

Exploring Twentieth-Century Music

Tradition and Innovation

Arnold Whittall

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1 The work in the world

Western orientations

'Cereal music for the weed-killers. Sally Beamish's new Proms piece calls for cleaner farming methods.' This was the punning headline to an article in *The Independent on Sunday* for 22 July 2001 about a BBC Proms commission called *Knotgrass Elegy*. A note in the 2001 Proms brochure elaborated: 'inspired by Graham Harvey's book *The Killing of the Countryside* and set in a latter-day Garden of Eden, the work describes the ravaging of our planet by pesticides and herbicides, with a particular focus on the fate of the humble knotweed grass... and the work describes a catalogue of destruction that results in the demise of both the knotgrass beetle and the partridge'.

While this pressingly contemporary, literally down-to-earth subject-matter was bound to affect the immediate response of audience and critics to *Knotgrass Elegy*, it is safe to predict that Beamish's composition is unlikely to have any great influence or effect on the environmental policies of the British government. It is not to be equated with a series of massive public demonstrations, or with a decisive electoral vote in favour of The Green Party. A composition like *Knotgrass Elegy* takes its place in the world as an art-work making political or other statements of belief. The beliefs in themselves are neither new nor unfamiliar; and in presenting them in the way they do, musical art-works in a modern, serious style demonstrate that their principal purpose is to be aesthetic within a particular cultural context.

Sally Beamish chose, in *Knotgrass Elegy*, to call for cleaner farming methods: yet her artistic and social value as a composer cannot be constrained by the relevance of her compositions to environmental or social topics, even if her musical style can somehow be shown to reflect a life-style consistently committed to 'green' principles. Just as, in the most familiar twentieth-century British examples, the fact that Michael Tippett, Benjamin Britten and several other important composers were homosexuals and pacifists creates a context for their compositions but cannot be said to provide all the useful materials for the critical, technical interpretation of those compositions, so the musical world of Sally Beamish is not determined entirely by her attitude to herbicides and pesticides.

To write in this way might appear to support the belief that 'postwar music scholarship has been particularly prone to the view that an analysis of social and political processes is irrelevant to an understanding of culture', and that while

much music scholarship has sought to avoid out-and-out formalism by addressing music's various 'contexts'... the very treatment of these contexts as explanatory factors in understanding musical texts can reinforce the tendency to privilege the text itself. What is lost here is any sense of the dialectical relationship between acts of musical communication on the one hand and political, economic, and cultural power-relations on the other.¹

There can be few musicologists writing about and reading around the subject today who will not be sensitive to the problems and challenges which arise with the concept of the composition, the work, as a text – an object open to infinite interpretation and reinterpretation. Yet to ask 'musical scholarship' – as Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh do – to transform itself into a form of cultural history rooted in unease with 'a cultural system than conceals domination and inequality' (p. 21) is to ask a great deal, given 'the multitextuality of music as culture and the irreducible complexity of musical signification' (p. 37).

It is therefore useful to be reminded of the difference between modes of critical and technical interpretation rooted in beliefs about the quality and value of those musical manifestations commonly termed 'compositions', and those more contextual enterprises to which such discriminations are anathema. For example, Peter J. Martin is clear that a proper sociology of music avoids aesthetic judgements, remaining 'indifferent to the arguments of musicians, critics and so on in their various debates and disputes',² and while it is not inconceivable for musicology to do the same – depending on the aims and ambitions of particular projects – the present enquiry is not of that kind. But my enquiry does acknowledge what Born and Hesmondhalgh term the 'irreducible complexity of musical signification'. There is no attempt to exclude a formalist stratum from its multivalent critical perspectives, if only because this can act as a check on the temptation to constrain the beliefs and predispositions of composers, in the same way as the aims and requirements of the musical institutions which provide composers with social roles are constrained. For myself, now, I do not accept that privileging the 'text', to the extent of commenting – subjectively – in detail on an object which I can see and contemplate in print as well as hear in real time, inevitably leads to an interpretation that lacks all social, political, cultural content.

