the world, a simple and noble man to whom the ordinary person could relate. This attitude to Gordon may be found in a letter from Tennyson, published in *The Times*, and which the Poet Laureate had written in response to a request from the American poet J. G. Whittier (1807–92):

> I herein send you an epitaph for Gordon in our Westminster Abbey, —i.e. for his cenotaph:—
>
> " 'Warrior of God, man's friend, not here below,
> " 'But somewhere dead far in the waste Soudan;
> " 'Thou livest in all hearts, for all men know
> " 'This earth hath borne no simpler, nobler man.'[81]

Imperial Heroes

Imperial heroes were instrumental in igniting the interest of the British public in imperial events, as individuals came to represent the struggles in which they partook. As Berenson states in his study of the conquest of Africa:

> What attracted ordinary citizens in Britain [...] to empire were stories by and about the charismatic individuals who gave imperialism a recognizable, human face. These heroes allowed the mass of citizens to understand overseas expansion as a series of extraordinary, personal quests.[82]

Walter E. Houghton believes that public fascination with heroes is characteristic of the Victorian period in particular:

> In no other age were men so often told to take 'the great ones of the earth' as models for imitation, or provided with so many books with titles like *Heroes and Hero-Worships, Lectures on Great Men, A Book of Golden Deeds, The Red Book of Heroes*.[83]

The exploits of imperial heroes were heralded in didactic contexts, held up as examples to admire and emulate, as Norman Vance explains:

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[81] 'News in Brief', *The Times,* 7 May 1885. Tennyson's unusual punctuation is discussed in Kathryn Ledbetter, *Tennyson and Victorian Periodicals: Commodities in Context* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 4.
[82] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 2.
[83] Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind: 1830–1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), 305.

> Major-General Havelock, hero of Lucknow in the Indian Mutiny, was one favourite example. Captain Hedley Vicars of the 93rd Regiment, killed in the Crimea in 1855, was another. [...] Havelock and Hedley Vicars and, some time later, General Gordon, were all Christian heroes of a decidedly Evangelical stamp, ruthlessly exploited in Evangelical pulpits, and in the Evangelical religious press.[84]

Robin Gilmour adds to these the example of missionary explorer David Livingstone (1813–73), who was revered in posthumous hagiographical literature as 'a sanctified hero of self-help'.[85] There was a significant commercial interest in highlighting the actions of these heroes: with the rise of the celebrity-focused New Journalism in the late century, MacDonald argues, 'heroes could be more easily promoted, and their heroics sold newspapers'.[86]

Berenson observes, further, that the link between imperial heroes of ancient times and those of the nineteenth-century British Empire served to increase the appeal of Gordon and others:

> Magnifying the exceptional prominence of these figures was their apparent resemblance to heroes of ancient Rome, especially Caractacus and Vercingetorix, whose epic stories were well known and hugely popular in Victorian Britain.[87]

Following their ancient counterparts, a crucial feature of these heroes was their noble behaviour. Houghton asserts that in the context of late-Victorian Britain, as the population sought comfort amid uncertainty, an unblemished character was essential:

> To the Victorians a hero might be a messiah or he might be a revelation of God, but he was certain to be a man of the highest moral stature, and therefore of enormous importance to a period in which the alarming increase of both the commercial spirit and religious doubt made moral inspiration a primary need.[88]

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[84] Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 27.
[85] Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature: 1830–1890* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), 181. See A. D. Roberts, 'Livingstone, David (1813–1873)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16803> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[86] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 82
[87] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 6.
[88] Houghton, *Victorian Frame of Mind*, 316.

To Houghton's list of Victorian discomforts we can add the imperial anxiety of the late century, for which large-scale reassurance was sought. The admirable Victorian hero, fighting bravely and selflessly for God and country, provided the British public with an ideal image of itself, its duty, and its place in the world.

The British Public and Imperial Specifics

MacKenzie argues that although the general public in Britain cared little for the details of official, political-imperial affairs, it revelled in the possession of an empire and the more exciting aspects thereof:

> The public, largely uninterested in specific Imperial principles and policies, were nonetheless fascinated by Empire's existence, its racial connotations, and the superior self-image which it offered in respect of the rest of the world.[89]

This is reminiscent of Seeley's observation, from his perspective in the 1880s, that only on occasion did the finer details of imperial intricacies impinge on the consciousness of the public, despite what he regarded as the great governmental task lying before the English nation:

> Never certainly did any nation, since the world began, assume anything like so much responsibility. Never did so many vast questions in all parts of the globe, questions calling for all sorts of special knowledge and special training, depend upon the decision of a single public. It must be confessed that this public bears its responsibility lightly! It does not even study colonial and Indian questions. It does not consider them interesting, except in those rare cases where they come to the foreground of politics. When the fate of a Ministry is concerned they are found intensely interesting, but the public does not consider them interesting so long as

[89] MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', 291. Large sections of the public were similarly uninterested in the finer details of domestic government. In a light-hearted article on a forthcoming general election in 1895, a writer for the *Penny Illustrated News* observes: 'I must say that most people seem extremely indifferent to the whole affair; and I imagine we shall witness a General Election with small polls. In fact, politics are of little account to the average man, who either calls a plague on both the great Houses, or shrugs his shoulders and busies himself with his private affairs. Many people are too poor to take an interest in politics; some are too rich. Others, again, are too easy-going, and too absorbed in the affairs of their own private lives'. See 'Prominent People and Public Topics', *Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times*, 6 July 1895.

> only the population of India, the destiny of a vast section of the planet, and the future of the English state itself, are concerned.[90]

However, the more adventurous side of empire—the heroes, the exoticism, the spectacle, the perceived spreading of good government and Christian morality throughout the world—held a widespread fascination for the British public, a fascination that is reflected in the imperial undercurrent of many cultural spheres in the late-nineteenth century. Moreover, in many cases, these cultural spheres by their nature brought forth simplified versions of events in the imperial world for consumption by the British people, as MacDonald explains in his study of the discourse of popular imperialism—of the signs, stories, poems and pictures defining complex occurrences abroad:

> The signs in use in popular imperialism were especially effective: they spoke directly to a large audience, they reduced the complexity of events to a (limited) number of readings, and most important of all, they turned moral ambiguity into unquestioned certainty [...] As the popular account moved from prose to verse, from print to the picture, or onto the stage of the theatre, ideological meaning was simplified and reduced to its essentials.[91]

MacDonald puts the poetry of Kipling into this category of art presented with a simplified ideological thrust, all the more powerful as a result of its simplicity. By the time of the publication of his collection *The Seven Seas* in 1896, MacDonald argues, Kipling was

> acknowledged as *the* voice of the Empire, and significantly, as its poet, rather than its story-teller, for in verse he could express the imperial idea in its simplest and most powerful form.[92]

This simplified representation of imperial events, reduced to their black-and-white essentials, often took the form of British good versus unknown, uncivilised undesirable. Such a binary opposition is at the heart of one of the late-nineteenth century's most popular and emblematic literary genres: adventure literature.

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[90] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 205–206.
[91] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 89.
[92] *Ibid.*, 145.

Adventure Literature and the Imagining of Empire

> *Now listen to me, if I have in these past details lost or burdened your attention; for this is what I have chiefly to say to you. The art of any country is the exponent of its social and political virtues.*[93]

Patrick Brantlinger alludes to the capacity of literature to absorb and reveal matters of social context when he states that 'literature is inevitably social: it is written in society, by social beings, addressed to other social beings'.[94] Jeffrey Richards believes that popular fiction has a didactic role to play in this regard:

> Popular fiction is one of the ways by which society instructs its members in its prevailing ideas and mores, its dominant role models and legitimate aspirations.[95]

Adventure stories (also called romances), such as those by R. M. Ballantyne (1825–94), G. A. Henty (1832–1902), Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94), and Henry Rider Haggard (1856–1925), were written for boys. They usually consist of exciting and dangerous journeys overseas, encounters with wild and exotic lands and peoples, shipwrecks and other near-death experiences, triumph over adversity, and a successful and enriched return home. In *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, Martin Green puts forward the idea that:

> The adventure tales that formed the light reading of Englishmen for two hundred years and more after *Robinson Crusoe* were, in fact, the energizing myth of English imperialism. They were, collectively, the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night; and, in the form of its dreams, they charged England's will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer and rule.[96]

From this genre, readers gleaned their images of adventure, of wild foreign lands and savage peoples, and of the good, worthy, civilising influence that could be wielded by a superior race. Adventure tales enjoyed huge sales in the developing mass market of the

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[93] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, 26.
[94] Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness*, 10.
[95] Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature,* 1.
[96] Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 3.

late-nineteenth century and, as well as appearing as standalone novels, also featured in popular boys' magazines such as the *Boy's Own Paper*, *Captain*, *Chums*, *Young England* and *Union Jack*. In *Modernism, Romance and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture 1880–1914*, Nicholas Daly argues that the popular late-Victorian romance 'in effect takes over from the domestic realist novel as the narrative flagship of middle-class Britain'.[97]

The reading public, to a significant extent, gathered its imagination of imperial reality from adventure literature, as Daly states:

> Coinciding with the new imperialism, stories like *King Solomon's Mines* and *Treasure Island,* among the most successful novels of the 1880s, use the imperial adventure story to establish a particular relation between the domestic reader and imperial space.[98]

The stories' characters, especially their heroes, serve as representatives of the British public in the exciting fictional imperial world, a mirror of the real one:

> These romances equipped the metropolitan subject with an imaginary model of the territories that were daily added to the British empire. They depict the conquest of overseas space by the reader's delegates within the text, the fictional explorers, hunters, soldiers and engineers who march relentlessly across trackless desert, jungle and veldt.[99]

In other words, the sights and sounds, the strange people and exotica of empire were brought to life for the British reader in the pages of adventure stories, and, moreover, by following their fictional heroes, readers could themselves become what Daly refers to as 'armchair adventurers'.[100] As Dennis Butts suggests in his introduction to *King Solomon's Mines*, Henry Rider Haggard

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[97] Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the* Fin de Siècle*: Popular Fiction and British Culture 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4.
[98] *Ibid.*, 26.
[99] *Ibid.*, 53.
[100] *Ibid.*, 61.

> makes his readers feel the heat of the desert, see an elephant charging, and hear the native regiments salute by drumming their shields with their spears.[101]

The genre provided excitement and wonder, an array of heroic male protagonists, and an attractive view of the powerful and civilising British people and nation.

The embedding of a natural feeling of superiority in a context of adventure may be seen, for example, in Chapter 3 of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, where the three British boys, Jack Martin, Ralph Rover and Peterkin Gay, find themselves stranded on a remote island, and Peterkin exclaims excitedly about their predicament and the likely outcome:

> It's capital—first rate—the best thing that ever happened to us, and the most splendid prospect that ever lay before three jolly young tars. We've got an island all to ourselves. We'll take possession in the name of the king, we'll go and enter the service of its inhabitants. Of course we'll rise, naturally, to the top of affairs. You shall be king, Jack; Ralph, prime minister.[102]

This confidence in British primacy, and the ability to achieve it nobly and in a non-violent manner, is a prominent theme throughout the adventure genre. The resultant sense of entitlement to take ownership may also be found, for example, in Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). As Chapter 2 draws to a close, the British adventurers Sir Henry Curtis, the aptly named Captain Good, and the narrator, Allan Quatermain, discuss the legend of the mines and the potential haul of diamonds they might find there. Sir Henry Curtis states that he is sufficiently well off, and so desires none of the treasures: 'And if by any chance we should reach this place, and find diamonds, they shall belong to you and Good equally'.[103] The question of native ownership does not arise.

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[101] Dennis Butts, 'Introduction' in Henry Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, new edn, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xv.
[102] R. M. Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, new edn (London: Puffin, 1982; orig. publ. 1857), 17.
[103] Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, 25.

Imperial Ideology

In line with the idea, discussed above, that artistic representations of imperial events reduced complex situations to simple terms—of good versus evil or civilised versus uncivilised—MacDonald asserts that the image of the empire presented in adventure literature was stripped down to its fundamental elements, and that this simplicity facilitated the communication of ideological didacticism:

> The separate world of the boys' story was of course reduced and simplified: ethics were straightforward, the right side always won, and the wicked were always punished, but beyond these simple moral positions extensive indoctrination was being carried out.[104]

Richards concurs with this idea that adventure literature served not simply as entertainment, but as a medium for the transmission of ideology. He draws attention to the aforementioned work of Martin Green as a study that demonstrates that writers of adventure literature were engaged in 'energising and validating the myth of empire as a vehicle for excitement, adventure and wish-fulfilment through action'.[105] Similarly, in his study of imperialism in the writings of Ballantyne, Stuart Hannabuss outlines the value of adventure stories for providing a contextual understanding not only of imperial attitudes, but of ideological intent:

> It is useful to see such fictions as touchstones for their age, as lenses through which we can peer and see (a) what writers were preoccupied with as far as specific forms of writing were concerned and (b) what they thought appropriate for children to read in terms of factual information and attitudes.[106]

Richards refers to the ideological power of adventure literature when he states that the genre functions

> not just as a mirror of the age but an active agency constructing and perpetuating a view of the world in which British imperialism was an

[104] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 205.
[105] Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, 2–3.
[106] Stuart Hannabuss, 'Ballantyne's Message of Empire', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, Richards (ed.), 53–71 (54).

> integral part of the cultural and psychological formation of each new generation of readers.[107]

The observations above suggest that adventure literature was a medium for widespread, calculated propaganda. However, Richards provides another angle as he casts a commercial eye over the production of literature for public consumption:

> There is a two-way reciprocal relationship between producers and consumers. The consumers, by what they buy, tell the producers what they want. The producers, aiming to maximise profit, seek to avoid controversy by dramatising what they perceive as the dominant ideas and headline topics of the day.[108]

This view raises the possibility that authors of adventure literature were not necessarily engaged in a deliberate campaign of indoctrination based on their own personal beliefs, but were simply giving the people what they wanted to hear, as a means of achieving success through fame or profit. Whether individual authors intentionally delivered propagandist material or simply sought to satisfy a particular public desire, the result, from the reader's perspective, was the same. Adventure literature both fuelled, and was fuelled by, British popular imperialism.

Didacticism in Victorian Literature

Although we cannot be certain of the ideological attitudes of late-nineteenth-century audiences, we can learn much from the prevailing reading material of the time. It is clear from children's reading material that a strong connection existed between messages of moral and religious rectitude and messages of imperial duty. Some of the era's most popular boys' magazines were published by religious groups who wished to influence the reading material, and consequently the values and outlook, of the nation's youth. A successful example of this is the *Boys' Own Paper*, 'the pre-eminent boys' paper of its

[107] Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature,* 3.
[108] *Ibid.*, 1.

age',[109] founded in 1879 by the Religious Tract Society (RTS). The management committee's intention at the outset was, Patrick Dunae states, 'to publish a conservative evangelical journal',[110] and the magazine's tales of empire and adventure attracted a huge readership. Despite financial losses in the early years of publication, the RTS continued its support for the *Boys' Own Paper* because it was seen as 'an agent for social good',[111] with its 'commitment to gentlemanly ideals and imperial values'.[112] Some of the leading adventure writers of the day wrote for the *Paper,* including Henty, Ballantyne, G. M. Fenn (1831–1909), and W. H. G. Kingston (1814–80), and the magazine also had access to real stories of empire through reports from RTS missionaries overseas. Within months of its launch, the *Paper* claimed a readership of 600,000, and within ten years this had soared to an estimated 1.4 million.[113]

As MacKenzie notes, through their input into boys' magazines, 'the churches and missionary societies were not the least sources of the popular culture of Empire'.[114] But simply presenting Christian values was insufficient: in his study of the mass market, W. Hamish Fraser notes that the boys' magazines which thrived were those which,

> while plugging some simple Christian message, nonetheless retained a sufficient quantity of the blood, gore and excitement of non-Christian competitors.[115]

Achieving a balance between the adventurous and didactic elements of the story was, it seems, essential. MacDonald notes that the *Boys' Own Paper* was particularly successful in achieving this combination of entertainment and improvement:

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[109] *Ibid.*, 5.
[110] Patrick A. Dunae, 'New Grub Street for Boys', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, Richards (ed.), 12–33 (26).
[111] *Ibid.*, 29.
[112] Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature,* 3.
[113] Dunae, 'New Grub Street for Boys', 23.
[114] MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', 281.
[115] W. Hamish Fraser, *The Coming of the Mass Market: 1850–1914* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), 230.

> The world of the *Boys' Own Paper* was earnest and industrious, dedicated to both the transmission of information and the encouragement of self-improvement.[116]

Magazines such as the *Boys' Own Paper* engaged in feeding the societal appetite for such self-improvement. As MacDonald states, the *Paper* was 'an emporium of knowledge, taking the attitude that there was nothing its readers did not want to learn or discover'.[117] He points out that, in addition to presenting useful information on a variety of topics, the didactic content of the *Paper* could be viewed another way: 'it was, in an important sense, an education in the ideology of power'.[118]

In her exploration of children's books and magazines, Kathryn Castle notes that this apparent imperial inculcation was reflected in other areas of juvenile reading, such as school textbooks and periodicals:

> The high tide of British imperialism corresponded with the expansion of history in the school curriculum, the growth of respectable periodicals, and the perception of a need to invigorate public morale and national pride.[119]

Castle points out that such learning and leisure reading material provided an image of empire for young readers who had no direct, real connection with imperial reality:

> Both the history textbooks and the children's periodicals offered to the young a version of how to relate to the imperial world and to the people who lived within it.[120]

To illustrate the point, Castle presents a telling excerpt from a late-Victorian history textbook, which, though it acknowledges the role of violence in the imperial acquisition of India, emphasises nonetheless the superior benefits of British rule for the distant land:

> It is true that India was won by the sword, but England has given peace and prosperity to 300 million of that vast dependency [...] freedom and

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[116] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 10.
[117] *Ibid.*, 10.
[118] *Ibid.*, 10.
[119] Kathryn Castle, *Britannia's Children: Reading Colonialism through Children's Books and Magazines*, Studies in Imperialism series (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 4.
[120] *Ibid.*, 8.

> justice to the struggling masses of people of all races and religions, who if left to themselves, would perish by war and brigandage.[121]

This corresponds with the view of natives presented, for example, in *King Solomon's Mines*. In Chapter 3, the narrator, Allan Quatermain, describes his 'little shanty', where he hosted Sir Henry Curtis and Captain Good before they set off on their adventure proper. The dwelling has three rooms, a kitchen and flourishing garden—a recreation of the ideal English country cottage. He remarks in passing that 'You can never get your Zulu to take much interest in gardening. It is a peaceful art, and peaceful arts are not in his line'.[122] Between adventure literature in books and magazines, and accounts of imperial oppositions in school textbooks, the youth of Britain were presented with general images of distant people and places, and of an order of nations headed by Britain. These simplifications led to the formation of impressions and stereotypes, which, according to Andrew Porter, 'multiplied, and were widely popularized, often in arguments about the inevitability of social-Darwinist, interracial struggles for survival'.[123] According to MacDonald, this meant that, by virtue of their reading material, British children were automatically exposed to and affected by an imperial mindset:

> By the end of the nineteenth century middle-class boys reading the fictions of adventure were necessarily caught up in the programme of empire.[124]

The Civilising Mission

The idea that British government was good government, that British rule brought freedom and justice to the less fortunate, permeated late-Victorian culture. This attitude may be found, for example, in newspaper reports from the 1890s, and particularly those from the

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[121] John Meiklejohn and Max Meiklejohn, *A School History of England* (London: Holden, 1901), cited in Castle, *Britannia's Children*, 27.
[122] Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, 29–30.
[123] Andrew Porter, 'Introduction: Britain and the Empire', 24. The implications of Darwin's theory for the present study are discussed in Chapter 3.
[124] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 205.

time of Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee. The following excerpt from *The Times* of 8 June 1897 outlines the civilising aims and achievements of British rule as stated in an article on the colonies:

> All of [the colonies] have grown to their present condition of prosperous maturity under the shelter of Imperial protection, and all have entered during the period of the present reign into the enjoyment of responsible institutions, the freedom of which has never been surpassed. It is the proudest boast of our Imperial system that the order established by it is so complete as to render liberty of this sort possible within its limit. Emancipation, not conquest, has been its aim.[125]

The British Empire as a civilising influence features strongly as a theme in the fictional context of adventure literature. Moreover, adventure stories make it clear that natives welcome the positive input—the improvement—implemented by their British superiors. This imperial logic is evident at the end of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, where the English adventurers leave the grateful Kukuana tribe much more civilised than they found them. Similarly, the conclusion of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* describes a demonstration of gratitude from the inhabitants of Mango Island for the civilising example of the English adventurers Ralph, Jack and Peterkin. In the case of Henry Rider Haggard, there is evidence that he firmly held this conviction regarding superior British rule himself. Haggard, who, according to Wendy R. Katz, very much incorporated his own world view into his fictional writings,[126] stated in an essay on the Transvaal in 1887 that:

> We Englishmen came to this land [...] with a high mission of truth and civilisation. [...] It is our mission to conquer and hold in subjection, not from thirst of conquest, but for the sake of law, justice and order.[127]

The benevolent image of Britain put forward in adventure stories is closely tied to the idea that the British Empire was a Christian empire, bringing the peaceful benefits of

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[125] 'The Colonies and the Jubilee', *The Times*, 8 June 1897.
[126] Wendy R. Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire: A Critical Study of British Imperial Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 50.
[127] Haggard, 'The Transvaal', *MacMillan's Magazine*, 1887; cited in Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire*, 50.

Christianity to the unenlightened. The power of the peaceful religion, and the great moral good it brought to wild savages, is repeatedly emphasised in Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*. In Chapter 23, for example, the trusty old shipman Bill explains this influence to Ralph Rover:

> The South Sea Islanders are such incarnate fiends that they are the better of being tamed, and the missionaries are the only men who can do it.[128]

The championing of Christianity is evident from the first chapter of the same story. Here, Ralph Rover hears from his well-travelled shipmates about the exotic islands of the southern seas, where

> men were wild, blood-thirsty savages, excepting in those favoured isles to which the gospel of our Saviour had been conveyed.[129]

Later in the same novel, Bill again outlines the great difference between those untouched by Christianity and those who have received the missionary message of their British visitors:

> We find that wherever the savages take up with Christianity they always give over their bloody ways, and are safe to be trusted.[130]

Finally, in Chapter 34, the imperial didacticism of *The Coral Island* comes squarely to the fore. The three boy-adventurers, held captive by savages, are saved by the timely arrival of a missionary and the conversion of the native chief. A converted native thanks Jack Martin for his chivalrous and heroic attempt to save the girl Avatea:

> She was a woman in distress, and that was enough to secure to her the aid of a Christian man. We, who live in these islands of the sea, know that the true Christians always act thus. Their religion is one of love and kindness. We thank God that so many Christians have been sent here—we hope many more will come.[131]

This promotion of the empire as a bringer of moral improvement is a major ideological current in the adventure genre. By presenting a simple opposition of uncivilised heathen

[128] Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, 157.
[129] *Ibid.*, 7.
[130] *Ibid.*, 161.
[131] *Ibid.*, 235.

and civilised, peace-loving Christian, adventure stories provided British readers with a comforting image of the British race spreading goodness and the gospel throughout the world. In other words, the adventure genre provided reassurance about the integrity of imperial motivations, and readers could enjoy the power of benevolent superiority vicariously through their literary heroes. Of course, such heroes, as representatives of British character and agents of moral improvement, had themselves to embody the physical and moral strengths befitting their role.

Muscular Christianity

The type of British heroism championed in imperial adventure literature is characterised by a distinctive combination of physical strength and Christian values. The term 'muscular Christianity' was used first in relation to the writings of clergyman and novelist Charles Kingsley (1819–75).[132] Kingsley's maritime adventure *Westward Ho!*, which MacDonald describes as 'the most widely read and influential historical romance of the early Victorian period',[133] was written in 1855 but immensely popular right up to the turn of the century, and was even distributed to English troops during the Crimean War.[134] The hero, Amyas Leigh, is fiery, strong, and chivalrous, and Kingsley holds him up as a specimen of the ideal young Englishman, looking forward to boarding a ship and sailing away to unknown but undoubtedly fruitful imperial adventures:

> And as he stands there with beating heart and kindling eye, the cool breeze whistling through his long fair curls, he is a symbol, though he knows it not, of brave young England longing to wing its way out of its island prison, to discover and to traffic, to colonise and civilise, until no wind can sweep the earth which does not bear the echoes of an English voice. Patience, young Amyas! Thou too shalt forth, and westward ho, beyond

[132] The term was used in a review of Kingsley's *Two Years Ago* (1857). Kingsley is said to have preferred the term 'Christian manliness'. See Norman Vance, 'Kingsley, Charles (1819–1875)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15617> [accessed 23 October 2012]
[133] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 61.
[134] Green, *Dreams of Adventure: Deeds of Empire*, 216.

> thy wildest dreams; and see brave sights, and do brave deeds, which no man has since the foundation of the world.[135]

The promotion of muscular Christianity was the promotion of a British ideal of behaviour and character. According to Richards, the ideology involved

> the reformulation of the image of the gentleman as an idealised medieval knight, the embodiment of the virtues of bravery, loyalty, courtesy, generosity, modesty, purity and compassion.[136]

The association in literature of military action with Christian values was reflected in the establishment of organisations such as the Boys' Brigade, a uniformed, 'church-based, interdenominational youth movement' founded in 1883 by William Alexander Smith (1854–1914).[137] The object of the movement, formulated by Smith, was (and remains)

> the advancement of Christ's kingdom among boys and the promotion of habits of obedience, reverence, discipline, self-respect, and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness.[138]

MacKenzie states that, by 1896, there were 700 Boys' Brigade companies across Britain and 'many soon appeared in the Dominions and colonies',[139] suggesting that the organisation's ideals were widely popular, and readily married to the broader imperialist purpose. The equivalence between the muscular Christianity associated with such organisations and the type promoted in the realm of fictional adventure literature may be seen in J. A. Mangan's observation with regard to the children's writer W. H. G. Kingston, who wrote over a hundred adventure books in addition to founding two magazines: *Kingston's Magazine for Boys* and *Union Jack.*[140] Kingston is described as 'an evangelical imperialist', who

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[135] Charles Kingsley, *Westward Ho!*, new edn (Cambridge, MA: John Wilson, 1899), 15–16.
[136] Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature,* 6.
[137] Springhall, John, 'Smith, Sir William Alexander (1854–1914)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37987> [accessed 23 Oct 2012]
[138] 'The Boys' Brigade: The Adventure Begins Here: Who We Are', <http://www.boys-brigade.org.uk/whoweare.htm> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[139] MacKenzie, 'Empire and Metropolitan Cultures', 283.
[140] J. A. Hamilton, 'Kingston, William Henry Giles (1814–1880)', Diana Dixon (rev.), *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15629> [accessed 23 October 2012].

> catered to the needs, as he saw them, of future builders of an Anglo-Saxon world, reminding them continually of the need to acquire character and then demonstrate it.[141]

The muscular Christian ethos of adventure literature facilitated a simplified and reassuring perception of the role of the British hero in the activities of empire. Moreover, muscular Christianity was not confined to any one branch of Christianity. As a non-denominational ideology it was all-inclusive: it allowed readers of all British Christian affiliations to enjoy and identify with the adventures of imperial heroes and to experience vicariously their action-packed efforts to spread British, Christian goodness throughout the world. Norman Vance summarises the comforting effect of muscular Christianity as presented by writers of adventure literature:

> The excitements of Christian manly heroism as they described them helped to bring romance to everyone, for all were the children of God, and the moral and religious emphasis of their work ensured that no-one need feel guilty about it.[142]

The straightforward nature of this broadly non-denominational perception of empire evident in adventure literature belied the complexity of religious divisions among the metropolitan population, a complexity which must be acknowledged in any attempt to understand the cultural landscape of late-Victorian Britain.

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[141] J. A. Mangan, 'Noble Specimens of Manhood: Schoolboy Literature and the Creation of a Colonial Chivalric Code', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, Richards (ed.), 173–94 (174–75).
[142] Vance, *Sinews of the Spirit*, 166.

Religion in Late-Victorian Society

> *I use then to-day, as I shall in future use, the word 'Religion' as signifying the feelings of love, reverence, or dread with which the human mind is affected by its conceptions of spiritual being; and you know well how necessary it is, both to the rightness of our own life, and to the understanding the lives of others, that we should always keep clearly distinguished our ideas of Religion, as thus defined, and of Morality, as the law of rightness in human conduct. For there are many religions, but there is only one morality.*[143]

> *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.*[144]

In his extensive study of Victorian literature, Robin Gilmour concludes that the religious life of the mid-to-late nineteenth century was 'intense and disputatious, and its problematic presence can be felt wherever we look in nineteenth-century literature', for example, in the works of Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Tennyson, Arnold, Hopkins, Hardy, Newman, Carlyle and Charlotte Brontë.[145] The topic of religion in late-Victorian Britain is immense, and immensely complex.[146] Gilmour outlines three broad categories of Christian classification in Britain, observing that significant internal diversity was a feature of each. These categories were: Anglican; Nonconformist/Dissenter/Free Church, including Quaker, Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Calvinist, Unitarian; and Roman Catholic.[147] This understanding of the Christian spectrum is further complicated by the presence of Evangelicalism—a way of life shaped by specific views on salvation and scriptural authority, rather than a denomination—which exerted enormous influence on

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[143] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, 40.
[144] Matthew Arnold, 'Dover Beach', published in *New Poems* (1867). For complete text, see <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/arnold/writings/doverbeach.html> [accessed 23 October 2012]. See also Stefan Collini, 'Arnold, Matthew (1822–1888)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/679> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[145] Gilmour, *Victorian Period*, 63.
[146] A comprehensive exploration of its nature and its cultural implications lies largely outside the boundaries of the present study.
[147] Gilmour, *Victorian Period*, 71.

nineteenth-century societal behaviour.[148] Throughout the century, the apparent conflict of aspects of religious belief with other cultural forces led to considerable movement within the denominational framework. Scientific discoveries—especially concerning the transmutation of species—intellectual debates, individual dissatisfaction and other factors led to a loss of religious certainty, an increased doubt in conventional church teaching, which in turn led to a search for new certainties, new comforts.

The nature of this process, this 'crisis of faith', is a matter of much dispute, as it is difficult to determine whether the perceived crisis took the form of a decline in religious belief, or rather a change of direction, a renewed search for religious understanding through diversification. Sydney Eisen points out that even if direct participation in organised religious activity decreased at this time—and he is not convinced that this is the case—religion remained a hugely pervasive cultural influence:

> If religion, either in the form of institutional membership or personal belief, 'declined', it certainly did not cease to be a significant social and spiritual force.[149]

Eisen argues that 'religion' denoted much more than a faith system in Victorian Britain: it dictated many details of an individual's social situation:

> Religion was not only a matter of belief but also an integral part of personal and public morality, family life, social position, occupation and friendship, not to mention education and party politics.[150]

Religion, therefore, was not only a pervasive cultural force, but also a prominent statement of identity in Victorian Britain.

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[148] Mark A. Smith asserts that Evangelicalism was 'much the largest component tradition in English Christianity throughout the nineteenth century', though his analysis lacks statistics. See Mark A. Smith, 'Religion' in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Chris Williams (ed.), Blackwell Companions to British History (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 337–52 (341).

[149] Sydney Eisen, 'Introduction', in *Victorian Faith in Crisis: Essays on Continuity and Change in Nineteenth-Century Religious Belief*, Richard J. Helmstadter and Bernard Lightman (eds.), (London: Macmillan, 1990), 3.

[150] *Ibid.*, 3.

Gilmour refers to the centrality of religion in literature as an indicator of religious influence throughout the nineteenth century, arguing that

> the very pervasiveness and variety of religious experience in Victorian literature is a sign of its importance in the culture at large.[151]

Moreover, Gilmour notes what he regards as

> the most remarkable fact of all about Victorian religion: the extent to which religious discourse tended to permeate other forms of intellectual and cultural discourse.[152]

Richard Altick's study of the tendencies of the reading public in the era of the developing mass market goes some way towards illustrating the immense penetration of didactic religious literature in late-nineteenth-century society. Altick notes particularly the influence of literature distributed by religious organisations:

> In 1897 the Religious Tract Society sent out from the 'home depot' alone over 38,720,000 pieces of literature, of which 18,320,000—less than half—were tracts, the rest being books (especially but not exclusively children's) and periodicals [...]. In the same year the S. P. C. K. issued a total of 12,000,000 pieces.[153]

This type of literature, Altick argues, was embraced by a middle class engaged in a campaign of self-improvement:

> The middle class, where evangelicalism was most at home, formed an insatiable market for the edifying tales and the serious didactic and inspirational works that flowed from pious pens.[154]

Altick further demonstrates the prevalence of religious literature by comparing publication figures with those for other strands, finding that, in the 1880s,

> in the annual classification of new books prepared by the *Publisher's Circular*, works of 'theology, sermons, biblical, etc.' were more numerous than any other class.[155]

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[151] Gilmour, *Victorian Period*, 63.
[152] *Ibid.*, 71.
[153] Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public: 1800–1900* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 101. The SPCK (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge) will be discussed in relation to the empire in Chapter 3.
[154] Altick, *English Common Reader*, 108.
[155] *Ibid.*, 108.

Altick's succinct conclusion is that 'religious literature, therefore, was everywhere in nineteenth-century England'.[156] The question arises as to why religion maintained such a prominent, albeit changing, role in spite of the challenges to faith posed by widely published scientific debate. One possible reason is that, as Bernard Lightman argues:

> Many prominent intellectuals and scientists fought to retain a place for religion in Victorian science in the face of the growing power of scientific naturalism.[157]

Another possible—and related—explanation is that the seemingly divergent paths of religious certainty and scientific questioning were to a great extent reconciled through a genre of literature written for the general reading public by writers known as popularizers of science.

Reconciling Religion and Science

Popularizers of science published extensively on various topics pertaining to science and nature. These writers presented in accessible language detailed scientific descriptions that successfully managed to marry empirical knowledge with Christian theology. In his substantial study of this area of didactic literature, Bernard Lightman shows that such writers reached a wide general audience:

> During the latter half of the nineteenth century a large group of scientific popularizers published massive numbers of books, some of which were phenomenal best sellers.[158]

A widely read example from the popular science genre is Margaret Gatty's *Parables of Nature*, a series of five books that, as Susan Drain states, appealed 'to both adult and child' and 'used natural history to teach moral and religious lessons, including the

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[156] *Ibid.*, 103.
[157] Bernard Lightman, *Evolutionary Naturalism in Victorian Britain: The 'Darwinians' and their Critics*, Varorium Collected Studies series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), II: 351.
[158] *Ibid.*, 355.

overriding lesson that God and nature need not be at strife'. [159] Gatty's didactic approach may be observed, for example, in her coincidentally titled parable 'The Light of Life', from the fourth book, published in 1864. Here, a young boy attempts to nurture a rose tree. A gardener imparts valuable scientific advice about caring for the plant, and, having followed these steps, the boy is distraught when it fails to thrive. Returning abject to the gardener, his mistake is revealed: he neglected to ensure that the plant was exposed to light. The gardener explains:

> I spoke like a fool when I talked of making roses beautiful with manure and things like that, as if they could do it of themselves. I didn't mean that. It is God who makes the roses, you know, and He makes them so that they can't do without the light He chooses them to live in, and that is the light from Heaven—do you see? [...] A man may help or hinder what God intends, by good or bad management, it's true; but that's all, and that's all I meant. Bones, and hair, and soap-suds are the finest rose-manure in the world, that's true too, and it's a great secret; but they're all nothing—nothing lad!—without God's secret—the light from heaven. Do you see what I mean?'[160]

Gatty's five books of parables were published between 1855 and 1871. Lightman notes that the first book was in its eighteenth edition by 1882, and provides evidence to suggest that the *Parables* were 'familiar to almost every middle-class child in the latter half of the nineteenth century'.[161]

Another well-known 'popularizer' was Eliza Brightwen (1830–1906), who, as Lightman states, 'drew upon the natural theology tradition and conveyed scientific information to a popular audience by telling stories about the natural world'.[162] Lightman outlines the convergence of religion and science in Brightwen's collection of stories:

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[159] Susan Drain, 'Gatty, Margaret (1809–1873)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10454> [accessed 23 Oct 2012].
[160] Margaret Gatty, 'The Light of Life', *Parables from Nature*, fourth series (London: Bell and Daldy, 1864), 14–15. In some editions, the title is given as *Parables from Nature*, in others, *Parables of Nature*. The author's name is sometimes given as 'Mrs Alfred Gatty'.
[161] Drain, 'Gatty, Margaret (1809–1873)'.
[161] Lightman, *Evolutionary Naturalism in Victorian Britain*, X: 192.
[162] *Ibid.*, 195

> Brightwen's loving relationship to nature not only leads to scientific knowledge, it also leads to knowledge of God's existence and wisdom. Brightwen's strong evangelical leanings manifest themselves throughout *Wild Nature Won by Kindness*.[163]

The likely permeation of a broad readership is also mentioned by Lightman, who suggests that although Brightwen wrote for children, her works 'would also have reached parents, teachers and governesses who read the stories to children'.[164]

Lightman argues that popularizers of science played a highly significant role in shaping attitudes to religion and science, and that this role has not been adequately appreciated:

> Seldom mentioned until very recently, these popularizers of science may have been more important than the Huxleys and Tyndalls in shaping the understanding of science in the minds of a reading public composed of children, teenagers, women, and non-scientific males.[165]

Thus, in the apparent conflict of religion and science, religion found a way to hold firm in the eyes of a large portion of the reading population. In this way, the popularizers served as an effective cultural determinant, as Lightman suggests:

> Though they could hardly aspire to be considered members of the cultural elite, the popularizers of science could throw their weight behind the Anglican clergy in their struggle with scientific naturalists for cultural authority.[166]

Lightman advocates a greater understanding of cultural forces other than scientific naturalism if a satisfactory picture of late nineteenth-century society is to be achieved. We must, he argues,

> be more attentive to the evidence for the continuing power of religion in late Victorian Britain. Why would the mass reading public buy the books of the popularizers of science perpetuating the natural theology tradition unless they were still attracted to religious themes in science?[167]

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[163] *Ibid.*, 196–97.
[164] *Ibid.*, X: 193.
[165] *Ibid.*, X: 188.
[166] *Ibid.*, II: 355.
[167] *Ibid.*, II, 365.

Lightman concludes that the immense popularity of this branch of literature points to a widespread appetite for religious certainty, rather than a desire to quench it:

> The cosmic stories of these popularizers testify to the continuing importance of religion to the reading public in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the belief that science was still an aid to faith, no matter what the Huxleys, Tyndalls, or Darwins said to the contrary.[168]

As Eisen points out, religion was still a leading cultural force in late-Victorian Britain, despite the influence of scientific progress:

> It seems that science and religion, after all the turbulence surrounding their relationship, were able to flourish side by side in an association like that of blood relations, who, whether they like it or not, are permanently linked.[169]

Muscular Christianity, with popular adventure literature central to its mythologies, was an essential feature of the late-nineteenth-century British self-view that played out with particular effect in the empire (and in public imaginations of it), and that provided a reassuring alternative to ambitious, commercial, expansionist philosophies. The version of popular science outlined above functioned as another assuaging force against the uncomfortable realities of modernity, a force that was equally effective in simplifying complexity and alleviating ideological tensions. Religion and empire were dominant, and conjoined, discourses that pervaded a conspicuous brand of British cultural expression in the late-Victorian period. This cultural expression served to a great extent as a response to incipient modernity and secularism in British society, and as a comfort in the context of public anxiety at the waning of British military and economic authority. Against this backdrop of British culture at the *fin de siècle*, Edward Elgar proceeded from humble beginnings in Worcester to a position as self-styled bard of the nation.

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[168] *Ibid.*, X: 207. See W. H. Brock, 'Tyndall, John (1820–1893)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27948> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[169] Eisen, 'Introduction', 4.

CHAPTER 2
CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON ELGAR'S EARLY CHORAL WORKS

> *I pass to the second, and for us the more practically important question, What is the effect of noble art upon other men; what has it done for national morality in time past: and what effect is the extended knowledge or possession of it likely to have upon us now?*[1]

This chapter will trace a range of influences on Elgar's early career so that the broader context in which he developed as a composer can be better understood. Elgar was a master at manipulating the public view of his life and work; this aspect of his character influences the ways in which his legacy has been preserved and needs to be examined in order to analyse his motivations with respect to his choral works of the 1890s. Drawing on a wide range of publications, and with close reference to a biographical sketch in the *Musical Standard* of 21 November 1896, Hughes concludes that Elgar sought 'to project himself to a national readership in three ways'. These three ways were 1) as a composer proud of his Worcester roots and 'an artist who stood disdainfully outside the networks of London musical life' but who also kept up with developments in the world of 'modern' music; 2) as a self-taught composer and a self-made man, 'who had achieved his festival triumphs by dint of solitary study and hard work'; and 3) as a gentleman-composer, of sound social respectability, married to the daughter of Sir Henry Gee Roberts, K.C.B.[2] Apart from a brief sojourn in London (1890–91), Edward Elgar was a Worcester musician, composer and teacher. His early musical life revolved around his experiences at St. George's Catholic Church, at the city's historic Anglican Cathedral, with various local instrumental ensembles, and, perhaps most significantly of all, at vast musical gatherings such as the triennial Worcester Three Choirs Festival. In conjunction with private study of the scores and theoretical texts available to him, Elgar's unique formative environment provided him with an intensely practical compositional apprenticeship,

[1] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, 81.
[2] Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press, 1850–1914: Watchmen of Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 165–66.

which greatly influenced the nature of his compositions, and which he regarded and cultivated as a defining feature of his public persona.[3]

This chapter does not attempt to present a biographical account of Elgar's early years: that has been done in detail elsewhere.[4] Rather, it highlights experiences in his early career that reflect Elgar's engagement with the cultural forces that influenced his compositional development and his social awareness; experiences that contributed to the moulding of this most practical, self-aware composer, who, throughout the 1890s, dedicated himself to accessing the cultural pulse of late-Victorian Britain.

A Provincial Apprenticeship

Elgar's manifold musical activities in Worcester during his childhood and youth are outlined by Moore in the early chapters of *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*. A striking feature of such activities is the close connection between playing and composing, with the former often proceeding swiftly to the latter. Deputising for his father as organist at St. George's Church led, for example, to opportunities to write for its choir. A *Salve Regina* and *Tantum Ergo* of 1876 constitute early examples of works for this context,[5] while the anthem *Ecce Sacerdos Magnus*, written for a visit by the Archbishop of Birmingham in October 1888 (by which time Elgar himself was the resident organist), represents a more mature example.

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[3] Elgar's autodidacticism was emphasised in interviews, early biographies, and at the conferral of an honorary doctorate at Cambridge in 1900, where the phrase 'Self-taught I sing: 'tis Heaven and Heaven alone/Inspires my song with promise all its own' (translated from Homer's *Odyssey*) was used by the public orator. See Rudolph de Cordova, 'Illustrated interviews: LXXXI: Dr. Edward Elgar', *Strand* Magazine, 25 (May 1904): 538–39; Robert J. Buckley, *Sir Edward Elgar* (London and New York, John Lane, 1905), and, for a summary of this topic, the following three articles by Brian Newbould: 'Elgar and Academicism 1: The Untutored Genius', *Musical Times*, 146/1891 (Summer 2005): 71–84; 'Elgar and Academicism 2: Practice Beyond Theory', *Musical Times*, 146/1892 (Autumn 2005), 25–41; and 'Elgar and Academicism 3: Devices and Contrivances', *Musical Times*, 146/1893 (Winter 2005): 29–44.

[4] See for example Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[5] Moore, *A Creative Life*, 70.

In the realm of instrumental music, the Worcester Glee Club, the band of the Worcester City and County Lunatic Asylum, and the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society provided opportunities for playing, leading, arranging and composing.[6] Basil Maine notes the effect of these early experiences on later works, as he remarks on the composer's correspondence with A. J. Jaeger of publishers Novello & Co prior to the first performance of *Caractacus* in 1898:

> [The letters] reveal the composer's care over the smallest details, and above all, that he always prepared his scores with the conditions of the performance in mind. Repeatedly these letters remind us of the essentially practical training of his early life when he was required to write music for all manner of instrumental combinations.[7]

Venturing from the immediate confines of Worcester, Elgar joined the violins of William Cole Stockley's Orchestra in Birmingham in 1882.[8] The following year, that ensemble listed—in illustrious musical company—an 'Intermezzo' by Elgar as part of its Orchestral Concerts series. The *Birmingham Daily Post* of 11 September 1883 mentions the 'Intermezzo' in Stockley's 'selections for the season', along with Beethoven's 'Eroica', symphonies by Schumann and Mendelssohn, and works by Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924), Alexander Mackenzie (1847–1935) and Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900).[9] The same ensemble presented a four-movement 'Suite' by Elgar in February 1888, with the composer conducting. Elgar's reaction to the occasion, recorded in a letter to his friend Charles W. Buck of 30 March, betrayed annoyance with critics as well as suggesting that the path of the 'local man' was not always straightforward:

> I had a good success at Birmingham with my Suite, but the critics, save two, are nettled. I am the only local man who has been asked to conduct

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[6] Percy M. Young, *Elgar: O. M.: A Study of a Musician*, rev. edn (London and New York: White Lion, 1973), 46–47.
[7] Basil Maine, *Elgar: His Life and Works*, rev. edn (Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1973), 79.
[8] Moore has Elgar in Stockley's second violins; Young has him in the firsts. See Jerrold Northrop Moore (ed.), *Edward Elgar: Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 6; Young, *Elgar: O. M.*, 51.
[9] 'Classified Ads', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 11 September 1883.

> his own work — & what's a greater offence, I *did it* — and *well* too; for this I must needs suffer.[10]

Elgar swiftly progressed with composing for his various creative outlets, however, outlining his subsequent activities in a letter to Buck of 8 July 1888:

> Thanks for the congratulations re. Birmingham Suite; that's ancient history now; I have written for the Society here, three movements for String Orchestra, classical Style; they were played [by the Worcester Musical Union conducted by the Revd Edward Vine Hall, who was precentor of Worcester Cathedral] on May 7 & took well. *I like 'em* (the first thing I ever did). Also, there's a terrific (!!!) song [*The Wind at Dawn*] in this month's Maga: of Music.[11]

Moore explains the personal significance of the new song mentioned here. *The Wind at Dawn* was a setting of a poem by Elgar's piano student, Caroline Alice Roberts, whom Elgar, a few months later, asked to marry him.[12]

Elgar's keen awareness of public musical taste is evident in sources from this time. In December 1886, he sent an article to the *Malvern Advertiser*, promoting a forthcoming concert of chamber music in Malvern, and providing information and musical commentary on the concert's subject: Johannes Brahms (1833–97).[13] Referring to Brahms as 'a composer who stands head and shoulders above all his fellows, Beethoven alone excepted', the article offers 'a few remarks' on Brahms's compositions, and in the process reveals something of Elgar's own attitudes to the purpose of music and to the music-going public:

> His melody, abundant though it often is, is not of a kind calculated to catch the ear of an ordinary public; it appeals rather to educated musicians than to a mixed audience. For this reason many of Brahms' compositions are not warmly received by those people who do not appreciate themselves the less because they are fond of 'tune'. Thus, though the better known works meet with the widest appreciation among the most musically

[10] Edward Elgar to C. W. Buck, 30 March 1888, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 23.
[11] Edward Elgar to C. W. Buck, 8 July 1888, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 24. Editor's additions.
[12] Moore (ed.), *Letters of a Lifetime*, 24–25. Edward Vine Hall is discussed below in relation to *The Light of Life*.
[13] According to Elgar, the *Advertiser* staff turned his article into a letter 'by adding "Yours truly" and prefixing "Sir" — to avoid paying for it'. See Moore, *Edward Elgar: The Windflower Letters* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 328; cited in *Letters of a Lifetime*, 17.

> advanced of our concert audiences, those who are in search of mere prettiness or languid sentimental enjoyment do not find what they require.[14]

This distinction between 'an ordinary public' with a fondness for 'tune', on the one hand, and 'educated musicians', impressed perhaps by more advanced features, on the other, was an important one as Elgar's own compositional career progressed.

Together with musical experiences in Worcester, regular excursions to the continent played a central role in facilitating Elgar's exposure to musical styles and sonorities in the early part of his career. In August 1880, Elgar made his first trip to mainland Europe, when he travelled to Paris with his friend and future brother-in-law Charles Pipe, and heard music by Saint-Saëns.[15] Thereafter, many continental trips, alone, with friends, or later, with his wife, allowed Elgar access to live music that he would not otherwise have heard. A news-filled letter to Charles Buck of December 1882, for example, mentions a forthcoming trip to Leipzig, while a letter of 1 July 1883 describes the trip, which took place in January of that year, and during which Elgar had visited Helen Weaver (to whom he was engaged for a time) and heard music by Haydn, Schumann, Brahms, Rubinstein and Wagner.[16] In tandem with these cultural expeditions to France and Germany, which punctuated his distinctive musical apprenticeship in Worcester, perhaps the principal influence on the direction, and the success, of Elgar's compositional career was his relationship with the British amateur choral tradition. This tradition was founded not only on collective musical endeavour, but on the premise that music and morality were intertwined.

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[14] Edward Elgar to the *Malvern Advertiser*, 21 December 1886, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 18–20 (19).
[15] Moore (ed.), *Letters of a Lifetime*, 3; *Idem*, *A Creative Life*, 88–89.
[16] Edward Elgar to C. W. Buck, 1 July 1883, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 5.

Music and Morals: The Amateur Choral Tradition

From a heritage built mainly around the cathedrals, and the legacy of George Frideric Handel, the world of choral performance in Britain expanded immensely in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There are many reasons for this growth. In her study of provincial musical festivals, Catherine Dale lists a variety of factors, not least the success in London of large musical gatherings such as the Handel Commemoration at Westminster Abbey and the Pantheon in 1784. 'The idea that excellence was related to size', Dale states, was 'triggered by the assembling of a choir and orchestra 500-strong' for the celebration of the capital's adopted musical son.[17] With the rapid and unprecedented urbanisation caused by the industrial revolution, provincial cities too became centres for communal music-making, and musical festivals took root in the fertile ground of the country's municipal populations:

> Musical festivals proliferated throughout England in the nineteenth century, particularly in centres of industrial expansion such as Leeds, Birmingham, Norwich, Newcastle, Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and York, where they became coupled with middle-class concerns about social conditions and embraced the philanthropic, educational ideals of the age.[18]

By the late-nineteenth century, choral music was an integral part of cultural life all over Britain. In his jubilee review of music during the reign of Queen Victoria, Joseph Bennett wrote with his characteristically colourful turn of phrase that:

> Exceptions aside, there were no amateur (unpaid) choralists sixty years ago [...] now you can hardly fling a stone in any part of the country without risk of hitting a member of some choral society.[19]

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[17] Catherine Dale, 'The Provincial Musical Festival in Nineteenth-Century England: A Case Study of Bridlington', in *Music in the British Provinces: 1690–1914*, Rachel Cowgill and Peter Holman (eds.), (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 325–48, 326.
[18] *Ibid.*, 325.
[19] Joseph Bennett 'Victorian Music', *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 38/647 (January 1897): 10–12 (11).

This vast increase in choral activity was partly due to John Curwen's (1816–80) promotion of amateur musical activity in the middle of the century, as much for moral as for musical reasons. In her study of music in North Staffordshire, Sarah Taylor explains:

> Curwen was not a music teacher, nor was he a musician: he was a Congregationalist minister who believed that choral singing and appreciation of sacred music could lead to the moral edification of the populace.[20]

Curwen's widespread propagation of music-teaching ideas formulated by Sarah Glover (1786–1867) illustrates the Victorian concern with moral improvement of the masses, a concern which greatly influenced the era's musical landscape.[21] Curwen's identification of tonic sol-fa as a means of bringing music to untrained singers was especially influential:

> Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Tonic Sol-fa movement involved tens of thousands of people of all ages. [...] At the heart of the Tonic Sol-fa movement, reflecting its founder's own values, was the notion of moral improvement, an important consideration for many Victorians. Throughout the century, amateur music-making blossomed in an environment where desires for self-improvement, moral salvation, and respectability predominated in almost every community. Certain forms of leisure activity were thought to promote personal and possibly national improvement, commonly known as 'rational recreation'. Within this climate of improvement, music, and especially choral singing, with its perceived relationship to God and the Church, came to be regarded as one of the most important means of achieving moral salvation.[22]

The oratorio—an unashamedly didactic genre—was at the centre of the amateur choral tradition for well over a century, as McGuire states:

> From the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the First World War, the oratorio was Britain's most important and accessible genre.[23]

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[20] Sarah E. Taylor, 'Finding Themselves: Musical Revolutions in Nineteenth-Century Staffordshire', in *Music in the British Provinces*, Cowgill and Holman (eds.), 223–35 (223). See also W. B. Squire, 'Curwen, John (1816–1880)', Peter Ward Jones (rev.), *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6967> [accessed 23 October 2012].

[21] The relationship between music and morality is explored, for example, by the Victorian author and clergyman H. R. Haweis (1838–1901) in his influential *Music and Morals* (London: Strahan, 1871). On Sarah Glover, who, incidentally, died at Malvern, see Bernarr Rainbow, 'Glover, Sarah Anna (1786–1867)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45795> [accessed 23 October 2012].

[22] Taylor, 'Finding Themselves', 224–25.

[23] Charles Edward McGuire, *Elgar's Oratorios: The Creation of an Epic Narrative* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), vi.

As well as satisfying a fascination with narrative pieces, the nature of this genre was closely allied to the prevalent vision of music, and of choral singing in particular, as morally instructive:

> Many considered the oratorio to be more a sublime spiritual and moral exercise rather than mere musical entertainment.[24]

Michael Kennedy captures the extent of popular enthusiasm for oratorios in Britain's urban centres, while also referring to the concerted efforts of composers to fit their music to the festival mould:

> The Leeds, Birmingham and Three Choirs Festivals were regarded as the goals to which all composers should aspire – and since the public's appetite for oratorios appeared to be insatiable, they catered for this taste in a manner which now seems almost indecently callous.[25]

The 'sheer immensity of the reputation of Handel and Mendelssohn' in this context of amateur choral performance is evident from McGuire's observation that Handel's *Messiah* was present in every Three Choirs Festival but two in the period 1767–1960,[26] and Anthony Boden's remark that Mendelssohn's *Elijah* was performed first at the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival of 1847, before featuring 'at every Festival until 1929 and many times thereafter'.[27] An incident noted by Catherine Dale illustrated the overwhelming popularity—and the related commercial importance—of these two works in choral festival repertoire:

> When the Leeds Festival Committee was considering the replacement of *Elijah* and *Messiah* by *St. Paul* and *Israel in Egypt* in their programme for 1877, members wrote to the committees of the Birmingham, Bristol and Worcester Festivals for advice. [...] Leeds was counselled not to take the risk, since *Elijah* and *Messiah* had always guaranteed musical and financial success, and never failed to fill the concert halls.[28]

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[24] *Ibid.*, vi.
[25] Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 38.
[26] *Ibid.*, vi, 9. Anthony Boden states that 'Messiah remained an indispensable favourite at the festival for two hundred years, being performed whole or in part every year until 1963'. See 'Three Choirs: A History of the Festival, <http://www.3choirs.org/about/three-choirs-history-festival-anthony-boden.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[27] Boden, 'Three Choirs Festival Timeline', <http://www.3choirs.org/about/three-choirs-festival-timeline.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[28] Dale, 'The Provincial Musical Festival', 326.

Choral singing, then, especially in the context of the oratorio-laden musical festivals, encapsulated the Victorian desires for religious respectability, moral rectitude, mass education, and self-improvement, and the consequent burgeoning of amateur musical endeavour took hold in Elgar's home city as much as anywhere.

A Local Example: The Worcester Festival Choral Society

In *A Prevailing Passion: A History of the Worcester Festival Choral Society*, Mary Parsons draws together information and documentation that provide an insight into the world of the late-nineteenth-century choral society, and one which is particularly relevant in the compositional development of Elgar. The Worcester Festival Choral Society (WFCS) was founded in 1861, and gave its first concert (Haydn's *Creation*) on 12 June 1862, with a choir of ninety-eight singers—and despite storm-damaged organ pipes.[29] In addition to presenting its own concerts in Worcester, a principal purpose of the WFCS was to provide singers for the annual Three Choirs Festival, which took place in the Cathedral cities of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester, each in turn. In his study of the Three Choirs Festival, Harold Watkins Shaw notes that singers were recruited not only from the large choral societies of the three festival cities, but also from

> a large number of other centres. Northern choral societies, Lichfield, Birmingham and Cardiff were the chief sources of supply, but there was any amount of variation from year to year.[30]

The Three Choirs Festival functioned to some extent as a network of amateur singers from many communities both inside and outside of the host cities. Parsons observes that members of the WFCS

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[29] Mary Parsons, *A Prevailing Passion: A History of Worcester Festival Choral Society* (Worcester: Osborne Heritage, 1996), 9.
[30] Harold Watkins Shaw, *The Three Choirs Festival: The Official History of the Meetings of the Three Choirs of Gloucester, Hereford and Worcester, c. 1713-1953* (Worcester and London: Three Choirs/Ebenezer Baylis, 1954), cited in Parsons, *A Prevailing Passion,* 14.

> had to compete for selection with experienced singers from the societies in the big cities, and even more, one suspects, with entrenched attitudes that insisted that the latter be invited.[31]

Despite the aggravation this competitive atmosphere may have caused, the overall musical result of WFCS involvement in the Three Choirs was positive, not only directly, but also indirectly, because 'any who were selected were gaining valuable experience which they were passing on to their fellow-members'.[32] The festival thus served as a productive assembly of choral enthusiasts, with benefits beyond the immediate performance context in that the general standard of singing was raised as a result.

Referring to the first rule book of the WFCS, dating from 1861, Parsons observes that the society seems to some extent to have bridged the Anglican–Catholic divide:

> There is no indication in the Rules as to the respective duties of the Secretary and the Hon. Secretary; but the fact that the first two men to hold those offices were an Anglican clergyman (Rev R Sarjeant) and a devout Roman Catholic (Mr J H Leicester) shows how the power of the love of music-making could transcend the sectarian attitudes of the times.[33]

This gives an impression of a society built on diverse community involvement with church input. However, a rule book dating from 1888 paints a somewhat different picture of inter-denominational cooperation in the WFCS. The aims of the society listed at this point show that the education of the choir and the audience was paramount, but also that the Anglican Cathedral exerted considerable influence on the choir's activities and ethos, as the society sought to promote

> the Advancement of the knowledge and pursuit of music among members and the public, by giving concerts [and] by rendering assistance in the musical portion of special services in the Cathedral.[34]

This rule book stipulates that 'those only who have been baptized and are prepared to conform to the customs of the Cathedral' were permitted to take part in such services,[35]

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[31] Parsons, *A Prevailing Passion*, 14.
[32] *Ibid.*, 14.
[33] *Ibid.*, 20–21.
[34] Worcester Festival Choral Society Rule Book, 1888, cited in Parsons, *A Prevailing Passion*, 27.

suggesting that the religious divide was alive and well in Worcester musical life at that stage.

Music by Handel, Mendelssohn and Haydn dominated the society's concert programmes in its early years.[36] WFCS Reports dating from the mid-1860s record a complaint that 'very few new works are brought out at concerts'.[37] The response of the Conductor, Mr. William Done, reflected some of the society's practical difficulties:

> As many new works will be introduced as the power of the Vocalists and Band will admit: at the same time a considerable improvement is necessary in the attendance at Rehearsals before the Conductor can undertake the responsibility of their performance.[38]

Luckily for Elgar, the attention given to new works was increased in subsequent years, and his overture *Froissart* found an outing at the Worcester Festival of 1890, his first oratorio *The Light of Life* featured at the Festival of 1896, while *The Black Knight* was premiered separately by the Worcester Festival Choral Society and Band in 1893.

Exposure to Music: The Three Choirs Festival in Worcester

The Three Choirs Festival, with its roots in the early eighteenth century, claimed to be the oldest musical festival of its kind, and offered, among other things, a prestigious platform for composers of new works.[39] Donald Hunt summarises the significance of Elgar's lifelong relationship with the Three Choirs Festival in his study of the topic:

> Bayreuth without Wagner and Salzburg without Mozart would be unthinkable; surely the Three Choirs Festival and Elgar are just as inseparable.[40]

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[35] Cited in Parsons, *A Prevailing Passion*, 28.
[36] A list of programmes is given in Parsons, *A Prevailing Passion*, 123–32.
[37] Parsons, *A Prevailing Passion*, 21.
[38] Cited in Parsons, *A Prevailing Passion*, 21–22.
[39] See for example 'Novelties for the Three Choirs Festival', *The Times*, 16 July 1962; and 'Three Choirs Festival: About the Festival', <http://www.3choirs.org/about/about-festival.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[40] Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival*, 149.

The Three Choirs Festival had a major impact on Elgar's exposure to music, as his experiences of listening and playing at the Worcester Festival not only introduced him to a wide range of repertoire but also allowed him to gain an insight into the musical and practical details of festival performance. Hunt records that Elgar's first encounter with the Festival took place in 1866, when he was nine years old. According to Hunt, Elgar attended a rehearsal of Beethoven's *Mass in C*, in which his father and uncle played as part of the string section. Hunt mentions that the work was referred to as *Service in C*, 'so as not to offend the sensibilities of narrow-minded clergy and committee members'.[41] The boy Elgar also attended a rehearsal for the 1869 Festival, this time hearing part of Handel's *Messiah*. In 1872, the Festival again took place in Worcester, and Hunt notes that Elgar was present at some of the performances, and while no details are available as to what he heard on this occasion, Hunt comes to the reasonable conclusion that:

> He would have soaked up the atmosphere, and the concerts would have provided him with the additional experience of choral/orchestral colouring and sonorities.[42]

The next Worcester Festival should have taken place in 1875, but it fell afoul of the sensibilities of local aristocrat Lord Dudley, who, Hunt reports, 'would not donate to the restoration appeal if a Festival, deemed to be too secular and commercial, was held',[43] thus ensuring the capitulation of the Cathedral clergy and Festival committee. Normality was restored by 1878 and the Festival went ahead with Elgar playing alongside his father in the second violins for repertoire including Haydn's *Creation*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Handel's *Messiah* and Spohr's *The Last Judgement*, as well as works by William Sterndale Bennett (1816–75) and Philip Armes (1836–1908).[44] Elgar moved to the back of the first violins for the next Worcester Festival in 1881, leaving his father behind in the

[41] *Ibid.*, 15.
[42] *Ibid.*, 16.
[43] *Ibid.*, 17.
[44] *Ibid.*, 17.

seconds. The programme consisted of what Hunt terms 'the usual fare', along with Alexander Mackenzie's cantata *The Bride* and local composer and WFCS organist Alfred Caldicott's *The Widow of Nain*.[45]

Through his experience of playing in the orchestra for the Worcester Festival, Elgar was familiar with the highly restrictive rehearsal schedule of such events. Hunt cites details recorded in 1895 in the *Origins and Progress of the Meeting of the Three Choirs* with regard to the punishing and yet insufficient rehearsal schedule at the 1881 Festival:

> Monday was, as usual, given up to rehearsals from 9.45a.m to 11p.m., when the band, chorus and soloists retired to their well-earned and much-needed rest. It was generally admitted on all sides that more rehearsals were needed, one day being totally inadequate for rehearsing more than a quarter of the week's work.[46]

Hunt asserts that this 'rehearsal monstrosity' was the norm, and such practice 'prevailed in a similar form for the whole of Elgar's association with the Festival'.[47]

In 1884, Antonin Dvořák was a guest at the Worcester Festival, where he conducted his *Stabat Mater* and Symphony in D (now known as No. 6), with Elgar playing in the first violins.[48] Elgar was enthralled by the orchestration of the visitor's music, as is clear from a letter to his friend Dr. C. W. Buck on 28 September 1884:

> The usual things went better than ordinarily except for one or two slips. I wish you could hear Dvořák's music. It is simply ravishing, so tuneful and clever, and the orchestration is wonderful; no matter how few instruments he uses it never sounds thin. I cannot describe it; it must be heard.[49]

The Festival of 1887 had no international star, but featured the first Worcester performance of Arthur Sullivan's *The Golden Legend*, premiered the previous year in

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[45] *Ibid.*, 22.
[46] *Origins and Progress of the Meeting of the Three Choirs,* 1895, cited in Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival*, 22.
[47] Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival*, 23.
[48] *Ibid.*, 24; Moore (ed.), *Letters of a Lifetime*, 11.
[49] Edward Elgar to C. W. Buck, 28 September 1884, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 12. The influence of Dvořák on Elgar is discussed by many commentators. See for example Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 35.

Leeds. For the 1887 performance, the chorus was sung only by the visiting Leeds members of the Festival Choir.[50] Elgar was again in the orchestra, and Hunt suggests that the quality of the Leeds chorus probably made an impression on him at this stage:

> We can be sure that Elgar, playing in the accompanying orchestra, would have noted [the] choral skills and special sonorities obtained by the northern choir, and this would surely be in his mind when he wrote *Caractacus* for a Leeds Festival commission in 1898.[51]

Without the Three Choir Festival in Worcester, it is fair to say that Elgar would have had an entirely different kind and quantity of exposure to music in his youth and early adulthood.

Compositional Considerations: Writing for the Festivals

Caldwell summarises the importance of the amateur choral world in the rise of composers in the late-nineteenth century:

> In the 1890s the primary objective of an English composer was still recognition through the commissioning and performance of major choral works, whether in London or in the provinces.[52]

Festival performances required a certain type of composition. The subject of the work had to be suitable for the performance venue (whether cathedral or public hall), for the organisers, and for the respectable members of society in attendance. A new commission usually formed part of a very long and varied concert programme, and time constraints applied. It was not uncommon for solo and choral singers to partake in multiple large-scale performances in one day, and rehearsal time, consequently, was not only limited, but congested. For example, the *Yorkshire Post* music critic, Herbert Thompson (1856–1945), reported that on the day of the *Caractacus* première in October 1898, the bass

[50] Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival*, 26. As noted by Parsons, the Three Choirs Festival Chorus was often augmented by singers from outside the three cities.
[51] Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival*, 26.
[52] John Caldwell, *Oxford History of English Music: Vol. II: from c.1715 to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 258.

Andrew Black, who at the final rehearsal a few days previously had been suffering from 'a slight indisposition', recovered sufficiently to sing the parts of Elijah in the morning and Caractacus in the evening.[53] Proportionate variation of musical texture was crucial, for the satisfaction of performers and audience alike. As Rushton states, 'a good sing for the chorus' was an essential element,[54] while ensembles such as duets were hugely popular at this time of the rise of the celebrity. In a letter of 7 July 1898, Elgar alludes to such considerations prior to rehearsals for *Caractacus*:

> I can face any orchestra under the sun, but a chorus looks so disgusted if they haven't a shouting four-pt yell from beginning to end.[55]

The importance of the large music festivals to Elgar's career in the 1890s is summarised by Robert Anderson:

> Once the Elgars decided, in April 1891, to leave London and return to the West Midlands, success was likely to depend on Elgar's prowess as a choral composer.[56]

This meant adhering to the considerations listed above, and incorporating the needs of the specific performance contexts into the personal artistic expression of composition. One way of looking at these ever-present parameters is that, with the rise in mass-consumption of literature, music and much more, the role formerly played by the commissioning patron in defining the character of the commission had been filled by the demands of the festival or commissioning body, which in turn was shaped to a considerable extent by the tastes of the participants. In this broad social context, composers were not alone in having to tailor their work to satisfy the demands of their creative outlets. As Nicholas Daly points out, writers of serialised adventure literature

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[53] Herbert Thompson, *Yorkshire Post*, 3 October 1898, cited in Julian Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', *Music and Performance Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Temperley*, Bennett Zon (ed.), Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 221–40 (230–31).
[54] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 236.
[55] Edward Elgar to August Jaeger, 7 July 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 78.
[56] Robert Anderson, *Elgar in Manuscript* (London: British Library, 1990), 21.

> had to suit their work to the carefully targeted readership of a particular periodical, and to trim the length of their text to suit that periodical's format.[57]

By 1898 Elgar was acutely aware of the necessary balancing act between personal creativity and festival conformity, and his works of the 1890s show his attempts at achieving a successful relationship between the two. His insight into this aspect of festival composition is evident in his letters, and can be seen, for example, in his comments regarding a commission for the Gloucester Festival in 1898, for which he recommended his fellow composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912):

> I hope he won't write anything too startling——that is founded on too remote a subject——of course he will want to shew the critics what's in him but the easygoing agriculturalists who support these things also want a tiny bit of consideration and, if he can please *them, without the slightest sacrifice of his own bent of course* it would be well in view of future commissions.[58]

The ability to display one's artistic talents while also catering for the tastes both of the critics and of the largely amateur audience was the hallmark of a successful festival composer. Added to this already complex listenership was the fact that while singers were mostly amateurs with varying levels of musical training, the conductors of festival choruses were often highly educated. Charles Swinnerton Heap and the chorus of the North Staffordshire Musical Festival exemplify this combination. A report in the *Musical Times* regarding the North Staffordshire Musical Festival of 1890 describes the chorus personnel and their impact:

> Dr. Heap had under him a capital chorus, gathered from the vocal amateurs who abound in the Potteries. This body of voices, nearly 400 strong, was, as a matter of fact, the distinguishing feature of the occasion.[59]

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[57] Daly, *Modernism, Romance and the* Fin de Siècle, 21.
[58] Edward Elgar to A. J. Jaeger, 10 May 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 73. Editorial emphasis.
[59] 'North Staffordshire Musical Festival', *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular,* 31/573 (November 1890): 661–62 (661).

Young also comments on the North Staffordshire chorus, who took part in the première of *King Olaf* in 1896. 'The Victoria Hall in Hanley is perhaps the ugliest concert hall in England',[60] Young states, but

> it housed choirs which were among the most notable in the history of English music. Potters, and miners, and their families dedicated themselves to music with a fervour that has never been surpassed.[61]

The conductor, Dr. Heap, was, Young asserts, 'no mere provincial' and could be found 'conducting as many as seven choral societies a week'.[62] According to an obituary in the *Musical Times* of July 1900, Heap was an organist, who won the Mendelssohn Scholarship and studied in Leipzig before taking a Mus.D at Cambridge. 'He conducted choral societies in Walsall, Stone, Stafford, and Stoke' and

> in 1881 he succeeded Mr Stockley as conductor of the Wolverhampton Festival Choral Society and conducted the Wolverhampton Festivals of 1883 and 1886.[63]

The obituary notes Heap's contribution to musical life in North Staffordshire, where he played an important role in the rise of Elgar, and in Birmingham, where he began choral rehearsals of *The Dream of Gerontius* before his untimely death:

> He had much to do with establishing the North Staffordshire Musical Festival, and held its conductorship from the initial celebration in 1888. In 1895 he was elected conductor of the Birmingham Festival Choral Society and in 1897 chorus master of the Birmingham Festival. [64]

Heap's achievements in composition and performance are also reported, with his obituary recording that he was 'best known by his cantatas "Fair Rosamund" and "The Maid of Astolat",' and concluding that 'Dr. Heap, who was an excellent pianist, had quite a genius for conducting'.[65] In 1888, Moore notes, Elgar 'went to play in the first violins at a

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[60] Young, *Elgar O. M.*, 75.
[61] *Ibid.*, 76.
[62] *Ibid.*, 76.
[63] 'Obituary: Dr Swinnerton Heap', *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 41/689 (July 1900): 483–84 (483–84).
[64] 'Obituary: Dr Swinnerton Heap', 484.
[65] *Ibid.*, 484.

"North Staffordshire Festival" which Swinnerton Heap had organised at Hanley'.[66] Eight years later, he wrote *King Olaf* for the same festival. Elgar therefore had hands-on experience of the multiple factors involved in a successful festival: the performing forces, the conductor, the audience, the rehearsal schedule, and the potential pitfalls. Given this and other similar experiences, Elgar became, as Anderson states,

> an intensely practical maker of music, used to the methods by which performance disasters might be avoided.[67]

Anderson notes, for example, that in relation to *The Black Knight,* Elgar

> greatly increased the number of cue letters in the vocal score, for ease of reference and as a safety measure in case of trouble.[68]

Such measures were wise in light of the restricted rehearsal time available for festival performances. Julian Rushton's investigation of the writings of Herbert Thompson brings to life the musical preparations for the première of *Caractacus* and the general sense of excitement surrounding the Leeds Festival of 1898. Rushton observes that a dangerous gap existed between the final rehearsal and the first performance:

> Perhaps the most striking difference from modern practice is that the final rehearsal of *Caractacus*, the first with soloists, chorus, and orchestra, took place on Saturday 1 October, whereas the performance was not until Wednesday 5 October. In such circumstances it is remarkable that a work of such unprecedented complexity came off without accident.[69]

Rushton also notes that rehearsal for Elgar's new commission came towards the end of a long and tiring day for the festival chorus:

> Then came the final rehearsal (1 October). Thompson's diary records that Elgar's turn came only at 7.35, ending at 9.45pm. The *Leeds Mercury* noted that 'the chorus, naturally, evinced some symptoms of fatigue, and after what had preceded it was deemed desirable to make as few repetitions as possible'.[70]

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[66] Moore, *A Creative Life*, 130.
[67] Anderson, *Elgar in Manuscript*, 24.
[68] Anderson, *Elgar*, 27.
[69] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 227.
[70] *Ibid.*, 230. Quote from *Leeds Mercury*, 3 October 1898.

Efforts to make the most of the limited rehearsal time are reflected in the ban on applause during the ticketed final rehearsal at Leeds. The duet of Eigen and Orbin, sung by popular soloists Medora Henson and Edward Lloyd at the end of Scene III of *Caractacus,* caused a mass transgression in this respect, as it prompted what Elgar's wife, Alice, referred to in her diary as 'tremendous applause'.[71] Rushton adds the accounts of the *Yorkshire Herald* and the *Yorkshire Post*, and notes the presence of policemen sent to ensure the smooth running of the rehearsal:

> The *Yorkshire Herald* confirms that 'the audience broke all restraints and applauded vigorously, bringing up the hon. secretary with a protest'. It was a condition of admission to rehearsals that audiences refrain from applause, and on 1 October a 'force of stalwart policemen' was stationed around the Hall [*Yorkshire Post*, 3 October 1898]. Thompson's diary records: 'Hall more crammed than ever. Attempts at applause hushed by police'.[72]

Rushton observes that this was not the first such disruption to rehearsals, as the principal conductor for the festival, Arthur Sullivan, had expressed annoyance the week before: 'the previous week, Sullivan had reproved the audience for wasting valuable time by applause'.[73] Insufficient rehearsal was a source of frustration for Elgar, as is evident from a letter of 29 August 1898 concerning the time allotted to the composer Alan Gray:

> It makes me, an artist, sick to see that fool Gray allowed as long to rehearse his blasted rot as I am who produce with all its many faults an attempt at something like a 'work'.[74]

Elgar's familiarity with the practical details of large choral festivals fundamentally influenced his choral works of the 1890s (and later). Within the context of the amateur choral tradition, the commercial interests of music publishers also affected the nature of Elgar's festival compositions.

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[71] Alice Elgar, Diary, quoted in Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 230.
[72] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 230.
[73] *Ibid.*, 230.
[74] Edward Elgar to August Jaeger, 29 August 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 87. Elgar's impatient and 'fidgety' disposition was criticised in the *Sunday Times*, 2 November 1898. See Moore, *A Creative Life*, 243.

Music Publishing: Novello & Co

In 1890, Elgar's setting of Andrew Lang's (1844–1912) poem, *My Love dwelt in a Northern Land*, was accepted for publication by the London firm, Novello. Thus began a productive professional relationship for the composer, albeit one that initially was unpredictable and unreliable. The influence of the publishing house on Elgar's creative path is reflected in Moore's comment that 'Novello's speciality was choral music, and choral music Elgar would write'.[75] In addition, it was through this professional association that Elgar made one of his most artistically important personal connections, to A. J. Jaeger.

Novello played an influential part in the nineteenth-century British choral world. The first Novello publication was issued in 1811 by Vincent Novello (1781–1861), organist of the Catholic chapel of the Portuguese embassy in London, and consisted of sacred pieces performed at the publisher's place of work. In the following decades, Novello brought forth editions of music gathered from diverse public and private collections, both unpublished and previously published, including, for example, *Purcell's Sacred Music* (five volumes, 1828–32), and a collection of sacred music entitled *The Fitzwilliam Music* (1825), from sources at the library of the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge.[76] From the 1850s and 1860s, the company began to publish new music, and in this respect in particular, played a considerable role in shaping the careers, and indeed the musical style, of contemporary British composers. Victoria Cooper stakes a strong claim for the place of the company founder in the history of British musical life, emphasising throughout her *DNB* article the educational aspect of his work:

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[75] Moore (ed.), *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 10.
[76] Victoria L. Cooper, 'Novello, Vincent (1781–1861)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/20377> [accessed 23 October 2012].

> Vincent Novello can be considered one of the leading contributors to the development of British musical life and education in the first half of the nineteenth century.[77]

Through his choice of music for publication, and particularly as the company grew in status and reach, Vincent Novello to some extent dictated the type of music available to amateur musicians and singers in the nineteenth century, and thus it could be claimed that he influenced the musical taste of the musically and educationally inclined middle class.[78]

Vincent Novello was joined and succeeded in the company by his son J. Alfred Novello (1810–96), whom Dave Russell describes as 'an extremely astute businessman, albeit one guided by a strong sense of moral purpose'.[79] Russell, like Cooper, emphasises the educational, 'improving' aspects of Novello operations. The younger Novello was a singer himself, and performed as a bass at provincial musical festivals as well as with the Lincoln's Inn chapel choir. Evidence of his astuteness in business may be seen, for example, in his acquisition of copyright for Mendelssohn's *St. Paul* in 1836.[80] Such a move suggests a productive understanding of the music festivals as commercial opportunities. In 1844, Novello took over Joseph Mainzer's journal, *Mainzer's Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, and, with a slight curtailment of the title, the journal became a central part of Novello's activities, both in advertising the company's publications and in disseminating educational material. The company also published Mainzer's *Singing for the Million*, with such publications described by Russell as

> central texts of the mass singing-class movement, enthusiastically supported by those concerned with working-class morality in an age of political and industrial radicalism.[81]

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[77] *Ibid.*
[78] *Ibid.*
[79] Dave Russell, 'Novello, (Joseph) Alfred (1810–1896)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56611> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[80] According to Peter Ward Jones, Alfred Novello paid Mendelssohn 30 guineas for the copyright. See Peter Ward Jones, 'Mendelssohn and his English Publishers', in *Mendelssohn Studies*, R. Larry Todd (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 240–55 (245).
[81] Russell, 'Novello, (Joseph) Alfred)', *DNB*.

Thus, the firm seems to have identified the commercial benefit in aligning itself with the idea that music was morally improving, and to have addressed directly the Victorian desire for edification through music.

The provision of music scores at affordable prices counts as one of Alfred Novello's principal commercial—and cultural—achievements. This move was facilitated by two major operating decisions. The first was to use musical type in the printing process, in place of the older engraved prints, and, following protests from London printing unions against this new development, the second decision was to utilise non-unionised labour in the new system. Russell uses the example of Handel's *Messiah* to illustrate the substantial unit price reductions achieved by the company under Alfred Novello and his successor as proprietor, Henry Littleton (1823–88):

> In August 1846 he made the first of many price reductions, publishing the vocal score and keyboard accompaniment for *Messiah* for 6*s*. 6*d*.: previously, a *Messiah* piano score could cost up to 1 guinea. Further reductions followed and by 1859 a pocket edition of *Messiah* and other major oratorios was available for 1*s*. 4*d*., with shilling editions following from 1862.[82]

Moving into the second half of the nineteenth century, Novello & Co thus joined the world of mass production, then exerting enormous influence in the spheres of literature and news. Henry Littleton's obituary in *The Times* of 14 May 1888 notes that, when Littleton entered the service of Alfred Novello in 1841:

> The firm had just conceived a plan of popularising the art of music by issuing at a comparatively cheap rate vocal scores and other musical publications. It was regarded as quite an innovation when in 1846 the *Messiah* was issued in 12 monthly numbers at sixpence each. This step gave a great impetus to the performance of oratorios by amateur choirs and others; and from that fortunate beginning with Handel's masterpiece a gigantic music business began to be developed among the general music-publishing trade. Glees and part songs, at a very small cost, and anthems and other works followed, whose issue has now reached tens of thousands annually.[83]

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[82] *Ibid.*
[83] 'Obituary', *The Times*, 14 May 1888.

The writer, perhaps an employee or at least an admirer of Novello, thus credits the company not only with 'popularising the art of music', but also with benefitting the performance of oratorios and invigorating the entire music publishing business.

The Times of 7 December 1911 carries a report of a gathering the previous evening to mark the centenary of the Novello publishing house, with composers Hubert Parry (1848–1918), Frank Bridge (1879–1941), Alexander Mackenzie (1847–1935) and Frederic Cowen (1852–1935) among those in attendance.[84] A presentation of 'an illuminated address' was made to Novello chairman Alfred H. Littleton (1845–1914; son of Henry Littleton), signed by the event's organising committee along with 240 supporters:

> This placed on record the signatories' appreciation of the services rendered to the art of music by the house of Novello, and said that the house, during an entire century, had taken the lead in supplying the English-speaking people with music of every kind, and especially with church and choral music, at prices within reach of the masses.[85]

The particular reference to 'church and choral music' in the history of the firm exemplifies the connection between Novello and the Victorian culture of improvement. In a special centenary supplement with the *Musical Times* in 1911, an article on the history of Novello & Co makes a case for the company's central position in the modern progress of English music:

> We think we can claim, without any undue pretension, that the history of the house of Novello is to a large extent the history of music in modern England.[86]

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[84] A letter from Alice Elgar to Nicholas Kilburn and his wife on 24 December notes that the Elgars had been engaged in a stressful house move, and records that Elgar 'has not been at all well'. This may explain his absence from the event. Alice Elgar to Mr. and Mrs. Kilburn, 24 December 1911, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 241.

[85] 'The Novello Centenary', *The Times*, 7 December 1911.

[86] 'The Novello Centenary: 1811–1911', *Musical Times,* 52/820, Novello Centenary Supplement (June 1911): 5–20 (5).

In particular, the writer draws attention to the company's role in the development of English composition as a whole:

> Not the least gratifying feature in the history of the century is the rise of a native school of composition that both in its best and in its average work can for the first time bear comparison with those of other countries. In this development Novello & Co. have played a leading part; by the variety, the quantity, the quality and the cheapness of their publications they have largely helped to spread that knowledge of and desire for music without which composers must strive in vain for a hearing; while a mere glance at their catalogues will show how much they have done, in each generation, to bring the representative composers of the day into touch with the public, and to encourage a native school of composition.[87]

Through its selection of works to publish and composers to promote, then, Novello exerted considerable influence over the direction of composition for the amateur market. The company's own view of its central position in musical life is evident from the centenary article's assertion that Novello both fuelled and fed the desire for quality music:

> The firm can justly claim that they have *made* the demand for good music rather than merely satisfied it; they created the appetite it has been their duty and pleasure to feed.[88]

Elgar was, it seems, in good hands with Novello, and the company's interest in him suggests that he was viewed as a composer who would and did appeal to the tastes of the profitable amateur choral market. The commercial demands of the publishing industry, represented in Elgar's career mainly by Novello and Co, constitute an influential facet of the provincial festival context in which Elgar received the practical training that is so central to his creative methods. This context had a distinctly Anglican character, rendering the Catholic Elgar, by definition, something of an outsider. The next section sets out the status of Catholics in relation to the late-Victorian Anglican majority, and

[87] *Ibid.*, 5.
[88] *Ibid.*, 5.

examines the challenge that this complex environment posed for the furtherance of Elgar's compositional ambitions.

Religious Identity

The relationship of Catholicism and Protestantism and the status of Catholics in late-Victorian society are of special relevance to the present study. In a series of nine lectures, delivered publicly at the Birmingham Corn Exchange between June and September 1851, John Henry Newman addressed the condition and status of Catholicism, and particularly the Protestant view of it.[89] He was in a position to speak with special authority, as England's most famous convert from Anglicanism, who had been received into the Catholic Church just six years earlier. In the opening lines of his first lecture, 'Protestant View of the Catholic Church', given on 30 June 1851, Newman set out the purpose of his series in a manner that suggests that, at that stage, there was significant animosity between the adherents of these denominations:

> I am going to inquire why it is, that, in this intelligent nation, and in this rational nineteenth century, we Catholics are so despised and hated by our own countrymen, with whom we have lived all our lives, that they are prompt to believe any story, however extravagant, that is told to our disadvantage; as if beyond a doubt we were, every one of us, either brutishly deluded or preternaturally hypocritical, and they themselves, on the contrary were in comparison of us absolute specimens of sagacity, wisdom, uprightness, manly virtue, and enlightened Christianity.[90]

Newman further outlines the poor relationship between Catholicism and Protestantism, alluding to political reasons for the continuation of this:

> I am neither assuming, nor intending to prove, that the Catholic Church comes from above [...] but here I am only investigating how it is she comes to be so despised and hated among us; since a Religion need not

[89] John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England: Addressed to the Brothers of the Oratory: in the Summer of 1851* (London, New York, Bombay and Calcutta: Longmans, Green & Co, 1908), available at <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/england> [accessed 23 October 2012].

[90] Newman, 'Protestant View of the Catholic Church', <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/england/lecture1.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].

> incur scorn and animosity simply because it is not recognized as true. And, I say, the reason is this, that reasons of State, political and national, prevent her from being heard in her defence. She is considered too absurd to be inquired into, and too corrupt to be defended, and too dangerous to be treated with equity and fair dealing. She is the victim of a prejudice which perpetuates itself, and gives birth to what it feeds upon.[91]

Matters, on an official level at least, seem not to have improved over subsequent decades. The declaration of papal infallibility at the first Vatican Council (1869–70), and about which Newman expressed serious reservations, brought forth a strong reaction in Britain, not least from W. E. Gladstone (1809–98). [92] In 1874 Gladstone published a pamphlet entitled *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation*, which sold over 100,000 copies.[93] In it, Gladstone summarised his understanding of the Vatican declaration:

> The Pope's infallibility, when he speaks *ex cathedrâ*, has been declared, with the assent of the Bishops of the Roman Church, to be an article of faith, binding on the conscience of every Christian; his claim to the obedience of his spiritual subjects has been declared in like manner without any practical limit or reserve; and his supremacy, without any reserve of civil rights, has been similarly affirmed to include everything which relates to the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world.[94]

Gladstone then outlined the conflict that, he felt, was created in relation to the civil allegiance of British Catholics, whose first duty, according to Gladstone's interpretation, was now to the Pope. This was, Gladstone argued, a surrender of 'mental and moral freedom'.[95] Stating that Catholics accounted for 'more than five millions (or nearly one-sixth) of the inhabitants of the United Kingdom', [96] Gladstone concluded that:

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[91] *Ibid.*
[92] One of Newman's clearest statements on the matter is a letter written in 1870. See Wilfred Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, vol. 2 (London: Longman, 1913), 287–89.
[93] Matthew, H. C. G., 'Gladstone, William Ewart (1809–1898)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10787> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[94] W. E. Gladstone, *The Vatican Decrees in their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation* (London: John Murray, 1874), 32.
[95] *Ibid.*, 23.
[96] *Ibid*, 45–46.

> England is entitled to ask, and to know, in what way the obedience required by the Pope and the Council of the Vatican is to be reconciled with the integrity of civil allegiance?[97]

This question surely affected Catholic identity in relation to church and state, while for non-Catholics, it must have raised suspicions concerning Catholic loyalty to queen and country. In his study of high-profile converts to Catholicism, Philip Waller discusses another area of suspicion and religious tension in late-Victorian Britain, and notes another reason why Gladstone took issue with Catholicism, this time on a more personal level:

> There were strong reasons to get agitated about Rome. Hence, conversion to that faith was judged a madness, and converts called 'perverts'. 'The pervert is lost to the family', observed Conan Doyle bleakly. Gladstone's perturbations about the surrender of his sister Helen are well recorded; likewise, Gladstone's shunning of Mrs Anne Ramsden Bennett, his cousin and sometime assistant, when she went the same way.[98]

Thus it is clear that that there were fundamental and well-established tensions between Protestants and Catholics in late-Victorian Britain and that conversion from one denomination to the other was a particular sore point.

Given the complex and continually shifting religious climate of late-nineteenth-century Britain, Elgar had to tread a careful path in his efforts to establish himself as a respected professional. The strength of his own religious convictions is difficult to discern from the surviving evidence, but his youth, as recent studies have emphasised,[99] was steeped in Catholic culture. Rachel Cowgill outlines the place of Catholicism in Elgar's life:

> Until his departure from Worcester to London in his early thirties, [Elgar] lived life in a Catholic context dominated by his mother, a fervent convert to the faith; he had attended Catholic schools and a Catholic church, had

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[97] *Ibid.*, 43.

[98] Philip Waller, 'Roman Candles: Catholic Converts among Authors in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain', in *Politics and Culture in Victorian Britain: Essays in Memory of Colin Matthew*, Peter Ghosh and Lawrence Goodman (eds.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 192–219 (193). On Helen Gladstone see H. C. G. Matthew, 'Gladstone, Helen Jane (1814–1880)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48450> [accessed 23 Oct 2012].

[99] See McGuire, 'Measure of a Man: Catechizing Elgar's Catholic Avatars', in *Edward Elgar and his World*, Byron Adams (ed.), 3–37; and Rachel Cowgill, 'Elgar's War Requiem', *loc. cit.*, 317–62.

> socialized with Catholics, and was organist at St. George's Catholic Church in Worcester.[100]

Elgar's mother converted from Anglicanism to Catholicism at a time when such a move was a major statement of culture and identity: one that provoked strong reactions and could have substantial social repercussions.[101] Certainly it was a move that determined in large part the cultural character of the Elgar household, as McGuire asserts:

> From Elgar's birth in 1857 until he left Worcester for London in 1889, Catholicism was the major spiritual and cultural fact of his life. [102]

In the context of the present study, the area of importance lies not in the nature of Elgar's own faith and how he chose to show or hide it, but rather in the development of his skill at negotiating his way within a complex religious culture. He became expert as a voice that could speak to all sides with his works, largely by exploring topics with broad, cross-denominational appeal.

In 1889, Elgar's multifaceted cultural identity opened a new chapter when he married Caroline Alice Roberts (1848/9–1920, known as Alice),[103] only daughter of Sir Henry Gee Roberts (1800–1860) and Julia Maria Raikes. Henry Gee Roberts's life is bound up with the empire, Julia Raikes's with the Anglican Church. Roberts spent almost his entire adult life as an army officer with the East India Company, beginning as a cadet in 1818, and rising steadily through the ranks of this company army due to successful military action and numerous commendations.[104] The entry on Roberts in the *Dictionary of National Biography* notes many military encounters and skirmishes in which he appears to have played a leading role. Only victories and commendations are mentioned

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[100] Cowgill, 'Elgar's War Requiem', 325.
[101] Elgar's mother converted in 1852; his father, though organist at St. George's Catholic Church, did not convert until shortly before his death in 1906. See Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 17.
[102] McGuire, 'Measure of a Man', 12.
[103] The uncertainty of date is discussed in Young, *Alice Elgar: Enigma of a Victorian Lady* (London: Dobson, 1978), 21, 23.
[104] Lloyd, E. M., 'Roberts, Sir Henry Gee (1800–1860)', Roger T. Stearn (rev.), *DNB,* <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23755> [accessed 23 October 2012].

in the *DNB* article, creating an image of a highly successful and respected commander. Roberts became a colonel in 1852 and a major-general two years later. His name is included in a list of thirteen high-ranking officers of the EIC army proposed by Lord Stanley in April 1859 to receive the thanks of parliament

> for the eminent skill, courage, and perseverance displayed by them during the military operations by which the late insurrection in India has been effectually suppressed.[105]

The *Morning Chronicle* of 18 May 1859 reports that Roberts, along with three colonels and one other major-general, was appointed Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath (K.C.B.).[106] He returned to England in 1859 and died the following year. A brief report concerning Roberts's will concludes with the notable remark that 'the testator entered very early in life the military profession, and acquired both rank and honours more rapidly than generally falls to the lot of officers employed in the military or naval service'.[107]

The imperial involvement of the family was not confined to Henry Gee Roberts. Alice's six uncles, her mother's brothers, also worked for the East India Company. Alice's own brothers Frederic Boyd and Stanley Napier Roberts were sent back to England from India to be educated at a school in Cheltenham, which, Young states, was established 'primarily for the purpose of educating the sons of the military' and where the boys were 'duly conditioned to follow in their father's footsteps'.[108] Frederic entered the Indian army as a cadet in 1857, and rose through the ranks as his father had done, reaching the rank of Major in 1877, while his younger brother, known as Napier, attended

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[105] 'Parliamentary Business: Notices of Motions', *Daily News*, 14 April 1859.
[106] 'The Order of the Bath', *Morning Chronicle*, 18 May 1859.
[107] 'Wills and Bequests', *Glasgow Herald*, 11 December 1860. Roberts bequeathed his estate to his wife.
[108] Young, *Alice Elgar*, 26. A third brother, Albert Henry, had died in infancy.

the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst and proceeded to fight in India, Afghanistan and Burma.[109]

Alice Elgar's mother, who died on 30 May 1887 at the age of seventy-one, was the daughter of Reverend Robert Napier Raikes, Vicar of Longhope, Gloucestershire,[110] and Caroline Probyn, also the daughter of an Anglican clergyman.[111] Alice Elgar's own obituary notes that her mother was descended from a Robert Raikes (1736–1811), who was the 'founder and promoter of the Sunday School movement'.[112] Alice Elgar thus came from a long line of active Anglicans, and, with reference to Henry Gee Roberts's papers, the British Library lists undated 'notes on the career of Roberts compiled by his daughter',[113] suggesting that Alice had at least an interest in the imperial affairs of her father.

Years later, Carice Elgar Blake, daughter of Elgar and Alice Roberts, gave her version of the reaction to news of her parents' engagement in 1888:

> This news brought cries of horror from the Roberts and Raikes (with the notable exception of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Raikes and her mother who lived in Norwood and were always most helpful). They said he was an unknown musician; his family was in trade; and anyway he looked too delicate to live any length of time. One of the aunts was going to leave Alice a substantial sum, but on hearing the news, she forthwith cast her out of her will altogether.[114]

While it is essential to bear in mind that Carice Elgar Blake's version of events was handed down and coloured both with the views of those who imparted the story and the views of her own time, it does seem that the mixed marriage of Elgar to Alice Roberts came at a time when such an event was remarkable and abhorrent to many. But Alice

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[109] Young, *Alice Elgar*, 27.
[110] 'Deaths', *The Times*, 2 June 1887.
[111] 'Oxford, Saturday September 22nd', *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 22 September 1810.
[112] 'Death of Lady Elgar', *The Times*, 8 April 1920.
[113] 'India Office Select Materials', <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/indiaofficeselect/Handlist.asp?FName=E265&BRef=Mss+Eur+E265> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[114] Carice Elgar Blake, Notes, cited in Young, *Alice Elgar*, 95–96.

Roberts, a cultured, well-read, artistic, and relatively free-thinking woman according to Young's in-depth study, in the very year that the Women's Franchise League was formed, stepped outside convention and married the younger (though not very young), poorer, Catholic musical tradesman on 8 May 1889.

According to Hunt, the marriage had an instant effect on social perceptions of Elgar, as 'almost immediately the local musician had assumed an air of respectability in the eyes of the locals', because the Roberts family was 'much-respected in county circles'.[115] Hunt also asserts that Elgar's new social status directly affected his compositional opportunities:

> This change of attitude towards the promising local composer clearly filtered through to the Festival committee when they met to plan the 1890 Festival, for the ageing William Done was persuaded to invite Elgar to write an orchestral work for the forthcoming event.[116]

Building a Profile: *Froissart* at the Three Choirs Festival

Elgar's orchestral overture *Froissart* marks the beginning of a decade-long journey through various topics, associations and musical forms, as the composer tried to find a way to the heart of the British musical public. In this case he capitalised on the then-current fascination with chivalry, as epitomised in the novels of Walter Scott. This type of heroic story crossed every divide in British society, not least the Protestant–Catholic one. The work's title, along with its 'motto', printed at the head of the score, set an imaginative framework for the audience:

> 'When Chivalry
> Lifted her lance on high'. –

The quote is an extract from John Keats's poem 'To —' (beginning 'Hadst thou liv'd in days of old'), written for the poet's brother George to give to Miss Georgiana Wylie on

[115] Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival,* 27.
[116] *Ibid.*, 27.