The following chapters will be much concerned with the argument that musical compositions exist in, and in some ways reflect, the wider world of politics, society, culture: that even if the nature of musical compositions (as describable in texts like this one) is primarily determined by the relationship between the creating mind of the composer and the interpreting minds of performers and listeners, those minds do not exist in a vacuum. To explore composers and their works from within cultural contexts held to interact significantly with the character and content of those works continues a well-established critical tradition, the composition

of twentieth-century music having taken place in constant counterpoint with commentaries on composers and compositions, many by musicologists eager to impose a sense of order, a construction of discipline, on what were often seen by contemporaries as the most chaotic and subversive compositional initiatives. We can trace in many of these writings the assumption that the kind of creativity most relevant to the last century reflected cultural realities as vividly as it resisted absorption into mere parallelism with social, political or military events. From the tension between reflection and resistance comes that sense of discontent commonly aligned with modernism as a form of cultural practice, even if that practice has more to do with alienation from a culture's predominant elements than with acceptance of them. And it should follow, logically, that modernism as discontent should be traceable to another binary tension – between the composer's sense of place (the need for the comforts of home, stability, tradition) and that same composer's resistance to the kind of constraints that are likely to be present in any modern, developed society founded in the uneasy interaction of conservative and radical impulses, and with strong popular preferences for 'escapist' entertainment, short-term gratification, rather than the challenges and deferred rewards of 'high' art.

Progressiveness and place

The argument that the early twentieth-century Viennese environment stimulated Schoenberg and Webern to pursue their radical visions, just as the contemporaneous Parisian environment stimulated Debussy and Stravinsky, says little more than that the larger cities were most likely to offer that institutional variety necessary to ensure an occasional hearing for radical or exotic musics, alongside more mainstream materials. That is not to suggest that composers were driven into radical modernity by cities, or that they were somehow obliged to compose the city into their music. Yet the feeling persists that the kind of opposition found, especially in Mahler and Ives, between the stresses and strains of professional life in the city before 1914 and the escape into the country for idyllic periods of composition was not typical of composers belonging more decisively to the twentieth century than to the nineteenth. Indeed, these composers might have gained strength from being implicated in such explicit interactions between city and nature as Julian Johnson has proposed in writing about early twentieth-century Vienna:

It is one of Vienna's most remarkable contradictions that it was a city increasingly financed by industrial wealth and yet one which managed largely to disguise the origin of that wealth. It epitomised the bourgeois fantasy of an autonomous culture which denied its economic foundations in industry and the market place. While denying that its cultural life was founded on the domination of nature, it sought to redress that by importing nature into itself.³

There is an important distinction to be drawn between the bourgeois 'desire to mask the modernity of their economic life with the archaisms of their aesthetic style' (p. 18) and the ability of a composer like Webern to fulfil the modernist project by means of what Johnson terms 'the transformation of nature'. Webern did this by developing the Mahlerian precept of nature 'not as the "expressive content" of his music but as a formal model, the paradigm of a technical process' (p. 42). It has long been known that Webern's susceptibility to landscape – to mountains, in particular – was associated by him with music that shuns the directly pictorial programmaticism of Strauss's *Eine Alpensinfonie* (1911–15). Yet there is something in the spirit of Webern's music which is equivalent to the character of a location, and the feelings that location inspired in him. Johnson links this 'something' directly to the contrast between country and city:

It seems reasonable to suggest [that the song, 'Nachtgebet der Braut' (1903),] was a product of his new life in Vienna to the same extent that the majority of the early songs are hymns to the beauties of the landscape surrounding the Preglhof. The majority of these are concerned with landscape as a metaphor of peace and spaciousness. Yet the first song he wrote after moving to Vienna is fast-moving, passionate, anxious, and full of a new, highly erotic longing not evidenced in many of the other songs. (pp. 56–7)

Similarly, Johnson observes that 'modern communications – such as those of a modern metropolis like Vienna or Berlin criss-crossed by transport systems in a world of constant movement which tended to dissolve the sense of solid objects and places – produced the paradox of individually purposive lines accumulating to such an extent that the result, to the bystander, verged on chaos'. Johnson then claims that 'this can be heard quite literally in Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony [No. 1] of 1906', in which 'contrapuntal activity – the combination of subjectively purposive lines – here becomes so dense and so rapid that it risks becoming opaque' (p. 18).