Valentine's Day 1816, and subsequently published in Keats's first collection, *Poems* in 1817.[117] Though the title of Elgar's overture refers to the fourteenth-century French chronicler Jean Froissart, the immediate inspiration, as McVeagh explains, was Walter Scott:

> Elgar acknowledged a specific source in Walter Scott's *Old Mortality*, in which John Claverhouse asks Henry Morton 'did you ever read Froissart?' and praises his description of a knight's 'loyalty to his king, pure faith to his religion, hardihood towards the enemy, and fidelity to his lady-love'.[118]

Evocations of knightly heroism reflect a widespread passion for such tales among Victorian readers, as Walter Houghton notes in his study of nineteenth-century attitudes and culture:

> Heroic myth was as popular as heroic biography. Tales of medieval knights and legendary heroes, Greek and Roman, Celtic and Norse, were widely read—in new editions of Malory and Froissart, in the poetry of Tennyson, Arnold, and the Pre-Raphaelites.[119]

Following the acceptance of his piece for Worcester, Elgar, as Moore puts it, 'wasted no time in addressing the dean of English music critics, Joseph Bennett of the *Daily Telegraph*',[120] informing him of the forthcoming performance, outlining his compositional achievements to date and explaining his approach thus:

> I hope you will not think I am writing from egotistical motives, but it is a crucial time in the career of a young musician and I was afraid you might question the committee's action in asking me to contribute to their scheme.[121]

It appears that this approach to Bennett was a smart move on the part of the emerging composer. Meirion Hughes summarises the importance of critics such as Bennett to the

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[117] John Keats, 'To— [Georgiana Augusta Wylie, later Mrs George Keats]' <http://www.john-keats.com/gedichte/to_georgiana.htm> [accessed 17 July 2012].

[118] Diana M. McVeagh, *Elgar: The Music Maker* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 13. Elgar's interest in the work of Scott may be seen in a letter to Charles Buck of 7 January 1887, in which he detailed his winter activities: 'These holidays have been dull: as they are nearly past, I look back & find a miserable record of wasted time. I have read three of Scott's novels — written 3 ballet airs & partly scored 'em — & coloured a clay-pipe — beast!' See *Letters of a Lifetime*, 21.

[119] Houghton, 305.

[120] Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 31.

[121] Edward Elgar to Joseph Bennett, n.d., transcribed by Jack Westrup; cited in Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime,* 31–32.

rise of composers and to the overall direction of compositional trends: 'The critics' influence on the canon formation of English music cannot be overestimated'.[122] Hughes goes so far as to suggest that 'in a very real sense [the critics] were the arbitrators of the future of English music'.[123] He asserts that the pragmatic Elgar may have approached Bennett in part because of the latter's geographical origin and consequent potential empathy:

> Elgar recognised in Bennett a musical patriot and a champion of the Musical Renaissance. The composer was also aware of the critic's 'local' Severnside roots and unrivalled knowledge of the festival circuit and its network of patronage.[124]

The composer may also have been aware that the *Daily Telegraph* had the widest circulation of any British paper at the time.[125] Elgar's cultivation of a public profile as a provincial self-made man was a deliberate, and successful, strategy, Hughes argues, stating that the composer

> embraced his own regionalism as a source of pride, and with not a little self-interest, since his chosen profile as a 'Worcester musician' helped him conquer the festival circuit of the 1890s.[126]

Elgar's letter to Bennett marked the beginning of a productive relationship with the influential critic, and the episode shows that the Three Choirs Festival provided Elgar with a platform of an altogether different level than Mr Stockley's concert series in Birmingham or any other performance outlet which he had yet experienced.

Prior to its first performance, *Froissart* was accepted for publication by Novello after an approach by Elgar,[127] and Moore observes that, while this agreement did not bear financial fruit, it was a significant step for the still little-known composer:

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[122] Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press*, 188.
[123] *Ibid.*, 185.
[124] *Ibid.*, 162.
[125] *Ibid.*, 162.
[126] *Ibid.*, 163.
[127] Moore (ed.), *Letters of a Lifetime*, 34.

> There was no payment in exchange for the copyright. But for a composer of only local reputation the terms were more than acceptable.[128]

The acceptance of a work by a virtually unknown composer was perhaps a measure of Novello's respect for the Three Choirs Festival and for its potential to provide a return on their investment in the immediate and long-term future.

Froissart was performed on 10 September 1890 in the Public Hall in Worcester, conducted by the composer. Press reaction to some extent brings to life the excitement of the festival occasion, as well as revealing the idiosyncrasies of contemporary music critics. On 11 September, the *Daily News* ran a substantial review of the Wednesday evening secular concert, recording that the audience 'very nearly filled the Public Hall (a building into which about 900 people can be crowded)', and took full advantage of the permission of applause—such raucous expression being forbidden in the Cathedral concerts. The listeners, according to the report,

> amply avenged themselves in the public hall by cheering the artists, and by giving a special ovation to Dr. Hubert Parry, who conducted his own work.[129]

The input of Elgar occupies several lines of the review, though the presence of the much more famous Parry not surprisingly takes precedence. 'Local talent', the paper records,

> was represented by a new concert overture, originating from the pen of Mr. Edward Elgar, a gentleman whose family have been long connected with music in Worcester.[130]

The reviewer offers little comment on the music itself, but dwells on the orchestration of the extra-musical allusions:

> The 'programme', apart from the overture, is a warmly coloured, effective piece of workmanship, showing plenty of vigour and an excellent knowledge of the capabilities of the modern orchestra.[131]

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[128] *Ibid.*, 34.
[129] 'The Worcester Musical Festival', *Daily News*, 11 September 1890. Parry's work was *Ode on St. Cecilia's Day*.
[130] 'The Worcester Musical Festival', *Daily News*, 11 September 1890.
[131] *Ibid.*

The writer notes that Elgar is not entirely without experience in the area of orchestration, stating that he

> is indeed no novice in this respect, for more than one work from his pen has already successfully been produced at Mr. Stockley's orchestral concerts at Birmingham.[132]

The composer, according to the review, received an enthusiastic reception, being 'called back to the platform and very warmly cheered'.[133] The concert review in the *Pall Mall Gazette* was entirely devoted to Parry's involvement in the Wednesday evening concert, with the final sentencing merely mentioning that the programme included 'a concert overture by Edward Elgar, conducted by the composer'.[134] *Lloyd's Weekly* placed Elgar in a more exalted position, saying of the Wednesday concert that 'the most interesting pieces' were 'Dr. Parry's "St. Cecilia's Day", and a spirited concert-overture called "Froissart", composed by Mr. Edward Elgar, a local musician'.[135] The *Graphic* included a short outline of *Froissart* and concluded that the piece 'shows some signs of crudeness, but it is a highly creditable effort for so young a musician'.[136] *The Times* also carried a review of Elgar's first major performance, with the work of the 'young local composer' accorded a few sentences. After mentioning the prefixed motto, the writer notes that:

> Themes of the work are more or less martial in character. They are fairly original, and are worked with some skill. The scoring is decidedly clever, although, like most young composers, Mr. Elgar is too fond of the brass instruments.[137]

Here, the reviewer singles out Elgar's use of the double bassoon for particular criticism, with a remark that may say more about the writer's taste than about the musical impact: 'The depth of his attack, the double bassoon, also reaches the limit of absurdity'.[138]

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[132] *Ibid.*
[133] *Ibid.*
[134] 'The Worcester Music Festival', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 September 1890.
[135] 'The Worcester Musical Festival', *Lloyd's Weekly*, 14 September 1890.
[136] 'Music', *Graphic*, 20 September 1890.
[137] 'Worcester Musical Festival', *The Times*, 11 September 1890.
[138] *Ibid.*

Moore notes that Joseph Bennett (to whom Elgar had written in advance of the *Froissart* performance) wrote a broadly positive review, in which his status as one of the country's leading reviewers is evident. Bennett pronounces that the work

> is one of considerable interest, arising from promise rather than actual achievement [...] But Mr. Elgar has ideas and feeling as well as aspiration, and should be encouraged to persevere. Mr. Punch's memorable advice to persons about to marry [i.e. 'Don't!'] is that which true charity dictates in nine cases out of ten when young men propose to write overtures and symphonies. I regard Mr. Elgar as an exception. Let him go on. He will one day 'arrive'.[139]

Here we see evidence for Hughes's claim that reviewers were the 'arbitrators' of English music; and the wisdom of Elgar's attempt to make a pre-emptive impression on Bennett becomes apparent. Robert Anderson presents some more cautious content from Bennett's review, showing that it was in fact rather mixed:

> It is in parts crude, and chiefly lacks the broad outline which in music of modern character is more than ever essential.[140]

Despite this apparent caution, and the focus on potential rather than achievement, Hunt concludes that, with the first performance of *Froissart*, 'the corner had indeed been turned' for Elgar.[141] The sheer number of reviews of the performance in local and national news publications is testament to the widespread interest in the Three Choirs Festival, and also to the prominence accorded to the relatively little-known Elgar by the inclusion of his overture in the Festival programme.

Press reaction, though broadly positive, was short-lived. Elgar returned to his musical routine and continued to seek opportunities to hear a variety of orchestral, choral and operatic repertoire. Young notes that he travelled to Bayreuth in August 1892 and to Munich in August 1893, where he heard *Die Meistersinger*, the operas of *Der Ring des*

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[139] Joseph Bennett, Concert Review, cited in Moore, *A Creative Life*, 154.
[140] Robert Anderson, *Elgar*, Dent Master Musicians series (London: J. M. Dent, 1993), 24.
[141] Hunt, *Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival*, 33.

Nibelungen, *Tannhäuser*, *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Feen*.[142] Evidence of his compositional activities around this time may be found among publications listed by the publisher Tuckwood in 1893, which included, in the words of an advertisement, 'two very pleasing songs, for which a lasting success may be anticipated': Elgar's 'Like to the Damask Rose' and 'A Song of Autumn'.[143] In 1892 he submitted a larger work, Serenade for Strings, to Novello. Notwithstanding previous interest in Elgar's output, the firm declined to publish the Serenade, explaining in a letter that, while they considered the piece to be 'very good', they found that 'this class of music is practically unsaleable'.[144] A change of direction was needed.

Embracing the Amateur Choral Tradition

Both Anderson and Moore cite pragmatic reasons for Elgar's decision to turn his attention to choral composition at this stage. A choral work, Moore asserts, 'would address all the amateur choral societies abounding in the Midlands', while 'a big work for choir stood a better chance of performance' than an orchestral work.[145] Anderson highlights commercial considerations, stating that with *The Black Knight*, Elgar

> had given Worcester the sort of choral music it could readily welcome, had provided Novello with a work that was eminently marketable, and [...] had charted his own probable course for the immediate future.[146]

For this, his first large work after *Froissart*, Elgar chose to set H. W. Longfellow's translation of Ludwig Uhland's chivalric and mysterious *Der schwarze Ritter*. He set out his rationale in a letter to Novello on 30 September 1892:

> I would point out that the present work is of a class much in request—chorus & orch: —& that the poem set is picturesque & popular at the same time presenting no great difficulty for the performers.[147]

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[142] Young, *Elgar: O. M.*, 68.
[143] 'New Music', *Graphic*, 26 August 1893.
[144] Novello to Edward Elgar, 30 July 1892, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 10.
[145] Moore, *A Creative Life*, 135.
[146] Anderson, *Elgar*, 27.

This direct statement illustrates Elgar's keen interest in the nature of public demand and in the practicalities of the amateur choral world, and his desire to pursue an artistic means of satisfying both. That said, the design was innovative, suggesting that Elgar sought to be creative within the boundaries of tradition. Five years after its first performance, Elgar described his vision for *The Black Knight* in a letter to A. J. Jaeger:

> I intended the work to be a sort of symphony in four divisions founded on the poem —different to anything, in structure, ever done before — where the 'picture' is fixable for a little time the words are repeated — in dramatic parts the words 'go on': it's not a proper cantata as the orch: is too important.[148]

The work was accepted for publication, and was performed by the Worcester Festival Choral Society on 18 April 1893.

Charles Swinnerton Heap later presented the work in Walsall, and, in an apparent show of support for the composer, invited Elgar to conduct the work himself in Wolverhampton,[149] with a 'successful performance' there on 26 February 1895.[150] An extensive review of the Wolverhampton performance was published in the *Birmingham Daily Post* the following day, synopsising the story of *The Black Knight*, offering a broadly positive reaction to the musical content, and concluding with a wish for further compositional output from Elgar:

> It would be a great pity if so richly conceived and highly successful a work were not followed by others from the same pen. The applause at the close from audience and executants was spontaneous and prolonged, and the composer had repeatedly to bow his acknowledgments.[151]

The chorus master Heap was a champion of Elgar's work, and commissioned *King Olaf* for North Staffordshire in 1896. Anderson draws attention to a further performance of

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[147] Edward Elgar to Novello, 30 September 1892, *Elgar and his Publishers,* I, 12.
[148] Edward Elgar to A. J. Jaeger, 1 March 1898, *Elgar and His Publishers*, I, 67.
[149] Moore, *A Creative Life*, 183.
[150] Anderson, *Elgar*, 30.
[151] 'Wolverhampton Festival Choral Society', *Birmingham Daily Post*, 27 February 1895.

The Black Knight—in Birmingham, scene of a number of significant performances in Elgar's career:

> Elgar's reputation was greatly enhanced by a performance in Birmingham of *The Black Knight* by Swinnerton Heap's choir on 5 December 1895.[152]

Elgar's appreciation for the support of Heap is reflected in the dedication of his first oratorio, *The Light of Life*: 'To C. Swinnerton Heap, with sincere regard'. This work offers an insight into Elgar's approach with regard to the selection and musical treatment of text in a specific cultural—and ideological—environment.

The Light of Life: An Insight into Elgar's Working Methods

Throughout the 1890s, Elgar's reputation and musical assurance underwent dramatic growth. The year 1896 occupies an important stage in his development from unknown provincial composer to national icon and bard, and from his tentative compositional offerings to robust, confident craftsmanship. Besides a number of minor works, his principal activities in this year were commissions for major choral festivals: *The Light of Life* for the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester, and *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* for the North Staffordshire Music Festival in Hanley. These works were premiered within weeks of each other in September and October 1896 and received public and media attention of a new kind in Elgar's career. In advance of a more detailed discussion of *King Olaf* in the next chapter, it is useful to examine here Elgar's working methods in selecting, altering and setting the text of *The Light of Life* for his late-Victorian choral festival audience.

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[152] Anderson, *Elgar*, 31.

Constructing *The Light of Life*

Elgar's first oratorio was a significant step up from *The Black Knight* in terms of length and performing forces. As argued earlier, his prospective audience was used to the oratorio as a genre of edification as well as entertainment, and, as McGuire points out, choir members as well as listeners could benefit from the power of its expression:

> The oratorio itself dovetailed nicely with the religious practices of the late nineteenth century, and the genre's adherents transformed it into a religious rite, thought capable by many to improve the moral character of those who sang oratorios as well as those who heard them.[153]

A number of important considerations affected the nature of the work, not least the fact that Elgar would have wished to address the topic in a way that was acceptable to the largely Anglican audience, without denying his own religious identity. By choosing a biblical subject that focused on the person of Jesus, the composer remained firmly within the bounds of the common ground of Anglicanism and Catholicism.

The process of securing a performance of a new work at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester in 1896 says much about Elgar's determination to strike the right ideological and professional tone. Moore asserts that the idea of a festival performance was on Elgar's mind throughout the previous year:

> Looking toward the next Worcester meeting of the Three Choirs Festival a year hence, he wanted a text on which he could base a work to offer the authorities for performance in the Cathedral.[154]

This observation by Moore shows firstly that Elgar was deliberate and organised in his pursuit of performance opportunities. He did not wait to be asked, but prepared well in advance to approach the festival authorities with a concrete proposition. Secondly, it suggests that the performance venue was a factor in the choice of topic: the principal venue for the festival was Worcester Cathedral, and consequently, as Moore states, the

[153] McGuire, *Elgar's Oratorios*, 45.
[154] Moore (ed.), *Letters of a Lifetime*, 47.

proposed work 'ought to have an Anglican imprimatur'.[155] To this end, Elgar sought advice on a scriptural subject from Edward Capel Cure, an Anglican clergyman and amateur cellist with whom he sometimes played chamber music.[156] Capel Cure offered to shape a libretto, and the result was received by Elgar during a holiday in Bavaria in summer 1895. The main narrative material is taken from John Chapter 9, with interpolations from other parts of the Bible as well as verses by Capel Cure himself. The format consists of a mixture of narrative and didactic text: designed to entertain and improve. McGuire suggests that the composer's choice of librettist was no accident, but was bound up with the complex religious context and the performance venue:

> Elgar's decision to use Capel Cure's text may have had as much to do with religious politics as the ability, enthusiasm or availability of the writer. As a Catholic, Elgar was susceptible to broadside attack from the more traditional elements of the religious community. Even though the Three Choirs' Festival was open to the public, it was held in an Anglican Cathedral, and the prayers and religious sentiment within were still relatively intolerant towards Catholics.[157]

The construction of *The Light of Life* libretto consisted of two editorial stages or layers: first, the choosing and moulding of the biblical and free text by Capel Cure; and second, omissions and alterations by Elgar. As with other dramatic Elgar works, notably *King Olaf* and *The Dream of Gerontius*, the question of what was left out is as revealing as what was left in, with the musical treatment of the surviving material often the most telling of all with regard to cultural context, creative intention and Elgarian pragmatism.

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[155] *Ibid.*, 47.

[156] The difficulty of researching Edward Capel Cure is compounded by the existence of a number of clergymen of the same name around the same time. It is likely that the Edward Capel Cure listed in *The Times* among the Ordinations in Worcester on Trinity Sunday 1885 is Elgar's librettist. Anderson and Moore state that Capel Cure had 'considerable musical gifts. As a boy at Charterhouse School he was a sufficiently accomplished cellist to be invited for chamber music to the house of Maria Fitton at nearby Godalming', and that 'he was probably the Anglican clergyman the Catholic Elgar knew best'. See 'Ordinations', *The Times,* 2 June 1885; and Anderson and Moore, 'Foreword', *The Light of Life*, ECE full score, v.

[157] McGuire, *Elgar's Oratorios*, 89, n. 4.

These two editorial stages may be observed in the handwritten draft libretto, prepared by Capel Cure and annotated and altered by Elgar.[158]

Alterations: Reasons and Methods

Capel Cure's libretto consisted of nineteen titled sections, from which Elgar devised sixteen musical numbers. The decisions and methods surrounding the excision or reworking of certain sections of text were governed by a number of significant considerations.

Suitability of Title

It was originally intended that the work should be called *Lux Christi*, but at Novello's request Elgar had suggested an English title, *The Light that Shineth.* Moore's explanation is that 'the publisher was afraid that Roman overtones in the Latin title might affect sales',[159] stating that the suggestion of an English title 'had arisen lest the work should seem to have too Roman Catholic a bias for an Anglican festival',[160] and so a change was sought on grounds of commerce and propriety. Novello replied to put forward an alternative, to which Elgar answered:

> Your suggested title '*The Light of Life*' is much better as it is in the chapter of St. John used in the work : we had thought of this name but had an idea that it had been used.[161]

It is curious that the Reverend Edward Capel Cure, an Anglican clergyman and the work's librettist, had no difficulty in suggesting the Latin title 'Lux Christi', while, according to Moore, the publishing firm Novello exercised caution out of fear that

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[158] Edward Capel Cure, *Lux Christi: An Oratorio*, Draft Libretto, Birthplace Museum MS no. 627.
[159] Moore (ed.), *Letters of a Lifetime*, 50.
[160] Robert Anderson and Jerrold Northrop Moore, 'Foreword', in Edward Elgar, *The Light of Life: Lux Christi: A Short Oratorio for Soli, Chorus, and Orchestra: The Words Written and Arranged by E. Capel Cure*, Elgar Complete Edition full score (London and Sevenoaks: Novello, 1989), vi.
[161] Edward Elgar to Novello, 21 April 1896, *Elgar and His Publishers,* I, 34.

offence might be caused, and preferred an English version. Capel Cure's initial suggestion is contained in an undated letter to Elgar (for which Moore suggests circa July 1895):

> Many ideas come into my head — The Best seems to me — the story of the Blind Man healed — call it 'Lux Christi'. See St John IX 1–38 inclusive [:] it is a perfect story descriptive and dramatic — would almost arrange itself for musical Treatment.[162]

Moreover, there is no evidence that any objection was raised by the Three Choirs Festival music subcommittee, the secretary of which was the Reverend T. Littleton Wheeler. Thus it is clear that to believe simply that Catholics were comfortable with Latin text while Anglicans were not is insufficient for the purposes of attempting to understand the complex theological context of Elgar's early career. This episode, like a related controversy outlined below, reflects the fact that considerable variation existed within the broad confines of Elgar's Anglican working world.

Time Constraints

The Light of Life is tailored to the precise measurements of festival concert logistics. In a letter to Elgar of 12 December 1895, the Rev. T. Littleton Wheeler stated that Elgar's proposal for a new work had been 'finally accepted unless you hear further', and immediately outlined the time constraints involved in the concert:

> The committee cannot spare much more than an hour for the performance of the work; in fact three quarters of an hour would be quite as suitable for its place in the programme. They hope that it may be ready for rehearsal at the earliest date possible.[163]

Conscious of his limited slot in the concert schedule, it is clear from the resultant changes that Elgar had his own ideas for emphasis and avoidance as well as a keen awareness of performance practicalities.

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[162] Edward Capel Cure to Edward Elgar, n.d. [c. July 1895], *Letters of a Lifetime*, 47.
[163] T. Littleton Wheeler to Edward Elgar, 12 December 1895, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 50.

Musical resources allowed Elgar to exercise efficiency by omitting sections of text, the communication of which could be delegated to the orchestra and therefore presented simultaneously with new information, resulting in an altogether tighter narrative. With the representative or reminiscence theme at his disposal, Elgar could engender, with varying levels of subtlety, emotive musical associations which rendered Capel Cure's at times lengthy theological explication redundant. For example, of Capel Cure's three verses of the Blind Man's first solo, Elgar chose to set only two, omitting the second:

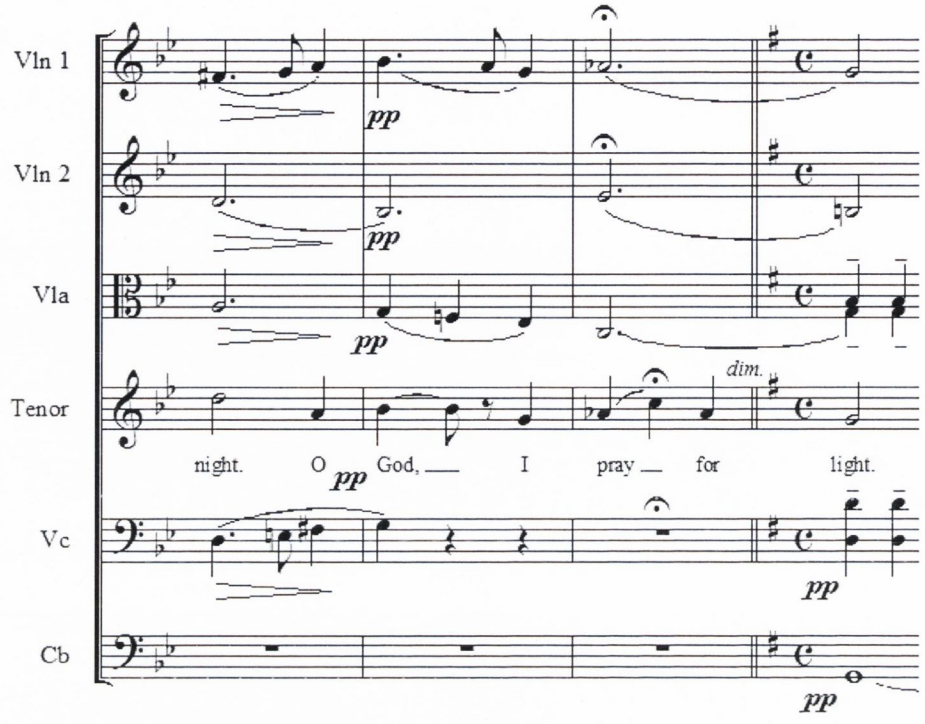
> The glories of the earth
> are witness to Thy worth
> Hast Thou not planned
> the sea and land
> as vestures for Thyself
> But, exiled from their sight
> O God, I pray for light.

It is likely that the paucity of references to light and darkness compared to the other verses resulted in this particular excision. The opposition of light and darkness is clearly set out in the choral opening of No. 2 ('Seek Him that Maketh the Seven Stars'). Here, a chorus of male voices presents short excerpts from Amos 5:8 and Psalm 136, with all lines included by reason of direct reference to darkness and light and the greatness of God. Elgar follows Capel Cure's lead by lending substantial musical weight to particularly light-endowed words and phrases. The musical setting adds considerable dramatic sophistication, however, as Elgar uses a number of devices, such as the swelling and receding of orchestral and vocal texture, to create impressions of distance, perspective and motion. While Capel Cure's draft libretto specifies only that this is a chorus of Levites, the score places them 'within the temple courts', with the subsequent Blind Man's solo taking place 'outside the Temple'—quasi stage directions, presumably added by Elgar, which are underwritten by the camera-angle, so to speak, of the music.

The musical representation of such three-dimensional imagery has the effect of accentuating, through musical means, the differences between characters, and in particular of encouraging empathy with the Blind Man on his quest for literal and metaphorical light. In this respect, *The Light of Life* acts as a precursor to *The Dream of Gerontius*, in which the polyphonic and associative powers of music allow the composer to omit sections of theological exposition in favour of a more direct engagement with the immediate concerns of the protagonist.

Avoiding Problematic Ideology

In relation to the Blind Man's first solo ('O Thou in Heaven's Dome'), it is also possible that Elgar omitted the middle verse so as to avoid touching the nerve of scientific naturalism by making any suggestion that God's creations must be seen to be believed. A Catholic in the early stages of his career and dependent on Anglican festival culture could ill afford to be associated, however innocently, with such an interpretation. In any case, the omission is smoothed over, as Elgar's use of representative themes clearly indicative of darkness and light,[164] his reordering of text to enhance the contrast of anonymous chorus and identifiable solo, and his creation of an air of mystery through strategic placing of the Neapolitan sixth chord (see Ex. 2.1 below) leave no doubt as to the righteousness and the mysterious ways of the maker of light, and of the Blind Man's desire to find his way to God, in the two remaining verses.

[164] Elgar indicated named representative themes in his personal copy of the printed vocal score, Birthplace Museum, PR33, for use in Herbert Thompson's programme notes for a second Worcester Festival performance, in 1899. See *The Light of Life*, ECE Full Score, xviii.

Ex. 2.1. *The Light of Life*, No. 2: The Blind Man, Tenor Solo, bb. 77–80

Elgar also left out two verses of text intended by Capel Cure as a solo for the Blind Man close to the end of the work (No. 17 of Capel Cure's nineteen sections):

> I ask no other sign than this
> For how couldst Thou, unless Divine,
> touch to their proper use these eyes.
> I were still blind, I should miss
> Thy Godhead shining thro' this sign,
> or Thee above all fail to prize.
>
> O Let me Thy disciple be
> each day will be a miracle
> of Heaven's ever brightening glow
> No longer do I care to see
> What earth can show of beautiful
> Thine unseen glory I must know.

This excision may well be related to the reasons Elgar omitted 'The glories of the earth/are witness to Thy worth' from the Blind Man's first solo. All these verses carry a possible interpretation that belief is dependent on seeing the performance of such miraculous works. Capel Cure was well-versed in theology; and to him these verses

probably stood not as a statement of doctrine, but as a statement of the Blind Man's human reaction in the instant of the moment. But to a reader they might well be interpreted differently. Although the scriptures make it clear many times that miracles are manifestations of Jesus's divinity, Jesus also said 'Thomas, because thou hast seen me, though hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.' (John 20:29). This potential ambiguity is a possible reason why, when Elgar considered verses for excision, these were chosen. In the cases outlined here, the probable reason for excision was not connected to Elgar's Catholic feeling, but rather—in addition to the consideration of time constraints noted above—to a desire to avoid any deviation from orthodoxy that might provoke an adverse reaction to his religious identity.

Textural Variety

Variations of texture, always of concern to the festival veteran Elgar, may also have played decisive roles in the latter excision. Jesus, a baritone, concludes the penultimate No. 15 with the first substantial baritone solo since No. 5, while the Blind Man, a tenor, was heard extensively much more recently, in No. 10. A weighty, theologically complex tenor solo immediately prior to Jesus's profound final solo ('I am the Good Shepherd') would have produced an entirely different textural, dramatic, and doctrinal approach to the final chorus.

Capel Cure's draft libretto shows that its author wrote specific directions with regard to vocal forces and other musical details. For example, he indicated when to have 'recitative' or 'aria', and 'solo' or 'duet', and where and in what form to place a choral refrain. Although Elgar followed Capel Cure's suggestions in many respects, there are some revealing departures, including the composer's decision in several instances to divide the chorus into male and female subsets rather than the straightforward 'double

chorus' suggested by the librettist. In all such instances, the women occupy the positive position, standing up for the Blind Man and for human concerns, while the men ascribe blame and punishment. This characterisation has the effect of strengthening the contrast between the antagonistic Pharisees and the questioning crowd, and may have been the chivalrous Elgar's nod to Victorian feminine virtue. It is likely also that structural concerns had a part to play in such decisions. The nature of the drama in *The Light of Life* means that the women's chorus is not heard until No. 6: before that we hear only men, as Pharisees and disciples. It seems that for Elgar it was important to balance this early male choral dominance with a definite role for women later on, as he deliberately departs from Capel Cure's directions to achieve it, perhaps as much to keep the large choir content and occupied as to satisfy the audience and air his own attitude to women. A similar demonstration of pragmatism is evident in a remark recorded by the early Elgar biographer R. J. Buckley, concerning *The Light of* Life's No. 9, a remark which shows the composer at his functional, self-aware finest:

> I thought a fugue would be expected of me. The British public would hardly tolerate oratorio without fugue. So I tried to give them one. Not a 'barn door' fugue, but one with an independent accompaniment. There's a bit of canon, too, and, in short, I hope there's enough counterpoint to give the real British religious respectability.[165]

In Nos. 7 and 8 we may observe a prime example of Capel Cure's *echt*-Victorian literary method, and Elgar's musical reaction to it. The narrator's text in No. 7, a recitative, is taken from John 9:6:

> *Narrator*
>
> And when he had thus spoken, He made clay from the ground and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him:

[165] Buckley, *Sir Edward Elgar*, 31.

The *King James Bible* account of mixing spittle with the clay was perhaps deemed unsavoury for a late-Victorian oratorio setting and is omitted.[166] Jesus then addresses the Blind Man, with text from John 9:7

Jesus

Go wash in the pool of Siloam.

Capel Cure continues the narration of the miracle in No. 9:

Solo (Narrator)

He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.[167]

But before this continuation, the librettist pauses the action and interpolates a didactic chorus, No. 8, in the style of a typical Victorian hymn text:

Doubt not thy Father's care!
For every grief
He finds relief,
And answers every prayer.

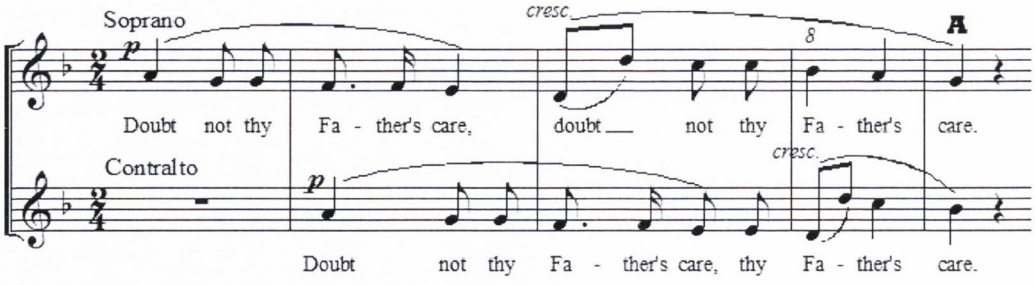
Night comes: the sun is lost;
He doth provide
In the Heavens wide
The gleam of a starry host.

Night comes: the soul is dark;
All joy is dead
All gladness fled
And life has missed its mark.

Then Thou—the wounded soul,
In that sad hour,
With healing power
Dost touch, and makest whole.

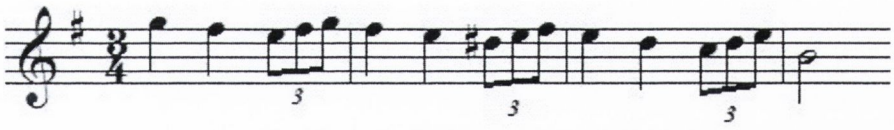
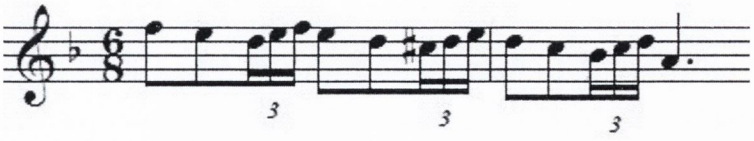
Elgar sets this in canon for female voices only, opting for a dramatic interlude of textural contrast rather than for the overt hymn style suggested by the rhyming structure. The didacticism is on this occasion gently stated, almost like profound and lovingly imparted maternal advice:

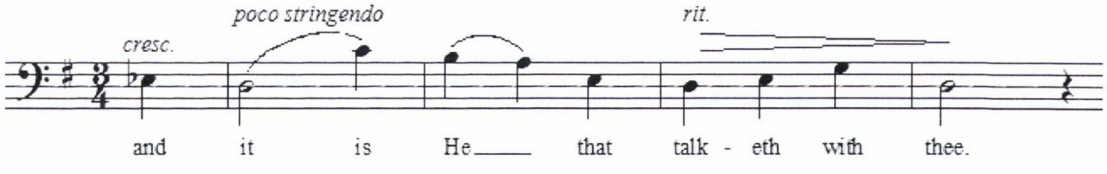
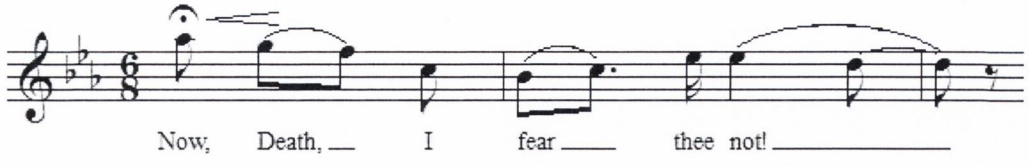
[166] 'When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay'. (John 9:6).
[167] The key words 'came seeing' are underlined in red by Elgar, the only words of the libretto so marked.



Ex. 2.2. *The Light of Life*, No. 8: Chorus, bb. 5–9

Associative Capabilities of Music

The penultimate number of *The Light of Life*, No. 15 ('Jesus heard that they had cast him out'), demonstrates the methods and creative aims of both Capel Cure and Elgar, and their reliance, in both text and music, on the ability of their audience to make connections between what they hear and much broader underlying ideas. The final verses of John Chapter 9 narrate the erstwhile Blind Man's meeting with Jesus and his declaration of faith, following which a solo for the baritone Jesus ties together lines from John 10:14, 10:10, 17:11, 17:17 and 17:24 to put forward the idea of the powerful but benevolent Lord, the Good Shepherd, once more before the final chorus. Capel Cure could juxtapose these disparate excerpts safe in the knowledge that his largely Anglican audience would recognise their contexts and bring them to bear on their understanding of the piece. Elgar's musical setting unifies these excerpts by tying them to earlier scenarios and ideas from the work, not only through thematic reference, but also through character-specific textures. The composer makes a deliberate and effective connection between this last section and No. 10, the Blind Man's intimate solo 'As a spirit didst Thou pass before mine eyes'. For example, the dialogue between Jesus and the Blind Man (now cured), 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?/Who is he, Lord, that I might', rests upon a melodic theme (Ex. 2.3) directly reminiscent of No. 10, and specifically of the melody accompanying the words 'Where may I hope to find Thee? I would throw/Myself and all I am before Thy feet/And Thee for evermore as master greet' (Ex. 2.4).

Ex. 2.3. *The Light of Life*, No. 15, bb.14–17, oboe

Ex. 2.4. *The Light of Life*, No. 10, bb. 31–32, oboe

The connection is strengthened by the fact that, in both instances, the melody is heard on the oboe. Thus the music goes further than the libretto in ensuring that No. 15 is clearly a resolution of No. 10, reinforcing the implication that the Blind Man's (and by extension the universal) search for God—Light—will be fruitful. Similarly, the theme heard in No. 15 with Jesus's words 'Thou hast both seen Him and it is He that talketh with thee' (ex. 2.5) is linked to the Blind Man's recounting of the Lord's miraculous gift of sight, and also to his memorable exclamation in No. 10: 'O Death, I fear Thee not' (example 2.6). In this way the audience is carried back to the ideas expounded in No. 10.

Ex. 2.5. *The Light of Life*, No. 15, bb. 18–21, Jesus

Ex. 2.6. *The Light of Life*, No. 10, bb. 55–57, The Blind Man

Thus, Elgar uses musical means to make narrative references that emphasise the gentle but miraculous power of the Lord much more deeply than the libretto. Bringing the ideas

and associations of No. 10 to bear on the happenings of No.15 also allows Elgar to save time in the latter by omitting the two aforementioned verses assigned by Capel Cure to the Blind Man, as the mystery of faith and wonderment at the divinity of Jesus expressed in these verses have already been rekindled through musical reference. Always conscious of the festival performance situation, Elgar balanced art and practicalities in these and other instances in *The Light of Life*, and, as with *The Dream of Gerontius* four years later, he achieved the required brevity largely by focusing on the human experience, and particularly on the protagonist, at the expense of theological explication, which may have proved more contentious as well as more time-consuming.

Commercial Considerations

The final chorus of *The Light of Life*, 'Light of the World, We Know Thy Praise', does not form part of the narrative. Rather, it is a multi-purpose hymn in G major, the text composed by Capel Cure, and suitable as much for separate concert performance as for drawing the oratorio's drama to a close. Robin Holloway's comment that the creators of *The Light of Life* eschewed the quiet dignity of the closing action to 'burn up into a loud commercial ending',[168] while somewhat blunt, is worth bearing in mind as we consider the Elgarian blend of pragmatism and inspiration in *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*. Donald Hunt asserts that the dramatic impact of the scripturally compact final solo (No. 15: 'I am the Good Shepherd') was 'submerged' by this closing chorus, with which, Hunt believes, Elgar 'felt obliged to end the work'.[169] In a similar vein, the opening orchestral

[168] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 70.
[169] Hunt, 'Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival', *Elgar Society Journal*, 16/1 (March 2009): 15–26 (19).

'Meditation', in which many of the work's musical themes are introduced, was later performed and marketed as a standalone piece.[170]

A Theological Controversy

An episode regarding the reception of *The Light of Life* illustrates the difficulty in understanding fully the complex religious climate in which Elgar sought to establish himself as a composer. Edward Vine Hall, Precentor of Worcester Cathedral, wrote a review of the work's first performance in a local paper, the *Worcestershire Echo*, in which he expressed a pointed opinion about No. 4, the soprano aria 'Be Not Extreme, O Lord':

> Then follows a solo for the Mother of the Blind Man, excellently sung last evening by Miss Anna Williams. The words of this solo are, in our opinion, open to criticism; and in one passage they seem to be somewhat deficient in reverence.[171]

The Rev Vine Hall proceeded to forward a copy of his review to the work's publisher, Novello, with additional comments pertaining to the offending section:

> I think Mr. Elgar wd. be well advised if he cd. get the words on page 18 rewritten. They strike me as being absolutely irreverent.[172]

The words in question were contained in the third verse of No. 4:

> Hadst Thou a son, O Lord, how couldst Thou bear
> To see him made Thy curse, to love and yet to hate
> Thy child, Thy sin's own signature, a gift
> Not given in love but as the sinner's fate?

Novello informed Elgar of the complaint, and the composer responded on 17 September 1896:

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[170] R. J. Buckley wrote that 'the cantata [*sic*] did not become so popular as was predicted, but the introductory "Meditation", played everywhere, kept the name of Elgar in the programmes'. See Buckley, *Sir Edward Elgar*, 49.

[171] Edward Vine Hall, *Worcestershire Echo*, 9 September 1896, cited in Anderson and Moore, 'Foreword', *The Light of Life*, ECE Full Score, viii.

[172] Edward Vine Hall to Novello, 12 September 1896, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 36.

> I regret very much that it should have ruffled the sensibilities of anyone and shall be very happy to suggest any alteration which might avoid hindrance to the future of the work.
>
> No critic—although they have written largely and severely on the *remplissage* in the libretto—has mentioned the point now under notice : I should like to know if you think the passage worth altering & if your advisers recommend it I would endeavour to get Mr. Capel-Cure to consider the stanza.
>
> Mr. Vine-Hall, who was reporting for a small local paper, mentioned the matter in his notice but I wd. prefer to have an opinion from some unbiassed [*sic*] person whose ability to judge literary and artistic matters is not so much open to doubt.[173]

This letter raises a number of issues. Firstly, Elgar expresses his willingness to make whatever change necessary to the survival and future success of the work, but then states that, if advised by Novello that a change was necessary, he would refer the matter to Capel Cure. This suggests that Elgar attributes a certain level of ownership of the text to the librettist, and, moreover, that the theological thrust of the libretto came from Capel Cure. Secondly, it appears from this letter that Elgar has no particular opinion on the theological matter himself: his priority at this stage is the safe passage of the work in performance and publication rather than an accurate representation of his own religious ideas. Finally, it is clear from this letter that Elgar holds little respect for the Rev Vine Hall,[174] himself a musician and conductor of the Worcester Musical Union, an ensemble which had in previous years performed pieces such as Elgar's 'three movements for String Orchestra' (Serenade for Strings) mentioned in a letter to Charles Buck, quoted

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[173] Edward Elgar to Novello, 17 September 1896, *Elgar and his Publishers,* I, 37.

[174] Edward Vine Hall (1837–1912), Precentor of Worcester Cathedral, was also a composer and author. In his youth he was a chorister at Magdalene College and New College, Oxford. Among his published compositions are *Te Deum Laudamus* in D, *Praise, O Praise Our God and King, Seven Offertory Sentences*, and settings of Tennyson's *Mary of Bethany* and *Ring Out, Wild Bells*. Other works include *Our English Cathedrals: Their Blessings and Their Dangers* (MacMillan, 1879), and *The Prayer-Book Simply Explained: A Book for Boys and Girls* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1907). Incidentally, his father, Edward Pickard Hall (1808–1886), was a partner and manager of University Bible Press, and later senior managing partner of Clarendon Press, Oxford. The family surname is not clear: of Edward Pickard Hall's thirteen children, three were known as 'Vine Hall', three as 'Pickard Hall', and the remainder simply as 'Hall'. See 'Rev Edward Vine Hall, MA', <http://clanbarker.com/getperson.php?personID=I647&tree=Br> [accessed 23 October 2012], and 'Edward Pickard Hall', <http://clanbarker.com/getperson.php?personID=I581&tree=Br> [accessed 23 October 2012].

above. Elgar's tone in the letter to Novello suggests that there was some tension between the two men, whether musical, religious, or merely personal in nature. Hunt notes that in 1887 Vine Hall had been the dedicatee of Elgar's song 'Through the Long Days', which might suggest 'that he and Elgar were on reasonable terms'.[175] However, if we take a more pragmatic view of Elgar, the dedication could be interpreted as another instance of clever manoeuvring in securing performances of his own works, or perhaps a statement of gratitude for such performances. In any case, it seems the relationship had soured by 1896.

Capel Cure, Moore tells us, was decidedly displeased by Vine Hall's criticism, and wrote directly to Novello with a level of outrage sufficient to prompt the following letter from Novello to Elgar on 22 October 1896, carefully worded, Moore notes, by the Novello company secretary, Henry Clayton, and a barrister:

> Having regard to the expressions underlined by him, which are both uncalled for and rude, and having regard to the general tone of the gentleman's letter, we feel that we cannot any longer correspond with him : & we shall be glad if you will deal with the matter, & let us know what is to be done.
>
> The criticism in the Worcester Newspaper called our attention to a point which certainly had not occurred to us, but as soon as our attention was called to it we saw the critic's point & understood that objection might be taken to the words 'Hadst Thou a Son' and 'Thy sin's own signature' as addressed to the Almighty.[176]

Perhaps the most telling feature of this episode is that Edward Capel Cure and Edward Vine Hall, both Anglican clergymen, could hold such different theological views, and that the nature of the offence and the solution to the issue could be so unclear. This gives an insight into the blurred lines of religious denomination in the late-nineteenth century, and again reinforces the point that Elgar's efforts to succeed in the Anglican musical world were greatly complicated by the intricacies and inconsistencies of that world. Vine

[175] Hunt, 'Elgar and the Three Choirs Festival', 15.
[176] Henry Clayton to Edward Elgar, 22 October 1896, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 38.

Hall's public criticism of the oratorio's libretto suggests personal conflict either with his fellow clergyman, Capel Cure, or his fellow Worcester conductor and composer, the Catholic Elgar. Separating the personal animosity from theological argument is now impossible.

From an encounter of Elgar with Edward Capel Cure six years after *The Light of Life*, it is clear that both composer and clergyman remained sensitive to public opinion with regard to theological content in musical works. Elgar turned to Capel Cure again for advice regarding the libretto of a third oratorio to follow *The Apostles* and *The Kingdom*. In a letter of 30 December 1902, Capel Cure suggested some textual amendments and referred specifically to a question regarding an unidentified passage from Revelation:

> With regard to the theological question of Revelation, I am in agreement with the commentators as to the matter of fact, but still I should not object to its use in your libretto and in the sense in which you employ it. But still if you can do without it, you put yourself out of reach of unfriendly critics.[177]

Even in his post-*Gerontius* confidence, Elgar deemed it necessary to consult with his Anglican acquaintance concerning matters of theological controversy, and still the avoidance of objection was an important consideration.

Meirion Hughes, in his extensive study of Elgar's press coverage, states that 'for its part, the musical press was delighted with *The Light of Life*'.[178] A report in the *Leeds Mercury* of 12 September 1896 is remarkable in that over half the review of the Worcester Festival is devoted to Elgar's new work. In fact, it mentions only the variable weather conditions, Handel's *Messiah*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Elgar's oratorio, suggesting that the writer of the review was a determined promoter of new music, was tired of the usual festival fare, was a friend of the composer, or, perhaps, was impartially and immensely impressed by the work:

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[177] Edward Capel Cure to Edward Elgar, 30 December 1902, Elgar Birthplace 705:445:3874.
[178] Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance and the Press*, 164.

> Looking back upon the Festival thus closed, the impression is that the feature of the week has been the production of Mr. Edward Elgar's 'Light of Life'. That a comparatively young and untried man should come forward with a work of such strength and suggestiveness as this is surely a most hopeful sign for British art.[179]

In *The Light of Life*, as in *King Olaf* and, later, *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900), various criteria were applied to reduce the source texts in order to form a musical work of manageable length. In *The Light of Life*, Capel Cure sought to provide a narrative with explanation on the greatness of God and the importance of faith, while Elgar was compelled to reduce the explanation and to further the narrative in order to comply with the time restriction of the Three Choirs Festival première. Though we cannot know for certain where the influence of one man ended and the other began, it is clear from the surviving documents that each played a significant part in the preparation of *The Light of Life* and that Elgar made deliberate and effective decisions as to the musical treatment of textual ideas, for reasons that reveal much about his cultural context and his creative aims within that context. The remaining chapters explore the corresponding compositional process in relation to Elgar's collaborations with the culturally significant Harry Acworth.

[179] 'The Worcester Musical Festival', *Leeds Mercury*, 12 September 1896.