As Johnson notes, significant moments of change and progress in the work of composers can often be illuminatingly associated with conjunctions between location and subject-matter, life and work. In the case of Stravinsky, Richard Taruskin's assertion that *Petrushka* was the work in which 'Stravinsky at last became Stravinsky'⁴ can be developed to suggest that *Petrushka* was the first work in which Stravinsky achieved the distance and detachment necessary to embody the specifically national in a potently modernist way. Most notably, its ending provides a paradigm of modernism's concern with disorientation and discontinuity: there is the terror of the Showman at the sudden, unexpected appearance of that most unnatural feature, the ghost of a puppet. And the music responds with superimpositions and juxtapositions that focus intently on the tension between octatonic symmetry and diatonic hierarchy which was one of Stravinsky's

best-learned lessons from his Russian precursors.⁵ This music evokes a continuing national tradition, and at the same time makes itself acceptable and attractive to radical spirits within a broader Western culture. In 1910, and after, Stravinsky's up-to-date Russian exoticism had a special appeal to the kind of French sensibility that found a sympathetic resonance between the 'otherness' of the octatonic scale (and other modes of limited transposition) and those poetic and pictorial concerns of the French progressives located primarily in Paris. Stravinsky might not have felt encouraged to develop his radical streak so fully and so rapidly had he been writing entirely for and within Russia in the years immediately after *Petrushka*.

So far I have touched on some of the ways in which early twentieth-century music can be perceived in terms of a conjunction between a composer's personal response to place (as nationality and location) and varieties of disorientation and instability as technical characteristics of musical modernism. Another example of this conjunction emerges from Judit Frigyesi's analysis of the conflicting reactions to Bartók's early work – the contrast between the 'hostility and unfair criticism' he received from 'the official cultural establishment in Hungary' and the 'enthusiastic, almost fanatically devoted and supportive audience... that surrounded him in Budapest'.⁶ Escaping from city to country, Frigyesi argues, 'gave Bartók the feeling of being one with all – with nature and society – and at the same time above and distanced from everything' (p. 153): and this polarity linked on to a technical practice aiming to express 'the greatest polarisation and underlying unity of the material' (p. 194). This was a practice in which 'unity' meant 'the capacity to make transparent the presence of the inner governing force that unites all elements in spite of their fragmentary nature, even opposition' (p. 297). It was a practice directly relevant to Bartók's later 'classicising' tendency (discussed in Chapter 3), and to his concern to distance himself from fully fledged modernism, even when he was in unhappy exile from Hungary after 1939.

'Genius' can be defined as the ability to develop the most visionary responses to wherever geniuses find themselves: and this supports Julian Johnson's ideas about the link between the hectic polyphony of Schoenberg's First Chamber Symphony and the topography of Vienna and Berlin. There is an obvious but profound process of interaction between the attractions which the physical qualities of locations can exert on strongly creative personalities, and the degree to which the cultural significance of a location is determined by the personality choosing it as somewhere to live and work. It would nevertheless be futile to claim that – for example – Debussy (to be discussed in Chapter 2) did more to imbue France in general and Paris in particular with distinctive musical attributes, than France, and Paris, did to mould Debussy's musical personality. Both sides of the equation are vital, and one side is meaningless without the other. Hence the importance of nationality (as distinct from nationalism) as a factor in culture, and the importance of

degrees of pictorialism in twentieth-century composition, contributing to musical identity and character.

City life

Few compositions are likely to have been more directly affected by non-musical events occurring some years after their composition than Steve Reich's *City Life* (1995) for eighteen musicians, including pre-recorded sounds played on two sampling keyboards. Reich writes that 'the desire to include everyday sounds in music has been growing', and gives as examples 'the use of taxi horns in Gershwin's *An American in Paris*... Varèse's sirens, Antheil's airplane propeller' and 'Cage's radio'. With twentieth-century advances in technology, the sampling keyboard now makes such usages 'a practical reality. In *City Life* not only samples of speech but also car horns, door slams, air brakes, subway chimes, pile drivers, car alarms, heart-beats, boat horns, buoys, and fire and police sirens are part of the fabric of the piece.'⁷

Including everyday, predominantly urban sounds in a composition alongside conventional instruments or voices is an obvious way of introducing a documentary, illustrative element into a work. It has long been possible to evoke the everyday by creating a collage of real-life sounds, 'composition' being the process of manipulating materials through editing. Such documentary compilations are the closest music comes to photography, in that the specifics of what is being depicted and evoked are relatively precise and unambiguous. The relationship between work and world is therefore direct, even if the possibility of determining some associated narrative as the collage unfolds in time may still be left to the listener's imagination. The association with musical sounds and structures usually ensures that the work/world relation is less precise. For example, in the fourth of *City Life*'s five movements, called 'Heartbeats/boats and buoys', the musical atmosphere evokes familiar kinds of water music, or riverscapes: but the connection with any particular city can only be arrived at through knowing the work's title, and hearing the movement in the context of other movements which are much more specific in their recreation of a New York environment. Moreover, even the last movement, called 'Heavy smoke', which uses speech samples 'from actual field communications of the New York City Fire Department on February 26, 1993, the day the World Trade Center was bombed', is not so much a documentary recreation – a 'picture in sound' – of the immediate aftermath of that event, as a musical structure which is associated by the composer with that event in that place. After 11 September 2001, it is instructive to reflect on why it will probably prove impossible to treat recordings made on that day as the basis for an art-work, and *City Life* itself will inevitably be affected by these retrospective associations. Yet it remains true – if we can set these associations aside – that of Reich's chosen materials and their treatments, forming something quite close to a kind of chorale prelude,

only the speech samples are exclusively and entirely associated with city life. The harmonies, rhythms and tone colours devised by Reich could serve equally well to evoke many quite different situations, locations and states of mind. And if location and situation disappear, a mood of non-place-specific agitation and menace is still likely to survive.

While works like *City Life* are written for live concert performance, or domestic reproduction by way of compact disc, they can still be said to have a function, though not qualifying as functional music like folk dances, wedding marches or national anthems. Their function is to refute any assumption that concert music has no significant connection to the cultural, social world within which the concert in question takes place. Nevertheless, to assert with every sign of confidence that ‘musical autonomy . . . is a chimera: neither music nor anything else can be other than worldly through and through’⁸ simply draws attention to the problems inherent in trying to show exactly in what the ‘worldliness’ of musical works consists. There is, for example, a great difference between the directness of the associations of a music hall song and other ‘found’ materials with which Charles Ives evokes late nineteenth-century New York in his orchestral piece *Central Park in the Dark* (1906) and the far more allusive network of connections between Brooklyn Bridge, Hart Crane’s poem ‘The Bridge’, and Elliott Carter’s *A Symphony of Three Orchestras* (1976). David Schiff describes this as ‘a symphonic work whose sounds, textures and form would evoke Crane’s life and work in purely abstract terms’.⁹ At one extreme, the association is essential – Carter’s *Symphony* would not be as it is, we infer, without Crane and his poem. At the other extreme, Crane’s (and New York’s) specifics have been transformed into ‘purely abstract’ musical terms, so that even when certain pictorial associations can be proposed – Crane’s flight of the seagull, Carter’s volatile opening trumpet solo – the assumption is that knowledge of such an association is not only unnecessary to understanding the music; it might even impose an inappropriately literal and restrictive level of connection between source and product. Neither the real Brooklyn Bridge nor Hart Crane’s poetic evocation of the bridge is more than a pretext for a composition whose importance to the world represented by the institutions and individuals who value Carter’s music must be determined primarily in terms of that composition’s quality and status as a musical work of art. This formulation reinforces the aesthetic, evaluative processes at work in my text, and distinguishes its hermeneutics – its assessment of the relations between work and world – from those to be found in sociologies of music.