CHAPTER 3
KING OLAF IN CONTEXT

Elgar's cantatas *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* and *Caractacus* were written for the North Staffordshire Musical Festival (1896) and the Leeds Musical Festival (1898) respectively, and the librettos for both were prepared by Harry Arbuthnot Acworth (1849–1933). An exploration of these texts is central to an understanding of the broader context of Elgar's major choral works, and as such, the involvement of Acworth constitutes a crucial part of this study. Following an introduction to this multifaceted librettist, the present chapter concerns the text and musical setting of *King Olaf*, while the cultural origins and implications of *Caractacus* form the basis of the following chapter. Together, these cantatas crystallise the creative intentions of Elgar and Acworth, as well as the cultural priorities of their late-Victorian environment.

In much of the biographical literature on Elgar, Acworth's role in the creation of the 1890s choral works is minimised unduly. For example, Percy Young, in the process of emphasising the composer's abilities with regard to the composition of *Caractacus*, severely downplays Acworth's input as librettist, summing up his contribution thus:

> Harry Acworth, who had spent his working life in the Civil Service of India, and retired as Municipal Commissioner to the city of Bombay, had had some part in preparing the libretto of *Caractacus*.[1]

In relation to *King Olaf*, Acworth's involvement is reduced, in the same study, to a single parenthetical mention, following a discussion of *The Black Knight*: 'In *King Olaf* the librettist is still Longfellow (with some help from H. A. Acworth)'.[2] This downgrading of Acworth is a by-product of the lionisation of Elgar evident in biographies of the mid-to-late twentieth century, in which the composer is at times presented as heroic for

[1] Young, *Elgar: O.M.*, 83.
[2] *Ibid.*, 299.

triumphing musically in spite of the poor verse with which he was compelled to work. Michael Kennedy's conclusion regarding *King Olaf* is a case in point:

> The libretto is so fatuous and risible that it requires a major effort of willpower to concentrate on the music.[3]

Evidence outlining the respective roles of composer and librettist is in short supply. Elgar and Acworth lived close enough to each other during the late 1890s to ensure that written correspondence between them was largely unnecessary, and as a result, the documentary record of their creative relationship is slight. Anderson and Moore conclude that Elgar held the editorial reins, at least for *Caractacus*:

> That Elgar controlled work on the libretto was clearly shown when Jaeger complained about excessive jingoism in Scene VI towards other nations [...] Elgar undertook to get this changed, and admitted that the 'patriotism' had been his own idea.[4]

On closer inspection, however, the well-known letter from Elgar to Jaeger that gives rise to this claim does not consign Acworth to the periphery to the extent suggested by Anderson and Moore. While it does show that the patriotism 'idea' came from Elgar, it does not support the assumption that Acworth's role was insignificant:

> By all means I will ask Acworth to eliminate the truculent 'note' in the lines : any nation but ours is allowed to war whoop as much as they like but I feel we are too strong to need it—I *did* suggest we should dabble in patriotism in the Finale, when lo! the *worder* (that's good!) instead of merely paddling his feet goes and gets naked and wallows in it.[5]

This letter suggests not only that Acworth in fact had a substantial role in shaping the work's content, but also that the ideological thrust of the libretto was far from accidental. The following addition shows that Elgar was well aware of the tone of *Caractacus*, while

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[3] Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar,* 73.

[4] Robert Anderson and Jerrold Northrop Moore (eds.), 'Foreword', in *Caractacus: A Cantata: For Soprano, Tenor, Baritone and Bass Soli, Chorus and Orchestra: The Words Written for Music by H. A. Acworth, C.I.E., The Music by Edward Elgar (Op. 35)*, Elgar Complete Edition full score (London: Novello, 1985), vi.

[5] Edward Elgar to August Jaeger, 21 June 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, Moore (ed.), I, 76.

also revealing to some extent his own perception of the levels of involvement of composer and librettist:

> I knew you wd. laugh at my librettist's patriotism (& mine!) never mind : England for the English is all I say—hands off! there's nothing apologetic about me.[6]

Elgar clearly suggests that Acworth's input was instrumental in determining the nature of the *Caractacus* finale, and credits him with a definite, even proprietary role. Given the nature of Acworth's personality and career, discussed below, we can presume that the librettist occupied a similarly effective role in the highly charged ideological trajectory of *King Olaf.*

A rare letter from Elgar to Acworth of 14 November 1904 addresses the potential adaptation of *Caractacus* as an opera, and gives something of an insight into Elgar's view of the respective roles of composer and librettist from the perspective of the post-*Gerontius* early twentieth century:

> As to Caractacus on the stage : there would be no difficulty in getting an opera performed if the work could be made practicable : I see no real trouble in knocking our present first two scenes into *one* with small changes of scene—letting the Dawn accompany the latter part where Orbin rushes off : this wd. make an admirable length for an act. The love music could stand, but what I want to know is, How can you end it? You see there's no tragedy so far as killing and slaying Caract : is concerned. If you could stretch out the thing in 3 acts
>
> Act 1 (present Sc I & II)
> [Act II (the pres[en]t Scenes III & IV & V
> Act III Roman triumph etc – but how end?]
>
> any more [incidents in Act] II wd. be grateful. If you could suggest anything let me know & we would meet & talk it over.
>
> The *heavy* chorus music ('We were gathered &c' for instance in Sc IV) wd. have to be cut for the stage, but that wd. not affect your libretto.[7]

Elgar refers to 'our' first two scenes, but then 'your libretto', and, while clearly hinting at substantial editorial input himself, also attributes significant ownership to Acworth. This

[6] Edward Elgar to August Jaeger, 12 July 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 79.
[7] Edward Elgar to Harry Acworth, 14 November 1904, *Letters of a Lifetime*, Moore (ed.), 158–59. Punctuation as per Moore's edition.

could of course contain an element of flattery, as Elgar wishes at this stage to extract a favour from Acworth. The lack of clarity surrounding Elgar's use of the word 'you' in the letter is unfortunate: it is not clear if he is referring to Acworth or to 'one' more generally. Nevertheless, Elgar evidently regards Acworth as a co-creator of the work.

With regard to *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf*, Moore again downplays Acworth's role:

> The libretto had been cobbled together from the Longfellow poem by Elgar with the help of a friend in Malvern, a charming and cultivated man named Harry Acworth.[8]

More recent authors, however, have given much greater recognition to the input of the librettist.[9] In his substantial article, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', Michael Pope calls into question a range of entrenched views on the work; he challenges criticisms of the *King Olaf* libretto, and, significantly in the present context, he recognises the role of Acworth in the textual alterations to the work. In reassessing the quality of the text, Pope draws attention to an apparent instance of double standards in critical judgement of librettos such as that of *King Olaf:*

> There seems to be a certain discrepancy between the criteria applied to librettos for cantatas and those for Opera; for when the music for an opera is of a quality which offsets any alleged deficiencies in the libretto, the work not infrequently receives both critical approval and regular public performance.[10]

Pope is satisfied that established criticisms pertaining to the textual organisation of *King Olaf* are inaccurate or unfair, and he lays out his own criteria for judging the work:

> So far as the libretto of *King Olaf* is concerned, the main points we have to consider are the structure and organic unity of the plot, and the motivation and consistency of the character of Olaf; and in this regard, I suggest that

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[8] Moore (ed.), *Letters of a Lifetime*, 51.
[9] Matthew Riley, however, states simply that 'extra lines were added by Elgar's Malvern neighbour H. A. Acworth', and does not consider the cultural implications of the librettist's involvement. See *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 156.
[10] Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 60.

> some of the adverse views propounded in the past appear to rest on insufficient grounds.[11]

In challenging the prevailing dismissive attitude to the *King Olaf* libretto, Pope calls on commentators to show a greater appreciation of Elgar's own judgement in relation to his choice of texts, asserting that this pragmatic composer was capable of making an informed decision in this regard, and that the responsibility for understanding the plot rests with the listener as much as much as the creators:

> In recent years, more and more evidence has accumulated to show that Elgar, like Wagner, had 'a brain of the rarest and subtlest composition', as [Ernest] Newman wrote of the latter; and we should surely give him credit for thinking carefully about these matters. He was scarcely going to accept a libretto for a full-length work, requiring at least one and a half hours of music, unless the result was going to be in his opinion a viable work of art. It is then of paramount importance to give the cantata the attention it deserves; and, as with *The Ring*, this means getting to grips with the story.[12]

The section of H. W. Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn* selected for use by Elgar for the North Staffordshire commission required substantial abridgement and adaptation to fit its new, musical context. Pope provides some description of Acworth's involvement in the editing process, and of his background in imperial and cultural matters:

> Elgar was assisted in this task by Harry Arbuthnot Acworth, who also rewrote several scenes for the purpose of the libretto and contributed the stanzas for the solo recitatives, and who later became the librettist for *Caractacus*, op. 35. Acworth, who was born in 1849 and educated at Worcester College, Oxford, had recently returned from India. In 1891 he had published *Ballads of the Marathas*, and his own English version appeared in 1894.[13]

Pope goes further in appreciating the practical imprint of Acworth on the textual organisation of *King Olaf*, noting the librettist's original contributions in addition to his editorial input:

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[11] *Ibid.*, 60.
[12] *Ibid.*, 60.
[13] *Ibid.*, 61. Pope is the only writer on Elgar to mention Acworth's 1891 publication (the 1894 version is often noted). This revealing document, and particularly its implications for the cultural interpretation of Elgar's *King Olaf*, is explored later in this chapter.

> Acworth's contribution to *King Olaf* was, in fact, a considerable one. The 'Conversion' and 'Sigrid' scenes, and 'The Death of Olaf', are entirely his work, as are the duet between Thyri and Olaf, 'The gray land breaks to lively green', and the six linking recitatives for bass soloist.[14]

However, Pope's outline of Acworth's role is confined to the practical consequences of the creative partnership. He states, for example, that the librettist 'helped Elgar in the reduction of Longfellow's twenty-two sections to eight, together with an Introduction and an Epilogue', and that 'the sequence of scenes from 'The Conversion' to 'Sigrid' represents a modification of that in Longfellow's Saga'.[15] Pope does not pursue an interpretative analysis of any cultural or ideological consequences of Acworth's alterations. He simply notes that the librettist's role in moulding the order and content of the scenes did not deserve to be dismissed as readily as it had been by earlier commentators on Elgar.

This chapter explores the ideological influence of Acworth's involvement in the composition of *King Olaf*. A similar approach was taken with reference to *Caractacus* in the 2007 article 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*: the Druids, Race and the Individual Hero', where Charles Edward McGuire asserts that:

> By closely examining Acworth's life and career, we can come to a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the cantata.[16]

In addition to providing a helpful timeline of Acworth's life and work, McGuire presents many useful references to informative sources that shed light on the cultural significance of the librettist. He considers 'Acworth, his character and the impact of his character on the libretto of *Caractacus*',[17] and argues, again in relation to the later cantata, that Acworth's biographical context

> informs a much-needed deeper consideration of *Caractacus*, if for no other reason than the cantata's subject, wholly entwined as it is in myth and

[14] Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 61.
[15] *Ibid.*, 61.
[16] McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*', 55.
[17] *Ibid.*, 74.

> history, folklore, and even amateur archaeology. Acworth was well-placed to provide Elgar with this sort of cultural support.[18]

The present study offers a new exploration of Acworth's background, and argues that it is highly likely that the personal and professional experience of this imperial administrator and author impinged significantly on the ideological content of Elgar's *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf*. Building on the information and sources presented by McGuire, this section presents a discussion of a notable publication by Acworth, as yet unexplored in Elgar scholarship, and outlines the implications of this revealing document for our understanding of the moral and imperial didacticism of Elgar's 1896 cantata. Further to Michael Pope's incisive article on the work, this chapter puts forward an ideological interpretation of the apparently conscious, deliberate and highly significant editorial decisions made during the moulding of *King Olaf* for the North Staffordshire Festival. Whereas Pope's article concentrates largely on the historical reality of the Norwegian king, this study prioritises the relevance of Elgar and Acworth's protagonist to the specific context of late-Victorian, imperial Britain.

This chapter seeks to demonstrate that *King Olaf* is a carefully purposeful revisionary piece, tailored specifically for a distinctive cultural environment, and far beyond anything that might be described as 'cobbled together'.[19] The cantata's text significantly alters Longfellow's poem by moulding an idealised late-Victorian, muscular Christian hero, and the contribution of Harry Acworth is central to this ideological transformation. Given the extent of his influence on *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*, a consideration of Acworth's working and political life must be taken into account in order to appreciate fully the ideological import of these works.

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[18] *Ibid.*, 57.
[19] See Moore's comment, above.

Harry Arbuthnot Acworth

Acworth is described in his *Times* obituary as a 'distinguished member of the Indian Civil Service'.[20] His father, Nathaniel Brindley Acworth, had served in the East India Company service before him, for a time as the registrar of the supreme court of Madras. Acworth's mother was the daughter of 'the well-known evangelical divine', the Rev Francis Close (1797–1882),[21] to whom Khim Harris refers in his study of evangelical educators as 'the powerful Clerical Vice-President of Cheltenham College' and 'well-known anti-Catholic controversialist',[22] who later became Dean of Carlisle. Having studied at Brighton College and Worcester College, Oxford, Acworth was called to the bar in 1870 and passed into the Indian Civil Service in the same year. From 1890 to 1895 he was the Municipal Commissioner of Bombay (now Mumbai). His obituary notes that his 'greatest achievement' was the establishment of a leprosy asylum in Mumbai,[23] which became known as the Acworth Municipal Leprosy Asylum and still functions as such today.[24] Acworth was made a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire (C.I.E.) at a royal ceremony in August 1895.[25] Upon his retirement to Malvern, he became involved in local Conservative politics, and, Young states, served as captain and treasurer of the golf and swimming clubs respectively, and as president of both the ratepayers' association and the naturalists' club.[26] According to *The Times*, Acworth was a man 'of strong opinions forcibly expressed', and, significantly, it is recorded that he was 'greatly interested in

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[20] 'Mr. H. A. Acworth: Distinguished Service in India', Obituary, *The Times*, 30 May 1933.
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] Khim Harris, *Evangelicals and Education: Evangelical Anglicans and Middle-Class Education in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004), 2.
[23] 'Mr. H. A. Acworth', Obituary.
[24] 'Acworth Municipal Hospital for Leprosy', <http://www.theacworthleprosymuseum.org/about.htm> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[25] 'Court Circular', *The Times*, 13 August 1895.
[26] Young, *Alice Elgar*, 138, n. 2. Young has in some respects confused Acworth with another of Elgar's acquaintances, Henry Dyke Acland, a Malvern bank manager and amateur cellist with whom Elgar played golf, and to whom Elgar's *Sursum Corda* (1894) is dedicated: Young refers to Acworth as Harry Dyke Acworth, a conflation of both names. Nevertheless, Young's description, *loc. cit.*, of the gentleman in question as 'a regular Pooh-Bah' is normally taken as a reference to Acworth.

theology' and was a 'loyal member of the Church of England', exhibiting 'zealous support of religious work in his neighbourhood'.[27]

Acworth's involvement in the educational affairs of Malvern was also deemed worthy of mention in his *Times* obituary, and the writer suggests that Acworth's 'deep religious convictions enabled him to support the loss of his beloved sons' in military service.[28] The younger son, John Arden Acworth,[29] died at the Third Battle of Ypres at Passchendaele in 1917, while the elder, Douglas Harry, died of pneumonia while serving in Egypt in 1919. The centrality of religion in the Acworth family may be noted from newspaper reports of these deaths. The *Malvern News* of 10 November 1917 printed the following comment on the character of the younger son:

> Those who loved John Acworth [...] will definitely recall the unmistakable genuineness of his religion. It was a religion at once child like [*sic*] and manly, and remarkable in its freedom from the fault which often disfigure the religion of young men, even where it is not means insincere [*sic*]; from any taint of cowardice or shamefacedness on the one hand, or of pedantry or ostentation or censoriousness on the other. He wrote to his father from the front that he could not understand how anyone at the seat of war could do without religion. This was very characteristic for him his religion [*sic*] was an abiding help and support: and his regular and devout use of the sacraments of Holy Communion was the expression of a life which was Christian in no merely conventional sense. There are few young men of whom one can feel more confident than of John Acworth that they have won the beatitude pronounced upon the pure in heart, that [they] shall see God.[30]

The importance of religion in the young man's life is stressed here to an extent that is highly unusual in the *Malvern News* reports of fallen soldiers of the area.[31] His elder brother is described in similar terms in his obituary sixteen months later:

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[27] 'Mr. H. A. Acworth', Obituary.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] John Acworth's middle name comes from the surname of his grandmother, Anne Diane Arden, first wife of Dean Francis Close. See A. F. Munden, 'Close, Francis', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5703?docPos=1> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[30] *Malvern News*, 10 November 1917, cited in 'Malvern's War Memorial: John Arden Acworth', <http://www.malvernremembers.co.uk/HPAcworth_JAMore.htm> [accessed 23 October 2012]. Punctuation is as per website.
[31] See 'To Those Who Nobly Served: 1914–1919', <http://www.malvernremembers.co.uk/IndexFrame.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].

> Major Acworth was like his younger brother a man of profound religious convictions, a simple hearted and earnest member of the Church of England, and a regular communicant.[32]

Thus it is clear that religion, and membership of the Church of England, were held in very high regard in the Acworth household, and that the Acworths were publicly recognised for this fact.[33] Such contextual details provide an informative framework for the analysis of both *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*, in light of the thematic contents of both works.

Acworth's educational and professional experiences constitute another vitally important part of our engagement with the cantatas, as the didactic aspects of their texts ought to be read in the broader context of the librettist's ideological formation and influences. McGuire states that Acworth 'came from an upper middle-class professional family that valued education',[34] and that 'from his Brighton College and Oxford education, we can surmise that Acworth was well versed in the classics',[35] with the latter of particular relevance to his involvement in *Caractacus* given that the details of the plot are preserved in classical sources. During his career with the Indian Civil Service, Acworth served as Third Assistant Collector and Magistrate of Ahmednuggur, a town to the east of Bombay, then as Under-Secretary to the Bombay President's Finance and Revenue departments, as Collector and Magistrate, Collector of Salt Revenue, and Deputy Municipal Commissioner of Bombay,[36] before acceding to the post of Municipal Commissioner, a position he held until his retirement in 1895. Prior to his retirement, he also served as President of the Bombay Archaeological Society.[37]

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[32] *Malvern News*, 1 February 1919, cited in 'Malvern's War Memorial: Douglas Harry Acworth', <http://www.malvernremembers.co.uk/HPAcworth_DHMore.htm> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[33] It is not clear whether Acworth was Evangelical. However, his professional activities, particularly during his tenure as Municipal Commissioner of Bombay, have a strong evangelical flavour.
[34] McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*', 57.
[35] *Ibid.*, 59.
[36] *Ibid.*, n. 18.
[37] *Ibid.*, 57.

It seems also that Acworth's interests in India were not confined to the colonial offices, for he was among that body of colonisers who took a keen interest in the cultural life and history of the colony concerned. In his case the interest was in folklore and poetry, and in 1894 he published a translation of Indian poetry, *Ballads of the Marathas,*[38] a publication noted in most of the Elgar literature in which Acworth is mentioned. However, Acworth also published an earlier collection of Maráthî poetry, which has received much less attention in literature concerning Acworth and Elgar.[39] This collection features Maráthî ballads known as *powade* (singular: *powada*), collected by Acworth and Shankar Tukaram Shaligram, and published in the original Maráthî language with an introduction in English by Acworth, dated November 1890.[40] The contents of this introduction shed light on the attitudes of Acworth to certain ideas of relevance to the present study, particularly his views of Indian natives, and it seems that the document's significance has not yet been explored in the context of Elgar scholarship.

Acworth's intellectual understanding of Maráthî literature is noted in studies of that field. For example, in discussing the Maráthî tradition of identifying with historical episodes as preserved in *powade* (which she calls *pavadas*), Rosalind O'Hanlon mentions the value of Acworth's publication:

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[38] Harry Arbuthnot Acworth, *Ballads of the Marathas Rendered into English Verse from the Marathi Originals* (London: Longmans, Green, 1894). 'Maráthas' refers to the native people of Mahárâshtra in western India. Largely fragmented during the Middle Ages, Mahárâshtra was united as an empire under the seventeenth-century ruler Shivaji (b. 1627). This empire was taken over by the British in the nineteenth century, forming part of the Bombay Presidency. Upon independence in 1947, the province became the Bombay State. In 1960, the state was divided, along linguistic lines, into Gujarat in the north and Mahárâshtra in the south. See Sitanshu Mookerjee and Sudhir Vyankatesh Wanmali, 'Maharashtra', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2012), <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/357937/Maharashtra> [accessed 23 October 2012].

[39] The publication is mentioned in passing by Michael Pope in his article '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', in *Elgar Studies*, Raymond Monk (ed.), (Aldershot: Scolar, 1990), 49–80 (61).

[40] H. A. Acworth, *Itihas Prasiddha Purushanche Va Striyanche Powade* (Powade of Illustrious Historically Famous Men and Women), <http://archive.org/details/itihsaprasiddhap00acwouoft> [accessed 23 October 2012]. The title is printed in Maráthî, but rendered in Latin script in a handwritten addition to the copy scanned for Archive.org. The translation of the title was found at 'Marathi Ballad Singers and their Poetry: The Powada', <http://www.powade.com/essays/overview.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].

> The best evidence for this largely pre-literate tradition, by which groups in rural society expressed a social and political identity through the celebration of episodes from Maratha history, is to be found in a large collection of traditional Marathi pavadas, made by a British administrator, Harry Acworth, at the end of the nineteenth century.[41]

In his list of sources for Mughal history, Manik Lal Gupta explains that Acworth's later and better-known *Ballads of the Marathas* (1894) comprised English translations of ten of the *powade* published in the earlier collection.[42] The 1890 collection is dedicated 'by permission to the present ruler of Mahárâshtra, H. E. the Rt. Hon Lord Harris, G.C.I.E., Governor of Bombay'. On the first page of the introduction, Acworth explains that the works of Maráthî poetry were written 'by educated men, generally, though not always, of good caste, for men of good caste', and 'have hardly entered into the great body of the people'.[43] He notes that, while this is 'not universally true', it may be generally accepted:

> But on the whole it may be said that the written poetry, consisting as it does in such very large measure of moral disquisitions and reflections, and the praises of this deity, or that, is little known to the ryots and the Mávalis of Mahárâshtra, and that it would not command their attention or admiration if it were known.[44]

Here Acworth begins to display a belief that the general Maráthî population has little interest in matters intellectual, moral, or theistic. Acworth continues his explanation in a manner that shows clearly his perception of the Maráthî people as mentally incapable of appreciating the majority of their own literature:

> There is nothing derogatory either to the people or to Maráthî poetry in this. In all countries it is equally the case that literature is the possession of the educated classes. Even among the best instructed peasantry, such as that of Scotland, the range of literary knowledge is as small as it must necessarily be where the time and energies are occupied in manual labour. And in Mahárâshtra, where the immense majority of the peasantry can neither read nor write, it is a mere truism to say that the literature of their country is absolutely unknown to them, and that their minds do not possess the refinement needed to appreciate it. One exception must be made, to

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[41] Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Maratha History as Polemic: Low Caste Ideology and Political Debate in Late Nineteenth-Century Western India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 17/1 (1983): 1–33 (2).
[42] Manik Lal Gupta, *Sources of Mughal History: 1526–1740* (New Delhi: Atlantic, 1989), 89.
[43] H. A. Acworth, 'Introduction', *Itihas Prasiddha Purushanche Va Striyanche Powade*, i.
[44] *Ibid.*, i.

> which I have referred above. There is one particular class of written poetry which has a tolerably wide circle of popularity, even among the peasantry; but assuredly, the fact does not infer the mental refinement on the absence of which I have just remarked.[45]

Thus Acworth sets out, logically and with no intended offence, his view that the majority of the Maráthî race is typical of cultures with a large uneducated population in being deficient in mental sophistication. Later in the introduction, he notes that the history and historic events of the Maráthî people are recorded in ballads, which are widely known among the general population. He explains the nature and content of these ballads in a paragraph that has deep resonance for his own involvement in the moulding of *Caractacus* eight years later:

> It is not to be supposed, however, that they are without a poetry of their own which is entitled to rank as a national product. With the Maráthás, as with every warlike race, the feelings of the commons have taken shape in ballads, which, however rude and inartificial in their language, their structure, and their rhythm, are the genuine embodiment of national enthusiasm, and are dear, and deserve to be dear, to those who repeat and those who listen to them. With their records of victory and defeat, of heroic deeds and heroic men, of battles, conquests, assassinations and intrigues, they preserve, wherever they are sung, the national memories of Mahárâshtra, its noble struggle to independence, its period of victorious expansion, its dominion, and its decline; and over the plains of the Deccan, and the deep valleys and bold ridges of the Sahyádris, from village to village, the humble Gondhali still travels, and still to rapt and excited audiences, sings of the great days when the armed fathers of the men around him gave laws at the spear's point to all the princes of India, or retreated, wounded and dismayed, before the sword of the sea-dwelling stranger. It is characteristic of the honesty of this class of poetry that many of the best Maráthî ballads commemorate defeats.[46]

This paragraph shows that the feeling of natural superiority betrayed so automatically by Acworth in relation to the mental refinement of the Maráthas does not translate into a negative view of the native population. In fact, Acworth clearly admires the 'noble struggle for independence' and subsequent 'victorious expansion' of Mahárâshtra, as well as the recording in song of these feats. He admires the Maráthás' 'heroic deeds and heroic

[45] *Ibid.*, i.
[46] *Ibid.*, ii. 'Deccan' refers to the plateau that makes up a large part of southern India; 'Sahyádri' refers to a mountain range to the west of the Deccan Plateau. A Gondhali was a professional singer of Maráthî poetry.

men', and their 'national enthusiasm'. In the final line of the extract above, we encounter a sentiment that is especially relevant to *Caractacus*: that some of the best ballads tell stories of defeat. This observation, too, is expressed with admiration. A further item of note is that Acworth mentions not only the independence, expansion and dominion of the Marátha Empire, but also its decline. Perhaps most significantly of all, Acworth expresses the opinion that the identity of a nation can be, and should be, embodied in its music. This belief impinges deeply on our understanding of the cultural functions of both *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*.

The simultaneous feelings of superiority over and admiration for the Maráthî people evident in this revealing document continue as Acworth explains the influence of the *powade* in the life of the noble foreigner, in a paragraph full of statements that are highly significant for the manner in which they anticipate fundamental ideological undercurrents of the choral works:

> The times that gave birth to [the ballads] have passed away, but they keep alive that love for the scenes and institutions of their country which is so conspicuous among the Maráthás. They add to the dignity and self-respect of the peasant, and they help to make him a more and not a less loyal subject of the British Crown, as he has an honourable past to look back upon, and manly traditions to preserve. He is not the man who will yield himself up to the wild hysterics of small agitators; he has the solid self-respect which true national feeling engenders; he has known when to fight and how to fight; he has won his freedom once from fanatical oppressors; and he is able and willing to acquiesce in the established fact which gives him peace and justice and perfect liberty.[47]

Here, the Maráthás' love of landscape and country is presented in a positive light. Acworth seems genuinely to believe that the Marátha preserves his identity and his dignity under British rule, and implies that the British Crown in no way seeks to impose a new identity on its subjects, but instead values their culture and their past, and exists with them in 'peace and justice and perfect liberty'. Acworth's admiration for the nation's

[47] *Ibid.*, iii.

'honourable past' and 'manly traditions' is also significant, as these ideas are emphasised in an imperial context in both *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*. The final section of the extract above could easily be applied to the history of Britain as presented in *Caractacus*: a Britain that shook off the shackles of imperial Rome, but which, in the process, adopted the peace, justice and liberty associated by Victorians with that ancient empire. Despite his educational deficiency, the noble Marátha, himself a former empire-builder, is respected by Acworth and by the benevolent British Crown: his strength and his traditions are admired, not suppressed. This belief underpins the imperial content of both *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*. Moreover, Acworth's apparent ability to identify with both parties in a situation in different ways, to admire certain aspects of ostensibly opposing forces, anticipates the narrative process used in *Caractacus*, where simultaneous respect for two seemingly conflicting sides is an essential feature.

Acworth's approach to his own philanthropic activities in India further illustrates his conception of the relationship between coloniser and colonised. During his tenure as Municipal Commissioner of Bombay, Acworth was involved in the establishment of the Homeless Leper Asylum at Matunga. The foundation of the asylum is described on its own website thus:

> A truly unique, nonsectarian Institution for Care and Treatment of Leprosy sufferers in the city, it was a tangible outcome of the funds donated by Mumbai's philanthropic citizens and the energetic efforts of the then Municipal Commissioner, H. A. Acworth.[48]

In a Ph.D dissertation on the topic of 'Leprosy in the Bombay Presidency', Shubhada S. Pandya describes the asylum as a 'unique colonial leprosy institution',[49] and highlights Acworth's shrewdness in attracting support for the project, even using an element of stealth for the sake of charity:

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[48] 'Acworth Municipal Hospital for Leprosy', <http://www.theacworthleprosymuseum.org/about.htm> [accessed 23 October 2012].

[49] Shubhada S. Pandya, 'Leprosy in the Bombay Presidency, 1840–1897: Perceptions and Approaches to its Control' (Ph.D diss., Mahamahopadhyaya P.V. Kane Institute, Asiatic Society of Bombay, 2001), 251.

> The founder of the 'Homeless Leper Asylum', the Municipal Commissioner H. A. Acworth, persuaded the Government to declare leprosy as an infectious disease, ignoring contemporary medical controversies. He skilfully recruited the support of the shetias of every community and the intelligentsia by emphasising the charitable and philanthropic aspects of the enterprise.[50]

Pandya concludes that, as an administrator, Acworth's 'watch-words were expediency and pragmatism'.[51] His emphasis on charity and philanthropy conforms to the idea that British imperial government was good government, working with the community to improve conditions for the less fortunate:

> Acworth looked upon 'his' institution as an example of the 'civilising mission' worthy of rank with the abolition of sati.[52]

This observation is confirmed by a statement from Acworth himself, in which he makes clear his view that the improvements brought to the treatment of leprosy in India as a result of British rule constituted a major achievement of the empire:

> The future historian of India, will, in the category of India's debt to England, place these measures for dealing with leprosy in the same rank as those in which *Suttee* and *Thuggee* were suppressed. But that historian will never know [...] that the wise and humane policy [...] was born, its feasibility proved, and its efficacy established, in a little institution known as the Matunga Asylum.[53]

This declaration demonstrates unequivocally Acworth's belief in the civilising influence of the colonial power. In the conclusion of her study, Pandya again emphasises Acworth's administrative astuteness in utilising the philanthropic and practical resources available to him for the purposes of establishing this institution as part of what Pandya regards as an imperial endeavour:

> The Homeless Leper Asylum at Matunga in Bombay was a unique colonial enterprise in its genesis and administration. It was due to Acworth's drive and astute harnessing of the Indian public's charitable instincts, and his

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[50] *Ibid.*, 22. Shetias were merchant princes.
[51] *Ibid.*, 254.
[52] Pandya, 'Leprosy in the Bombay Presidency', 23. *Sati* was the practice of burning a woman on her husband's funeral pyre. The practice was declared illegal by the British in 1829. See 'Women in World History', <http://chnm.gmu.edu/wwh/modules/lesson5/lesson5.php?s=0> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[53] Acworth, 'Leprosy in India', 235, cited in Pandya, 'Leprosy in the Bombay Presidency', 282.

> unabashed use of Municipal facilities, that his project required just six months to become a reality. Acworth recruited the city's and Presidency's wealthy and the 'intelligentsia' both as exemplars and as intermediaries to reach the pockets and the sympathy of the common citizen in an imperial cause.[54]

The idea that Acworth was, through the establishment of the asylum, playing his role in furthering the civilising, improving cause of the British Empire through benevolent means is laid bare by Pandya:

> His unparalleled influence over the Homeless Leper Asylum gave Acworth ample scope for demonstrating the paternalism which marked the colonial civil servant. The leper came to acquiesce in his own incarceration behind an eight foot high barbed wire fence, and saw the *sirkar* as a benevolent but firm authority.[55]

Here again, we encounter the notion of the native collaborating with the imperial power for his own benefit, a practice praised by Acworth in the introduction to his first collection of Maráthî ballads, and later emphasised in the context of Christian conversion in *King Olaf*.

The evidence presented above indicates that Acworth was firmly of the belief that the British Empire was a force for good, a respectful but superior civilising power, a bringer of peace, justice, knowledge and improvement to the less fortunate and the less capable. The facilitation of improvement was a central task of his imperial career in India, while his ability to admire the 'other' is also apparent. The idea of the empire as a civilising force is fundamental to the ideological impetus of *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*, and the ramifications of Acworth's experiences and attitudes in this regard demand close examination. The next section will outline the Christian imperial ideology that, this thesis will argue, is integral to both *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* as a result of the combined efforts of Elgar and Acworth.

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[54] Pandya, 'Leprosy in the Bombay Presidency', 279.
[55] *Ibid.*, 281.

The Christian Empire

The idea of empire as a divinely endorsed force for good is creatively inserted and emphasised by Acworth and Elgar in both *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* and *Caractacus*. In *Caractacus* the empire in question is clearly British, while in the earlier work the hero, though literally a medieval Norse king, is strongly imbued with the characteristics and the purpose of a British imperial adventurer, and is presented as a vicar of Christ and champion of righteousness whom a British audience could claim as its own. The question arises as to why Elgar and his librettist chose to pursue this theme of God-given imperial mission in both of these major festival commissions of the late 1890s, and, moreover, why they pursued it with such creativity and vigour, in particular in the case of *King Olaf*, where substantial emphasis is placed on Christian conversion at the imperial frontier. As outlined in Chapter 1, the idea of spreading a muscular Christian message throughout the empire was appealing right throughout British society at that time, across all Christian denominations. Placing the choral works in the ideological context set out earlier in this study, the present chapter will show that *King Olaf* promotes the idea of a Christian empire, and the dissemination of the Christian message within it, making *King Olaf* an ideal subject for Elgar as he sought to establish himself with his festival audience, with the publishers, the critics, and the British musical public in general.

The possession of an empire presented a dilemma for those of a simultaneously religious and imperial outlook:

> There was an important theological tradition that considered all empires to be tainted with a burden of sin, if not actually evil. Christ had said 'My kingdom is not of this world' (John 18:36) and this was generally taken to mean that Christians, especially professional Christians such as missionaries, should stay out of politics.[56]

[56] Hilary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World, c.1801–1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 6.

The idea of imperial expansion for political or economic gain was uncomfortable for those who believed that earthly empires were inherently problematic. The solution to this dilemma was simple, however: by viewing the empire as a Christian rather than a political or commercial community, and especially as one with potential for expansion in the name of God, the unwanted associations with politics and material benefits were minimised, and Christian benevolence was instead pushed to the fore. The empire could legitimately be regarded as a force for good, an opportunity for spreading improvement, particularly by means of conversion. The view of late-nineteenth-century missionaries was, as Hilary Carey puts it, that:

> Conversion, not conquest and colonisation, was the way to hasten the coming of Christ's kingdom or perfect God's empire on earth.[57]

Robin Gilmour asserts that missionary work gave the expansion of empire the air of respectability it needed, and alleviated the discomfort that may have affected associations with a racially driven commercial and military project:

> A moral sanction for the European attitude of superiority to other, more primitive races was provided by the intense and unprecedented missionary activity of the period. Honest doubt may have been all very well for troubled intellectuals at home but the missionaries who went to Africa and India had few doubts about the superior truth of Christianity or the superiority of European civilisation.[58]

In her extensive study of missionary work in the British Empire, Hilary Carey finds that all major British Christian denominations were in favour of direct involvement in imperial missionary activities:

> Anglicans, Catholics and other Nonconformists were keen to take advantage of the empire to extend the geographical and spiritual boundaries of their churches.[59]

In the midst of the complex web of religious variety in the late-nineteenth century, therefore, one activity that was acceptable to all branches of the Christian church in

[57] *Ibid.*, 6.
[58] Gilmour, *Victorian Period*, 181.
[59] Carey, *God's Empire*, 4.

Britain was the spread of Christianity through the conversion of pagans in the empire. Anglicans, Nonconformists and Catholics all viewed such practices in a positive light, and Evangelicals were particularly strenuous in their imperial ideals.[60] The practical manifestation of this outlook was implemented by the missionary societies associated with the British churches. By the late-nineteenth century, some of these societies were hundreds of years old, but empire gave them fertile ground, which they exploited. Such organisations included the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG, Anglican), the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Roman Catholic), and the Association for the Propagation of the Faith (APG, Catholic), the Colonial and Continental Church Society (CCCS, evangelical Anglican), the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS), the Church Missionary Society (CMS, evangelical Anglican), the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK, Anglican) and Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge (SSPCK, Church of Scotland), the Glasgow Colonial Society (Presbyterian), the London Missionary Society (LMS, non-denominational and evangelical), as well as smaller organisations, and auxiliary branches of the churches themselves. This cross-denominational unity of imperial purpose is congruent with the ideology of muscular Christianity outlined in the context of popular literature in Chapter 1, and provides a crucial frame of reference for understanding the artistic motives of Elgar and Acworth. In emphasising the *Christian* aspects of *King Olaf* and *Caractacus*, and especially the act of conversion, Elgar and Acworth give huge prominence to an endeavour much prioritised and promoted by powerful organisations operating in imperial territories.

[60] *Ibid.*, 151.

The Concept of 'Greater Britain'

Carey ties her aforementioned study of missionary ideals in British churches to the concept of 'Greater Britain', an idea first put forward by the Liberal politician and writer Charles Wentworth Dilke (1843–1911),[61] and enlarged upon by the historian J. R. Seeley, who stated in 1883 that:

> Greater Britain is not a mere Empire, though we often call it so. Its union is of the more vital kind. It is united by blood and religion.[62]

The term refers to 'an idea as much as a set of territories',[63] and Carey argues that this British world beyond Britain was a 'mission field' for British churches:

> For all the churches, the empire created opportunities for the construction of transnational spiritual networks that aimed to transcend the cultural constraints and legal proscriptions of the past.[64]

Carey illustrates her theme by recounting the story of John Clifford (1836–1923), a Baptist pastor and writer who undertook and documented a tour of Australia, New Zealand and Canada in the jubilee year of 1897. Having studied his writings, Carey concludes that Clifford was 'delighted to report' that colonists had 'extended Christ's kingdom through democratic and social reforms' and he looked forward to 'even greater unity' in the future, believing that 'the whole world was becoming one through the redeeming power of Jesus Christ in the British empire'.[65] Clifford clearly believed that British colonists were doing the work of God, and he sought to spur his readers to act for the good of those who would travel to the outposts of the empire, bringing their faith and their missionary potential with them:

> One insistent voice reaches us at home; let us heed it! Go preach the Gospel to every Englander, and persuade him to accept it before he leaves

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[61] C. W. Dilke, *Greater Britain: A Record of Travel in English Speaking Countries During 1866 and 1867,* 2 vols. (London, 1868). Carey states that this was a 'Victorian bestseller'; Carey, *God's Empire*, 7. It should be noted that the term 'Greater Britain' took on a different meaning in the twentieth century.
[62] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 60.
[63] Carey, *God's Empire*, 3.
[64] *Ibid.*, 3, 4.
[65] *Ibid.*, 4.

> for the new worlds, of Africa, or India, of Canada, or the Southern Seas, so that wherever he goes he may carry with him the saving energies of the Redeemer.[66]

Carey explores the widespread belief that the source of British imperial power was divine. She quotes from an evangelical Anglican publication, the quarterly paper of the Colonial and Continental Church Society, revealingly entitled the *Greater Britain Messenger*. In its first issue, in April 1876, the following poem was printed, in the hope, Carey states, that it would inspire readers 'to respond to the religious needs of colonists':

> Rest not! but heed thy brother's cry of anguish
> For 'living bread' across the stormy sea.
> Shall famished souls in Greater Britain languish
> When God has sent His messengers to thee?
>
> Haste! where as yet no heaven-pointing tower
> Reminds the settler of a better world;
> Go! teach his sons the source of England's power,
> The 'Spirit's sword', the Gospel flag unfurl'd.[67]

Such rousing sentiments, Carey notes, could be found in a variety of didactic settings at home:

> Embedded in hymns, sermons and tracts, texts such as these assumed that Britain's overseas settler colonies formed part of a wider Christian realm, a cultural community that both transcended and reinforced other, more political bonds.[68]

The idea that the Word of God, the 'sword', is the source of Christian power, a sword to be carried throughout the world, was prominent in nineteenth-century culture, featuring strongly, for example, in the sermons of the prolific and highly influential Baptist preacher and writer Charles Spurgeon (1834–92). His sermon entitled 'The Sword of the Spirit', delivered in April 1891 after a Gospel reading of Ephesians 6, begins with the line 'To be a Christian is to be a warrior' and makes extensive use of the well-known biblical

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[66] John Clifford, *God's Greater Britain: Letters and Addresses* (London, 1899), cited in Carey, *God's Empire*, 4.
[67] *Greater Britain Messenger*, 1 (April, 1876), 7; cited in Carey, *God's Empire,* 5. The image put forward in the poem's final two lines is used in the Epilogue of *King Olaf.*
[68] Carey, *God's Empire,* 6.

metaphor in exhorting listeners and readers to 'grasp your weapon and go forth to fight'.[69] Spurgeon takes ownership of the Word of God, and assumes responsibility, presumably on behalf of British Christians, for its promulgation:

> This sword is to be ours. We are ordered to take the sword of the Spirit, and so make it our own sword.

Spurgeon uses highly militaristic language to promote peaceful conquest, significantly, in terms that are identical to the imagery in the Epilogue of *King Olaf* and to the philosophy of the Epilogue in *Caractacus*:

> Wherefore, see to it, that you use from this day forth no other weapon than the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.[70]

Arguing convincingly that the identifying adjectives 'British' and 'Christian' were held in similar regard by many involved in church and empire, Carey reports a widespread view that:

> British settlers had spread throughout the whole world; the Gospel flag, as much as the British flag, should be their source of unity.[71]

Religion, Carey argues,

> played a significant role in shaping the idea of Greater Britain, a settler realm without an established Church, but with a Christian ethos shaped by the British churches.[72]

Thus, the various denominations were instrumental in forming the Christian character of the British Empire, and, in a manner redolent of the muscular Christian aspect of adventure literature explored in Chapter 1, the overarching Christian nature of that character took priority over the specific ideology of the individual denominations.

The involvement, and the visibility, of the British Christian churches and their missionary outposts in imperial consolidation suited the political establishment, as the

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[69] Charles Spurgeon, 'The Sword of the Spirit', Sermon No. 2201, given 19 April 1891, <http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/2201.htm> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[70] *Ibid.*
[71] Carey, *God's Empire,* 6.
[72] *Ibid.*, 39.

furtherance of British imperial interests for benevolent religious ends, utilising the substantial fundraising capabilities of religious organisations, not only looked better, but cost less too, as Edward Berenson observes:

> Only the most advanced imperialists wished to devote sizable armies and resources to their cause. Most others, Gladstonian Liberals included, hoped to maintain empire on the cheap and do so as a civilizing, Christian mission rather than a series of military assaults.[73]

In this respect, the idea of a 'Greater Britain', a Christian British world far from British shores, differed from the objectives of French colonial policy in the nineteenth century. As Alice Conkley notes in her study of French expansion in West Africa, the attitude of the French government to its *mission civilisatrice* was rather more determined:

> Of course all European powers at the end of the nineteenth century claimed to be carrying out the work of civilization in their overseas territories; but only in republican France was this claim elevated to the realm of official imperial doctrine.[74]

The characteristics of the two main European competitors for imperial glory, Britain and France, differed significantly in their relationships with their subject peoples; and those characteristics shaped popular and artistic thought about empire. The French approach to colonial relations was to draw the colonised peoples into a direct relationship with French culture; in other words, to strive for assimilation. In French West Africa, natives who spoke French, adopted French culture and were Christians, became entitled to French citizenship, and in the later stages of colonisation that included representation in the *Chambre des Députés*. This situation is summed up by Lucy Mair in her study of various forms of imperial rule in Africa:

> The assumption which governs the whole attitude of France towards native development is that French civilisation is necessarily the best and need only be presented to the intelligent African for him to adopt it. Once he has done so, no avenue is to be closed to him. If he proves himself capable of

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[73] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 86.

[74] Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa: 1895–1930* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 1.

> assimilating French education, he may enter any profession [...] and will be received as an equal by French society.[75]

In effect, French West Africa was governed as an extension of metropolitan France.[76] French missionary activity was deeply affected by this relationship. For example, missionary work, which was almost exclusively Roman Catholic, operated not only under the supervision of the church, but also of a government ministry, which also offered funding support for aspects of that work.

By contrast, British colonisation tended to regard colonised peoples as distinct from British civilisation. This is evident in the writings of J. R. Seeley, who emphasised the distinction, and the consequent impermanence of the colonial relationship:

> All this vast expansion, all these prodigious accretions which have gathered round the original England in three centuries, are yet not so completely incorporate with England that we cannot contemplate shaking ourselves free from them. [...] We can most easily conceive them separated from us, and, if we chose, we could most easily bring about the separation.[77]

In some cases—notably in India—the British encountered cultures that were highly developed, and had a cultural continuity far longer than that of Britain itself. Particularly in such places, highly individual relationships developed between the British administrators and rulers, and the native rulers and cultures that, as far as the British public was concerned, were different partly because they were exotic. As Seeley stated in 1883:

> We cannot help seeing that the races of India are far removed from ourselves in all physical, intellectual and moral conditions.[78]

Here too, as Michael Mann observes, missionary work was characterised by these relationships and by the two essentially individualistic creeds that shaped such work,

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[75] Lucy P. Mair, *Native Policies in Africa* (London: Routledge, 1936), 189.
[76] On the differences between French and British colonial attitudes see Michael Crowder, 'Indirect Rule: French and British Style', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 34/3 (July 1964): 197–205.
[77] Seeley, *Expansion of England*, 190.
[78] *Ibid.*, 193.

Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism.[79] Though missionary activities were run largely by societies, individuals were responsible for raising their own funds. Mission work in British colonies was energetic and varied in its nature; and a large part of it was devoted to bringing 'material and moral improvement'.[80] All this inevitably meant that the concept of mission was deeply rooted in the values of British culture, and, even if such mission was not explicitly Christian, it was inclined to lofty moral purpose because of another distinctive aspect of British imperial thought and practice, an aspect to which the diplomat and writer Harold Nicolson referred some forty years after the premiere of *King Olaf.* Nicolson asked the question 'How comes it [...] that we rule these dependencies with so modest an exhibition of the apparatus of power?' He compared Britain with her continental counterparts and declared that:

> The particular meaning of prestige in our own philosophy is: 'Power based upon reputation rather than reputation based upon power'.

That reputation (and Britain's prestige) was built on the idea of morally superior conduct.[81] When Elgar's audiences listened to works such as *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf,* they may have been moved not by its parables of power, but by a more comforting message—a message of moral reputation and prestige which could be identified with their nation's conduct, and therefore with themselves.

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[79] Michael Mann, '"Torchbearers upon the Path of Progress": Britain's Ideology of a "Moral and Material Progress" in India', in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India,* Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann (eds.), Anthem South Asian Studies (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2004), 1–26, (see 11–12).

[80] *Ibid.*, 4.

[81] Harold Nicolson, *The Meaning of Prestige* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 6, 9, 16.

Of and For its Time: *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf*

> *But that they may be able to do this, she must make her own majesty stainless; she must give them thoughts of their home of which they can be proud. The England who is to be mistress of half the earth cannot remain herself a heap of cinders, trampled by contending and miserable crowds; she must yet again become the England she was once, and in all beautiful ways,—more: so happy, so secluded, and so pure, that in her sky—polluted by no unholy clouds—she may be able to spell rightly of every star that heaven doth show; and in her fields, ordered and wide and fair, of every herb that sips the dew; and under the green avenues of her enchanted garden, a sacred Circe, true Daughter of the Sun, she must guide the human arts, and gather the divine knowledge, of distant nations, transformed from savageness to manhood, and redeemed from despairing into Peace.*[82]

Michael Pope, in an effort to raise the profile of Elgar's pre-'Enigma' works, and particularly of *King Olaf*, draws together reactions to the early cantatas from some of British music's leading contemporary figures. The admiration of Hubert Parry for Elgar was illustrated by remarks in his *Summary of the History and Development of Mediaeval and Modern European Music*:

> A new light of exceptional brilliancy came rapidly to the forefront in the last five years of the century in the person of Edward Elgar (born 1857), whose fine cantatas *King Olaf* and *Caractacus* came out respectively at Hanley in 1896 and at Leeds in 1898.[83]

Alexander Mackenzie noted the importance of *King Olaf* at this stage of Elgar's career, mentioning that C. V. Stanford too was impressed:

> The publication of *King Olaf* brought Edward Elgar's name into sudden prominence by immediately stamping him as an exceedingly accomplished musician who quickly secured unanimous recognition. It was Stanford who enthusiastically drew my attention to the almost unknown new-comer's splendid gifts.[84]

Pope himself makes a strong claim for the significance of Elgar's work within the cantata genre:

> With the composition of *King Olaf*, between 1894 and 1896, Elgar raised the choral cantata to fresh heights; and by extending the size and scope to

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[82] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, 30–31.