In its use of distinct, interacting instrumental groupings, *A Symphony of Three Orchestras* does not sound all that different from Carter’s earlier *Concerto For Orchestra* (1969), inspired by a poem by St John Perse which ‘describes winds blowing over the American plains destroying old, dried-up forms and sweeping in the new’ (Schiff, *Carter*, p. 291). David Schiff accepts that listeners to the

concerto – especially those who have prior information about its poetic inspiration – might sense that it evokes ‘an entire continent and a vast heterogeneous society in a state of turmoil’, whereas ‘for those who prefer their music “absolute”, the Concerto can be heard as a four-tiered kaleidoscopic collage of shimmering textures and pulsating rhythms, all in a state of continuous flux’. In fact, there seems no great difference between the relatively literal sense of ‘a vast heterogeneous society in a state of turmoil’ and the more abstract ‘shimmering textures and pulsating rhythms, all in a state of continuous flux’. The first response scarcely depends on the matching vision of a precise location: the work’s worldliness is assured by the truth of its musical character, its ability to convince listeners that this turmoil, this flux, is an experience of substance and significance, a real experience of value to real people. When as searching a commentator as Roger Scruton declares that Carter’s Concerto is ‘a life-affirming work... which succeeds in turning an uncompromising modernism to the service of joy’¹⁰ his account of his response makes no reference to landscapes or weather systems, even though terms like ‘life-affirming’ and ‘uncompromising’ identify qualities of human personality whose interaction offers one possible construction of a modernist aesthetic.

Place, personality and Sibelius

Carter avoids pictorial titles, like Messiaen’s *Des canyons aux étoiles*, or Tippett’s *The Rose Lake*, which seem to promise a direct connection between geographical location and musical sound. If we have visited Bryce Canyon, Utah, or Senegal’s Rose Lake, we might believe that our experience of these places (as monumental, numinous) matches our experience of the music – that the music represents and embodies the essence of the place. At the same time, we might recognise that other titles for the same music are not inconceivable.

The identity of a musical composition results from the conjunction of a personal tone of voice – the composer’s style – and the particular form or genre chosen for the work in question, which under normal circumstances will not be the sole creation of that composer. In listening to, and thinking about, Sibelius’s last orchestral work, *Tapiola* (1926), we may find it difficult to avoid notions of nationality on the one hand and of genre – the orchestral tone poem – on the other. This is a work with an illustrative title and a poetic epigraph, referring to a Finnish forest region,¹¹ and the title creates expectations about the meaning of the music, to the extent that, we presume, the composer intended the one to refer to and to evoke the other. Although the distinctiveness and distinction of Sibelius’s style might seem to matter more than the specifics of its Finnishness, it is pointless to try to divorce the Sibelian musical identity from all national qualities, even when there is little if any direct input from folk-music. It is inconceivable that Sibelius’s musical personality would be as distinctive as it is without the sense of place which *Tapiola* and other works convey. Yet it is an essential aspect of

Sibelius's achievement that this distinctive voice should find expression in all his mature works, not just in those with titles evoking Finnish legend and landscape.

If location is one aspect of music's world, the life-history of the composer is another. In recent musicology, Sibelius's identity has been reconstructed from a variety of source materials, of which his diaries and the annotations on his musical manuscripts have proved especially fruitful. In particular, James Hepokoski's notion of the composer as a 'modern classicist'¹² underlines his distance from Germanic late romanticism and expressionism, as well as from the more exotic, even primitive forms of nationality contemporarily evident in Stravinsky, Bartók or Janáček. On its own, the concept of modern classicism could suggest a composer concerned to avoid treating music solely as a means of self-expression, or self-representation, preferring 'objective' forms and a general air of detachment. Such detachment need not imply bloodless music, as the powerful climaxes of Sibelius's Fifth and Seventh Symphonies show. But the familiar comparisons with Mahler – or Strauss – reinforce this characterisation of Sibelius as the reviver of disciplined attitudes to composition which are at odds with more progressive contemporary practices – attitudes which required him not simply to turn away from his leading contemporaries but to resist the open emotionalism and expansive expressiveness of his own earlier style, linked as this was to nineteenth-century Russian romanticism.

On the basis of sketchbook evidence for the common elements shared by *Tapiola* with Sibelius's last three symphonies, James Hepokoski comments that 'it may be argued that "Tapiola" or "The forest" (literally, "The place where the god Tapio dwells") – may be regarded as the implied overarching title of Symphonies 5, 6 and 7 as well' (Hepokoski, *Symphony*, p. 36). Hepokoski also refers to Sibelius's 'separate, redemptive world of symphonic composition' (p. 54) as a kind of escape from a world of 'harsh external events' (the explosion of Finland into Civil War as a consequence of the 1917 Russian Revolution): and it is surely a legitimate response to the 'affirmation' of E♭ major at the end of the Fifth Symphony to interpret this as a triumph *over* society, rather than a triumph with or for society. That 'vital rise' to the symphony's forceful conclusion was not simply the Ode to Joy of a Finnish patriot, since by temperament the older Sibelius was not so much organically at one with the metropolitan, political world as self-consciously distanced from its ideals and practices.

Such an evaluation makes it all the more appropriate that Sibelius's 'last word' as a composer should have been music which portrays a landscape embodying nature as both indifferent and threatening. *Tapiola* depicts both storm and calm, but the calm is less that of contemplative humanity than of sublimely indifferent natural forces to which humanity is irrelevant. It is therefore more appropriate to speak of *Tapiola*, rather than the Seventh Symphony, as a work in which "resurrection" becomes ambiguous if not tragically precluded'.¹³

The world into which James Hepokoski places *Tapiola* is unambiguously anti-urban. Starting from the argument that all the works after the Symphony No. 4 are the result of ‘an increasing flight from cosmopolitan fashion into near-solitary contemplation’ (Hepokoski, ‘Sibelius’, p. 333), Hepokoski declares that Sibelius’s later compositions

are inseparable from his day-to-day existence at his forest retreat, Ainola, outside Järvenpää: its towering, resinous pines, its crystalline lakes, its boreal plants and wildlife, including its majestic migrating birds... its dramatic and pitiless change of seasons, its utter separation from anything urban.

There is a close connection between this very specific environment and compositional objectives and processes: Hepokoski claims that from 1912 Sibelius envisaged ‘an enormous final project: bringing the nineteenth century ideal of organic form to a culmination’; and he also argues that Sibelius’s ‘aesthetic pantheism’ was supplemented by

his growing belief in the potential reuniting of music with nature. He now sought to bring the palpable, grainy textures of musical sound and the processes of musical elaboration into alignment with the magisterial spontaneity of nature’s cries, rustles, splashes, storms, cyclical course and the like. Thus the act of composition became a neo-pantheist spiritual exercise. The resultant work of art was intended to invite a complementarily mystical, reverential or poetic listening – not to be captured by rational analysis or chalkboard explanation. (p. 334)

Hepokoski’s powerful rhetoric allows little room for ‘mere humankind’ in this world, as his comments on *Tapiola* itself reveal. He claims that ‘the entire work, seeking an identity with the dark and ancient pine forests, harbouring their hidden god, Tapio, is produced from the ramifying growth of a single, brief motive’, and he links ‘the gathering up and climactic double-discharging’ of that basic motive with ‘the self-disclosure of the animated forest-god’, as the result of a musical form and atmosphere governed by ‘impersonal, elemental natural processes before which mere humankind fades into insignificance’ (p. 338).

My immediate response to Hepokoski’s reading is to try to bring Sibelius himself, and with him ‘mere humankind’, back into the world of *Tapiola*. Hepokoski has also suggested that Sibelius was a ‘nature-mystic’ who ‘may have been inviting us to brood on the elemental cycles that structure our own lives’,¹⁴ and the composer’s own comment that works like the Sixth Symphony are ‘more confessions of faith than are my other works’ encourages the argument that – even if that ‘faith’ is pantheistic – it is the relationship between the human and the divine which is central, not the implacable, awe-inspiring existence of the divine alone. From this it could follow that the music of *Tapiola* attempts an interaction between

[Largamente]

353

fp *cresc. possibile* *fff* *dim. molto*

Ex. 1.1 Sibelius, *Tapiola*, bars 353–8

those ‘impersonal, elemental natural processes’ and human awareness of them – even if that ‘awareness’ involves resistance as well as acceptance. An analysis pursuing this understanding would therefore interpret the work’s basic motive not as a representation of the forest god Tapio but as the human response to perceptions about the god. Thus that ‘climactic double-discharging’ in bars 356 (Ex. 1.1) and 569 can be felt as embodying troubled humanity’s terror and despair in face of the god’s ‘self-disclosure’ – a sense of the human contemplating an intimidating form of otherness that can then be read back into *Tapiola*’s opening contrast between a short, pleading melodic phrase and a sustained, swelling and dying chord.