[83] C. Hubert H. Parry, *Summary of the History and Development of Mediaeval and Modern European Music*, rev. edn (London: Novello, 1904), 124; cited in Michael Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', in *Elgar Studies*, Monk (ed.), 49–80 (56).

[84] Alexander Campbell Mackenzie, *A Musician's Narrative* (London: Cassell, 1927), 122; cited in Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 56.

> the fullest extent he created a secular work on the scale of his last oratorio, *The Kingdom*.[85]

Elgar's *King Olaf*, based on one section of Longfellow's historical poem *Tales of a Wayside Inn,* presents a series of events in the life of the tenth-century Norwegian king and Christian champion, Olaf Tryggveson.[86] The historical Olaf (?–999), after numerous campaigns of pillage and conquest, and according to unreliable historical accounts, converted to Christianity in 993 and then played a prominent and often bloody role in the Christianisation of Norway.[87] As stated above, Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*, containing twenty-two episodes and almost 8,000 words, required significant abridgement to facilitate the creation of a manageable and performable work, and for this task Elgar enlisted the help of his neighbour Harry Acworth. The Elgar–Acworth redaction is more than just an abridgement, however: the musical setting features a much stronger and more clearly defined moral course than Longfellow's version, and is clearly a product of its own cultural context and of the beliefs and pragmatic intentions of its late-Victorian creators. It is tailor-made for its target audience, at a time when the British Empire consisted of forty-seven separate governments.[88] Although the work is not set in the contemporary empire, it embodies many of the key characteristics and ideals of late-nineteenth-century imperialism, and promotes a particular type of conquering Christian heroism in a world of good versus evil, civilised versus savage. The Olaf created by Acworth and Elgar tends towards an admirable imperial adventurer: his purpose not to subjugate but to improve; a military hero, but one motivated by noble, essentially Christian ideals.

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[85] Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 56.
[86] For Longfellow's complete text see <http://www.hwlongfellow.org/poems_poem.php?pid=2020> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[87] Olaf's life is poorly documented and sources are often contradictory. Information given here is taken from Niels Lund, 'Óláf Tryggvason (d. 999)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/49266> [accessed 23 October 2012] and from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Part III, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/657/pg657.html> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[88] Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*, 344.

Choosing Longfellow

There are several possible reasons why Elgar chose Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf* for the fulfilment of the North Staffordshire commission. Moore notes that Elgar's mother was a lover of Longfellow's poetry, and that she passed this tendency on to her son.[89] Pope discusses the importance of Longfellow in society and in Elgar's career, referring to the American as

> the Romantic poet who touched the hearts of a countless number of English-speaking people and whose influence on Elgar was greater than that of any comparable figure.[90]

A number of biographers have suggested that the possible Scandinavian origin of Elgar's surname may have led the composer to a Norse topic.[91] Matthew Riley pinpoints a nineteenth-century fascination with medieval Norse life and literature as another reason for Elgar's choice:

> *King Olaf* was composed against the backdrop of the Victorian surge of interest in the 'old north', as witnessed by countless treatises, translations, novels, poems and pictures, which familiarised the British with the term 'Viking' and added depth and sympathy to the picture of violent, barbarian raiders that had been the dominant image of the Norsemen for previous generations. A sense of kinship stood behind much of this cultural phenomenon – a feeling that the Vikings embodied what was best about the contemporary English national character.[92]

It is probable that some or all of the considerations listed above may have influenced the decision to use a Longfellow text at this point. However, the appeal both of the poet himself and of the dominant themes of the saga—heroism, civilising missionary conquest, chivalry and maritime adventure—to Elgar's late-Victorian audience, combined with the dramatic potential for solo, chorus, and audience-friendly ensemble writing, may have been more persuasive.

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[89] Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*, 64.
[90] Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 57.
[91] For a discussion of this, see Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 57.
[92] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 155.

Richard Altick outlines the immense popularity of Longfellow's publications in Britain:

> Two of the chief firms that published Longfellow's poems—Routledge and Warne—together sold over 1,126,900 copies of Longfellow's various volumes to 1900. More than seventy different publishers had at least one Longfellow volume on their lists.[93]

This high regard for Longfellow among nineteenth-century British readers is summarised by Pope:

> Not only was he the most admired American poet of the nineteenth century, but his reputation in England rivalled that of Alfred Tennyson.[94]

Similarly, Byron Adams comments on Victorian adulation of the American poet from diverse corners of British society:

> Longfellow's mellifluous verse struck a resonant and sustained chord in the hearts of British readers. That he was fêted by the great reflected this: on an 1868 visit to England the American poet was granted degrees by both Cambridge and Oxford; was received at Windsor by Queen Victoria; and was handsomely entertained by the likes of Gladstone, Dickens, Ruskin, and Tennyson.[95]

As with many creative artists (Elgar included), the works of Longfellow, Pope states, 'went through an unfashionable period for a considerable time' after the poet's death. Longfellow was, however, accorded a level of public recognition unusual for Americans, as Pope explains:

> So far as England is concerned, Longfellow was held in such esteem that in 1884, two years after his death, a bust to his memory was placed in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, next to Chaucer, the only occasion on which an American subject has been honoured in this manner.[96]

All things considered, Pope concludes:

> It is not difficult [...] to understand why he was a favourite poet of Ann Elgar, the composer's mother; nor need we feel any surprise that she

[93] Altick, *The English Common Reader*, 387.
[94] Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 55.
[95] Byron Adams, 'Elgar and the Persistence of Memory' in *Idem* (ed.), *Elgar and his World*, 59–95 (63–64).
[96] Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 59.

> inspired her son Edward with a love for Longfellow's writings, both poetry and prose.[97]

Neither is it surprising that, at this crucial stage in his efforts to achieve recognition and acceptance as a composer, and for his largest commission to date, Elgar opted for an exciting, heroic adventure story by a much-loved bard.

Creative Roles

As noted earlier, it is difficult to ascertain from extant manuscripts the precise levels of input from Acworth and Elgar in the preparation of the cantata's libretto. Robert Anderson concludes from his detailed study of surviving evidence that the boundaries between the respective contributions are practically indistinguishable.[98] From this and all other available records we can only assume that both men had some degree of influence over the content and organisation of the text. Twelve of Longfellow's episodes were removed in their entirety for the musical setting. Some of these consist of plotlines, characters and locations not directly relevant to the fortunes of the eponymous hero, while others display the king in an unsavoury light. In other cases, the festival experience of the composer comes to the fore, as the text is manoeuvred so as to create opportunities for textural variation, and especially for crowd-pleasing duets and choir-pleasing choruses. The adaptation of Longfellow's episode XVI is a case in point. Here, Olaf encounters Thyri, the third of three love interests. Thyri's flight from her brief and unhappy marriage to Burislaf the Vend and her subsequent union with King Olaf are outlined in 'A Little Bird in the Air' (Longfellow XV; Elgar No. 13), a narrative sequence reproduced in full from Longfellow as a chorus for female voices. By contrast, Acworth's revision of Longfellow's 'Queen Thyri and the Angelica Stalks' (XVI) transforms the characters of

[97] *Ibid.*, 59. Pope notes that Elgar used Longfellow texts in several works, including *Spanish Serenade* (1892), *The Black Knight* (1893), and a song entitled 'Rondel' (1894); and that Longfellow's *The Divine Tragedy* was a major influence on the textual structure of *The Apostles* (1903).
[98] For a discussion of this difficulty, see Anderson, *Elgar in Manuscript*, 29–32.

Thyri and Olaf, as well as the nature of their relationship. Longfellow's Thyri is 'lonely and unhappy' (XVI: 2), immersed in grief for her lost dowry lands, now in the possession of the abandoned Burislaf, and determined that her new husband, Olaf, should retrieve them by force. Olaf's gift of angelica flowers is no consolation, as Thyri refuses the offering and castigates him for failing to act against Burislaf:

> But she cast them from her,
> Haughty and indignant,
> On the floor she threw them
> With a look of scorn. (XVI: 10)

Olaf, despite his earlier chivalrous demeanour and gift, becomes proud and dismissive at his wife's accusations of proprietorial impotence:

> Smarting with the insult,
> Through the streets of Drontheim
> Strode he red and wrathful,
> With his stately air. (XVI: 18)

Acworth and Elgar transform the encounter of the demanding, greedy wife and strident, tempestuous husband into a tender meeting of lovers (No. 14). Thyri sings of spring, is gracious about her husband's floral gift, and gently bemoans the loss of her dowry lands. Olaf comes to her rescue with an affectionate, lyrical solo [No. 14, 5 after L (b. 121)]:

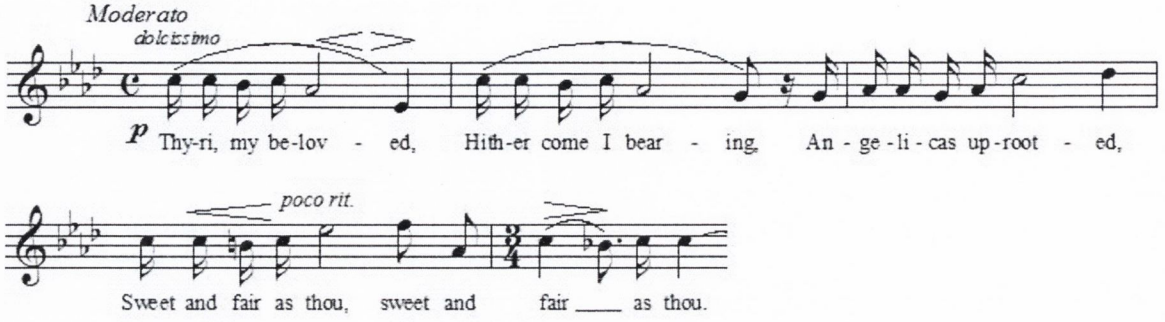
> Fear not, doubt not, weep not,
> As a Queen triumphant
> Towards the happy sunlight
> Lift thy radiant eyes.[99]

From Longfellow's largely third-person narrative, Acworth and Elgar create a dialogue between soprano and tenor that, as well as reducing the length by half, provides an opportunity to include a flourishing operatic love duet as the scene's climax.

The musical details of Elgar's settings are essential components of these and all other such revisions, and while it is probable that the requirements of musical variety played a significant part in shaping decisions about textual re-writing, there can be no

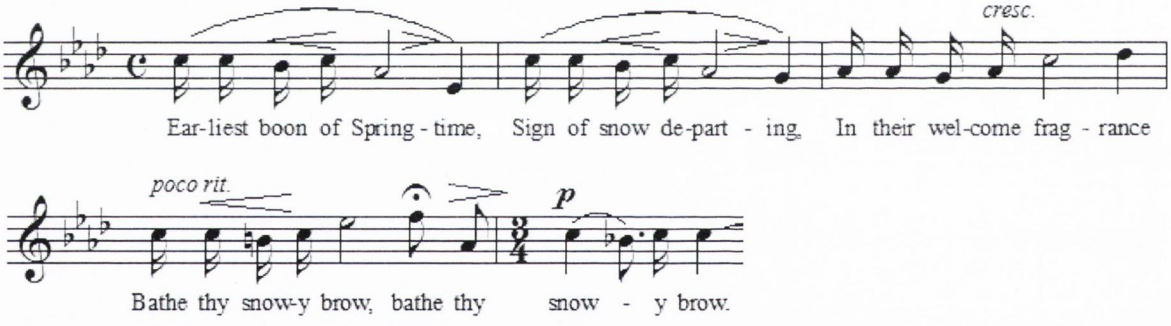
[99] References to rehearsal letters and bar numbers in *King Olaf* reflect the layout of the ECE full score.

doubt that the over-riding consideration was to present Olaf in a guise that his audience could recognise and admire. Elgar's Olaf is the very personification of gentlemanly deportment throughout the encounter with Thyri:



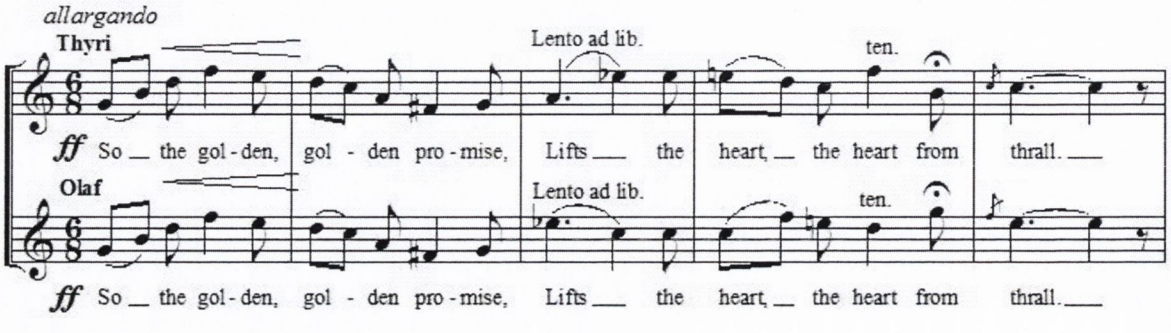
Ex. 3.1. No. 14, 'The Gray Land Breaks to Lively Green', G, bb. 73–78

A brief instrumental interlude leads to a further display of Olaf's love of nature and of his wife:



Ex. 3.2. No. 14, 'The Gray Land Breaks to Lively Green', I, bb. 85–89

Elgar takes full advantage of the theatrical potential of the situation, concluding the scene with a reprise of its opening melody, now leading the lovers forward with optimism:



Ex. 3.3. No. 14, 'The Gray Land Breaks to Lively Green', 7 after S, bb. 206–210

The balance of soprano and tenor solo material with the female chorus (No. 13) and operatic duet (above) suggests a composer thoroughly familiar with the choral festival audience and choir, who, in these early days of celebrity culture, may have been just as interested in the performers as they were in the musical content. More significantly though, Acworth and Elgar's alterations to Olaf's character, as shown throughout No.14, suggest a desire to shape an ideal hero, admirable not only on the battlefield, but in everyday life. Hannabuss, in his study of nineteenth-century adventure literature, refers to R. M. Ballantyne's belief that 'true heroes are not just mindless men of action but they are also thoughtful and pious'.[100] Olaf, as we shall see, was heroic in the round.

Changes to Olaf's Character

A notable excision in the journey from poem to cantata, and one which significantly alters the character of the protagonist, is that of Longfellow's Episode V, 'The Skerry of Shrieks'. Here, having feasted into the night with his men-at-arms, the slumbering Olaf is surrounded by a band of warlocks. With the break of dawn the king and his men arise and proceed to capture their unwanted visitors. They then bind them hand and foot on shoreline rocks, calmly sit with lighted candles, and wait for the tide to turn (Longfellow, V:15):

> Shrieks and cries of wild despair
> Filled the air,
> Growing fainter as they listened;
> Then the bursting surge alone
> Sounded on; —
> Thus the sorcerers were christened!

This unpalatable, ruthless side of Olaf's character could not be reconciled with the admirable Christian champion moulded by Acworth and Elgar. Similarly, Olaf's words

[100] Hannabuss, 'Ballantyne's Message of Empire', in *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature*, Richards (ed.), 57.

and actions in Episodes X, 'Raud the Strong' and XI, 'Bishop Sigurd at Salten Fiord', did not sit well with the carefully shaped evangelical hero of the cantata, and were omitted. Olaf's determination to 'preach the gospel with [his] sword' (X: 7) was rather literal, while the grisly killing of the inexorable pagan, Raud, using a provoked snake (XI: 15–18) was far from the Victorian ideal of a compassionate missionary:

> Then King Olaf said: 'O Sea-King!
> Little time have we for speaking,
> Choose between the good and evil;
> Be baptized, or thou shalt die!'
>
> But in his scorn the heathen scoffer
> Answered, 'I disdain thine offer;
> Neither fear I God nor Devil;
> Thee and thy Gospel I defy!'
>
> Then between his jaws distended,
> When his frantic struggles ended,
> Through King Olaf's horn an adder,
> Touched by fire, they forced to glide.
>
> Sharp his tooth was as an arrow,
> As he gnawed through bone and marrow;
> But without a groan or shudder,
> Raud the Strong blaspheming died.

Such scenes of violent conquest would surely have seemed distasteful and nauseating, as well as ideologically abhorrent, to the festival communities, the publishers, and the reviewers of Elgar's world.

By contrast, according to Berenson, the manner in which conquests were achieved was crucial to the Victorian heroic ideal:

> If explorers and conquerors stood out as sources of national strength, as fearless figures who engaged their compatriots emotionally and drew large numbers to them, they could not achieve their conquests in just any way. To qualify as genuine national heroes in the second half of the nineteenth century, they had to be peaceful conquerors—or appear as such—capturing territory in a 'civilized', humane way or defending civilization against barbarism with their heroic acts.[101]

[101] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 12.

Berenson argues that the adulation of admirable, noble heroes was linked to a fear of the opposite, of behaviour that was associated with the dreaded, uncivilised savage:

> The newly energized male of the fin-de-siècle could not be a brute. An excessively violent man would resemble savages abroad.[102]

Acworth and Elgar's omissions facilitated the evasion of this danger, and the elision of the often brutal realities of conquest. As Gillian Fellowes-Jensen notes in her textual comparison of early versions of the Olaf story with the version presented in the cantata, the latter accentuates 'the more visionary and romantic elements of the hero's life'.[103] This corresponds directly to the literary adventure stories that were so influential in providing an image of empire for the British reading public.

A Familiar Scenario: *King Olaf* and Heroes of Literature and Empire

Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf shares important characteristics with the imperial adventure genre, which, as outlined in Chapter 1, was hugely popular in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. King Olaf himself, following substantial alteration by Acworth and Elgar, shares many attributes with the heroes of this genre. He is strong, chivalrous, shrewd, rugged, athletic and skilful, occasionally violent, but only in pursuit of noble ends, an able seaman and a respected commander of men. The desired image of Olaf was set out in the *Daily Telegraph* critic Joseph Bennett's *Analytical Notes* on the work, part of Novello's Series of the Words of Oratorios and Cantatas.[104] Here, the prefatory note—curtailed from Thomas Carlyle's *Early Kings of Norway* (1875)—leaves no doubt as to the nature of the hero. Olaf, it states, was

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[102] *Ibid.*, 13.
[103] Gillian Fellowes-Jensen, 'King Olaf Tryggvason and Sir Edward Elgar', *Elgar Society Journal*, 11/4 (March 2000): 202–18 (216).
[104] Joseph Bennett, 'Prefatory Note' (from Thomas Carlyle's *Early Kings of Norway*), in *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf: By H. W. Longfellow and H. A. Acworth, C.I.E.: Set to Music for Soprano, Tenor, And Bass Soli, Chorus, and Orchestra by Edward Elgar: Book of Words with Analytical Notes* (London: Novello, 1900), 4.

> a magnificent, far-shining man, more expert in all bodily exercises, than any man had ever been before him, or after was [...], a high, true, and great human soul [with] a bright, airy, wise way of speech, dressed beautifully, and with care; a man admired and loved exceedingly by those he liked, dreaded as death by those he did not like.

Furthermore, he was, according to Carlyle and Bennett (and by extension, Acworth and Elgar), 'the wildly beautifulest man, in body and in soul, that one has ever heard of in the North', who 'did feats without number in many seas, in England latterly and most conspicuously of all'.[105] This description alerts us to the many admirable features of Olaf the man, and also establishes that he occupies the side of right; he is the character with whom the audience should identify culturally, racially and morally. Significantly, the prefatory note makes a stated connection with England which is not present in the cantata itself. Thus, the audience was deliberately furnished with a vision of and a relationship to this great champion before a note was played.

The description of Olaf given in the prefatory note could hardly be bettered as an example of muscular Christianity, an ideology prevalent in adventure literature since the middle of the century and that resulted in the type of hero to which the late-Victorian reading public had become accustomed. Acworth and Elgar's seafaring warrior conforms to type, exhibiting a combination of physical strength, bravery, intelligence and thoughtfulness characteristic of the heroic leads in novels by Ballantyne, Stevenson and others. Olaf is, furthermore, a Christian engaged in the spreading of Christianity among the less fortunate. In a review of the widely read works of Charles Kingsley, T.C. Sandars summarises Kingsley's model muscular Christian hero:

> A man who fears God and can walk a thousand miles in a thousand hours – who, in the language which Mr. Kingsley has made popular, breathes God's free air on God's rich earth, and at the same time can hit a woodcock, doctor a horse, and twist a poker around his fingers.[106]

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[105] *Ibid.*, 4.

[106] T. C. Sandars, Review of Charles Kingsley, *Two Years Ago*, cited in Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 7.

Providing a similar summary of Kingsley's ideal, Donald Hall shows that reassurance for readers was at the heart of muscular Christianity, which drew together 'physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself'.[107] In an age that was deeply religious, but that also was troubled by religious uncertainty, strong Christian heroes—whether fictional or actual (for example Gordon and others)—provided comfort. The remoulded Christian warrior of Elgar and Acworth's cantata embodies the Victorian heroic ideal, drawing on paragons from literature and reality to reinforce the belief that Britain was doing and spreading good throughout the world. This belief in the muscular Christian nature of imperial heroes, and the associated Christian benevolence of the British Empire itself, is set forth in a hugely significant section of the cantata entitled 'The Conversion Scene', to which we now turn.

The Conversion Scene

The scenes prepared and set by Acworth and Elgar include 'The Challenge of Thor' (No. 2), 'King Olaf's Return' (No. 3), 'The Wraith of Odin' (No. 9); separate encounters with three formidable females, 'Gudrun' (No. 7), 'Sigrid' (No. 11) and 'Thyri' (Nos. 13–14); and 'The Death of Olaf' (No. 16). Perhaps the most revealing section of the cantata with regard to late-Victorian cultural values is 'The Conversion' (No. 5), a dramatic musical set piece involving the tenor Olaf, the pagan leader and bass, Ironbeard, and the narrating chorus, with the king demanding that the pagans of Drontheim embrace Christianity. From all the episodes of Longfellow's text, Acworth lifts a relatively unremarkable encounter (Episode VII, 'Ironbeard') and transforms it into a key dramatic moment of the cantata. This overhaul of Longfellow's poem suggests a deliberate refashioning, an opportunity to deliver a calculated ideological point. The linking recitative (No. 4)

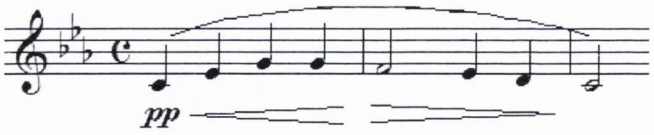
[107] Hall, *Muscular Christianity*, 7.

immediately prior to the Conversion Scene, written by Acworth and imparted by a skald, prepares the way, making the nature and purpose of Olaf's mission clear and unequivocal: for Acworth and Elgar, the king is a messenger of Christ:

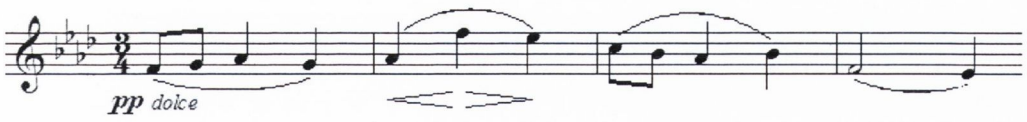
> Tell how Olaf bore the Cross
> To the folk at Nidaros,
> Norland, Iceland, land and seas
> Winning to the God of Peace.

Musically, three themes are prominent in No. 4. The opening bars feature an orchestral motif which Joseph Bennett states is 'suggestive of a subject afterwards to be identified with Christianity'.[108]

Ex. 3.4. No. 4, 'Tell How Olaf Bore the Cross', bb. 1–2, 'Christianity'

The second theme, supported by broken chords on the harp, follows the skald's mention of the Cross, and returns significantly to represent the Christian symbol during the Conversion Scene.

Ex. 3.5. No. 4, 'Tell How Olaf Bore the Cross', bb. 7–9

The third theme used as a building block for this introductory recitative is a developed fragment of a melodic idea heard earlier in No. 3 (at A) and termed the 'Sailing' motif in Bennett's analysis.[109]

[108] Bennett, *Book of Words with Analytical Notes*, 11.
[109] *Ibid.*, 9.

Ex. 3.6. No. 3, 'King Olaf's Return', bb. 11–14, 'Sailing'; variant used in No. 4, bb. 9–15

The concise statement of these three associative musical ideas, combined with the matter-of-fact outline of Olaf's purpose put forward by the text, does much more than narrate the action of the plot: it succinctly and frankly presents the adventuring protagonist as a benevolent missionary, working on behalf of God to extend the peaceful Christian empire.

This represents a major change from Longfellow's version. Beginning without any form of introduction, the opening stanza of Longfellow's 'Ironbeard' episode clearly indicates that Olaf himself instigates a violent confrontation with the pagans by sending a summons through the land via a bugle-horn blast. The pagan leader is described by Longfellow as an old farmer, with passions 'as bitter as home-brewed ale':

> But he loved the freedom of his farm,
> His ale at night, by the fireside warm,
> Gudrun his daughter, with her flaxen tresses.
>
> He loved his horses and his herds,
> The smell of the earth and the song of birds,
> His well-filled barns, his brook with its water-cresses. (VII: 7–8)

Longfellow's Ironbeard is a rustic man of the land. He and his fellow farmers abandon their physical labouring to gather with their weapons in answer to the king's call. Ironbeard's response to Olaf's provocation is thus presented by Longfellow as one of defensive necessity, a coming together of unsophisticated rural dwellers in response to a challenge from an aggressive intruder.

The Ironbeard of the cantata, on the other hand, is antagonistic, bold and defiant, wild and fierce, and responsible, together with his organised battalion, for instigating an attack on Olaf's blameless army. A small but noteworthy change to the positioning of

Olaf's bugle call deepens our impression of the pagans as unprovoked aggressors: Longfellow's episode opens directly with

> Olaf the King, one summer morn
> Blew a blast on his bugle-horn,
> Sending his signal through the land of Drontheim.

Acworth's account differs in a number of significant respects. The scene begins with a description of the setting prior to the confrontation of Olaf and Ironbeard:

> King Olaf's prows at Nidaros
> Furrowed the golden shore,
> His axe-men and his bowmen
> Lay around the shrine of Thor.
>
> Round the stately fane at Mærin
> King Olaf's housecarles lay,
> And watch'd the men of Drontheim
> Gather at break of day.

Here Acworth transfers responsibility for the initiative onto the men of Drontheim, who, rather than responding to Olaf's challenge, gather unprovoked to take him on. The tone of the encounter is further altered by the fact that the two verses are narrated *dolce e legato*, in a hymn-like style, by unison chorus, and are accompanied by the broad, unthreatening 'Sailing' motif (see Ex. 3.6 above).

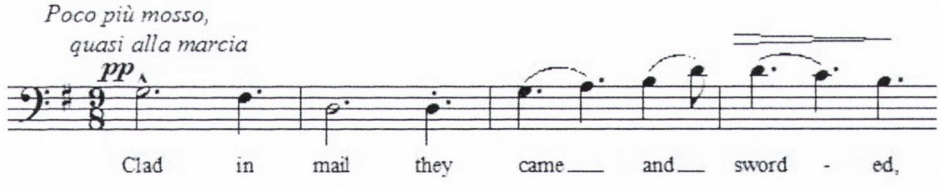
The blending of this gentle narrative style with a theme clearly associated with sailing focuses on Olaf as a noble seaman and adventurer, and disregards the aggressive warrior of Longfellow's poem. The positioning of Olaf's bugle call (Ex. 3.7) is telling: whereas Longfellow mentions the signal in the episode's opening stanza, Elgar withholds the musical manifestation until much later, after the assembly and approach of Ironbeard's threatening horde, with the implication that the Christian king is leaping into action only in response to a sinister attack by his primitive adversary, rather than instigating the confrontation himself.

Ex. 3.7. No. 5, 'The Conversion', bb. 102–103

Acworth's account of the pagan advance is far from the rustic old farmer Ironbeard presented by Longfellow. Acworth writes:

> Clad in mail they came and sworded
> Corslet and buckler ring
> As they throng behind the Ironbeard
> Who leads them to the King.

Elgar's setting of this stanza lends considerable musical weight to the newfound ferocity of the pagan multitude. A martial melodic theme begins in G major, sung first by the basses, then by tenors, altos, and finally sopranos. Rising through the vocal lines, with entries four bars apart, the theme seems to swell the numbers of the heathen throng and propel them forward rank on rank as a formidable marching battalion.



Ex. 3.8. No. 5, 'The Conversion', bb. 36–39

The composer's treatment of the theme creates the impression of strength and motion, as he manipulates the medium of music for dramatic and spatial purposes, building in volume, texture and range. Added to this are menacing repetitions of the words 'corslet and buckler ring' (see Ex. 3.9 below) in the lower voices, and the use of a warlike snare-drum pattern, with the whole cycle building up to a fearsome climax on the word 'Ironbeard' sung *fortissimo* by full choir bolstered by bass drum, cymbals and military brass (5 after D; b. 63), after which the battalion seems to pass by: the texture gradually attenuates, dynamics diminish and the listener is left behind. (The layout of the vocal

entries is shown in Table 3.1 below.) The pagans disappear in the distance with two final *pianissimo* iterations of 'corslet and buckler ring' before blending into a return of the unison narrative choir (at E).

Ex. 3.9. No. 5, 'The Conversion', b. 43

Bar No.	Voice	Text
36 (C)	Bass	Clad in mail they came and sworded
40	Tenor	Clad in mail they came and sworded
41	Bass	Corslet and buckler ring, corslet and buckler ring
44	Alto	Clad in mail they came and sworded
45	Bass	Corslet and buckler ring
46	Tenor	Corslet and buckler ring
47	Bass	Corslet and buckler ring
48	Soprano	Clad in mail, clad in mail they came and sworded
48	Bass	As they throng behind the Ironbeard
49	Tenor	Corslet and buckler ring
50	Alto	Corslet and buckler ring
52	Tenor, Alto	As they throng behind the Ironbeard
53	Soprano	As they throng behind the Ironbeard
54	Bass	As they throng behind the Ironbeard
56	Alto	The Ironbeard who leads them to the king
57	Soprano	Who leads them, who leads them to the king
57	Tenor	Corslet and buckler ring
58 (D)	Tenor, Bass	Ironbeard, Ironbeard leads them to the king
61	Alto	Leads them to the king, leads them to the king
63	All voices	Ironbeard, Ironbeard leads them to the king
67	Soprano	To the king, to the king
67	Alto, Bass	Ironbeard leads them to the king
68	Tenor	Ironbeard leads them to the king
70	Bass	To the king
73	Tenor	Corslet and buckler ring
74	Bass	Corslet and buckler ring

Table 3.1. No. 5, 'The Conversion', Vocal entries from b. 36 (C)

Out of the twenty-three words of Acworth's stanza, Elgar builds a substantial musical structure, with constantly overlapping and dovetailing vocal entries creating an impression of forceful forward motion. The textual organisation of this forty-bar verse setting underlines the vast increase in the ferocity and antagonism of Ironbeard, from the protective farmer of the Longfellow poem to the aggressive warrior of the cantata. King

Olaf, on the other hand, is transformed in the same scene from a ruthless, tyrannical conqueror into a vicar of Christ. Acworth, musically supported by Elgar, therefore turns Longfellow's account of the action on its head to pitch the virtuous Olaf, Christian champion and people's hero, against the detestable, savage pagan attackers. This structuring of the Conversion Scene corresponds to Riley's observation regarding the early stages of the cantata ('The Challenge of Thor'), where the sinister violence of pagan life is emphasised and contrasted with the peace of Christianity:

> The final libretto legitimises Olaf's assault by painting the pagan religion as black as possible: near the beginning Thor lays down a challenge to Christ, claiming that, in the North, 'Force rules the world still, /has ruled it, shall rule it; / Meekness is weakness, / Strength is triumphant'. Olaf, by contrast, serves the 'God of Peace.[110]

This 'legitimisation' of conquest through the stark opposition of good and evil is perhaps most strongly evidence in the dramatically reconfigured Conversion Scene.

Why did Elgar and Acworth alter Longfellow's sequence of events to create a detailed military scenario of good versus evil, with a clear delineation between the hero and the unseemly savages? In his study of British and French imperial heroes, Berenson states that in the real world of colonial expansion, western heroes were absolved from blame in the event of violent confrontations, with the fault laid at the feet of the uncivilised other:

> When colonial violence occurred, as it often did, British and French commentators rarely saw it as initiated by their heroic emissaries. Instead, such men found themselves eulogized as martyrs to the civilizing process of colonialism.[111]

If we relate the characters of Olaf and the pagans to the heroes and savages of nineteenth-century imperial adventure stories, we find that a distinctive type of image predominated

[110] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 156.
[111] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 12.

in the case of each. A particular attitude to foreign natives was so pervasive in these popular adventure tales that it would have been taken for granted by those who had grown up immersed in the dominant tropes of the genre. In short, distant natives were imagined by the metropolitan population as wild, unkempt, barbaric cannibals, capable of heinous violence towards strangers and towards each other. In Chapter 3 of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, for example, the young narrator, Ralph, states that the natives 'looked more like demons than human beings', and recounts his hope that the island on which he was marooned was uninhabited:

> If it should be inhabited, I felt certain, from all I had heard of South Sea Islanders, that we should be roasted alive and eaten.[112]

This fear is given credence in Chapter 19, with a gruesome description of the fate of a murdered savage at the hands of his fellow natives:

> Scarcely had his limbs ceased to quiver when the monsters cut slices from his body, and, after roasting them slightly over the fire, devoured them.[113]

Cannibalism and gratuitous slaughter are also prominent in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (serialised 1881–82), and in Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She* (1886–87), in which the heroic English adventurers have many narrow escapes. Acworth's added description of the unsightly pagans in the Conversion Scene places them in the category of detestable savages, creating a clear visual contrast with the victorious hero, and leaving little doubt as to whom the audience should identify with and embrace as their own.

Acworth's changes to the image and demeanour of Longfellow's Ironbeard may be related to the gruesome foreign figureheads of adventure literature. For example, Twala, the King of Kukuanaland, is depicted in grisly detail in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. In Chapter 7, as Sir Henry Curtis, Captain Good and Allan Quatermain travel in

[112] Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, 17.
[113] *Ibid.*, 128.

search of the mines, they encounter Scragga, the son of Twala, who describes his father thus:

> Husband of a thousand wives, chief and lord paramount of the Kukuanas, keeper of the great road, terror of his enemies, student of the Black Arts, leader of an hundred thousand warriors, Twala the One-eyed, the Black, the Terrible.[114]

Scragga takes the Englishmen to his father, who appears before the adventurers in the following chapter:

> Then the gigantic figure slipped off the karross and stood up before us, a truly alarming spectacle. It was that of an enormous man with the most entirely repulsive countenance we had ever beheld. The lips were as thick as a negro's, the nose was flat, it had but one gleaming black eye (for the other was represented by a hollow in the face), and its whole expression was cruel and sensual to a degree.[115]

A similar mode of representing savage leaders is evident in the writings of Ballantyne. In Chapter 19 of *The Coral Island*, Ralph Rover describes a chieftain of the South Sea Islands:

> Altogether, with his yellow turban-like hair, his Herculean frame, his glittering eyes and white teeth, he seemed the most terrible monster I ever beheld.[116]

This view of savages in distant lands was shaped not merely by uninformed prejudices; it is also supported by the reactions of one of the great scientific minds of the age, Charles Darwin (1809–82), to an encounter with some of the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego. The first edition of Darwin's *The Descent of Man* was published in 1871, with a second edition three years later and numerous reprints thereafter. In a general summary of the work's findings, Darwin reveals what appears to be a widespread view of savages:

> The main conclusion arrived at in this work, namely, that man is descended from some lowly organised form, will, I regret to think, be highly distasteful to many. But there can hardly be a doubt that we are descended from Barbarians. The astonishment which I felt on first seeing a party of Fuegians on a wild and broken shore will never be forgotten by

[114] Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, 75.
[115] *Ibid.*, 89. Haggard explains that a 'karross' is a traditional mantle or cloak.
[116] Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, 127.

> me, for the reflection at once rushed into my mind—such were our ancestors. These men were absolutely naked and bedaubed with paint, their long hair was tangled, their mouths frothed with excitement, and their expression was wild, startled, and distrustful. They possessed hardly any arts, and like wild animals lived on what they could catch; they had no government, and were merciless to every one not of their own small tribe. He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins. For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey who braved its dreaded enemy in order to save the life of its keeper or from that old baboon, who, descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs—as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions.[117]

Sam Smiles points out that Darwin's view of the savage must have reflected a general consensus:

> In defending his conclusions about the ancestry of mankind Darwin voiced a detestation of the savage which must have been widely shared if his argument in this passage was to succeed.[118]

Moreover, the encounter of the hero Olaf with the pagan throng in the Conversion Scene may be related to the exploits of real imperial heroes such as General Gordon. In her exploration of Gordon's public legacy, Behrman discusses the image of the British hero at the limit of civilisation, facing into an abyss of primitivism, as a fascination of Victorians at home:

> Men like Gordon, standing against beleaguering hordes—those masses of anonymous black, brown, and yellow humanity that peopled the Empire—personified the English task in the modern world. He stood for Enlightenment, Freedom, Justice, and Civilisation.[119]

Such attitudes to natives could also be viewed as reflective of a late-Victorian fear of lower-class throngs and of 'reverse invasion': of elements of the empire coming to threaten the homeland. This fear is manifested in novels such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

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[117] Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1871), 404.
[118] Sam Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 2.
[119] Behrman, 'The Afterlife of General Gordon', 50–51.

(1897), which bring to life the terror of foreign dangers reaching British shores and cities. *Dracula*, Thomas Richards argues, 'reverses the customary direction of colonization' and 'proves a master at using Britain's imperial system of transport to his own advantage'.[120] Berenson shows that fear of the unclean masses was a real concern late in the century:

> Salisbury's 1883 essay, 'Disintegration', published in the influential *Quarterly Review*, pointed in particular to a growing menace from below. For the future prime minister, Britain's electoral reforms announced a new age of mass politics in which the rabble would rule.[121]

The disinclination of the better-off to engage in any meaningful way with the lower classes is encapsulated (or perhaps mocked) in the opening lines of Chapter 6 of E. M. Forster's *Howard's End*, published in 1910:

> We are not concerned with the very poor. They are unthinkable, and only to be approached by the statistician or the poet.[122]

The general horror of unthinkable throngs also involved a fear of the infectious diseases they might carry and transmit. As John M. MacKenzie states, the empire was viewed in some instances as 'a place where dangerous tropical diseases [were] rife'.[123] MacKenzie notes that scientific scholarship reacted to this threat as the nineteenth century progressed:

> Tropical medicine had emerged as a new discipline and studies of micro-biology raised hopes for solutions but also fears of contamination.[124]

From the ruthless King Olaf and the set-upon pagans of Longfellow's poem, Elgar and Acworth create an admirable Christian hero and a throng of fearsome natives, setting up a familiar imperial scenario, and conforming almost exactly to the paradigm laid out in much of the literature and scientific thought of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. This image of hero and savage gave comfort to the British audience and reaffirmed the general

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[120] Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London and New York: Verson, 1993), 61.
[121] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 8.
[122] E. M. Forster, *Howards End*, with introduction and notes by David Lodge, Pengiun Classics (London: Penguin, 2000; org. publ. 1910), 38. Whether Forster's comment is ironic or otherwise, the point remains.
[123] MacKenzie, 'Passion or Indifference? Popular Imperialism in Britain: Continuities and Discontinuities over Two Centuries', in *idem* (ed.) *European Empires and the People*, 71.
[124] *Ibid.*, 71.

belief in the imperial mission of bringing improvement to races that were viewed as inferior, but above all unfortunate because they did not know these civilising benefits.

The Imperial Mission: Extending Christ's Kingdom

Not only is the Christian/pagan confrontation recast in the cantata's Conversion Scene, but there is also a dramatic alteration to the catalyst for Christianisation. In Longfellow's version, Olaf presents an ultimatum to the pagans after their leader, Ironbeard, is slain:

> King Olaf from the doorway spoke
> Choose ye between two things my folk
> To be baptised or given up to slaughter.

The pagans, now without leadership and recognising that they have no alternative, reluctantly concede to the demands of Olaf:

> And seeing their leader stark and dead,
> The people with a murmur said,
> 'O King, baptize us with thy holy water'.

For the cantata, the ultimatum is omitted. Instead, following the slow demise of the defiant Ironbeard, Acworth inserts, and Elgar exploits, a divine apparition above the battlefield:

> Then o'er the blood-stained Horg-stone
> The Cross of Christ was seen.
> The holy priests were praying,
> The singers sang between.

This incident guides the pagans, through wonder and awe at the miraculous appearance of the heavenly symbol, to a wish for Christian conversion:

> The men of Drontheim trembled
> They marvelled and they knelt.
> Their helpless God was broken
> The power of Christ was felt.

They beseech Olaf to receive them into the Christian fold, recognising that it was God, through Olaf, who caused the death of Ironbeard and the smashing of the pagan gods for whom he stood:

> Receive us, King; we kneel to him
> Who fell'd by thee the War-God grim;
>
> Water bring our brows to lave,
> And on our shields the cross engrave.
>
> Blood and battle, let them cease,
> Knit us to the God of peace.

Thus Acworth alters the action such that the savage pagans themselves seek to be improved by the conquering Christians, believing that Olaf is carrying out the work of God.

The insertion of a vision of the holy cross in the sky above the battle scene is a provocative gesture. It is probable that the idea was borrowed from the historical account of the Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity, reported to have taken place in the year 312 A.D. before the Battle at Milvian Bridge between the emperor and his Roman foe, Maxentius. In his panegyric *Life of the Emperor Constantine*, the church historian Eusebius (ca. 260–340 A.D.) records Constantine's description of his holy vision thus:

> He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription CONQUER BY THIS. At this sight he was struck with amazement, and his whole army also, which followed him on this expedition, and witnessed this miracle.[125]

[125] Eusebius Pamphilus, *The Life of the Blessed Emperor Constantine* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Volume 1*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.), Ernest Cushing Richardson (trans.), A Select Library of the Christian Church, 10 Vols. (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890; repr. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1999), 481–559 (490).

Although this is partly in conflict with versions of events recorded by the contemporary historian Lactantius and some later sources,[126] it is the account by Eusebius, which, John Wordsworth wrote in 1877, 'as in itself the most striking and as resting on the authority of the emperor, has been most popularly received'.[127] It is likely, therefore, that the idea of a heavenly vision endorsing a particular side in battle was well known in the time of Elgar and Acworth, with the latter, as a keen theologian, surely familiar with its referential significance. The apparition has the narrative effect in the cantata's Conversion Scene of convincing the leaderless pagans that Christianity is the right way, and that the Christian God has taken the side of King Olaf and his victorious army. It seems a deliberate and meaningful statement by the cantata's creators, intended to associate the character of Olaf with a historical Christian emperor of a realm much admired by the late Victorians.[128]

The use of an apparently supernatural vision as a narrative tool also features in adventure literature as a means of endorsing the 'right' side. The occasion of an eclipse, for example, is used in Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, when the captured Englishmen, claiming to have come from the stars, prove their superiority and righteousness by commanding the sun to stop shining on the puzzled and suitably impressed natives.[129] Dennis Butts observes in his introduction to *King Solomon's Mines* that such assistance from the supernatural was an established narrative device in stories of heroism:

> The traditional hero normally has the assistance of supernatural help—a Chinese lamp, some magic beans, an extraordinary cat—Allan

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[126] Lactantius has 'Constantine was directed in a dream to cause the heavenly sign to be delineated on the shields of his soldiers, and so to proceed to battle', with no mention of a cross above. See Lactantius, *Of the Manner in which the Persecutors Died* in *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume 7*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), William Fletcher (trans.), (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886; repr. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1999), 301–22 (318).

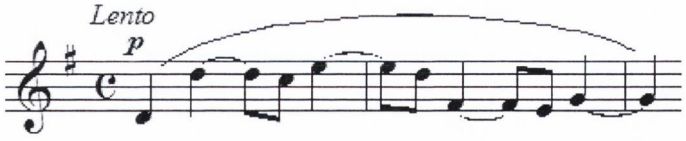
[127] John Wordsworth, 'Constantinus I' in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines: Being a Continuation of the Dictionary of the Bible*, William Smith and Henry Wace, vol. 1 (London: John Murray, 1877), 624–49 (647).

[128] The Victorian fascination with Ancient Rome will be discussed in the next chapter.

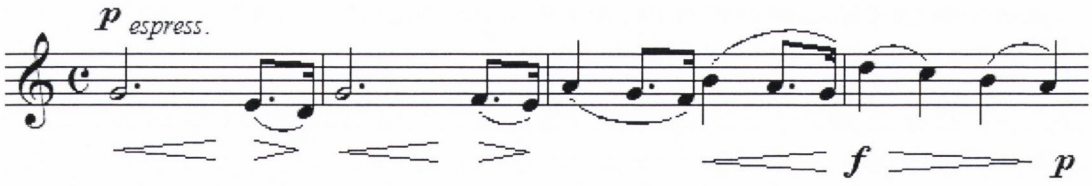
[129] This particular usage of the supernatural as a narrative device has since featured for example in *The Adventures of Tin Tin* (in an encounter with the Incas), in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee at the Court of King Arthur*, and in Enid Blyton's *The Secret Mountain*, as well as in parody form in the cartoon *Darkwing Duck*.

> Quatermain's party are able to impress with the 'magic' of Captain Good's false teeth and Quatermain's rifle shooting.[130]

Acworth's insertion of the cross is a pointed alteration to the Longfellow poem, then, and has the effect of cementing the role of Olaf as the benevolent, heavenly endorsed hero bringing light to the foreign heathens.

Elgar's setting of Acworth's text at this stage of the drama does much to amplify this suggestion of Christian, imperial righteousness. From the immediacy of Ironbeard's death scene and one last utterance of the 'clad in mail' idea (9 before V; b. 355), the listener's perspective begins to change: brass gives way to strings, defiance to resignation, as the once threatening theme dies away. The audience withdraws from the scene of the action via a gradual thinning of orchestral texture and diminishing of intensity, moving to a wider, perhaps higher, more distant view of the battlefield. The subsequent narrative imparted by the choir has the character of a heavenly commentary wafting from above. Female voices provide a cherubic sonority for the description of the miraculous vision: 'Then o'er the blood-stained Horg-stone/The cross of Christ was seen', accompanied by gentle string tremolo and woodwind counterpoint (No. 5, V). After the tenors join with 'The holy priests were praying/The singer sang between', a distinctive new melodic theme is heard (at W) that is central to the character of this key section of the drama:

Ex. 3.10. No. 5, 'The Conversion', W, bb. 373–75

Heard here on oboe, this is somewhat reminiscent of a melody sounded in conjunction with the tender memory of Olaf's mother, Astrid the Abbess, in No. 3, 'King Olaf's Return', at G:

[130] Butts, 'Introduction' to Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, xiv.

Ex. 3.11. No. 3, 'And King Olaf heard the Cry', G, bb. 79–82

Both themes are played on solo woodwind instruments with similar accompanying sonorities, and are heard first in one key and then in the key a major third higher (in No. 3 as an exact sequence; in No. 5 as a less exact but nonetheless referential form). These similarities cause the music to suggest connections between moments and memories of deep religious feeling, in each case creating an impression of gentle, tranquil, benevolent power. In the Conversion Scene, the melody shown in Ex. 3.10 is accompanied by harp chords and string tremolo as the awe-struck choir brings us back to Olaf the individual, the Christian hero:

> King Olaf's axe was lower'd,
> His bright blue eyes were dim,
> As swung the golden censer,
> As swell'd the solemn hymn.