In proposing this interpretation, I am aligning *Tapiola* with a rather different single-movement orchestral composition, Webern’s *Variations for Orchestra* Op. 30 (1940), if only because thinking about the nature of the Sibelius brought aspects of my Webern interpretation to mind. These issues concern the principle of dialogue between lyric and dramatic qualities as they promote ‘a spiritual conflict between vulnerability (seeking serenity) and assertiveness (a tendency to violence)’, and the associations of this with the placing of pastoral, as ‘the pantheistic sense of God in Nature’, in a tragic perspective.¹⁵ For me, the claims of a tragic perspective in *Tapiola* are focused on what happens after bar 569, the second of Hepokoski’s shattering points of divine self-disclosure. Here it could appear that ‘mere humankind’ has faded into insignificance – although, as suggested above, this need not be so if human terror rather than divine fist-shaking is heard. But in any case *Tapiola* does not end with this gesture, and the subsequent melodic statements, high and (initially) loud in the strings, sound less like a gentler, more humanly tolerant statement from the forest god than pleading and ultimately accepting, if not quite serene, human responses. As for the final juxtaposition of chords, the first unstable, animated by swelling and dying away, the second consonant, uninflected: a hermeneutic reading cannot ignore the dramatic contrast which these chords embody, even though it is as absurd to claim that the first stands for divine grandeur and the second for human acquiescence as it is to argue that the chords somehow combine to represent the absorption of human into divine, the mortal into the timeless.

Writing of the first movement of Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata* Op. 101, Robert S. Hatten argues that ‘the mixing of tragic elements endows the pastoral with

greater seriousness, and the elevation of style in turn supports the interpretation of the pastoral as a poetic conceit for a spiritual state of innocence (or serenity) subject to the disturbances of tragic experience (or remembrance).¹⁶ While it might be easy to align a multitude of musical compositions with the image of innocence disturbed by tragedy, I believe that the conjunction, and the human focus it involves, is of special significance for *Tapiola*. There is ‘tragic’ separation here as well as structural interdependence. The ‘purely musical’ gesture, and drama, have an inevitability and a necessity that leave semantic interpretation opaque and ambiguous. Sibelius’s own presence is nevertheless still evident, as is his admonition to his interpreting listeners ‘to brood on the elemental cycles that structure our lives’,¹⁷ and which do so in cities as well as in forests.

Environmental sensibilities

In the later twentieth century, it was easier for artists and politicians to think in terms of man’s self-destructive indifference to, or abuse of, nature than of nature’s *Tapiola*-like indifference to mere humanity. As the threat of nuclear disaster receded, and the Cold War waned, the dangers of pollution and global warming advanced to become more pressing threats to life on earth. During the first half of the twentieth century, the literary and visual arts had responded liberally to the killing-fields imagery of the First World War, and even musical compositions were able to find analogies for bleak, stark scenes of despoiled nature. For example, the possibility of connecting representations of landscape with lament, or elegy, is explored in Vaughan Williams’s Third, ‘Pastoral’ Symphony (1916–21), and even though Gustav Holst’s austere tone poem *Egdon Heath* (1927) was inspired by Thomas Hardy’s description of a bleak English landscape in his novel *The Return of the Native* (1878), it has never been difficult to regard that specific location as a metaphor – prophetic, in Hardy’s case – for Flanders and the Somme.

There is always the possibility of linking perceptions about a composer’s sense of place, or feeling for location, with generic adaptations or mutations of pastoral, whether openly embraced or in some sense evaded. As the genre most directly connected to place, pastoral is a tempting recourse for critics and commentators eager to avoid accusations of reifying the alleged ‘autonomy’ of musical compositions: and the possible linkage of pastoral with notions of nationality and nationalism makes it even more seductive as a potential means of finding somewhere in the world for a musical work to belong. The rewards of connecting modernist challenges to synthesis with aspects of pastoral theory have been well demonstrated in Geoffrey Chew’s study of *The Rake’s Progress*, centring on the argument that ‘Stravinsky’s neoclassicism, with the differing degrees of “defamiliarisation” it offers of familiar materials, is ideally suited to symbolise and project the fluid ambiguities of Auden’s pastoral fable’.¹⁸ But the open-ended relevance of pastoral associations makes it all the more important to avoid implying that there

is an invariable connection between technical 'defamiliarisation' and pastoral as a genre. Nor, for that matter, are works of art which deal with the natural world, or with threats to the environment (up to and including Sally Beamish's *Knotgrass Elegy* of 2001), necessarily best thought of as aligned with pastoral, even though in its broadest definition this is 'a literary, dramatic or musical genre that depicts the characters and scenes of rural life or is expressive of its atmosphere'.¹⁹ There is, after all, a distinction between the concept of 'rural life' and an understanding of the natural world as something which impinges on all life, rural and urban alike.

Discussing *Tapiola's* impact on later twentieth-century composition, Tim Howell notes the particular significance of Sibelius's later style for Peter Maxwell Davies. The comment by Maxwell Davies which Howell quotes – 'What I find particularly interesting is the way he articulates his time and the way he transforms his material'²⁰ – seems to allude to the way first movement is transformed into scherzo in Sibelius's Fifth, a 'confusion' of formal prototypes which is attractive to Maxwell Davies, concerned as he is to bring out the ambivalence and multiplicity that comes from reworking traditional genres and formal templates. Yet it is in the musical language itself, and how this relates to a feeling for place, that Davies appears to learn most from Sibelius.

Timothy L. Jackson's concept of crystallisation and entropy²¹ is in essence an organic, even biological metaphor for musical process, using the opposition between coming to birth (or into focus) and dissolution (or death). The main reason why I prefer Hepokoski's interpretation of Sibelius's language in terms of modern classicism to Jackson's rather underdeveloped notion of modernism is because (as I understand it) modern classicism seeks to re-establish synthesis as the main technical and structural factor in music. For Sibelius, the 'synthesis' represented by traditional tonal structuring had been inherent in all music in his early years, and so for him it was less a question of re-establishing it than of reaffirming it while exploring the tensions between it and forces seeking to destroy it. The case of Peter Maxwell Davies, whose first work called symphony dates from the 1970s, is very different, and although Davies insists that he uses 'tonality' consistently and coherently throughout his symphonic music, he has acknowledged that there are far-reaching differences between tonality as he conceives it and the tonality found in Sibelius. Those differences, as I have argued in detail elsewhere,²² are substantial enough to enforce a basic distinction between the modern-classic Sibelius and the modernist Maxwell Davies, and I have therefore used a different metaphor, invoking a spatial rather than an organic continuum, and represented by the terms 'fixed' and 'floating' with respect to the presence of tonal centres (or 'rooted' and 'symmetric' with respect to harmonic structuring).

It is possible to demonstrate the parallels and differences between Sibelius and Maxwell Davies in varying degrees of analytical depth – for example, comparing the single-movement design of Davies's Fifth with Sibelius's Seventh: the role

of B as principal tonality, or tonal centre, in *Tapiola*, Davies's Second Symphony (1980) and the 'choreographic poem' *The Beltane Fire* (1995). To summarise an intricate technical topic, a world of difference exists between the ultimate consonant, major triad orientation at the end of *Tapiola* (and allowing for the extent to which Sibelius's harmony is far from straightforwardly diatonic in every respect), and the ending of *The Beltane Fire*, in which the principal harmonic factor is not a major triad but a diminished seventh, and the tension, within that seventh, between B and F♭ is enhanced by the way in which the F has a (minor) triad built onto it. Davies's harmony is more post-tonal than tonal as these terms are normally understood, and it might therefore be argued that any alignment between him and Sibelius is pointless. I would nevertheless suggest that placing these works in the world reveals aspects of affinity that speak very directly across the technical barriers of style and structure. As far as the world of this book is concerned, the next step is from the observation of such expressive affinities to the examining of reflection, mirroring, as context and technique.