The miraculous vision, reinforced for its audience by the connections with ceremonial liturgy (the golden censer), has a powerful impact on the defeated pagans:

> The men of Drontheim trembled,
> They marvell'd as they knelt.

The music then builds chromatically through the line 'Their helpless God was broken' to arrive at the climax of the whole scene at the words 'The pow'r of Christ was felt'. The theme shown in Ex 3.10 is used again after the climax, to unite another religious reference, as Olaf invites the erstwhile pagans to 'join in the prayer/That swells to the Lord of the earth and the air' (3 before Y; b. 407). The chorus of pagans submits to Christianity in a unison hymn, in which Olaf is identified as an instrument of God:

Receive us King; we kneel to him
Who fell'd by thee the War-God grim; (Y; b. 410)

Thus, the pagans acknowledge that Olaf is endorsed by heaven, doing the will of the Christian God. Moving to four-part harmony and continuing in the style of a chorale, the pagans then appeal to their new God to cleanse them and accept them into the Christian fold:

Water bring our brows to lave,
And on our shields the cross engrave. (9 after Y; b. 418):

This invitation to engrave the metaphorical cross on shields, another powerful image associated with the story of the Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity, emphasises further the idea that savages welcome the civilising influence of their conquerors. As the chorus extends the hymn tune in a polyphonic context (from Z), Elgar sets up a dramatic opposition between the regular phrases of the downtrodden pagans and the more ornate countermelody of the victorious Olaf, who calls on God to accept the pleading supplicants:

Lord, receive them! King divine,
Breathe a blessing; they are Thine.[131]

Here, Olaf is given the intercessory role of a priest, with both text and music suggesting that he holds an influential, even intermediary power, and that he seeks victory not for his own glory, but for the glory of God and for the improvement of the pagans. The accompanying harp in particular—with its angelic associations—creates a heavenly aura around the king. The pagans' text is emphasised by repetition, as their multiple reiterations of 'knit us to the God of peace' both champion the traits of Christianity and stress that, rather than being forced to convert, the pagans themselves, awed by the power and, paradoxically, peace of the religion, request that they be granted conversion.

[131] These lines are in Elgar's handwriting in book of drafts and sketches, Lbl Add.MS57994.

Throughout this scene, Acworth and Elgar reinforce the idea that savages welcome, indeed invite, civilisation by a greater power. For a citizen of an expanding, conquering empire, this was a comforting thought.

The broad Conversion Scene comes to an end with an expansive C-major iteration of the pagans' plea to 'knit us to the God of peace', and spacious accompanying triplets contribute to a sense of grand significance. The clarity of implication created at this point by tempo, key and harmonic texture is rendered all the more effective by the chromatic, polyphonic complexity of the preceding eight bars (from 5 after AA; b. 448). Here, the lines of the previous verse are interwoven by the choral voices, with all twelve notes of the chromatic scale featuring above a C pedal in this short build-up. The pagans' repeated cry of 'blood and battle, let them cease' leads to an explosive augmented-sixth chord (9 bars from the end) before bursting into the final, glorious comfort of Christian righteousness. In this way, Elgar's setting reinforces Acworth's textual emphasis on the opposition of wild paganism and peaceful Christianity. The twelve-note frenzy of 'blood and battle' is ultimately quenched by the pure, clear C major of 'peace', and the episode fades away.

The softening of Olaf's character and the insertion of a vision of the cross in the Conversion Scene constitute two strategic and vital creative decisions, with significant ideological repercussions. It is highly likely that Harry Acworth, an experienced and passionate servant of the empire, played an important role in enacting these decisions. Acworth was familiar with and participated effectively in colonial philanthropic endeavours, and with the efforts needed to raise money for their implementation. The violent Christian warrior of Longfellow's 'Ironbeard' episode may have been seen as damaging to the many missionary societies, from across the spectrum of religious denominations, which were active in the empire at that time. The slaughtering conqueror,

as presented by Longfellow, was not merely distasteful, but was potentially harmful and offensive to the colonial organisations with which Acworth not only had a connection, but with which he had spent his career, and for which he probably retained respect and empathy. The presentation of conversion to Christianity only as an alternative to slaughter could not be included by Acworth, a firm believer in the civilising power of benevolent colonialists. Moreover, it was a professional imperative for Elgar, as a Catholic trying to make his way in the world of the Anglican festival, to tread an inoffensive ideological path at this stage. As McGuire points out, the complexity of Elgar's own religious upbringing and surroundings meant that striking the correct ideological tone in the context of Christian feeling was crucial to his career:

> Elgar's mixed religious background, inherited from his parents, his own mixed marriage, and his work within a predominantly Anglican profession made being able to speak to both faiths not just convenient, but a necessity for his survival.[132]

As well as excising or abridging Longfellow's text, Acworth also re-ordered certain events, with significant repercussions. In Longfellow's poem, the 'Ironbeard' episode is situated later, after the tales of 'Queen Sigrid the Haughty' and 'The Wraith of Odin' as well as others which do not appear in the cantata. Acworth brings forward the Ironbeard story, making it the first item of importance after the 'Challenge of Thor' and 'King Olaf's Return'. Pope draws attention to the artistic effects of this change:

> From the point of view of musical structure, 'The Conversion' scene brings Part I of the cantata to a conclusion which is both deeply moving and artistically satisfying.[133]

However, Acworth's repositioning also gives the vastly expanded Conversion Scene a prominence, and consequent significance, not intended by Longfellow, and is immensely

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[132] McGuire, 'Measure of a Man: Catechizing Elgar's Catholic Avatars', in *Edward Elgar and his World*, Adams (ed.), 28.
[133] Pope, '*King Olaf* and the English Choral Tradition', 62.

revealing of Acworth and Elgar's priorities for the work. The scene is hugely emphatic and carefully placed for dramatic and ideological impact.

A Hero's Death

A comparison of the narrative of King Olaf's death as presented in Longfellow's poem and in Elgar and Acworth's cantata reveals significant discrepancies regarding the order and nature of the final encounter, and about the identity of the perpetrator of the fatal blow. Longfellow begins the tale of the king's demise in Episode XVII, and his complex and character-heavy description of events leading to Olaf's death, or at least disappearance, continues through Episodes XVIII, XIX, XX and XXI.[134] Longfellow's account involves three kings who wish death upon the protagonist: King Svend the Dane, who seeks revenge on behalf of his new wife, Sigrid the Haughty, rejected by Olaf earlier in the saga; the King of Sweden, who rises in aid of his Danish ally; and Eric the Norseman, who seeks vengeance for his father, Hakon Jarl, whose severed head swung from a gibbet, at Olaf's behest, in Episode III. The three kings sail together in search of their common foe. The initial reason for pursuit is King Svend's quest to appease his humiliated queen, still seething from her treatment by Olaf:

> Still on her scornful face,
> Blushing with deep disgrace,
> Bore she the crimson trace
> Of Olaf's gauntlet;
> Like a malignant star,
> Blazing in heaven afar,
> Red shone the angry scar
> Under her frontlet. (XVII: 3)

The scorned queen, Longfellow states, appealed to her new husband to inflict punishment on her former suitor:

[134] Historical sources differ as to whether Olaf was killed in battle by an opponent, whether he jumped into the sea rather than be overwhelmed by his enemies, or, by being silent about his fate, allow him to disappear from the story.

Oft to King Svend she spake,
'For thine own honour's sake
Shalt thou swift vengeance take
On the vile coward!'
Until the King at last,
Gusty and overcast,
Like a tempestuous blast
Threatened and lowered. (XVII: 4)

However, the focus soon turns to the cause of Eric the Norseman, also known as Eric the Earl, and it is his hatred of his father's killer that proves the ultimate motive:

Louder the war-horns growl and snarl,
Sharper the dragons bite and sting!
Eric the son of Hakon Jarl
A death-drink salt as the sea
Pledges to thee,
Olaf the King! (XIX: 11)

In Episode XXI, amid the violence of the kings' sea battle, Longfellow emphasises the depth of Eric's fury:

All day the battle has raged,
All day have the ships engaged,
But not yet is assuaged
The vengeance of Eric the Earl. (XXI: 1)

Episode XXI is concerned entirely with the confrontation of Eric and Olaf, and contains no reference to King Svend the Dane or to his wife's wounded pride. As Eric closes in on his foe, he shouts 'Remember Jarl Hakon!' (XXI: 10), leaving no doubt as to his rationale. Olaf's end is mysterious and unresolved: along with his marshall, Kolbiorn, he leaps into the sea, and, as Longfellow states:

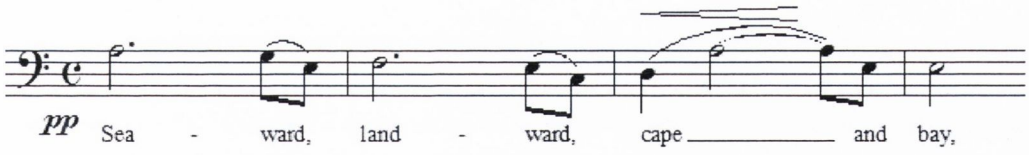
There is told a wonderful tale,
How the king stripped off his mail,
Like leaves of the brown sea-kale,
As he swam beneath the main;

But the young grew old and gray,
And never, by night or by day,
In his kingdom of Norroway
Was King Olaf seen again! (XXI: 16)

Thus, the king's death, prompted by Eric the Earl, is not confirmed. Instead, an air of mystery prevails.

Longfellow's approach to and description of Olaf's presumed death, at five episodes and a total of fifty-three stanzas, is too long for musical setting. Acworth's rewriting (No. 16) reveals a shift of emphasis with noteworthy consequences for the character of Olaf in his late-Victorian context. The section is dramatically simplified: Eric the Earl and the gruesome fate of his father Hakon Jarl are excised, and the desire for revenge felt by Queen Sigrid is established as the direct reason for Olaf's downfall. The redaction reveals King Svend the Dane as Olaf's attacker. As in the poem, Acworth relates that Svend's new wife, Queen Sigrid the Haughty, was earlier scorned by Olaf on the grounds of her steadfast paganism. In Elgar's No. 11, Olaf exclaimed: 'I will give my body and soul to flame/ere I take to my heart a heathen dame', before insulting the queen and striking her with his glove, thereby showing the strength of his commitment to Christianity and distaste for the refractory unbeliever. Sigrid's resultant anger and insistence on retribution are given by Acworth as the seeds of Olaf's demise, with the implication that Olaf died a martyr's death, slain for his unshakable dedication to the purity of his faith. The result of this shift in emphasis is twofold: King Olaf's butchery of Hakon Jarl is omitted, and Olaf, in his late-Victorian manifestation, dies a principled fighting man, in the line of his missionary duty, in the service of God.

Elgar uses the representative theme to emphasise the newly formed connection between Olaf's rejection of the resolute pagan Sigrid and his death at the behest of her new husband. The chorus narrates the approach of the army of King Svend the Dane (Ex. 3.12) with a melody last heard in No. 11, 'Sigrid sits in her High Abode', accompanied by a figure described by Joseph Bennett as 'the theme of Sigrid's vengeance' (ex. 3.13).[135]

[135] Bennett, *Book of Words with Analytical Notes*, 29.

Ex. 3.12. No. 16, 'King Olaf's Dragons take the Sea', E (bb. 77–80)

Ex. 3.13. No. 16, 'King Olaf's Dragons take the Sea', E (bb. 77–78), Bassoon I

This combination of melody and bass was previously heard Allegro con fuoco in No. 11 (at K, b. 100), as Sigrid reaffirmed her loyalty to the pagan gods, and continued as Olaf swore never to take a pagan wife. The enduring association of this theme is the sentiment with which No. 11 closes: Sigrid's determination to exact revenge:

> Thou art gone! Nay, spur not through the gate;
> I am one that can watch and wait;
> By yonder glove on the oaken floor;
> By my father's head and the soul of Thor,
> By the hand she offered, Sigrid saith,
> Sigrid yet shall be Olaf's death.

The final line of Sigrid's song is evoked by Elgar through the use of this theme in 'The Death of Olaf', underlining musically her decisive role in the king's downfall.

Elgar and Acworth use the choral recitative 'After Queen Gunhild's Death' (No. 15) to strengthen the link between Olaf's religious conviction in rejecting Sigrid, and his death at her request. The placing of this recitative demonstrates how a simple repositioning of Longfellow's verse could significantly alter the narrative intent. The text of No. 15 is extracted from Longfellow's episode XVII, but its placement in the cantata—immediately prior to 'The Death of Olaf'—gives it an amplified implicative purpose.

> After Queen Gunhild's death,
> So the old Saga sáith,
> Plighted King Svend his faith
> To Sigrid the Haughty;
> And to avenge his bride,

Soothing her wounded pride,
Over the waters wide
King Olaf sought he. (XVII: 2)

This stanza cements the image of Svend, and through him his recalcitrant pagan wife Sigrid, as the killer, meaning that Olaf dies for a noble cause, and therefore dies a death that would inevitably have been attractive to the Victorian audience. MacDonald notes that this kind of 'good death', dying well in the service of the Christian empire, was especially resonant in late-Victorian Britain and in the early twentieth century:

> As a cultural sign dying well for Queen and Country was both potent and accessible. *The Last Stand* (Major Wilson in Matabeleland), *The Charge* (the Light Brigade), *Faithful Unto Death* (Jack Cornwell, the boy sailor, at Jutland) —these were all images of imperial sacrifice. The iconography of the good death became a significant element in popular culture.[136]

Dying in the service of one's country was of course particularly associated with the General Gordon story. With this in mind, it is significant that, while Longfellow arguably leaves Olaf's death unconfirmed,[137] Acworth and Elgar end the scene without any such ambiguity, with the final, unequivocal verse imparted by the chorus and accompanied by a death knell and an ominous organ pedal, both on a low C.

Thy latest fight is fought in vain,
No more the axe of Olaf slain,
No more the glittering crest,
Shall victory pluck from ruin's verge,
Or to the chase his spearmen urge;
Above him rolls the sullen surge,
That stormy heart has rest. (No. 16, K; b. 166)

This confirmation means that a comparison may be drawn with the case of Gordon, whose death by beheading was confirmed, but whose body was never found. Behrman summarises the heroic qualities of General Gordon, beloved of the late-Victorian public, with words that could equally be applied to King Olaf:

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[136] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 24.
[137] Anderson states that Longfellow's version 'concentrates on Olaf's mysterious fate'. See his *Elgar and Chivalry* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2002), 141.

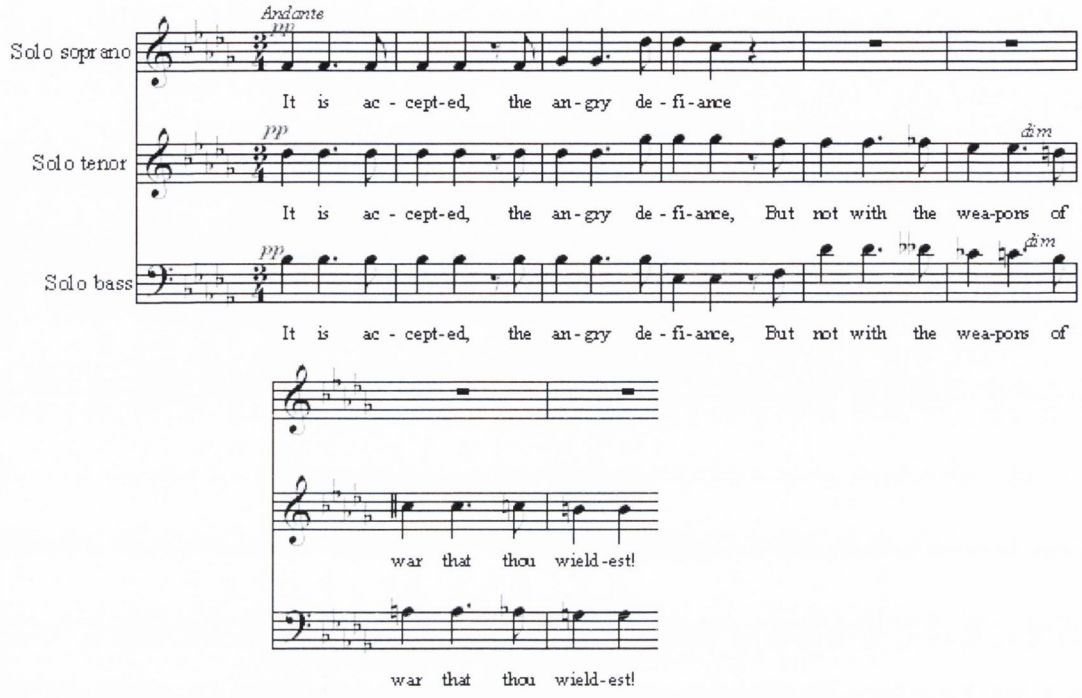
> He had all those qualities of the archetypal hero: bravery, modesty, resourcefulness, a certain charismatic quality of his leadership, and—most of all—the fact that he was dead.[138]

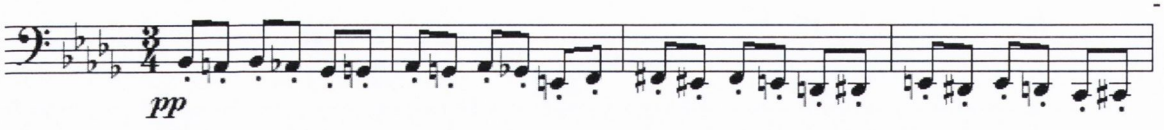
The Epilogue: An Imperial Vision

The cantata's Epilogue is an abridged version of Longfellow's Episode XXII, with three full stanzas, and parts of three others, excised. References to 'The Virgin and Mother' and 'the voice of Saint John' are omitted—probably to spare the sensibilities of a largely Protestant festival audience—and their absences are passed over seamlessly. Longfellow's words of St. John are delegated to unidentified soloists and choir, and the scene takes on the character of a sermon. The Epilogue's apparent moral, that Christianity is the peaceful religion, that peace is preferable to war, and that violence is not the correct medium for the spread of Christianity, does not follow the pattern of Longfellow's tale, in which violence was clearly the principal catalyst for conversion; but it fits well with the righteous, sanitised Olaf moulded by Acworth and Elgar. In the cantata, the king is Christ-like in his helplessness at his hour of death. The 'Peace-God', highly praised in the Epilogue, had visibly and miraculously supported the Christian messenger during the Conversion Scene, but does not save him from an ignominious death at the hands of earthly killers bearing earthly grievances.

Elgar throws the full weight of his musical muscle behind the ideals of the Epilogue. His treatment of themes associated with the pagan gods links this section with the work's opening scene, 'The Challenge of Thor' (No. 2) and goes even further than the text to indicate the demise of the old order, the end of pagan primacy. The antagonistic 'Thor' motif of the opening is, in the Epilogue, sung by much smaller forces

[138] Behrman, 'The Afterlife of General Gordon', 48. Real-life admiration for 'the good death' is reflected in adventure literature. In Chapter 31 of Ballantyne's *The Coral Island*, for example, the protagonists propose a noble effort to rescue the island girl Avatea. A missionary teacher warns them of the dangers of 'venturing among these ferocious savages', but the exemplary muscular Christian Jack Martin replies 'Well [...] I am not afraid to die in a good cause'. See Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*, 210.

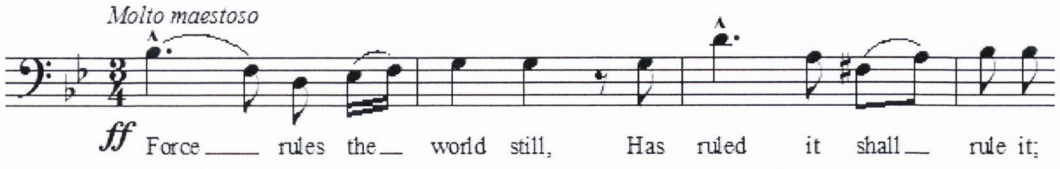
and with less threatening rhythm (the double dot of the second crotchet is reduced to a single dot), slowed to *Andante* and reduced to *pianissimo*:

Ex. 3.14. 'Epilogue', C, bb. 28–35

The 'Thor' pattern continues through a descending chromatic scale (Ex. 3.14 above, bb. 32–35) underpinned by a mournful variant of the bass pattern originally heard in its fearsome fullness at the outset (No. 2, b. 1):

Ex. 3.15. 'Epilogue', 5 after C, bb. 32–35

Here, it accompanies the words 'But not with the weapons/Of war that thou wieldest'. Whether the text refers to Thor or to Olaf,[139] the music is clear: the old violent ways are no longer acceptable; Christianity and peace are now intertwined. Conquest is not for self-aggrandisement, but for the improvement of the conquered. A further musical connection with, and rebuke of, 'The Challenge of Thor' is the return of a melodic theme originally

[139] On a possible lack of narrative clarity in the Epilogue see Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 74.

heard *tutta forza* near the opening with the words 'Force rules the world still/Has ruled it, shall rule it/Meekness is weakness/Strength is triumphant':



Ex. 3.16. No. 2, 'I Am the God Thor', H, bb. 94–97

When heard *legato* and *pianissimo* in the Epilogue (D; b. 37), this theme is thoroughly subdued, as are the ideas that it represents. Here, accompanying the words 'Cross against corslet/Love against hatred/Peace-cry for war-cry', it captures and strengthens the idea of the pagan demise, and of admirable, Christian imperialism. The dominance of the 'peaceful' religion, and the righteous colonists, becomes even more emphatic through Elgar's use of combined soloists and chorus for the words 'Patience is powerful/He that o'ercometh/Hath power o'er the nations' (E; b. 44). This is a key statement, an apparent justification of imperial expansion, which, particularly when read in its Scriptural entirety, relates both to the story of Olaf and to nineteenth-century Britain.[140] The line is Longfellow's, but the artistic intention is Acworth's and Elgar's: late-Victorian, not-for-profit, 'White Man's Burden' British.

That these words are sung in an isolated unison is both revealing and emphatic, and the fact that each line of text is sung a third higher than its predecessor contributes to the dignified exaltation of Christianity. Where Longfellow relies on alliteration for emphasis, as in 'Patience is powerful', Elgar exploits the advantages of his medium of music by utilising the expressive capabilities of his extensive choral resources to praise those who spread their religion peacefully, as a matter of duty and for the benefit of less

[140] 'And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations' (Revelation 2:26).

civilised races, as Rudyard Kipling would encourage three years later in his famous poem of 1899.[141]

Dignified adulation is epitomised by Elgar in the freestanding chorus 'As Torrents in Summer', a substantial but calm testament to the power of faith (F; b. 55). Resisting the obvious opportunities for musical magnitude suggested by words and phrases such as 'torrents', 'suddenly rise', 'sky', 'rain', 'fountains', 'full to o'erflowing', and 'marvel', Elgar opts for a quietly potent statement using the rhythmic pattern of the transformed 'Thor' motif as his basic building block. This moment is rendered all the more effective by the fact that it is the only example of prolonged writing for unaccompanied chorus in the entire work. Indeed, such was the impact of this section of the Epilogue that Elgar wrote proudly of it in 1924:

> 28 years ago and the thing [*King Olaf*] is alive; of all the lucky accidents the PLACING of 'As torrents' was worthy of all praise.[142]

Daily Telegraph critic Joseph Bennett's observation in both his analysis and his review of *King Olaf* that 'impressiveness has no essential connection with noise' is particularly applicable to this powerful reflection on the mystery of faith,[143] in which the music goes further than the text in the expression of the Elgar–Acworth manifesto.

Elgar's management of choral forces in the Epilogue ensures that each change of vocal texture brings a new freshness and a new emphasis. Following the unaccompanied choral section, lines of immense significance in British imperial culture, lines of which Charles Spurgeon would be proud, receive special musical treatment:

> Stronger than steel
> Is the sword of the Spirit;
> Swifter than arrows

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[141] Rudyard Kipling, 'The White Man's Burden'. For full text see <http://www.kipling.org/kip_fra.htm> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[142] Edward Elgar to Ivor Atkins, 1924, cited in E. Wulstan Atkins (ed.), *The Elgar-Atkins Friendship* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1984), 374.
[143] Joseph Bennett, 'Review of *King Olaf*', *Daily Telegraph*, 31 October 1896, repr. in *An Elgar Companion*, Christopher Redwood (ed.), (Ashbourne: Moor, 1982), 14–18 (17).

The light of the truth is,
Greater than anger
Is love, and subdueth.

These are delivered first by the soprano (J; b. 98) and then by the ensemble of soloists (K; b. 113). The solo soprano has not been heard since the 'Thyri' scene (No. 14), and her appearance here creates a complete contrast with the preceding chorus, while the repetition of the verse by the trio of soloists constitutes both a reinforcement of this important portion of text and a stepping-stone to the following choral entry, where, out of the final six-line stanza of the Epilogue, Elgar builds a great amalgam of praise and affirmation for the Christian faith, exploiting the polyphonic capabilities of music to prolong symbolic lines such as 'Love is eternal' and 'God is still God/And His faith shall not fail us'. Thus the ideals and the morals of the British, Christian Empire are proclaimed.

Lest we forget that the cantata is primarily a story of an individual, Elgar and Acworth remind us of the title character's recent death with their inclusion of four lines from the Interlude that follows Longfellow's 'Saga of King Olaf':

A strain of music ends the tale,
A low, monotonous funeral wail,
That with its cadence, wild and sweet
Makes the saga more complete.

Here, Elgar's return to the work's sombre opening theme (O; b. 174) brings the ultimate focus back from the wider issues of Christianity and conquest to the fate of the eponymous hero and an acknowledgement of his central role in the Saga. The presence of the last four lines facilitates a musical ending appropriate to a tragedy, in this case one where the protagonist is killed for his staunch opposition to paganism and his promotion of the Christian cause. Unlike Longfellow's butchering warrior, Elgar's Olaf is the figurehead, the white man, whose burden, whose mission of peace and civilisation, is to be admired and promoted. Throughout the cantata, Olaf embodies the Victorian heroic

contradiction: he is a strong and fearless warrior but also a peace-loving Christian. Again, the strongest contemporary parallel is perhaps General Gordon, whom MacDonald perceives as 'both Christ-like and an empire-builder, a man of peace and a man of war'.[144]

This chapter outlines the value of exploring the libretto of *King Olaf* as a means of understanding the musical setting and the ideological purpose of this substantial and culturally significant work in the broader context of the Christian-imperial ethos of late-nineteenth-century British society, symbolised by the muscular Christian heroes of real-life and fictional adventure. The British self-image as benevolent facilitator of moral improvement in a world where superior and inferior were clearly defined is central to this contextual reading. In particular, this chapter demonstrates that the role of Harry Acworth in the formulation of the cantata's considerable ideological didacticism must be placed in the foreground of scholarly engagement with *King Olaf*, as is the case with the next instalment of Elgar–Acworth collaboration, *Caractacus*.

[144] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 87.

CHAPTER 4
CARACTACUS IN CONTEXT

> *One kingdom; but who is to be its king? Is there to be no king in it, think you, and every man to do that which is right in his own eyes? Or only kings of terror, and the obscene empires of Mammon and Belial? Or will you, youths of England, make your country again a royal throne of kings; a sceptred isle, for all the world a source of light, a centre for peace; mistress of Learning and of the Arts;—faithful guardian of great memories in the midst of irreverent and ephemeral visions;—faithful servant of time-tried principles, under temptation from fond experiments and licentious desires; and amidst the cruel and clamorous jealousies of the nations, worshipped in her strange valour of goodwill towards men?* [1]

Elgar and Acworth's 1898 cantata concerns the betrayal of the ancient British king Caractacus by an Arch-Druid, and the consequent defeat of British forces by the Roman army. The captured king is then pardoned in Rome by the emperor Claudius, who is moved by his prisoner's dignified demeanour. Again using Acworth's libretto as a key to the musical setting and to the broader cultural context—this time in relation to an overtly British, imperial work—the present chapter explores the means by which the eponymous king is recast as an idealised Christian hero, despite his pre-Christian origins, and, focusing particularly on the cantata's controversial epilogue as a defining feature of this reorientation, the chapter reconsiders widespread twentieth-century embarrassment at the work's conclusion by situating the ending in the context of nineteenth-century poetry and melodrama.

Recent articles by Charles Edward McGuire and Julian Rushton offer new perspectives on debates surrounding *Caractacus*. McGuire's 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*: the Druids, Race, and the Individual Hero' is one of a small number of studies that appreciates the cultural importance of Acworth in the ideological construction of Elgar's cantatas. In examining the collaboration of composer and librettist, McGuire concentrates on those sections of *Caractacus* in which Druids and pagan ritual play a prominent dramatic role. He illustrates the influence of Acworth by focusing on the

[1] Ruskin, *Lectures on Art*, 29.

interaction of the Druids in Scene II, tying their characteristics to the librettist's racial views, as revealed in his published works, and his previous experience of, and admiration for, 'individuals from Hindu subgroups'.[2] McGuire argues that the cantata's emphasis on themes such as 'the individual' and 'the pastoral' is just as likely to have arisen from Acworth's involvement as from Elgar's, and with this probability in mind, he calls for a broad cultural understanding of the oft-maligned libretto and of the work in its entirety:

> Merely deriding the text of this work and dismissing the cantata as a whole as outmoded, jingoistic Empire celebration misses the point. *Caractacus* and its authors, when queried deeply and properly, reveal much about this Victorian world we as scholars celebrate.[3]

Julian Rushton's recent 'Musicking *Caractacus*', as well as exploring illuminating correspondence between Elgar and the *Yorkshire Post* critic Herbert Thompson, places Elgar's cantata in a historical line both of settings of the Caractacus story itself, and of works that presaged striking aspects of the cantata, such as the aforementioned treatment of Druids, and that to which Rushton refers as the 'dramatically extraneous epilogue'.[4] Rushton draws on diverse works of art, mainly from the spheres of poetry and drama, and presents a particularly valuable discussion of William Mason's eighteenth-century poem *Caractacus* (subsequently staged; see below) as an ideological precursor to the cantata.

This chapter builds on the contributions of both McGuire and Rushton. McGuire's method of considering the content of *Caractacus* in the light of Acworth's cultural experience is carried through to other parts of the cantata, particularly the king's Lament that closes Scene IV, as well as the final scene and epilogue. To Rushton's discussion of the work's ambiguities this study adds further explorations into precedents and parallels from disciplines other than music, referring most notably to William Stewart Ross's

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[2] McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*: the Druids, Race, and the Individual Hero', in *Elgar Studies*, Grimley and Rushton (eds.), 55.
[3] *Ibid.*, 75.
[4] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', in *Music and Performance Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Zon (ed.), 233.

Caractacus the Briton, a poem which thus far has not been examined in Elgar studies, and which greatly aids the contextual understanding of the cantata. The structure of Ross's poem suggests, like the popular perception of General Gordon and other defeated imperial heroes, that for the British public, noble behaviour in defeat surpassed the fact of defeat itself—a feature emphasised in the version of *Caractacus* fashioned by Acworth and Elgar. In addition, this chapter brings a new angle—related to the recasting of *King Olaf* and to the British self-image evident there and in imperial adventure literature—to the imperial vision laid out in this work. Matthew Riley outlines the cantata's message that Britain is the superior successor of Rome:

> Today the work is best remembered for its jingoistic final chorus, which assures the audience that, despite their defeat, the British will take up the Roman mantle and build an even greater empire, one based on the "order, law and liberty" that Caractacus urges the emperor to teach his people.[5]

In this chapter, Riley's view will be augmented by the argument that one of the principal effects wrought on the Caractacus story by Acworth and Elgar was the introduction of divine endorsement, a deliberate suggestion, crafted for their late-Victorian audience, that the nineteenth-century British empire eclipsed its ancient Roman equivalent not only because it was more humane, more benevolent, more just and more improving, but because it had the Christian God on its side.

Unlike *King Olaf*, for which Longfellow's poem provided an immediate source, *Caractacus* was, with regard to the libretto, a blank canvas, and Acworth, as Robin Holloway notes, 'had to start from scratch with no prototype to build on'.[6] As a result, a comparison of the cantata with its narrative source material is greatly complicated. A further, significant, complication arises given that, in contrast to *King Olaf*, where lines of good/bad or superior/inferior are clearly drawn, the relationship between coloniser and

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[5] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 160.
[6] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', in *The Cambridge Companion to Elgar*, Grimley and Rushton (eds.), 75.

colonised in *Caractacus* is much more complex. The resolution of this ideological intricacy posed a much greater narrative challenge for the librettist, and reflects a shift in imperial discourse more broadly in British society in the two years since the earlier Elgar–Acworth collaboration.

Sources

In the 'Argument', printed with the score and the programme notes of *Caractacus* and signed 'H. A. A.', Acworth outlines the relationship of the libretto to history, tradition, and fiction:

> The general lines of history—or, failing history, of tradition—have been followed. [...] Caractacus's appearance before Claudius in Rome, his bold defence, and the pardon of himself and his daughter are historical. Orbin is an imaginary character.[7]

This extract suggests that Acworth regarded Caractacus's encounter with Claudius, and in particular the king's brave and dignified actions in the presence of the Roman emperor, as the central dramatic moment of the plot. Comparisons of the cantata's libretto with a number of probable source texts reveal that this important—and symbolic—moment was emphasised carefully and distinctively by Acworth and Elgar for a Victorian public seeking comfort and reassurance at a time of sharply rising imperial uncertainty and insecurity.

The absence of extant written communication between Elgar and Acworth means that the precise source material used for compiling the libretto is uncertain. Anderson and Moore assert that:

> Acworth's libretto for *Caractacus* was entirely his own; but for the essence of the story he could draw on the classical authors Tacitus and Dio Cassius.[8]

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[7] Harry A. Acworth, 'Argument', *Caractacus: A Cantata*, Elgar Complete Edition full score (London and Sevenoaks: Novello, 1985), front matter.
[8] Robert Anderson and Jerrold Northrop Moore (eds.), 'Foreword', *Caractacus*, ECE full score, v.

While the *Roman History* of Dio Cassius makes only brief reference to the encounter of Caractacus with the Romans (see below), the *Annals* of Cornelius Tacitus not only describe the reputation of the king and his battle with the army of Roman commander Ostorius Scapula, but also raise a number of pertinent ideological points concerning the morality of imperial conquest.[9]

Tacitus and Dio Cassius

The Roman political historian and variously senator, consul, and proconsul of Asia, Publius Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56–c. 120) records that at the time of the battle between Caractacus and the Roman army, 'the war in Britain was in its ninth year',[10] and 'the situation inherited by the imperial governor Publius Ostorius Scapula was chaotic'.[11] For Tacitus, the British natives were characterised by ferocity and by faith in the perseverance of their chieftain:

> The natural ferocity of the inhabitants was intensified by their belief in the prowess of Caratacus [*sic*], whose many undefeated battles—and even many victories—had made him pre-eminent among British chieftains. His deficiency in strength was compensated by superior cunning and topographical knowledge.[12]

Having documented the 'great victory' of the Romans and the defeat and capture of Caractacus,[13] Tacitus gives a lengthy account of the king's speech in Rome and his pardon by the emperor Claudius:

> Had my lineage and rank been accompanied by only moderate success, I should have come to this city as friend rather than prisoner, and you would not have disdained to ally yourself with one so nobly born, the ruler of so

[9] In his exploration of the cantata's Druidic aspects, McGuire lists a number of other classical sources and states that Acworth's reliance on these is 'obvious from the ritual nature of the Druidic scenes'. The sources include 'Caesar, Cicero, Diodorus, Strabo, Suetonius, Pomponius Mela, Lucan and Pliny'. See McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*', 59.
[10] Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, Michael Grant (trans.), (London: Cassell, 1963), 258.
[11] *Ibid.*, 256.
[12] *Ibid.*, 257. The spelling of the king's name varies in the sources. Translations of Tacitus and Dio Cassius use 'Caratacus'.
[13] *Ibid.*, 258.

> many nations. As it is, humiliation is my lot, glory yours. I had horses, men, arms, wealth. Are you surprised I am sorry to lose them? If you want to rule the world, does it follow that everyone else welcomes enslavement? If I had surrendered without a blow before being brought before you, neither my downfall nor your triumph would have become famous. If you execute me, they will be forgotten. Spare me, and I shall be an everlasting token of your mercy!
>
> Claudius responded by pardoning him and his wife and brothers.[14]

The challenge to imperial entitlement put forward here by Caractacus is ideologically problematic in the context of late-Victorian Britain. The Tacitus scholar Ronald Syme explores Tacitus's own attitude to empire, asserting that the historian's writings in fact represent a 'fervid denunciation of imperial conquest' and quoting Tacitus's argument, outlined in his *Agricola*, that:

> The Romans call it empire, it is in fact murder and rapine and profit; they make a desolation and they call it peace.[15]

Giving an overview of the writings of Tacitus, Syme draws a conclusion demonstrating that diverse interpretations of imperial motives were as resonant in ancient Rome as they were in nineteenth-century Britain:

> There was a conventional theme—Rome's mission of peace in the world, with concord, prosperity, and ordered life. That could be assumed or disregarded. No other writer reveals so sharply the double face of Roman rule. At the same time, he keeps a sense of proportion. He knew that the Roman power was something more than a product of craft and violence.[16]

The conflict of benevolence and violence presented in the writings of Tacitus necessitated careful handling by Elgar and Acworth for their audience in the modern imperial centre. The manner in which they sought to effect this delicate balance is central to the design of the cantata and will be discussed later in this chapter.

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[14] *Ibid.*, 258.
[15] Ronald Syme, *Tacitus*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 529. The passage cited is from Tacitus's *Agricola*, 30.7.
[16] Syme, *Tacitus*, 529.

A more concise, less flamboyant description of Caractacus's encounter with the Roman authorities is given by the administrator and historian Dio Cassius (c. 150–235) in his record of the year 52 AD:

> Caratacus, a barbarian chieftain who was captured and brought to Rome and later pardoned by Claudius, wandered about the city after his liberation; and after beholding its splendour and its magnitude he exclaimed: 'And can you, then, who have got such possessions and so many of them, covet our poor tents?'.[17]

Unlike Tacitus, Dio Cassius does not make reference to the demeanour of Caractacus before the Roman emperor. Like Tacitus, however, he too raises uncomfortable issues for members of an imperial metropolitan society possessed of a particular self-image, in this case through a depiction of the defeated chieftain questioning the need for the already powerful and prosperous Rome to pursue further expansion and conquest.

William Mason's *Caractacus*

The narrative attractions of the ancient Caractacus story had not gone unnoticed prior to Elgar and Acworth's version: the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought forth several representations of the story in literature and theatre:

> Caractacus had long featured in standard histories such as Thomas Carte's *General History of England* (1747) and Oliver Goldsmith's *History of England* (1764) (partly derived from it) and was seen as a patriotic hero, a national champion comparable to the German Hermann or Arminius or the French Vercingetorix. He had been celebrated in William Mason's play *Caractacus* (1759), sculpted by Thomas Banks (1774) (at Stowe School) and J. H. Foley (1860) (in London's Mansion House), drawn by G. F. Watts (1843) (first prize in the Palace of Westminster competition), and even set to music in a ballet by Sir Henry Bishop (1808).[18]

[17] Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History*, Earnest Cary (trans.), vol. 8 (London: William Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1925), Book LXI, Epitome, 23.
[18] Norman Vance, *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 206. Vance refers here to Mason's 'play'. The 1756 publication was a poem, which was adapted for the stage in 1776.

The English cleric, author and garden designer William Mason's (1725–97) *Caractacus: A Dramatic Poem* was published in 1759,[19] and, according to Julian Rushton, adapted in 1776 'for the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, with an elaborate musical score (unfortunately lost) by Thomas Arne'.[20] Mason's *Caractacus* features prominently in historical studies of Druidism and in analyses of Victorian attitudes to the Roman Empire (outlined below) but, as Rushton states in his recent article on Elgar's *Caractacus*, the version has not been examined in relation to the cantata:

> Elgar's choice of subject and the composition of *Caractacus* are covered in recent literature without, so far as I am aware, any mention of Mason.[21]

Rushton undertakes a substantial comparison of the poem and the cantata. Basic disparities include, for example, the names of some of the lead characters:

> As is common in legendary dramas, Mason played freely with names. Caractacus's queen, already captured by the Romans, is Guideria; Arviragus is his son and Evelina his daughter.[22]

The different time frame of the two versions is also mentioned by Rushton, who points out that the action of Mason's drama 'begins after Caractacus's defeat',[23] while the cantata begins much earlier, before the battle commences. Druids play a more pronounced and pervasive role in Mason's poem than in the cantata, featuring more or less throughout. As Ronald Hutton notes in his study of Druidism in Britain, the poem 'focused directly upon Druids'.[24] In the cantata, though the Druids play a significant part,

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[19] William Mason, *Caractacus: A Dramatic Poem: Written on the Model of the Ancient Greek Tragedy by the Author of Elfrida* (London: Knapton and Dodsley, 1759). For further information on Mason, see Jules Smith, 'Mason, William (1725–1797)', *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18293> [accessed 23 October 2012].

[20] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 222. Rushton notes that this adaptation was preceded on the London stage by an opera entitled *Carattaco* (1767), by Johann Christian Bach. See Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', n. 8.

[21] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 224. Mason's *Caractacus* is in fact mentioned briefly by Matthew Riley in his *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 161.

[22] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 223. The daughter's name is given as 'Evilina' in the version of Mason's poem available at <www.archive.org>.

[23] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus'*, 222.

[24] Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 117.

it is much more short-lived, confined mainly to the ritual and betrayal outlined in the cantata's second and third scenes. Rushton asserts that both versions reveal their reliance on classical sources, having 'inherited ideas about British religion from Caesar, Tacitus (female druids), and Pliny (mistletoe, oak, and gory sacrifice)';[25] and finds occasional similarities of rhyming structure:

> Mason's drama unfolds in unrhymed iambic pentameters, a neo-classical application of Shakespearean blank verse. Passages intended for musical setting are in rhymed iambic tetrameters, which Acworth also employs for a passage of ritual.[26]

However, it is not known whether Acworth was familiar with Mason's *Caractacus*. Rushton raises the possibility that he did not know the work, but that he used the same sources to piece together the elements of his libretto.[27] In any case, Mason's poem was influential at least for several decades after its publication. According to Rushton, the dramatised version was 'freely adapted as a French opera for Antonio Sacchini, *Arvire et Evélina* (1788)', while a later adaptation, by Lorenzo da Ponte (1797), 'was even advertised as *Evelina, or the Triumph of the English* [*sic*] *over the Romans*'.[28] Sam Smiles records that the popularity of the Caractacus story throughout the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries owed much to Mason's poem, which achieved considerable commercial success:

> Interest in Caractacus had revived thanks to William Mason's *Caractacus, a dramatic Poem*, published in 1759 and republished in 17 different editions between 1759 and 1811.[29]

Discussing Mason's utilisation of sources in his dramatic poem, Hutton outlines an approach that is deeply resonant in relation to the creative methods of Elgar and

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[25] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 225.
[26] *Ibid.*, 225.
[27] *Ibid.*, 225.
[28] *Ibid.*, 223.
[29] Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 154.

Acworth over a century later, when the composer and librettist reworked the story specifically for the late-Victorian market:

> Mason had read [John] Toland to improve his knowledge of Druids, and gained much other information on the historical context from [his friend, the poet Thomas] Gray. His poem was based on the Roman attack on Anglesea by Suetonius Paulinus. With an eye to its market, however, he mangled even the apparently known historical facts beyond recognition, transporting the genuine British hero Caractacus there from a different decade, and crediting the Romans with a gallantry completely at variance with everything in Tacitus's account of the attack.[30]

Mason's eighteenth-century reading of his target audience was successful, as Hutton demonstrates:

> The result was a bestseller, which went through another edition before the end of the year and four more before 1777, when it was turned into a stage play as well.[31]

Local Histories

In their foreword to the ECE full score of *Caractacus*, Anderson and Moore suggest that Acworth and Elgar may have used a local history publication for information beyond that contained in the classical sources:

> Acworth probably found background detail for the libretto in a book about the British Camp on the Herefordshire Beacon by James McKay, published locally 20 years earlier.[32]

Charles Edward McGuire challenges this assumption, noting that Acworth did not arrive in the area until the mid-1890s, and drawing attention to a second possibility, which McGuire regards as more feasible:

> Similar enthusiasm for projected Worcestershire Celtic history may be found in a second local source, William Salt Brassington's *Historic Worcestershire: Worcestershire Historical, Biographical, Traditional, Legendary and Romantic*. This book was a more likely source for aspects

[30] Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, 117.
[31] *Ibid.*, 118.
[32] Anderson and Moore, 'Foreword', *Caractacus*, ECE full score, v.

> of the libretto, being a privately published history that included Elgar among the subscribers.[33]

The difficulty of tracing the sources used by Elgar and Acworth emerges when we take into account that wholesale copying between historical studies was widespread and apparently unobjectionable.[34] Taking for example an excerpt from McKay's *The British Camp on the Herefordshire Beacon*, in which he describes the role and status of Druids, it is clear that isolating a particular source may prove impossible:

> The Druids were the first and most distinguished order among Britons; they were chosen out of the best families; and the honours of their birth, joined with those of their function, procured them the highest veneration among the people.[35]

The same description, with identical or near-identical wording, may be found in a host of other publications, some dating from much earlier, and some substantially later, than McKay's book. It is used, for example, in *The Royal English Dictionary, or, a Treasury of the English Language* (1763), again in *Bell's New Pantheon; or, Historical Dictionary of the Gods, Demi-Gods, Heroes, and Fabulous Personages of Antiquity* (1790) and in *Encyclopaedia, or, a Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature*, published in 1797. It features in *The Annual Register, or a view of the History, Politics and Literature for the Year 1804*, published in that year by Rivington, London, and in Ezekiel Blomfield's *A General View of the World: Geographical, Historical and Philosophical, on a Plan Entirely New*, published in 'two huge volumes' in 1807, and described in the *DNB* as showing 'wide but ill-digested reading'.[36] A later example, *Arthur's Home Magazine* (1870), published by Timothy Shay Arthur, contains almost the

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[33] McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*', 62.
[34] Bashford notes a similar attitude to copying in the area of programme notes for nineteenth-century musical festivals, prior to the Copyright Act of 1911. See Christina Bashford, 'Educating England: Networks of Programme-Note Provision in the Nineteenth Century', in *Music in the British Provinces*, Cowgill and Holman (eds.), 349–76.
[35] James McKay, *The British Camp on the Herefordshire Beacon: Fifteen Short Essays on Scenes and Incidents in the Lives of the Ancient Britons* (Malvern: Advertiser Office, 1875), 30.
[36] A. B. Grosart, 'Blomfield, Ezekiel (1778–1818)', K. D. Reynolds (rev.), *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2670> [accessed 23 October 2012].

same wording,[37] and many further instances from the nineteenth century may be found.[38] It seems, then, that such details about Druids in rural England were widespread in educational literature throughout the century, and McKay's publication of 1875, therefore, takes its place in a long line of histories which draw on the same general information. Acworth and Elgar may have used McKay's book—it does not seem unreasonable that a book published twenty years earlier would survive in the Malvern area and make its way into the hands of the composer or librettist—or they may have had access to one of the many other publications presenting similar information to that given by McKay and Brassington. In any case, stories of Druids, their ancient status and rituals, and their connection to the story of Caractacus, appear to have been widely known among nineteenth-century readers. All of these local histories played into public consciousness of the ancient king as a symbol of British heroism, and, together with the accounts of Tacitus and Dio Cassius, they provided Acworth with the historical and traditional bases for his late-Victorian interpretation of the Caractacus story, tailor-made to appeal to the Leeds Festival audience.[39]

The Appeal of *Caractacus*

Holloway speculates about the reasons behind Elgar's choice of subject for the Leeds Festival:

> The appeal to Elgar is strong and manifold—the nostalgic sadness of a lost but noble cause, the beloved boyhood landscape, the impulse from romance-spinning with his mother, are irresistible.[40]

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[37] Timothy Shay Arthur and Virginia Townsend (eds.), *Arthur's Home Magazine*, 35 (Philadelphia: T. S. Arthur & Sons, 1870), 264.
[38] Via a simple internet search.
[39] Anderson and Moore note another source: they record that Elgar looked at the score of a 'Caractacus' setting by a composer called John Reed (published by Novello), but for whatever reason Elgar 'decided that he must have his own libretto'. See 'Foreword', *Caractacus*, ECE full score, v.
[40] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 75.

To this we can add the popular topics of Druidism, heroism, and the Roman Empire—major features of the story likely to appeal in Elgar's cultural context—along with the potential for facilitating attractive solos, ensembles and choruses in a musical version, and for providing the audience with a reassuring statement of the late-nineteenth-century British self-image.

Druidism

A strong reason for the appeal of Caractacus as a topic is the presence of Druids as a prominent feature of the story.[41] Hutton outlines the popularity of Druidism in nineteenth-century Britain, noting for example the various literary forms in which Druids appear. He states that Druidism was a major element of general histories long before Elgar's *Caractacus*:

> By the second half of the eighteenth century, the Druids featured prominently in every history of Britain, local, regional or national, that dealt with the ancient past.[42]

Hutton further illustrates the prevalence of Druidism in nineteenth-century literature with his statement that Druids were 'fully established as the leading and representative figures of the earliest British past', and 'featured as major players in any interpretation of that past, in English works of history, literature, art and theology'.[43] Hutton draws particular attention to William Wordsworth (1770–1850), 'one of the leading British poets of all time and the one who wrote most often about Druids',[44] to the politician and poet Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803–73), 'who dealt with the Druids in his epic poem on King Arthur, published in 1849',[45] and to Tennyson, who wrote his poem 'The Druid's Prophesies' in 1827, for a competition at the University of Cambridge for 'the best poem on the Druids

[41] McGuire explores in detail the cantata's treatment of the Druids in 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*'.
[42] Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, 183.
[43] *Ibid.*, 210.
[44] *Ibid.*, 183.
[45] *Ibid.*, 214.

submitted by an undergraduate'.[46] Sam Smiles refers to another artistic manifestation of Druidism:

> For most Victorians, however, the most ready access to Druidic ceremony would have been in the opera house. Vincenzo Bellini's *Norma* (1831) focused attention on the Druids quite decisively and its popularity in England must have helped keep the subject at the forefront of public awareness.[47]

Smiles outlines the popularity of *Norma* by noting that it was staged at Covent Garden every year from 1847 to 1861. Rushton, too, acknowledges the probable influence of *Norma* on public awareness of Druidism, and adds another musical connection:

> A further link with eighteenth-century interest in druids is provided by C.V. Stanford's setting of Gray's *The Bard*, begun in 1892, and published and performed at the Cardiff festival in 1895.[48]

In addition to these artistic references to Druidism, Hutton provides evidence of a widespread trend for 'the formation of societies and clubs that took the name of Druid'.[49]

Victorian Britain and the Roman Empire

The construction of a link with ancient society is, according to Smiles, 'a process of self-validation', in which 'present concerns are projected into the past to produce the desired image of antiquity'.[50] Norman Vance outlines the Victorian, and universal, tendency to admire and seek to emulate ancient ideals:

> Like everybody else, the Victorians tried to make sense of themselves and their own times by looking at other epochs and constructing patterns of similarity and difference.[51]

In the case of Victorian Britain, one epoch in particular appealed for this purpose of identification and comparison: that of ancient Rome:

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[46] *Ibid.*, 211.
[47] Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 108.
[48] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 224.
[49] *Ibid.*, 215.
[50] Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 2.
[51] Vance, *Victorians and Ancient Rome*, vi.

> In politics, in war and in civil engineering, as well as in literature, there was a widespread sense of ultimate connection with Rome.[52]

Riley asserts that Rome was viewed as an imperial model for British society throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century:

> Ever since Disraeli had persuaded Parliament in 1876 to confer the title Empress of India on Queen Victoria, Britain had become consciously imperialist, and naturally looked to ancient Rome as an example, both in attitude and language.[53]

The availability of its literature allowed an image of the Roman Empire to come to life in the minds of a wide range of nineteenth-century British readers. According to Vance:

> In the course of the nineteenth century readers of modest classical attainment or none had available to them an increasing number of contemporary or reprinted translations in verse and prose.[54]

Classical texts appeared in part or in full in series designed to bring the literature of Rome to Victorian readers of all kinds, resulting in a widespread awareness of the genre and the era:

> Some of the most important elementary introductions, incorporating translated passages and extensive paraphrasing or summary of classical texts, appeared in William Blackwood's series of Ancient Classics for English Readers (1870–1932), intended particularly for ladies who were not normally taught much Latin or Greek.[55]

The needs of schools were satisfied by editions of works, for example by Virgil and Lucretius, suitable for young readers. Vance notes that 'large-scale editions were followed by smaller ones for the use of schools'.[56]

Theatrical manifestations of Roman culture also aided the retrospective imagination of the ancient empire, not only for the Victorian public, but for writers dealing with the topic:

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[52] *Ibid.*, vi.
[53] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 164.
[54] Vance, *Victorians and Ancient Rome*, viii.
[55] *Ibid.*, viii.
[56] *Ibid.*, viii.

> Shakespeare's Roman plays in performance, particularly with elaborate sets and costumes, helped the general public to visualize Roman life and provided novelists dealing with ancient Rome and the early Church with a convenient reference point. *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* in particular had enjoyed renewed success in the nineteenth-century theatre and supplied Victorian readers and writers with models of imaginative realization and dramatic structure.[57]

Vance explains that it is reasonable to assume a high level of accuracy with respect to the images of ancient Rome presented in these works, as

> ever more elaborate productions of both plays, drawing on recent archaeology, made idealized Roman scenes and more or less historically correct costumes widely familiar.[58]

Having explored many instances of Roman influence on nineteenth-century Britain, and presented considerable evidence and argument to substantiate his findings, Vance acknowledges that the late-Victorian relationship with ancient Rome was, as with many ideas pertaining to the late Victorians, 'complicated', and that the differences between eras were as important as the similarities:

> Being different was part of the appeal of ancient Rome to the late Victorians: in an era of sombre frock-coats and the widow of Windsor its history and literature could provide colour and spectacle, on the dramatic and operatic stage and in paintings, as well as on the page.[59]

In other words, the spectacle associated with imperial Rome provided a sparkling contrast to certain visual aspects of Victorian everyday life. Thus, Vance emphasises that while Britain was in some respects viewed as the heir of Rome, part of the fascination was based on the exoticism of difference. Notwithstanding such contrasts, important, if idealised, continuities were asserted. Vance makes a significant point of relevance to Elgar's choice of *Caractacus* for Leeds:

> Late Victorians, particularly in the north of England, liked to see themselves as they saw the Romans, as successful engineers and efficient rulers.[60]

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[57] *Ibid.*, 209.
[58] *Ibid.*, 210.
[59] *Ibid.*, 199.
[60] *Ibid.*, 198.

By linking the solid disciplines of engineering and government, Vance alludes to the popular perception of British rule as competent and reliable, possessed of industrial and administrative skills that could benefit the world far beyond Britain.

Caractacus: a Reassuring Icon

Vance produces substantial evidence to show that the story of Caractacus was popular and widely admired in nineteenth-century Britain. He asserts that the ancient king was viewed by Victorians as 'a father-figure of British nationality, almost a saint and a martyr within the spectrum of possible heroes'.[61] Moreover, Vance regards this popularity as a telling insight into Victorian thought. Caractacus, he states,

> enjoyed a nineteenth-century afterlife in Britain, on the page and on the stage, in music and the visual arts, in middle to lowbrow as well as in highbrow culture. This now-forgotten fame affords unexpected insights into the preoccupations and tensions of nineteenth-century society.[62]

Referring to the relative success of different literary incarnations of the story, Vance demonstrates that Caractacus and imperial adventure literature made a winning combination:

> The enormous expansion of the reading public and the new availability of cheap reading material for mass audiences coincided with the popular enthusiasm for empire. In an earlier epoch, *Caractacus: A Metrical Sketch in Twelve Parts* (1832) had had little impact. But *Caractacus, Champion of the Arena* (c. 1885), an illustrated boys' adventure-story selling at a shilling, was much more exciting.[63]

Thus, the illustrated story took flight when combined with the public fascination for ancient empire. Based on her extensive study of illustrated stories, Rosemary Mitchell is unequivocal about their impact on the reading public: 'It is abundantly obvious that the

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[61] Norman Vance, 'Roman Heroism and the Problems of Nineteenth-Century Empire: Aeneas and Caractacus' in *Heroic Reputations and Exemplary Lives*, Geoffrey Cubitt and Allen Warren (eds.), (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 142–156 (142).
[62] *Ibid.*, 142.
[63] *Ibid.*, 154.

Victorian reader took illustrations very seriously'.[64] It is probable, therefore, that the story and image of Caractacus were firmly planted in late-Victorian consciousness. Regarding G. A. Henty's popular *Beric the Briton: A Story of the Roman Invasion*, Vance notes that 'Caractacus himself is mentioned only in passing, but Beric is partly modelled on him',[65] demonstrating once again the king's influence and literary permeation. Significantly, Vance suggests that Caractacus was resurrected as a source of inspiration particularly in times of difficulty or fear for the British people:

> Under the stimulus or perceived threat of foreign foes, usually French, Caractacus was retrospectively constructed as a patriotic hero, a national or proto-national champion.[66]

According to this line of argument, the timing of the Leeds commission may have much to do with Elgar's choice of topic. Just a year before illusions of invincibility were shattered by the Boer War, and as other imperial powers grew in industrial strength, naval capability and global influence, Elgar may have judged that *Caractacus* would provide the ideal comfort for the festival audience at Leeds. Indeed, the cantata's text contains a direct reference to the threat of competing imperial aspirants. The fourth verse of the epilogue exhorts the British people to withstand external pressures:

> Britons alert! And fear not,
> Though round your path of pow'r,
> Opposing cohorts gather,
> And jealous tyrants low'r; [VI: RN 54][67]

The threat is felt keenly through the use of rolling snare drum to accompany 'though round your path of pow'r', while the lines 'opposing cohorts gather/And jealous tyrants low'r' are set in a defiant unison. The accompaniment for this section of text is overtly

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[64] Rosemary Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image: 1830–70* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), 21.
[65] Vance, 'Roman Heroism', 154. Riley also refers to Henty's novel as a possible model for *Caractacus*. See *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 164.
[66] Vance, 'Roman Heroism', 151.
[67] The use of Rehearsal Number (RN) reflects the layout of the ECE full score.

military in tone, with brass to the forefront of the texture, and here, as elsewhere in the work, a judicious use of unison to express strength and solidarity.

An embodiment of the strength and solidarity sought by the British public at this time of heightened anxiety could be found in the person of Caractacus. Smiles discusses the popular perception of the ancient king as created by depictions in visual art that conform to the image of the king as a source of national inspiration:

> Caractacus is aligned with an innate nobility of spirit capable of sustaining him even in defeat. Caractacus in chains before Claudius predominates over all other versions of his history.[68]

Certain influential artworks played a role in initiating and preserving this popular image of the noble hero. One such work was Francis Hayman's much-copied *The Noble Behaviour of Caractacus, Before Emperor Claudius of Rome* (1751), which, Smiles notes, 'appears to have inaugurated this tradition' of depicting the king in a dignified stance before the emperor.[69] According to Smiles, the descriptive text accompanying Hayman's drawing was instrumental in cementing this image in the mind's eye of the general public. Smiles explains, incorporating extracts from the descriptive text:

> Its attendant letter-press articulates the features of the story that were to remain dominant in subsequent visual elucidations of the theme. Caractacus, 'this illustrious Prisoner, who had so bravely resisted the Power of the *Romans* for upwards of nine Years' is brought before the Emperor and Empress. Hayman shows the moment after his speech to Claudius
>
> > 'so sensible and affecting, yet with an Air and Manner so noble, and so much superior to his present Fortunes, that the Emperor, struck with the Greatness of his Mind and the Gallantry of his Behaviour, immediately order's [*sic*] his Chains to be taken off, and restor'd his whole Family to Liberty'.[70]

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[68] Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 153.

[69] *Ibid.*, 153. Numerous visual depictions of Caractacus before Claudius, many of them after Hayman, may be viewed in the online collection of the British Museum. See <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx>, using the search term 'Caractacus'. Riley, too, notes Hayman's initiation of an 'iconographic tradition' but does not expand on its interpretative relevance to the cantata. See *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 162.

[70] Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 153. The text cited may be found in Ralph Griffiths and G. E. Griffiths, *The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal, giving a candid Account, with Abstracts of, or Extracts from, the New Books and Pamphlets, Published in Great-Britain and Ireland, as they come out*, vol. VII (London: R. Griffiths, 1753), 279–280.

Smiles asserts that Hayman was 'genuinely inventive in his personification of the British chief' with regard to appearance and proud stance.[71] Caractacus was the subject of later artworks by Henry Fuseli, William Hamilton, Thomas Banks, John Linnell, and others, with several of these in turn the bases of later engravings. Such images do more than simply depict the scene. In Andrew Birrell's 1792 engraving of Henry Fuseli's painting *Caractacus at the Tribunal of Claudius at Rome,* it is clear that the king is presented in a manner that is intended to produce a particular effect.[72] A noble, defiant Caractacus stands upright in a swathe of light in the centre of the image, his arm raised, his strength evident through clearly defined muscles, his heroic features triumphing over his prisoner's garb. By contrast, Claudius is seated in relative darkness, his legs crossed, his body turned away, his features blurred. There is no doubt as to which man is intended as an emblem of strength, bravery and resistance. In a similar vein, Jodi Mikalachki observes in her survey of early-modern British histories that, in accounts of the capture of Caractacus, the admirable character of the defeated king is emphasised:

> Caractacus's manliness, his Roman *virtus*, is the focus of early modern accounts of his uprising. The patriotic oration Caractacus delivers before Claudius is never condemned.[73]

The overall impression given by these histories, Mikalachi states, is that the king

> so distinguished himself by the dignity of his speech and bearing that he won freedom and commendation of his manly courage from Claudius himself.[74]

In general, Mikalachki concludes, Caractacus as presented in widely available histories of the nation 'wins unqualified historiographical praise for both his initial resistance and his

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[71] Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity*, 153.
[72] Andrew Birrell, *Caractacus at the Tribunal of Claudius at Rome*, engraving after a painting by Henry Fuseli, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-pga-00226. Image available at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Caractacus-Claudius-Birrell-Fuseli.jpeg> [accessed 23 October 2012].
[73] Jodi Mikalachki, 'The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain: Cymbeline and Early Modern English Nationalism', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46/3 (Autumn 1995): 301–322 (310).
[74] *Ibid.*, 310.

eventual submission to Rome'.[75] Thus, his heroism and nobility shown in defeat eclipse the fact of the defeat itself. This aspect of the story is central to Elgar's musical setting—and related to the fate of real imperial icons such as General Gordon—and will be discussed below.

In line with the characteristics of Victorian heroes outlined in Chapters 1 and 3, Vance suggests another angle to the popularity of Caractacus in nineteenth-century Britain, as he notes the potential for exploiting an imagined Christian side of the first-century British king:

> The appeal of Caractacus in middle-class Protestant England was domestic and religious as well as public: it was not just that he was British and a patriot admired even by the conquering Romans but that he was an exemplary married man with a family and that with some ingenuity he could also be linked with the early days of Christianity.[76]

Local historian McKay makes a valiant effort to relate Caractacus to Christianity in his *British Camp on the Herefordshire Beacon*:

> Whether Caractacus himself was ever brought to the faith of Christ we cannot say; but there can be little real doubt that, even if we reject, as pure legends, the story of the conversion of his father and daughter, he did hear the love of the Saviour of men proclaimed.[77]

McKay's connection reflects the general nineteenth-century desire to associate military heroes with Christianity, evident with regard both to heroes of fiction and to real-life imperial role-models. Acworth and Elgar adhere to this tendency by constructing a truly Christian persona for their pre-British-Christian title character.

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[75] *Ibid.*, 310.
[76] Vance, 'Roman Heroism', 151.
[77] McKay, *British Camp on the Herefordshire Beacon*, 175.

Constructing the Hero: The King's Lament

As argued in Chapter 3, in *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf* Elgar and Acworth transform Longfellow's Norse protagonist into a model Christian hero, whose moral value for Britain is clearly implied. In *Caractacus*, the hero is specifically British, and, while not specifically religious, is imbued with the Christian characteristics associated with his nation and its heroes. A principal feature of British heroism was the maintenance of dignity in defeat, as displayed for example by muscular Christian champions Hedley Vicars at Sevastopol (1855), Henry Havelock at Lucknow (1857) and Gordon at Khartoum (1885). Caractacus's nobility and humanity in defeat are carefully set out by Acworth and Elgar in the Lament that closes the cantata's Scene IV. Here, Caractacus calls on his slain soldiers to bear witness to his conduct as military leader:

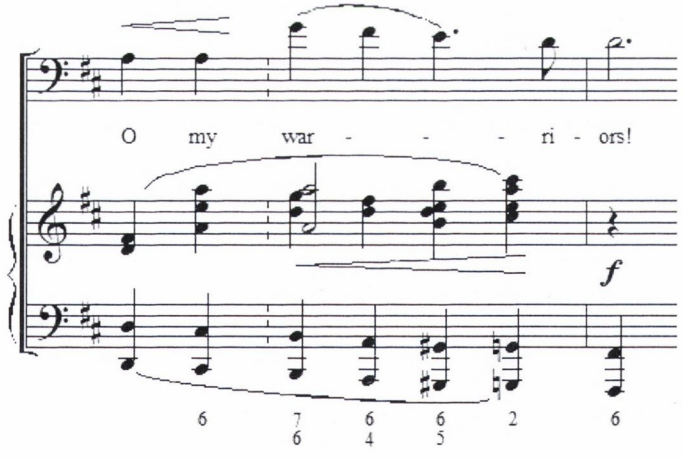
> O my warriors, tell me truly,
> O'er the red graves where ye lie,
> That your monarch led you duly,
> First to charge and last to fly:
>
> Speak, ah speak, beloved voices,
> From the chambers where ye feast,
> Where the war god stern rejoices
> That his host has been increas'd. [IV: RN 24]

The king's concern and fondness for his charges, his steadfastness in strife, and his focus on community over personal gain are strongly emphasised in Acworth's libretto. Elgar further underlines the Lament, and consequently the admirable Christian attributes of Caractacus portrayed therein, by setting this section in 7/4 time, a highly unusual move and unique in his early choral works. Holloway regards the Lament as 'one of the score's manifest high points', and draws attention to the consequence of Elgar's unusual setting: 'It transforms the regular four-beat clunk of Acworth's text [...] into a supple 7/4

(3+2+2)'.[78] According to Holloway, the composer's decision here succeeds in creating a nuanced sense of dignity and nobility out of four-square poetry:

> Elgar's effecting this by play of regular and irregular shows high rhetorical art, but what strikes one is how effortless and uneccentric the rhythm is: everything moves with natural eloquence, the very accents of dignified public elegy.[79]

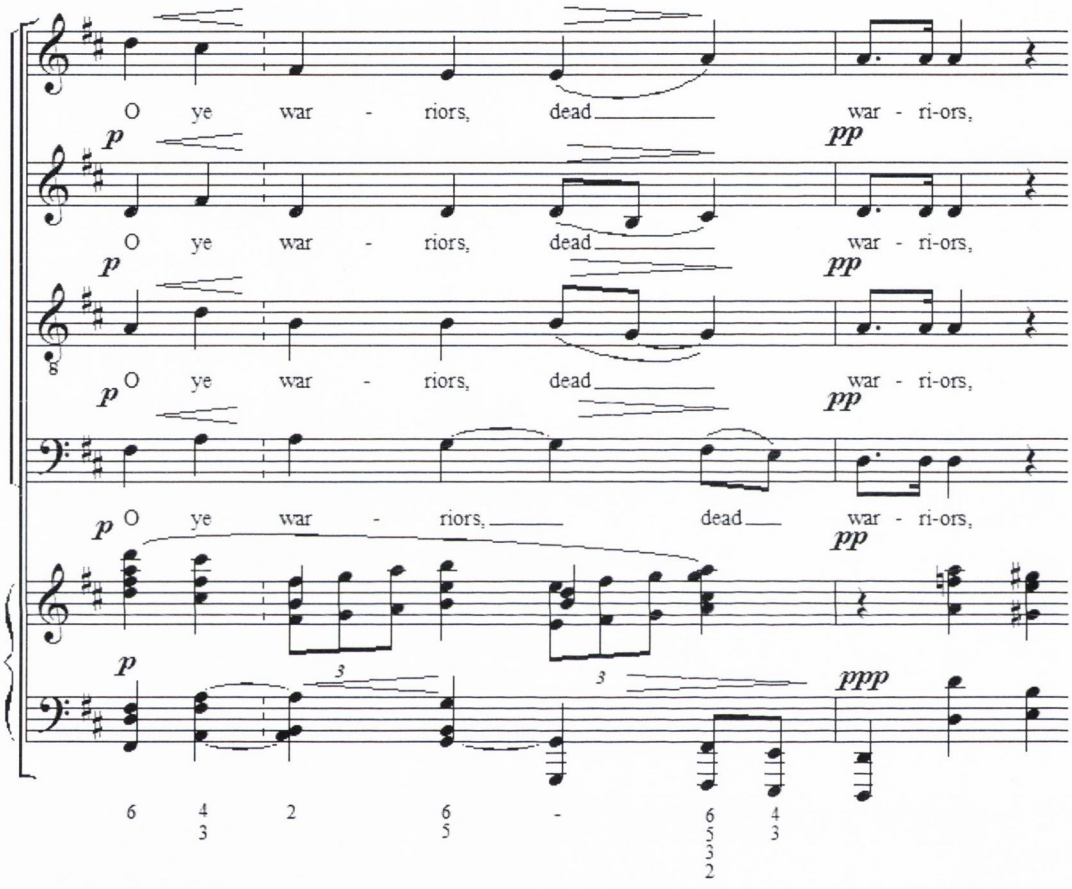
It is undoubtedly a striking section of the work, and has the air of a carefully considered compositional decision: Elgar fashions a radically different rhythmic effect to that suggested by Acworth's trochaic metre. In doing so, the composer repeats selected phrases of text that contribute to the scene's clear promotion of noble bravery, of magnanimous muscular Christianity. After the first four lines of the Lament, the words 'O my warriors!' are repeated passionately, with the bass Caractacus leaping to and descending from a high 'G' and Elgar avoiding bald statements of power by eschewing 5/3 chords almost entirely at this point:



Ex. 4.1. *Caractacus*, Scene IV, 'Lament', 5 after RN 24

This judicious setting of the repeated words accentuates the king's care for his troops and his personal grief at their demise, which take precedence over the fact of defeat in battle. The chorus, at this point occupying an unspecified dramatic role, echoes the king's

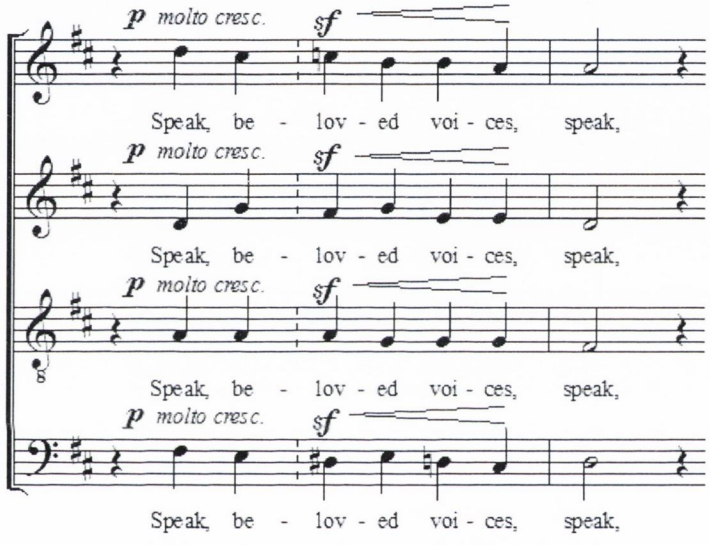
[78] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 77.
[79] *Ibid.*, 77–78.

mourning, gently lamenting the British dead in a manner that avoids 5/3 chords entirely until the *pianissimo* phrase ending (Ex. 4.2), where the effect is further softened, even personalised, by the absence of chordal accompaniment, leaving only a bare 'D' in the low strings before moving into a series of modulations:

Ex. 4.2. *Caractacus*, Scene IV, 'Lament', 3 before RN 25

A similar use of repetition occurs as Caractacus calls on his troops to bear witness to his selfless endurance:

> Say, too, when the fight was ending,
> That with glazing eyes ye saw
> Me, my quiv'ring ranks defending
> From the greedy Roman maw. [2 after RN 26]

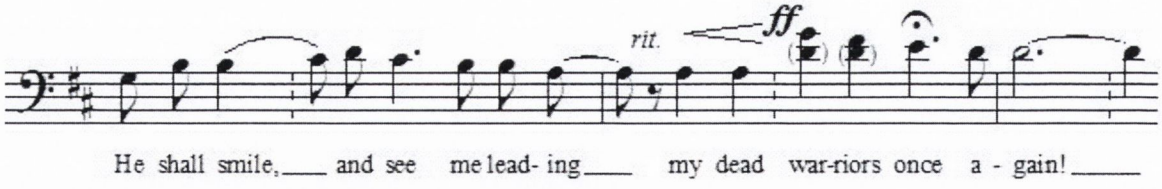
Elgar's repetition of 'my quiv'ring ranks defending' (2 before RN 27) again highlights the perseverance of the king for the good of his fading charges. 5/3 chords are scarce here and throughout the whole Lament, with the result that the show of musical muscle that

might be expected from such military language is avoided, and the admirable personal attributes of Caractacus himself are prioritised, as those of the Christian hero Olaf had been two years previously. Even the powerful image of the 'greedy Roman maw' (1 before RN 27) is de-emphasised by the lack of any cadence, and by the use of a single note 'A' (albeit in multiple octaves) for the final word. The focus is instead placed on the choral contribution 'Speak, beloved voices, speak' which enters just after (at RN 27), growing in size and intensity to embrace the significant text which follows:

Ex. 4.3. *Caractacus*, Scene IV, 'Lament', RN 27

Typical Christian characteristics are ascribed by Acworth and Elgar to the pagan Caractacus throughout the cantata. However, the work's implicit endorsement of Christianity is not confined to the eponymous king. The text and the musical treatment of the Lament appear to suggest that Caractacus's dead warriors will be rewarded in heaven for their sacrifice. Though ostensibly referring to 'the war god' (with a small 'g') mentioned moments before, the final lines of the king's Lament reinforce the Christian concepts of salvation and immortality (2 after RN 27):

> And the god shall give you heeding,
> And across the heav'nly plain,
> He shall smile and see me leading
> My dead warriors once again.

The reference to an afterlife here could be regarded as both immediate and prophetic, as Elgar's stately setting hints at glories to come for British military heroes. At this point in the text, a significant change may be noted in the vocal writing. From the opening of the Lament, the chorus provides a gentle answering or reinforcing of the soloist's sentiments in an almost undeviating homophonic texture, as if joining together in mourning for the British dead, calling to them with fondness and a collective sense of loss. A marked change occurs, however, as the king sings these closing lines. A new resolve may be felt as the chorus moves to a more determined (though still quiet) dotted rhythm and a quasi-antiphonal polyphonic texture, based on the pairing of men's voices and women's voices respectively. Here, under the king's *fortissimo* statement that 'the god shall give you heeding/And across the heav'nly plain/He shall smile, and see me leading' (3 after RN 27), the choral reiteration takes on a new character, a growing confidence. With ascending sequential melodic patterns in all voices and *divisi* in the women's, set against descending scales in the bass instruments, the texture, and with it the sentiment, broadens as we arrive, via an emotion-filled *ritenuto*, to the king's prophetic 'My dead warriors once again' (just before RN 28). After the dignified, human focus of the Lament, the climax of the section occurs with the baritone solo again leaping to a high 'G', as the king foresees the afterlife of his lost British men:



Ex. 4.4. *Caractacus*, Scene IV, 'Lament', 2 before RN 28

The choir maintains the powerful moment with a sudden swell to *fortissimo* on the words 'the King heroic leading' (RN 28), accompanied by brass instruments, which here come forth in the texture for the first time in this most unmilitary recounting of military action.

The repeated interjections of the chorus throughout the Lament, gently but persistently calling on the dead warriors to 'speak, ah speak' from beyond their graves, from the land of plenty where they now feast, underline the double meaning of the afterlife, so strongly promoted in this scene: that of the dead soldiers of Caractacus's age, sure to be rewarded for their sacrifice, and that of the nineteenth-century British Empire, when British warriors would again be led into battle.

The emphasis on the afterlife, inserted by Acworth and musically endorsed by Elgar in the manner just described, is hugely significant. Outside the immediate context of the Caractacus story, it is possible to argue that Acworth seeks to give comfort in the event of British soldiers dying in action, by emphasising that they will receive a heavenly reward. The comparatively recent deaths in battle that would have resonated include the First Anglo-Zulu War, especially the Battle of Isandlwana (1879), in which almost the entire British-African army was wiped out; the Battle of Maiwand (1880) in the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878–1880), when an Anglo-Indian army lost around 1,000 men;[80] the First Boer War (1880–81), in which the British lost around 400 men; the Siege of Khartoum (1884–85) in which the entire Anglo-Egyptian army of around 7,000 was killed.[81] The earlier, much-lamented Crimean War (1853–56) had resulted in about 25,000 British deaths.[82] The emphasis on heavenly reward is also poignant considering the later deaths of Acworth's own sons in military service.

Following the musical climax in the king's melody and immediately afterwards in the choral parts, the texture thins dramatically. This brief foray into hopefulness fades away, blurred by soft, broad chords on the harp, and Scene IV comes to a close. Holloway remarks on the effect of this short section, noting the 'profundity, and heroic

[80] The Battle of Maiwand is commemorated in Kipling's poem 'That Day', published in 1896.
[81] For details, see <www.britishbattles.com> [accessed 16 September 2012].
[82] Andrew Lambert, 'The Crimean War',
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/crimea_01.shtml> [accessed 16 September 2012].

size, in a mere twenty-nine bars' and the 'unmissable deep feeling'.[83] The 'heroic size' to which he refers is created in an understated, unforceful, elegiac manner.

Acworth's construction of the character of Caractacus and Elgar's deliberately emphatic setting of the Scene IV Lament suggest an attempt to mould their protagonist into a Christian military hero beloved of the Victorian public, a type of hero emblematic of the imperial cultural context of the 1890s. Edward Berenson outlines the selfless Christian characteristics of exalted imperial heroes:

> Like Havelock, Gordon distinguished himself as a pious Christian soldier. Both appeared to be modest, self-effacing men more interested in serving others than in earning fame and fortune for themselves.[84]

It is evident from Elgar's correspondence that General Gordon, killed thirteen years earlier, was very much on the composer's mind around the time of the *Caractacus* premiere.[85] A series of letters from October–November 1898 reveals Elgar's complex and at times tempestuous relationship with the musical public, money, artistic expression, and the need to be accepted. On 20 October 1898, just two weeks after the Leeds performance, Elgar replied with an air of frustration to a letter from A. J. Jaeger that had referred to the possibility of a 'Gordon' symphony:

> I like this idee but my dear man *why* should I try?? I can't see – I have to earn money somehow & its [sic] *no good* trying this sort of thing, even for a 'living wage' & your firm wouldn't give 5£ for it – I tell you I am sick of it all: why can't I be encouraged to do decent stuff & not hounded into triviality.[86]

Here Elgar appears exasperated at having to bow to public taste, as determined by the publishing house. His dismissive reaction to the Gordon suggestion was quickly replaced, however, and a contrasting attitude is evident from a letter to F. G. Edwards of the *Musical Times* the following day:

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[83] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 78.
[84] Berenson, *Heroes of Empire*, 88.
[85] For a discussion of this correspondence, and Elgar's Gordon associations (though not in relation to *Caractacus*), see Robert Anderson, *Elgar and Chivalry*, 169–81.
[86] Edward Elgar to A. J. Jaeger, 20 October 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, Moore (ed.), I, 93.

> Anyhow 'Gordon' simmereth mighty pleasantly in my (brain) pan & will no doubt boil over one day.[87]

Earlier in 1898, Elgar had mentioned to Edwards the idea of writing a 'Gordon' symphony for the Worcester Three Choirs festival the following year, with the pragmatic intention of 'appealing to the feelings &c, &c'.[88] On 11 November, he returned to the theme in a letter to Jaeger, with the implication this time that he was in fact genuinely interested in writing a 'Gordon' symphony:

> Now as to Gordon : the thing possesses me, but I can't write it down yet : I *may* make it the Worcester work, if that engagement still holds [—] so don't, please, pass on the idea to anybody else just yet. I would really ask Edwards to announce it [in the Musical Times] but I must first get to know if the Dean & Chapter would object to the subject in an English Cathedral.[89]

Not unusually, the letters of this complex personality fail to provide the clarity beloved of historians, but it is at least evident that Elgar was stimulated by the Gordon idea, and that both he and Jaeger, at this significant time, regarded Gordon as a subject likely to find favour with the musical public. A *Musical Times* announcement of March 1899 suggests that Elgar had his audience's sympathies and interests very much in mind with respect to Gordon, and that this was encouraged by Novello, who owned the magazine:

> The extraordinary career of General Gordon—his military achievements, his unbounded energy, his self-sacrifice, his resolution, his deep religious fervour—offers to a composer of Mr. Elgar's temperament a magnificent subject, and affords full scope for the exercise of his genius; moreover it is a subject that appeals to all true-hearted Englishmen.[90]

Gordon served as a popular embodiment of British imperial sentiment at the *fin de siècle*, when the public's need to perceive imperial expansion as a moral duty was at its zenith. In this context of heightened patriotic feeling and Christian mission, the most striking

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[87] Edward Elgar to F. G. Edwards, 21 October 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers,* I, 94.
[88] Edward Elgar to F. G. Edwards, 16 Feb 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 108.
[89] Elgar to A. J. Jaeger, 11 November 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 96.
[90] 'Occasional Notes', *Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 40/673 (March 1899): 161.

didactic feature of Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*, the standalone final chorus, comes to the fore.

'For All The World Shall Learn It': The Ending of *Caractacus*

Despite the victory of the Romans and the defeat of the ancient British king, the story of Caractacus as portrayed in Elgar and Acworth's cantata ends with a triumphant chorus acclaiming the power, glory and righteousness of nineteenth-century imperial Britain. In the Elgar literature, this decision to reinforce imperial authority is often hurriedly dismissed, in a manner that suggests a deep discomfort on the part of later writers. Holloway states simply that the entire libretto 'has been widely regretted ever since',[91] while Riley observes that 'reaction to the final chorus from Elgar's advocates has ranged from embarrassment to derision'.[92] Young, from his perspective in the 1950s, writes of the epilogue that:

> There is nothing to be noted but enthusiasm. Since the words are our guide we stand now in mortification at their sentiments.[93]

Moore notes that the ending necessitates 'an awkward volte-face in the libretto',[94] and Michael Kennedy concedes that the final chorus has been 'a stumbling-block for the squeamish'.[95] Holloway maintains that it strikes 'a note of triumphalist time-travelling',[96] while Basil Maine is adamant about the poor narrative quality of the conclusion:

> Here the librettist unnecessarily drags in a narration of the passing of Rome's glory and the ascendency of Britain. No verse, of whatever grandeur and dignity, could carry off so incongruous a sentiment in this context.[97]

Maine, writing in 1933, while the composer was still alive, squirms at the ideas proclaimed in the final chorus, and tries to absolve Elgar of wrongdoing, pointing the finger of ideological impropriety squarely at Acworth:

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[91] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 75.
[92] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 160.
[93] Young, *Elgar: O. M.*, 86.
[94] Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life*, 238.
[95] Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar*, 74.
[96] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 75.
[97] Maine, *Elgar: His Life and Works,* 32.

> Apart from the fact that he has chosen to set this particular libretto, there is no good reason why the composer should be blamed for the faulty conception of the epilogue.[98]

While the sentiments expressed in the epilogue have caused considerable unease since the post-war anxiety of the twentieth century, their inclusion and reception can be better understood by placing them in their own world of popular values, interests and uncertainties, and in their place at a particular stage in Elgar's career.

The Text

The eleven verses of the cantata's epilogue step entirely outside of the work's timeframe, offering a vision for a world under the benevolent imperial rule of Britain:

The clang of arms is over, 1
Abide in peace, and brood
On splendid ages coming,
And Kings of British blood.

The light descends from heaven, 2
The centuries roll away.
The empire of the Roman,
Is crumbled into clay.

The eagle's flight is ended, 3
His weary wings are furl'd,
The oak has grown and shadow'd
The shores of all the world.

Britons alert! And fear not, 4
Though round your path of pow'r,
Opposing cohorts gather,
And jealous tyrants low'r;

On– though the world desert you, 5
On– so your cause be right;
Britons alert! And fear not,
But gird your loins for fight.

And ever your dominion 6
From age to age shall grow
O'er peoples undiscover'd,

[98] *Ibid.*, 32–33.

In lands we cannot know;

And where the flag of Britain 7
Its triple crosses rears,
No slave shall be for subject,
No trophy wet with tears.

But folk shall bless the banner, 8
And bless the crosses twin'd,
That bear the gift of freedom,
On ev'ry blowing wind;

Nor shall her might diminish 9
While firm she holds the faith
Of equal law to all men
And holds it to the death.

For all the world shall learn it– 10
Though long the task shall be–
The text of Britain's teaching,
The message of the free;

And when at last they find it, 11
The nations all shall stand
And hymn the praise of Britain,
Like brothers hand in hand.

The epilogue thus provides a thoroughly triumphal British ending in spite of the preceding British defeat. Here, the text puts forward a vision of empire similar to that which Elgar and Acworth had sought to create in *King Olaf*, a vision compatible with the idea of 'Greater Britain', and one which encapsulates the imperial contradictions of fighting for peace, of subduing to set free, and of equality through subordination. This imperial vision is presented in *Caractacus* in a manner that is apparently independent of the narrative circumstances. Such a use of imperial celebration regardless of historical accuracy corresponds to commonplace tropes found in the theatrical context of Victorian melodrama, while an important and revealing precursor to the type of epilogue used in the cantata may also be found in William Stewart Ross's poem 'Caractacus the Britain' (discussed below), published in the early 1880s, and as yet unexplored in relation to Elgar's work.

Parallels in Victorian Theatre

In his review of the first performance of *Caractacus*, published in *The Musical Standard* on 8 October 1898, critic E. A. Baughan ruminates at length on many compositional details of the new work and swings drastically between praise and censure, but never once admonishes, or indeed mentions, the final chorus, suggesting that this apparently incongruous and henceforth uncomfortable, even embarrassing, ending caused no offence in its own time.[99] This disparity may be explained by the fact that instances of triumphal endings similar to that of *Caractacus* were widely used, for example, in late-Victorian melodrama. In her study of imperial theatre, J. S. Bratton notes that there were

> hundreds of spectacular melodramas on military or imperialistic themes, with soldiers, sailors or adventurers as their heroes, ending on a patriotic display of flags and cannon to the tune of 'Rule Britannia'. In the course of the nineteenth century they were to be found at every theatrical level from the saloons and gaffs up to Drury Lane [...and] they appeared frequently outside London, in venues ranging from circus booths to the Theatre Royal.[100]

Heidi J. Holder, in the same study, describes a play, and particularly an ending, which serves as a revealing parallel to Elgar's cantata. Muskerry and Jourdain's drama *Khartoum!* concerns the siege of the title city in the last days of General Gordon, and its fall into the hands of the Muslim Mahdi at Gordon's death. Holder points out that:

> Although the final scene of *Khartoum!* is entitled 'Too Late', and the desperation of the besieged city is stressed throughout the play, the audience is none the less presented with a traditional victorious conclusion.[101]

Regarding the fall of Gordon at Khartoum, she points out the difficulty surrounding faithful representation of the event, and the creative reaction to this problem:

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[99] E. A. Baughan, 'Review of Caractacus', *The Musical Standard*, 8 October 1898; repr. in *An Elgar Companion*, Christopher Redwood (ed.), (Ashbourne: Sequoia, 1982): 20–25.
[100] J. S. Bratton, 'British Heroism and the Structure of Melodrama', in *Idem* et al, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage: 1790–1903,* 18–61 (22).
[101] Holder, 'Melodrama, Realism and Empire on the British Stage', in *Acts of Supremacy*, Bratton et al, 141.

> As no European survived the storming of the city, there could be no 'authoritative' accounts of what actually happened, particularly the manner of the death of the besieged General Gordon. But not only did a barrage of stories appear recounting his heroic demise—as well as atrocities perpetrated by the Mahdi's troops on the Europeans—but the dramatic accounts of the campaign stalwartly refused to accept the fact of defeat.[102]

An extreme example of this kind of idealistic alteration may be found in Henry Pettitt and Augustus Harris's 'Autumn Melodrama' *Human Nature*, presented at Drury Lane on 12 September 1885. Here, according to Holder:

> We see another revision of recent history as the 'desert city' of Act IV (clearly modelled on Khartoum) is saved by the British.[103]

Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*, therefore, was not alone in receiving a creative makeover in its final scene.

A Poetic Parallel: 'Caractacus the Briton'

Furthermore, Elgar and Acworth were not the first to end an account of Caractacus's defeat with a commemoration of his values and a prophecy of his nation's future greatness. Structurally and temporally, the Elgar–Acworth celebration of the defeated but noble king and analogous exaltation of the superior British Empire over its historical Roman counterpart follows the pattern of a poem on the same topic published by William Stewart Ross c. 1881.[104] In 'Caractacus the Briton', from his collection *Lays of Romance and Chivalry*, Ross moves in twenty-one verses from the victory march of the Roman soldiers in their home city, through the procession of weary British captives, to the conclusion that history will look favourably on the heroic king and on the glorious modern empire. A consideration of Elgar's work in the light of Ross's concise version of

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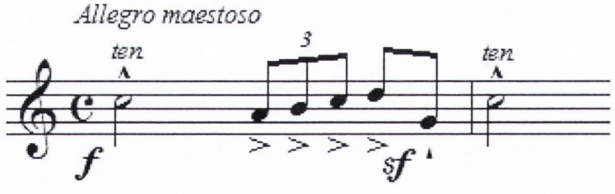
[102] *Ibid.*, 141.
[103] *Ibid.*, 141.
[104] William Stewart Ross, *Lays of Romance and Chivalry* (London: W. Stewart, n.d. [c. 1881]): 1–4. The exact date of publication could not be ascertained.

the Caractacus story strengthens the cantata's capacity to reveal the attitudes and expectations of its time.

The early part of Ross's poem describes the scene in Rome as its returning military sons parade through the cheering multitude:

> Adown the Via Sacra,
> In the noonday's golden glow,
> Rolled the thunder of the Triumph,
> Two thousand years ago.
>
> And through the crowded Forum
> Passed the triumphal car;
> And o'er the shouting thousands
> Waved the standards of the war.
>
> Blazing with gold and green with palms
> On moved the mighty show;-
> Above, proud Roman eagles,
> Stout Roman hearts below.

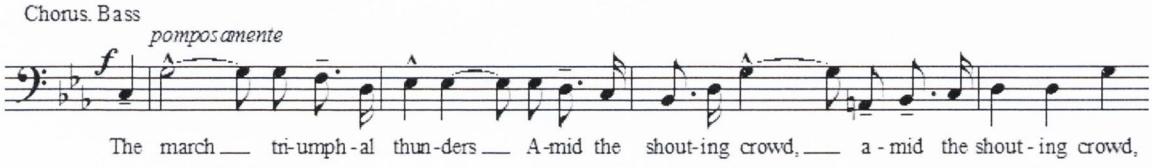
Elgar's version bears strong resemblance to this narration. He sets the same action Allegro maestoso at the beginning of Scene VI, with a triumphal march in C major, opening with an instrumental theme that continues an association with Rome later in the scene:

Ex. 4.5. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'The March Triumphal Thunders', opening bars

The cantata's text depicts the imagery of victorious Rome in a manner strongly reminiscent of Ross's narrative. Acworth's lines convey the same sense of magnitude, noise and public euphoria:

> The march triumphal thunders
> Amid the shouting crowd,
> With flash of helm and corslet,
> While trumpets scream aloud.

And cymbals sharply ringing
The car of triumph greet,
With the milk-white steeds that draw it
Along the sacred street.

Elgar's juxtaposition of C major (the instrumental march) and C minor (the choral narration, see Ex. 4.6) in this section combines the glory of the Roman ceremony with awe at the noise and the display of military strength.



Ex. 4.6. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'The March Triumphal Thunders', 2 after RN 6

The composer's depiction of the Roman spectacle continues with a grand chorus in C major, as further details of the victory scene are presented *largamente e cantabile* (RN 18; see Ex. 4.9 below):

Over the marble palace,
Over the golden shrine,
O'er street and square and forum
Glaring, the noon-beams shine;

Widely the robes are waving,
Brightly the jewels glance,
Eager the eyes that lighten
Each joyous countenance.

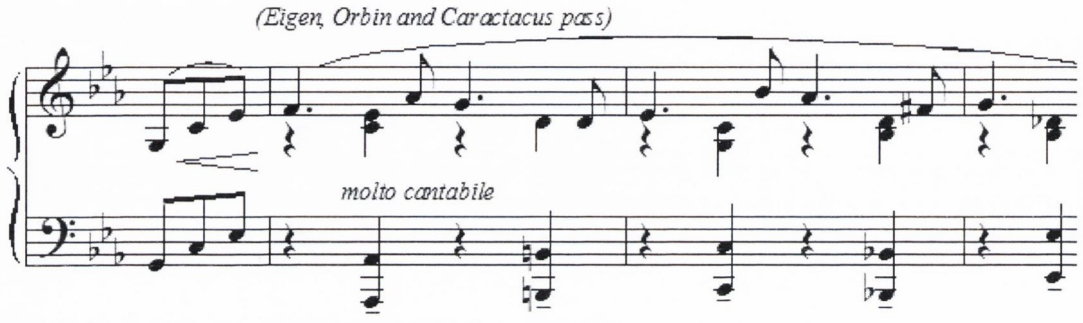
There are similarities, too, between the portrayals of British captives presented in the poem and the cantata respectively. Verses 10 and 11 of Ross's version depict the plight of the prisoners traipsing through the streets of Rome:

But, toiling to Jove's temple,
With weary steps and slow,
The haggard prisoners totter,
In suffering and woe.

Hair matted and eyes streaming,
They march on four-and-four;

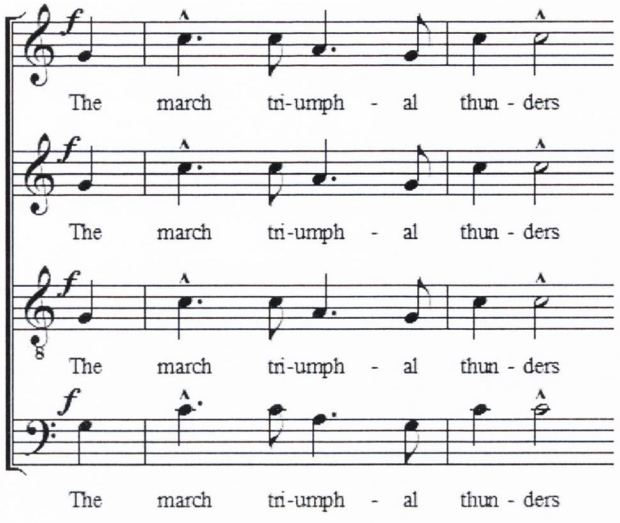
Their wounds are raw and ghastly,
And stiff with dust and gore.

Elgar and Acworth spare their festival audience this level of graphic misery, but set forth the pitiful prisoners with a mournful C-minor melody—heard in D minor in the previous scene (RN 2 and RN 6)—underpinned here by accented, limping off-beat bass notes:



Ex. 4.7. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'The March Triumphal Thunders', 5 after RN 10

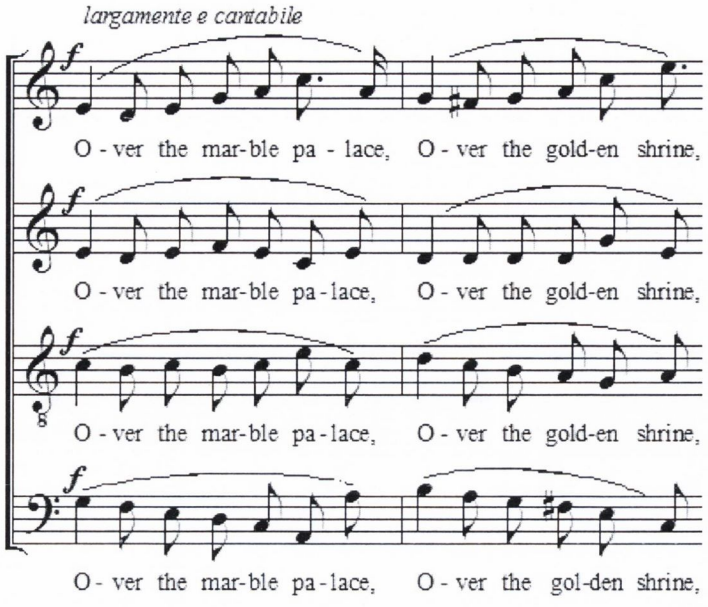
The narrative information 'Eigen, Orbin and Caractacus pass' is given in the score, as composer and librettist focus on the protagonists over the masses, and, reflecting the order in which the prisoners are mentioned, the subsequent text, 'how different they who barefoot drag their weary way', is intoned first by sopranos and altos, and then reiterated in a chromatic descent by the tenors and basses, with a 4–3 suspension on a flattened-second chord (D flat major, 4 before RN 12) for the word 'weary' reinforcing the hopelessness of the situation. Interestingly, and in contrast to Ross's poem, the cantata, having depicted the mournful procession of captives, then presents a reiteration of the scene's opening verse, a description of Roman splendour, this time imparted by unison choir in C major:



Ex. 4.8. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'The March Triumphal Thunders', RN 17

Thus, the musical setting prolongs the imagining of ancient Rome, exploiting the descriptive text to impress on the listener the spectacular and powerful demonstration of imperial might.

The qualities of the Elgar–Acworth view are reinforced by a comparison with Ross's poem. Significantly, both works seem to express admiration for Rome, and particularly for the majesty of the Roman public spectacle. The first nine verses of Ross's poem give no indication that Rome is in fact the enemy, but rather extol the might and triumph of the ancient empire and depict its brilliant homecoming reception. Acworth dwells too on the glittering welcome for Rome's victorious soldiers, while Elgar indulges the image *largamente e cantabile*, as the boundaries between Ancient Rome and modern Britain seem to erode:



Ex. 4.9. *Caractacus,* Scene VI, 'The March Triumphal Thunders', RN 18

The erosion of boundaries and eras continues as, despite the Roman victory and the consequent respect just mentioned, both poem and cantata conclude with a paean to the person of Caractacus and the glory of a later British Empire imbued with his qualities. Ross asserts that history will prefer the noble king to the mighty Rome, and points to future majesty for the hero's homeland in the final five verses of his poem:

> Heed not, O gallant soldier!
> A deathless name is thine,
> When power has left Mount Coelius
> And ruined Aventine;-
>
> When History scarce remembers
> The grandeur now before thee,
> She'll blazon on her brightest page
> The far-off isle that bore thee
>
> And when the world recalleth
> Time's misty yesterday,
> She'll offer thee, Caractacus,
> The laurel and the lay.
>
> Two thousand years of story
> Now part this age from thine.
> And many a deed of glory
> Has graced thy land and mine.

Yet, brilliant in the muster
Of the deathless in the grave,
Shines CARACTACUS THE BRITON,
The bravest of the brave!

Thus, the final five verses of Ross's poem take leave of the ancient setting, and the final two verses, though still focused on the story of Caractacus, are voiced from the perspective of the modern empire.

Acworth and Elgar draw their conclusion from the work, of course on a much larger scale than Ross's short poem, with the chorus 'The Clang of Arms is Over' (RN 50), in which the cantata leaves Rome behind in the key of C minor, progresses chromatically through D flat major and D major to arrive in E flat major (RN 52), where it establishes itself firmly in late-nineteenth-century Britain with the lines:

The clang of arms is over,
Abide in peace, and brood
On splendid ages coming,
And Kings of British blood.

The light descends from heaven,
The centuries roll away.
The empire of the Roman,
Is crumbled into clay.

The eagle's flight is ended,
His weary wings are furl'd,
The oak has grown and shadow'd
The shores of all the world.[105]

With the rolling away of the centuries, the cantata thus follows the temporal architecture of Ross's final verses, and similarly reinforces the superior image of the modern British Empire.

[105] The eagle represents Rome; the oak, Britain. Both symbols are widely used in nineteenth-century literature.

Other Precedents

It is not known whether Elgar and Acworth encountered Ross's poem; in any case, the narrative device of deviating from unity of time was evidently an established convention. Rushton suggests other precedents, citing for example the work of Berlioz as a model for the perspectival shift in the cantata's final scene:

> In Scene VI of *Caractacus* the Britons and Claudius combine in a harmonious quartet. Then, as in Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ*, a possible model, we quit the temporal framework, and the chorus, which in both works plays several roles, steps out of character to view the action from a modern perspective, and to prophesy.[106]

National prophesy of the sort championed in the *Caractacus* epilogue may also be found in the famous ode, 'Rule Britannia', from Thomas Arne's *Alfred*, which started as a masque in 1740 before later adaptations as an oratorio and then an opera. At the time of composition, Britain was engaged in a war against Spain, but the prophetic refrain 'Rule, Britannia, rule the waves' points to later maritime glory, which undoubtedly came to pass with the Royal Navy's dominance in the nineteenth century.[107] Rushton also lists another possible influence on the prophetic tone of the cantata's ending: John Huddlestone Wynne's 'Sacred Elegy' *Evelina*, a setting of the Caractacus story from 1774, which, Rushton believes, may itself have been influenced by Mason's poem.[108] Rushton cites a passage from Wynne's work, in which the eclipsing of the ancient Roman Empire by a glorious British power yet to come is laid out in a Druidic proclamation:

> For it will come, the dire, disastrous day
> When all your boasted honours shall decay,
> When the proud tow'rs of your Imperial Rome
> Shall stoop to conquest and receive their doom.
> The late-relenting Gods shall bid arise

[106] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 232.
[107] Prophesy pervades the verses of the ode. For example, verse 3 begins 'Still more majestic shalt thou rise/More dreadful from each foreign stroke/As the loud blast that tears the skies/Serves but to root thy native oak'. See Edward Rimbault Dibdin, 'The Bi-Centenary of "Rule Britannia"', *Music and Letters*, 21/3 (July 1940): 275–290 (284–85).
[108] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 232.

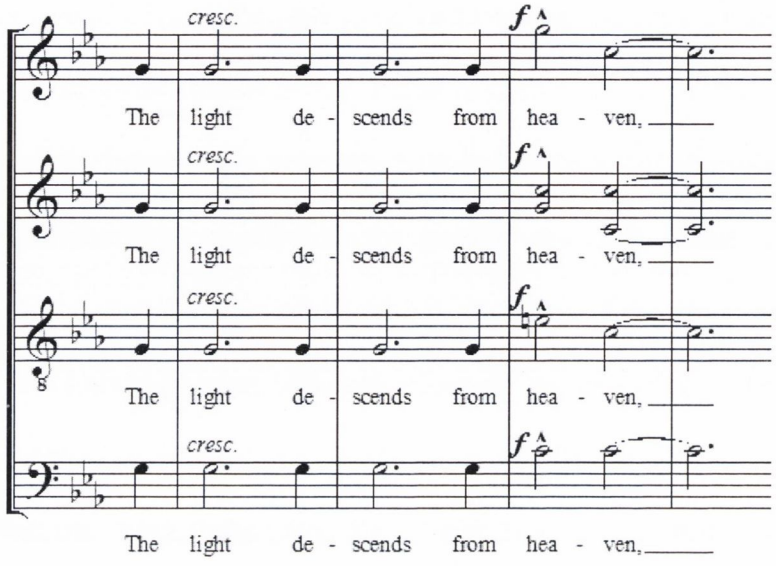
> The British glories to the concave skies,
> Shall bid this injur'd isle extend her sway,
> Ev'n from the rising to the falling day,
> And bear her conq'ring arms to ev'ry zone
> Where Rome's proud eagle yet has never flown.[109]

Here, after a story in which the Romans triumph, the narration turns to the future, foreseeing glory for an empire that will stretch further than its predecessor. This, Rushton states, 'is equivalent to Acworth's direct address to audiences in the great cities of the British Empire'.[110] The message is clear: the British Empire is superior to its ancient Roman predecessor. Taking into account the examples cited from Victorian melodrama, as well as versions of the Caractacus story by Ross and Wynne and other musical precedents suggested by Rushton, such as Berlioz's *L'Enfance du Christ*, and embedding these in the culture of heroism and noble defeat explored above, it may be argued that the ending of the cantata should not be regarded as an incongruous aberration, but as a form that owed much to British theatrical convention and literary precursors, all responding to the British view of itself as executor of a great moral crusade throughout the world.

A Christian Empire

Not only does the concluding chorus 'The Clang of Arms is Over' bring the British Empire to the fore, but with the mention and placing of light from heaven, and the musical treatment thereof (RN 51), Elgar and Acworth set the new empire in the Christian era, the enlightened era, with God on the side of the glorious, thus accentuating the superiority of the modern empire over ancient Rome. Elgar gives considerable musical prominence to this Christian reference: the opening lines of the chorus are sung in unison in C minor, with all parts ascending by diatonic step from the opening C (RN

[109] John Huddlestone Wynne, *Evelina, daughter of Caractacus. A sacred elegy. To this edition is added the ancient fragment from which the poem had its origin* (London: J. P. Coghlan and G. Riley, 1774), 37–38; cited in Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 233.
[110] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 233.

50) to G a fifth higher, from where the voices burst into an accented five-part C-major chord on the word 'heaven' (3 after RN 51):

Ex. 4.10. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'The Clang of Arms is Over', RN 51

This allusion to Christian endorsement of the modern empire has no parallel in Ross's poem. Acworth and Elgar, however, emphatically underline it in the cantata's final chorus, drawing a strong link, just as they did in *King Olaf*, between the ideals of empire and the will of God.

With respect to divine endorsement of imperial conquest, the final chorus of *Caractacus* has similarities of tone with Kipling's 'A Song of the English', from a collection called *The Seven Seas* (written 1891–96). The poem's opening verse states plainly that the path of British imperial expansion was prepared by God:

> Fair is our lot – O goodly is our heritage!
> (Humble ye, my people, and be fearful in your mirth!)
> For the Lord our God Most High
> He hath made the deep as dry,
> He hath smote for us a pathway to the ends of all the Earth![111]

[111] Rudyard Kipling, 'A Song of the English' from *The Seven Seas*. Full text available at http://www.daypoems.net/poems/1826.html [accessed 23 October].

MacDonald comments on the strong statement of imperial purpose laid out by Kipling in the first verse:

> If these lines are inspected for their ideological content, they reveal powerful imperial claims. England's lot is good, and her world Empire is sanctified by God.[112]

A similar confidence in divine endorsement for British conquest is evident in the context of adventure literature, for example in Chapter 5 of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. As the protagonists prepare to march into the desert en route to the mines, they pause, and Sir Henry Curtis addresses his companions:

> 'Gentlemen', said Sir Henry presently, in his low, deep voice, 'we are going on about as strange a journey as men can make in this world. It is very doubtful if we can succeed in it. But we are three men who will stand together for good or for evil to the last. And now before we start let us for a moment pray to the Power who shapes the destinies of men, and who ages since has marked out our paths, that it may please Him to direct our steps in accordance with His will'.[113]

This belief in divine approval and intention for the British Empire is reinforced in the fourth verse of Kipling's 'Song of the English':

> Keep ye the Law — be swift in all obedience —
> Clear the land of evil, drive the road and bridge the ford.
> Make ye sure to each his own
> That he reap where he hath sown;
> By the peace among Our peoples let men know we serve the Lord!

Here, with strong biblical language, Kipling reiterates the duty of empire builders. MacDonald asserts that the poet was responding to the imperial climate in which he worked and encouraging a particular view of Britain's task:

> What drives his meanings are present needs, which, in spite of the use of Old Testament words, are more in tune with the ethos of the favourite Victorian hymns 'Fight the good fight with all thy might' and 'Rise at the cry of battle…Quit you like men, be strong!'. Here too are the militarist metaphors, and the call to action.[114]

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[112] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 153.
[113] Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, 49–50.
[114] MacDonald, *Language of Empire*, 154.

Kipling thus channels the exertions of empire-building into an effort for the glory of God, with exploration and conquest viewed as serving the spread of Christian values, to 'clear the land of evil'. MacDonald outlines the significance of Kipling in the creation of the public's understanding of the empire and of the motivations for maintaining and expanding it:

> The importance of Kipling as the mythmaker of the Empire cannot be overstressed. He was the writer of the imperial hymns, he both spoke for and helped create the expansionist mood of the 1890s. Kipling beat the drum, but he also called his fellow-imperialists to a sense of responsibility and duty.[115]

Kipling, according to Jeffrey Richards, 'saw the duty of civilizing the world as a burden laid on the nation by God'.[116] The closing chorus of *Caractacus*, with its reference to divine endorsement, suggests either that its creators subscribed to the same view, or that they believed that that is what their audience wished to hear.

It may be significant that as the action of the cantata arrives to the nineteenth-century British Empire, the key of E flat major is reached (2 before RN 52). This key is associated with the person of Christ in other Elgar works, for example *The Light of Life*, where it features prominently in Jesus's solo 'I am the Good Shepherd', and McGuire observes that this connection continues in later instances: 'E flat major is strongly identified with Christ and Christ's actions throughout *The Apostles*'.[117] E flat also returns for the final two verses of *Caractacus* (RN 61: 'For all the world shall learn it'), perhaps maintaining the claim of divine support for 'The text of British teaching/The message of the free' (4 before RN 62).

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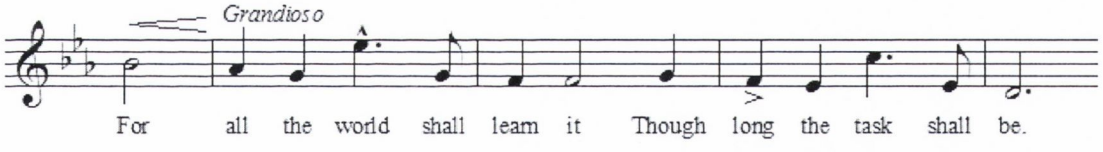
[115] *Ibid.*, 161.
[116] Richards, *Imperialism and Music*, 54.
[117] Charles Edward McGuire, 'Elgar, Judas, and the Theology of Betrayal', *19th-Century Music*, 23/3 (Spring 2000): 236–72 (258).

A Benevolent Empire

The final two verses of the cantata (vs. 10 and 11) reflect Britain's view of its own resolute but altruistic purpose:

> For all the world shall learn it–
> Though long the task shall be–
> The text of Britain's teaching,
> The message of the free;
>
> And when at last they find it,
> The nations all shall stand
> And hymn the praise of Britain,
> Like brothers hand in hand.

Here (RN 61), the musical setting, with its confident but benevolent marching bass, hymn-like harmonisation and use of choral unison, is grand, inclusive and gently expansive, rather than threatening, sinister or imposing. The broad melodic theme, labelled simply 'Britain' in Elgar's preparations for a thematic analysis,[118] exudes inclusivity and inoffensiveness, virtue and duty:



Ex. 4.11. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'The Clang of Arms is Over', RN 61

The perspective used in the text is highly significant: through Britain's engagement with the long and worthy task, the world *itself* shall learn, the nations shall *themselves* find the message of freedom and consequently stand together in praise of Britain. As Acworth and Elgar present the scenario, it is not the case that Britain shall impose its teaching, enforce its message, and elicit awe. The role of the imperial power is to facilitate improvement, to guide the less fortunate to freedom, as Acworth himself so clearly stated.[119]

[118] Discussed below.
[119] See Chapter 3.

An Image of 'Modern Britain'

Julian Rushton's presentation and analysis of unpublished correspondence between Elgar and the Yorkshire Post music critic Herbert Thompson does much to shed light on the composer's attitude to the text of the cantata's epilogue. In keeping with the Victorian tradition of audience edification, a musical analysis of *Caractacus*, prepared by Thompson in conjunction with Elgar, was made available to those attending the première. This booklet, similar to that prepared by Joseph Bennett for *King Olaf*, was later published by Novello.[120] Rushton quotes a letter from Elgar to Thompson of 16 June 1898 in which the composer outlines the *modus operandi*: 'I would furnish you with the salient themes if you could do the illustrative remarks'.[121] Elgar proceeded to send a score with principal themes marked and titled, and, as Rushton observes, 'Thompson took over Elgar's labels and numbering virtually intact'.[122] Writing to Thompson on 18 July, Elgar noted his own reservations about labelling themes:

> I hope you won't forget that I 'label' the themes against my better judgement, & only for conversational purposes — in my own mind they only exist as part of the whole. If you don't think the names good please alter them.[123]

Despite his fears about reductive description and labelling, Elgar adhered to audience demand for clarity and education, and his thematic labels are revealing with respect to the level of conscious musical endorsement given to the ideology of the epilogue. Rushton notes, for example, that Acworth's account of the end of the Roman eagle's flight and its replacement throughout the world by the British oak is directly reflected in the thematic material:

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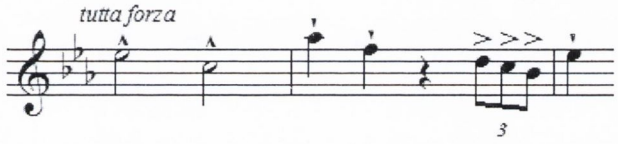
[120] *Caractacus. A Cantata. The words written for music by H. A. Acworth, C.I.E., The music by Edward Elgar (Op. 35). Book of words with Analytical Notes by Herbert Thompson.* Novello's Series of the Words of Oratorios, Cantatas, &c. (London: Novello, 1900).
[121] Edward Elgar to Herbert Thompson, 16 June 1898, cited in Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 227.
[122] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 228.
[123] Edward Elgar to Herbert Thompson, 18 July 1898, cited in Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 228.

> The 'Roman' motif (from fig. 52) dissolves upwards and is replaced, as the music gains the dominant of E flat, by the motive [...] which here represents the sacred oak.[124]

Rushton points out too that Elgar's labelling of themes included one which was designated 'Modern Britain', a label, Rushton tells us, that for some reason 'Thompson chose not to use' in his analysis.[125] The theme in question, from its entry at RN 54, constitutes one of the principal musical elements of the epilogue:

Ex. 4.12. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'The Clang of Arms is Over', RN 54

This theme is heard throughout or surrounding many ideologically emphatic verses of the cantata's concluding section, and is interspersed with the aforementioned 'Britain' theme to create the musical content of the vast majority of the epilogue. 'Modern Britain' is directly, synchronously associated with portions of text such as 'fear not/Though round your path of pow'r/Opposing cohorts gather (RN 54), 'On– though the world desert you/On– though your cause be right' (RN 55), and 'But gird your loins for fight' (RN 56), before bursting forth as the main musical material for the ninth of the epilogue's eleven verses (RN 60):

> Nor shall her might diminish
> While firm she holds the faith
> Of equal law to all men–
> And holds it to the death.

Rushton makes the strong point that the cantata's epilogue in effect presented Elgar with an opportunity to impart a moral on one of a number of subjects connected to the preceding story. Through the associations of the 'Modern Britain' theme, it is clear that his choice was empire:

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[124] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 233.
[125] *Ibid.*, 233.

> Considered simply as musical rhetoric, this is splendid stuff, but the words pose a problem for our reception. 'Modern Britain' does not evoke the industrial and commercial heartland—brass bands, large choirs, triennial festivals—nor does it allude to Elgar's woodlands. Instead it raises the spectre of empire, an association that has long muddied Elgar's reputation.[126]

In other words, for this most significant, most enduring point in the work for Leeds, for his vision of 'Modern Britain' (or the vision he thought his audience desired), Elgar opted not for a celebration of landscape, industry or commerce, nor for any other aspect of British culture or connection with the ancient hero Caractacus, but rather, at this crucial stage of his career, building on the success of *King Olaf* and the ceremonial works of the jubilee year, for a celebration of the modern empire, and the God-given British mission to expand it.

The Meaning of *Caractacus*

The reception of Elgar's *Caractacus* has proved problematic for commentators, and some have explored the possibility that Elgar in fact intended a certain irony in the final chorus, while others consider whether excessive self-awareness in relation to his career ideals led the composer to overdo his efforts to please the audience. Indeed, some commentators put forward several feasible interpretations of the work, acknowledging that the identification of a 'correct' version is difficult.

Was *Caractacus* ironic?

Recent critics have put forward a variety of lenses through which to view the work's seemingly overt populist and imperialist conclusion. Robin Holloway discusses the harmonic approach to the end of the cantata and suggests that a perceived lack of harmonic finality may hint at some dubiety of ideological intent:

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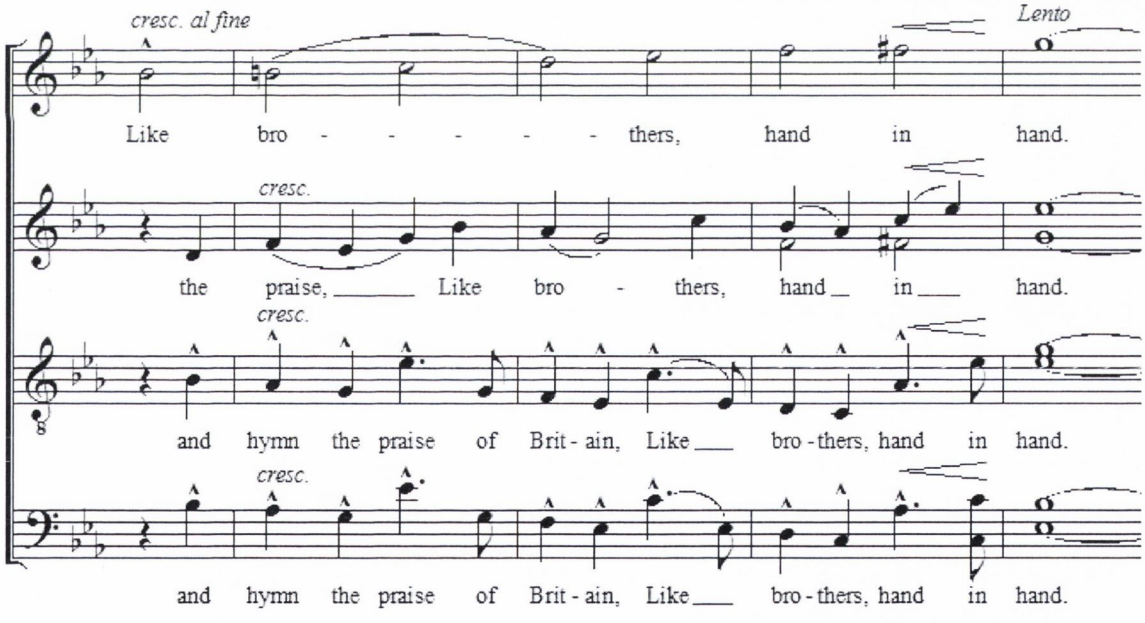
[126] *Ibid.*, 233–34.

> The closing pages do give forth a certain uncertainty: cadences are undercut, evading or even avoiding the dominant, C minor remains strong, and the very close is a IV^6–I which can sound rather unfinal despite being placed over a mighty E flat pedal. So it could plausibly be claimed that this tonal ambiguity, for all the splendid 'noise it makes', echoes the implicit hollowness of aspirations that have proved unstable to say the least.[127]

However, such a reading is open to interpretation, and attention to the musical narrative suggests that Elgar prioritised the continuation of the 'Britain' theme—heard in the tenor and bass voices, brass and wind instruments, cello and organ— throughout the final bars, over the inclusion of a bald perfect cadence. It should also be noted that the sixth in the IV^6 mentioned by Holloway is raised (F sharp), which creates substantial tension with the A flat, C, and then E flat below it, prior to the bursting forth of the tonic E flat major three bars from the end:



Ex. 4.13. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'The Clang of Arms is Over', 2 after RN 64

A comparable situation in *King Olaf* may be found at the end of the ideologically central Conversion Scene, where a similar prioritisation of a melodic theme, this time the 'Sailing' motif, heard also in the accompanying bass instruments (bassoon, bass clarinet,

[127] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 79.

trombone, tuba, organ pedals, low strings), causes what might be perceived as a lack of conventional harmonic finality. The notes of the 'Sailing' motif as used here ensure that the only dominant chords heard are de-emphasised 4/3 chords, and that the closest idea to a final cadence is a IV–I^6 four bars before the scene's end. Added to this apparent evasion is the fact that, prior to the entry of the 'Sailing' motif in the bass, eight remarkable bars of choral writing, featuring all twelve notes of the chromatic scale above a tonic pedal (C), are heard without any suggestion of ideological ambiguity on the part of the composer (5 after AA, bb. 448–55). At the end of the Conversion Scene, as may be argued in relation to the end of *Caractacus*, Elgar achieves a perhaps unorthodox sense of closure by prioritising the thematic content and consequently forgoing the obvious V–I that seems to be expected.

Rushton's discussion of Herbert Thompson's *Yorkshire Post* review of *Caractacus* raises questions about the level of consciousness involved in Elgar's compositional process that are of immediate relevance to the question of intentionality at the work's conclusion. Rushton states:

> In the 'Britain theme' – the last thematic element, heard six bars from the end – [Thompson] detects 'a certain touch of Philistinism' and he wonders whether Elgar 'intended a subtle sarcasm'.[128]

Thompson's insinuation may of course reflect his own opinions about the empire as much as Elgar's.[129] The reviewer does not elaborate, and Rushton goes on to ask:

> Was Thompson right to identify 'subtle sarcasm' behind the imperial *nobilmente*? He presumably attributed it to Elgar rather than Acworth. The climactic 'Britain' motive is indeed tarred by association with the Druid, who uses it, also in E flat, in his passionate but mendacious address to Caractacus.[130]

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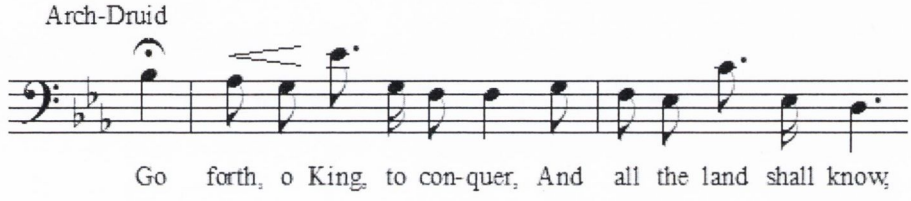
[128] Herbert Thompson, Concert Review, *Yorkshire Post*, 6 October 1898, cited in Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 232.

[129] Thompson belongs to the world of journalistic music criticism, itself an interpretative minefield greatly complicated by the personality, education, taste, competitiveness and, on occasion, insecurity of each reviewer, and an extensive study of Thompson himself would be required to illuminate fully the background to his comment.

[130] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 237.

Rushton rightly points out that the 'Britain' theme, prevalent in the epilogue, was heard earlier, in Scene II, as the Arch-Druid knowingly urged the trusting Caractacus on to his defeat. Rushton's assertion that the theme is thus 'tarred by association' is valid, but another possibility is simply that the text of the Arch-Druid's betrayal, taken at face value, brought forth from Elgar a suitably royal, noble, British theme:



Ex. 4.14. *Caractacus*, Scene II, 'Bard, What Read Ye?', RN 23

Matthew Riley offers another interpretation of the work's ending by reading the epilogue as something of an anti-imperial pronouncement: a musical protest of sorts. He asserts that 'the illogicality of the chorus is highly suggestive', and implies a deliberate political statement on the part of the composer and/or librettist:

> It reads like a token effort to paper over the cracks that the work comes dangerously close to exposing in the contested ground of late nineteenth-century Englishness, assuring the audience that a happy synthesis of ancient Roman and British values will eventually triumph.[131]

However, a number of factors combine to render this level of bold ideological manoeuvring improbable. Firstly, the involvement of Acworth, whose experiences, actions, and writings suggest nothing short of a full embrace of British imperial ideals, means that a calculated engagement with the frailties of empire is unlikely. Secondly, *Caractacus* arrived at a particularly sensitive time in Elgar's career. He had not yet achieved the recognition he so evidently desired, and the Leeds Festival, as Moore states, 'was one of the leading choral festivals in the country, and would provide exposure on a

[131] Riley, *Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 160.

scale beyond anything Elgar had so far experienced',[132] with the occasion constituting the 'first time Elgar was offered a commission fee by the performers'.[133] Surely, it was neither the time nor the place for Elgar to risk a protest and potentially alienate his supporters and his audience. Thirdly, the tradition of ending a work with a prophetic triumphal scene, regardless of the preceding action, was well established and perfectly acceptable in other arts. Defeats involving noble military heroes were regarded as quasi-victories, worthy of a celebration of national character, not only in theatrical settings, but in literature and journalism, and especially pertaining to the demise of imperial heroes such as General Gordon. Finally, as Holloway notes,

> *Caractacus* is dedicated 'by special permission' to Her Most Gracious Majesty and there is no reason whatsoever to suggest a scintilla of irony, reservation, insincerity in such homage, or in the ambitions that underlie it.[134]

Elgar was a shrewd fashioner of his own career and publicity, and a royal dedication, organised through his acquaintance Sir Walter Parratt, was an achievement of which he was proud. The importance of the dedication is evident from Elgar's willingness, recorded in a letter to Novello, to delay the printing of the work in order to wait for a response from Parratt: 'It will be worth while to delay printing the work for sale until I hear from him again'.[135] In a letter to Nicholas Kilburn, Elgar outlined his satisfaction that the dedication was approved:

> The dedication pleases me, as it is, I understand, accepted as a 'work of art' (an attempt) & there is nothing of a 'royal event' character about it which leads to the usual dedication.[136]

A letter to Kilburn earlier in the composition of *Caractacus* suggests that the composer was genuine in his approach to the work:

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[132] Moore (ed.), *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 59.
[133] *Ibid.*, 63.
[134] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 79.
[135] Edward Elgar to Novello, 29 July 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 84.
[136] Edward Elgar to Nicholas Kilburn, 21 August 1898, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 66.

> Caractacus is near his end & some of it is, I think adequate: a Dirge ['O my warriors'] — C. with chorus [—] may please you [:] (in 7/4) but — I am too near it to judge — you asked about him or I would not have mentioned him. Anyhow the attempt is sincere and, I hope, high.[137]

As noted in the introduction to this study, Elgar's own attitude to the empire is difficult to pin down, as he rarely referred to such matters directly in his writings. However, a letter to Jaeger in July 1898 indicates that, if not a confirmed imperialist, Elgar certainly was not against taking pride in one's country:

> I knew you wd. laugh at my librettist's patriotism (& mine) never mind: England for the English is all I say — hands off! there's nothing apologetic about me.[138]

Despite his flirtation with a possible ambiguous reading of the harmonies of the *Caractacus* epilogue, Holloway concludes that:

> Elgar's patriotic aim was ardent, deeply felt, in tune with the mood of the time and place, yet imaginatively rich, beyond the 'common man' whose fanfare he composes, inseparably bound up with his manhood, his compositional prowess, his artistic being.[139]

Holloway argues ultimately that the agenda of the final chorus (if not to promote empire, then to please an audience that approved of such a policy) was sincerely intended:

> It cannot be impugned as shallow, jingoistic, strident: and he's given it his all in this superbly composed close to *Caractacus*, absolutely right for its occasion and its culture.[140]

Rushton observes similarly that 'Elgar pulled out all the stops in support of the words',[141] while Holloway, having taken a tour of reasonable reactions to *Caractacus*, encourages the giving of credit where credit is due, regardless of ideological conflicts:

> Changed ideologies should not embarrass legitimate admiration for such music nor indeed for what it celebrates so fervently.[142]

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[137] Edward Elgar to Nicholas Kilburn, 27 April 1898, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 65. Moore's additions.
[138] Edward Elgar to A. J. Jaeger, 12 July 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 79.
[139] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 79.
[140] *Ibid.*, 80.
[141] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 238.
[142] Holloway, 'The Early Choral Works', 79.

Efforts to dissociate Elgar from the blatant imperialism of the cantata's final chorus by criticising the text, thereby offloading ideological responsibility onto Acworth, and by suggesting an alternative, ironic interpretation, suggest extreme discomfort on the part of Elgar scholars over the years, for whom an imperialist Elgar was anathema in a time when an expressed intention to rule the world was toxic ideology. It is still not clear whether Elgar was or was not imperialist, and the question is perhaps of little consequence. It is clear, however, that he sought, at this crucial point in his career, to tap into the cultural pulse of the British musical public, a public immersed in the culture of empire, and to give them the view of empire that they wished to see.

Caractacus has, nevertheless, a complex ideological relationship with its imperial context. At several points in the cantata, ideas are expressed which appear at first to be at odds with the ideals of the imperial metropolitan. Some of these incongruities may be explained by the ability of the festival audience to shift allegiance during the drama: to identify now with one side, now with the other. Rome is at times presented as the enemy, but at times, significantly, as an imperial power, a precursor and in some respects an equivalent of the modern imperial power, and worthy of admiration. By facilitating the aforementioned shifting of audience allegiance, Acworth's libretto and Elgar's musical reinforcement deftly sidestep associations with unsavoury aspects of colonial expansion and lay the ground for the statement of British moral superiority and imperial benevolence that concludes the work.

Explaining Incongruity: Audience Allegiance

The action of the cantata's Scene VI, immediately prior to the epilogue, features a dominating imperial ruler, as the emperor Claudius considers the captured Caractacus (RN 23):

Unbind his hands, silence the trumpets; plead,
Briton, if plea can purge thy crimes away,
Or turn the doom of many a bloody deed,
The ling'ring doom that waits on thee today.

Here, the imperial power threatens the conquered with death for the crime of defending his homeland, a scenario which would conflict with the benevolent self-image of the modern empire. At this point, however, the emphasis is on Caractacus, the British hero, unfailingly dignified, and, like the popular perception of General Gordon, a stalwart in defeat (RN 25):

Heap torment upon torment, woe on woe,
Let months and years of anguish'd life be mine;
Tears from these eyes Rome cannot cause to flow
Nor bend this knee by any pow'r of thine.

Caractacus thus vows not to sacrifice his dignity, but to resist unto the death, as Gordon had. This image of the admirable, staunch, though defeated king is similar to that put forward at the corresponding point of Ross's poem (vs. 15, 16):

The hindmost of the captives,
A king serene and high,
Marches erect and fearless,
Wild daring in his eye.

What brow like his to wear a crown!
What hand to wield the glaive!—
Caractacus the Briton,
The bravest of the brave![143]

The demeanour of the cantata's Caractacus is prioritised throughout his encounter with Claudius, conforming also to the image presented in Francis Hayman's aforementioned artistic depiction. The king continues his oration before the emperor (RN 27):

We liv'd in peace, was that a crime to thee,
That thy fierce eagle stoop'd upon our nest?
A freeborn chieftain, and a people free,
We dwelt among our woodlands and were blest.

[143] Ross, 'Caractacus the Briton', *Lays of Romance and Chivalry*, 3.

The opening question, 'We lived in peace, was that a crime to thee?', seems at first a startling provocation, a suggestion that the imperial power intrudes unjustly and fiercely on peaceful natives. But Acworth's reference to the symbolic 'eagle' here shows that Rome, and not any undefined (and therefore potentially British) imperial power, is the clearly identified oppressor. Acworth significantly refers to 'woodlands' (2 before RN 29), making the British a homely, gentle people, subscribing to what McGuire terms the 'almost pathological nostalgia for the countryside' in nineteenth-century Britain.[144] Elgar exploits the text by placing a dramatic pause after the word 'woodlands', and inserting a *pianissimo e molto espressivo* reiteration of the word before the faltering Caractacus proceeds. This was consciously done, as the composer acknowledged in a letter to Jaeger:

> I made old Caractacus stop as if broken down ... & choke & say 'woodlands' again because I'm so madly devoted to my woods.[145]

The cruelty wrought by an over-zealous imperial power is thus attributed specifically to imperial Rome, as the implication begins to come forth that imperial Britain is altogether better—an implication that is hammered home in the epilogue. The cantata's emphasis on British pastoral devotion and homely contentment conjures a national character that is considerably, and comfortingly, distant from the military ambition and oppression ascribed to Rome. Moreover, it supports an image of the British as benevolent, even gentle, imperialists.

Caractacus continues to highlight the dignified actions of the set-upon British, selflessly calling on the emperor to direct his ire at Caractacus himself, sparing his comrades (2 after RN 29):

> For liberty, wives, children, hearth and shrine,
> From sea to plain we fought, from plain to hill.
> Now all is lost, all that was ours is thine,
> My soul alone remains unshackled still.

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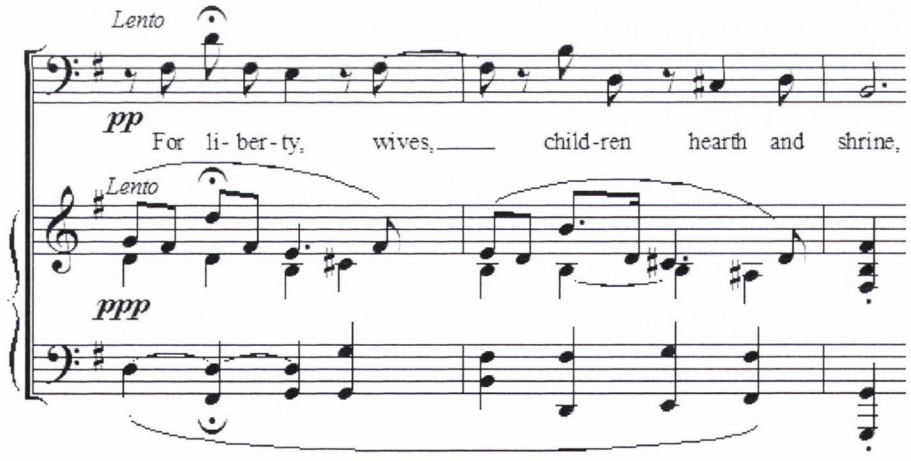
[144] McGuire, 'Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus*', 73.
[145] Edward Elgar to A. J. Jaeger, 21 August 1898, *Elgar and his Publishers*, I, 86.

Do then, thy worst on me; my people spare
Who fought for freedom in our land at home;
Slaves they are not; be wise and teach them there
Order, and law, and liberty with Rome.

A comparison with the account given by Tacitus is revealing here. Where Tacitus has 'horses, men, arms, wealth',[146] Acworth's Caractacus points to 'liberty, wives, children, hearth and shrine' as worthy of defence. The music at this point is prophetic: Caractacus's list of treasured possessions and loved ones is embedded in a D-major version of the 'Britain' theme, in an inoffensive, pastoral form, a theme that returns, *grandioso,* in the cantata's final lines, at the height of the moral didacticism of 'For all the world shall learn it'. A pause on the first syllable of 'liberty', on the note 'D' above a D-major 6/3 chord, is classic Elgar pathos: the king is presented at his most human, deflecting pity from himself and exhibiting a range of noble traits:



Ex. 4.15. *Caractacus*, Scene VI, 'Heap Torment upon Torment', 2 after RN 29

The use of the 'Britain' theme emphasises these British values, as the identity of the superior empire emerges musically as well as textually. However, Caractacus's final sentiment in this solo again shows the libretto's shifting allegiance, with the two concluding lines particularly significant:

[146] Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 258.

> Slaves they are not; be wise and teach them there
> Order, and law, and liberty with Rome.

These lines, firstly, put forward the comforting view that the imperial power does not treat subordinates as slaves. Secondly, they note some of the admirable features associated with the Roman Empire and desired for the modern empire as part of its imperial inheritance. Riley alludes to the ability of the British audience to switch sides as their allegiance shifted according to the demonstration of noble characteristics. He argues that, despite the fact that Caractacus was a British hero:

> It still cannot be taken for granted that a late-Victorian audience would have unreservedly identified with Caractacus's side in the conflict, Britons or no.[147]

'Rome' sits atop a majestic D-flat-major chord (at RN 32) but the majesty fades almost instantly, and symbolically, as the theme of the Triumphal March (see above, Ex. 4.5) withdraws, *rall. e dim. molto,* giving way to a brief duet for Eigen and Orbin, in which the former emphasises the beauty of the British landscape, and the latter simultaneously expresses his devotion to his lover:

Eigen:	Orbin:
O for the sward of Britain, and the hills!	O for mine Eigen in her woodland glade.
The whisp'ring forest by our Habren's side!	Light as the morning, tripping on the lea!
O for our Habren and her silver rills,	Spare her Roman, spare this trembling maid
Before we lost them would that we had died!	And measure tenfold torment upon me.

Thus, in this short scene, depicting the encounter of Caractacus with the emperor Claudius, Elgar and Acworth manage to combine admiration for the dignity of the British hero and the selfless love and gentle patriotism of Eigen and Orbin with respect for the honourable and desirable characteristics of the Roman empire, all the while hinting that the new empire is morally superior to the old.

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[147] Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, 164.

In relation to this stage of the historical action, Tacitus records that 'there were no downcast looks or appeals for mercy from Caratacus'.[148] Acworth, on the contrary, includes just such an appeal, but uses it to show the selflessness of the king (RN 37):

> I plead not for myself; not earth or heav'n
> Can shake a soul like mine prepar'd for all;
> Yet, I plead that mercy may be given
> To these, my comrades of the Roman thrall.
>
> My guileless daughter and the warrior bard,
> Her lover, fled from priestly bonds at home,
> Is there no grace for them, and is it hard
> To win so little from Imperial Rome?

Here again, Caractacus's concern for others is prioritised. The final words, 'from Imperial Rome' are accompanied by a faint, and dying, iteration of the Roman March theme (1 before RN 39), followed by exclamations of 'Plead not for me' from Eigen and Orbin, as each in turn deflects pity from themselves and onto their companions in a show of selfless fortitude. Throughout this section, Caractacus is Christ-like, at the mercy of the roaring rabble, as the chorus of Roman citizens interjects with 'Slay, slay the Britons!' (for example at RN 34).[149] Claudius, as Acworth states in the Argument, is 'so struck by the intrepidity of Caractacus' that he grants his pardon, and a quartet by Eigen, Orbin, Claudius and Caractacus ends the scene. Claudius's text at this point is particularly significant (RN 44–49):

> Dwell here in Rome, and by the Emperor's side
> Find safety, peace, and rest for ever more.

The noble selflessness of the conquered earns grace from the imperial power. Harmony is achieved, and a four-bar interlude leads us to the epilogue, over 1800 years later. As Vance states with regard to the Caractacus story in general, the king

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[148] Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 258.

[149] Vance observes in relation to the generally known version of the Caractacus story that 'Both Caractacus and Christ himself had been brought before the Roman authorities'. See 'Roman Heroism and the Problems of Nineteenth-Century Empire', 153.

> provided late-Victorian Britain with a means of bridging the political and imaginative gulf between coloniser and colonised, conquest and freedom. He helped the British public to accommodate latter-day British colonialism. Although he already existed, it was necessary to reinvent him. He assuaged colonial guilt, since Britain could be magnanimous as Claudius had been and could think of itself as committed to establishing peace.[150]

Scene VI of Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus* could be viewed as a crystallisation of the complexities and contradictions of Victorian, imperial Britain. The ability of the audience to identify with the British and Roman sides in turn, and on occasion simultaneously, facilitates a plausible understanding of the scene's apparently shifting ideological content.

Hutton, in his discussion of Mason's eighteenth-century *Caractacus*, illustrates the story's ability to combine the attributes of Rome and Britain, in a manner highly relevant to the cantata:

> Published in the great year of British victories over the French, from Canada to India, it played up to the swelling mood of patriotic fervour by letting readers have the best of both worlds in their attitudes to the Roman conquest of Britain. The native British were portrayed as heroic and noble barbarians, and their Druids as admirable, while the Romans were made into magnanimous conquerors who added to British culture the blessings of civilization and of reason, and so created a perfect blend that was eventually to produce an unbeatable nation.[151]

Mason's *Caractacus* is testament to the fact that the simultaneous admiration for opposing sides evident in the cantata was not without precedent. In Mason's version the action does not move to Rome, but the probability of mercy at the foot of Claudius is hinted at by the Roman general Aulus Didius, as he says to the defeated Caractacus:

> Droop not, king.
> When Claudius, the great master of the world,
> Shall hear the noble story of thy valour,
> His pity —[152]

This is followed by Caractacus's exclamation questioning the magnanimity of his captor:

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[150] Vance, 'Roman Heroism', 154–55.
[151] Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe*, 117. Hutton's description of the British should be qualified, however. In Mason's play, Caractacus is betrayed by fellow Britons—sons of Cartimandua—who are by no means portrayed as heroic and noble.
[152] Mason, *Caractacus: A Dramatic Poem*, 87.

Can a Roman pity, soldier?
And if he can, gods! must a Briton bear it?

Clearly drawing on the account of Tacitus, Mason's Caractacus goes on to question Didius in a manner evidently critical of imperial entitlement:

What if Caesar aims,
To lord it universal o'er the world,
Shall the world tamely crouch at Caesar's footstool?

Aulus Didius responds in language that, as Rushton observes, 'epitomizes a justification for imperial expansion that is highly pertinent to Elgar's cantata':[153]

The Romans fight
Not to enslave, but humanize the world.[154]

This statement, from Mason's eighteenth-century poem, encapsulates the late-nineteenth-century British view of empire as a civilising influence, as well as the Victorians' selective identification with their Roman predecessors. Elgar and Acworth carry on this tradition of alternating praise and suspicion for Rome, emphasising both similarity and difference between the ancient and modern empires, before concluding ultimately that the new empire, having incorporated desirable Roman traits, is morally and religiously superior.

Although composed just two years after *King Olaf*, Elgar and Acworth's *Caractacus* stands as a much more complex imperial statement. The later work gives expression to a contemporary cultural milieu of rapidly increasing *fin-de-siècle* anxiety and a related popular bolstering of an honourable imperial self-image. The very fact that *Caractacus* boldly eschews the allegorical framework of *King Olaf*, presenting instead an overtly British exposition, is reflective of the evolving tone of imperial discourse more broadly. Furthermore, the creative efforts required to emphasise the Christian aspects of

[153] Rushton, 'Musicking *Caractacus*', 223.
[154] Mason, *Caractacus: A Dramatic Poem*, 82.

both the hero and the imperial power were much greater in *Caractacus*, as, in contrast to *King Olaf*, this Christian character had to be invented more or less from scratch, rather than simply increased from an existing model. The acceptance of this narrative challenge, too, shows that Elgar and Acworth were determined to present the British public with an entirely admirable view of their nation's conduct, its moral purpose, and its Christian-imperial identity, in the distinctive cultural context of the century's final years.

Conclusion

Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf and *Caractacus* are highly charged, culturally significant encapsulations of late-Victorian Christian-imperial ideology. This thesis demonstrates that in these consciously tailored choral works, Elgar and Acworth sought to present audiences of the late-nineteenth-century choral festival world with a comforting view of the British Empire as a thoroughly admirable, benevolent force for global moral improvement. In *King Olaf*, the journey from Longfellow's original text, through Acworth's narrative adaptation, to the final, musical manifestation reveals a calculated effort to mould an ideal hero who, like General Gordon, embodied—and justified—the contradictions inherent in an expansionist imperial power with a self-image built on the cultivation of peace. In *Caractacus*, the libretto, and the musical setting, responds to an intensifying need for reassurance amid the rising uncertainties of the *fin de siècle* by reinforcing the perceived God-given Christian duty of the British Empire, evident also in areas of culture such as the poetry of Kipling and the adventure novels of Haggard, Ballantyne and others.

It is clear from this study that an understanding of Acworth's contribution to these artistic collaborations is essential for an interpretation of the cantatas' cultural significance. The importance of reading the librettos in the broader context of Acworth's own ideological disposition has been outlined, and the nature of the librettist's educational, religious and imperial experience supports the acceptance of these choral works as expressions of British idealism and cross-denominational, muscular Christian imperial identity.

Elgar's decisions surrounding the musical treatment of Acworth's ideological statements reveal, if not his own philosophy, then his desire, founded on an intensely practical understanding of the amateur choral festivals and the religious character thereof,

to access the pulse of the late-nineteenth-century music-going public in order to establish himself as a respected professional, a career composer and musical bard.

Through an analysis of the textual and musical content of these significant cultural statements, this study demonstrates that Edward Elgar, a pragmatic and self-aware composer, and Harry Acworth, an imperially experienced and highly educated librettist, joined creative forces in the unique and rapidly evolving ideological context of 1890s Britain to produce substantial works that crystallised the British view of itself and its role in the world.

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