PSYCHOLOGICAL REPRIEVE IN THE SYMPHONIES OF
RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

A Thesis in
Musicology

by
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ABSTRACT

The Vaughan Williams compositions that stand to yield the most to new analyses are those expressively adventurous works written during trying periods in the composer’s life, especially the WWI years (Symphony No. 3) and those right before his death in 1958 (Symphony No. 9). Both pieces continually reference their morbid source material, WWI and Tess of the d’Urbervilles, respectively. Although the music is frequently explained in terms of these sources, no examination begins with the composer and what internal processes may have influenced the composition of these works.

Seeking to fill this considerable gap in Vaughan Williams scholarship, my thesis explores how Vaughan Williams engages with the idea of psychological reprieve in the Pastoral Symphony (No. 3) and Symphony No. 9. In The Pastoral, I will show that Vaughan Williams removes himself from the war in which the work first germinated by including elements of a locus amoenus to provide distance and refuge from his traumatic memories of the trenches. In Symphony No. 9, I will identify various manifestations of the Freudian uncanny, the sensation that occurs when a once-suppressed idea re-emerges, in effect a failure to achieve full removal. This concept is particularly suitable for exploring R.V.W.’s ninth effort, since this work, based on Hardy’s Tess, brought the composer into contact with several elements that resurrected his primal fear of death. Though he, like all other humans, suppressed such eschatological fears, they appear to have come roaring back as he delved into Tess to compose his final symphony.

This work will feature an introduction, two central segments, and a conclusion. In the introduction, I will frame the compositions as outgrowths of their musical and socio-political environments. With the broader context established, I will investigate personal
issues in the composer’s life during the time of the Third and Ninth Symphonies. By examining these difficulties, I will be able to define how he would have imagined removal and why he needed it.

Following the introduction, I will examine the Pastoral Symphony, first conceived in the trenches of WWI. Through a semiotic analysis of rotational circularity, harmonic stasis, and references to prelapsarian locales in the first three movements, I will show that Vaughan Williams created and populated a locus amoenus to remove himself from the war by providing an alternate place of pleasance. Proceeding to the fourth movement, I will show that, through an introduction-coda frame, Vaughan Williams redefines the purpose of the locus, using it instead to sequester semiotic references to his war. In effect, he creates an Ovidian locus terribilis and finds removal outside its boundaries.

Section two examines Symphony No. 9 and the means by which Vaughan Williams articulates the Freudian Unheimliche (uncanny), the feeling of terror when a stimulus reawakens a primal, repressed fear, in this case, death. The musical uncanny will be explored by evaluating common elements in musical segments depicting Stonehenge, the “ghost drummer of Salisbury Plain,” and the bells that signals Tess’ execution, all experiences that would trigger uncanny sensations, some of which directly connect to the composer’s life. R.V.W. wrote of an uncanny sensation when he first saw Stonehenge, and later lived near the monument on Salisbury Plain (he was billeted there during WWI). He also includes references to the South Tidworth poltergeist, or the “ghost drummer of Salisbury Plain,” a legend with which he would have been familiar, and replicates Clare and Liza Lu’s interaction with the chimes that signaled Tess’s execution. By telling the
Tess story, we soon discover that the aging composer composed a largely autobiographical work, one that struggles to provide the same reprieve he created in the *Pastoral*.

This research demonstrates that Vaughan Williams musically articulates his attempts at psychological refuge, whether they are successful or unfruitful. This study is one of the first works to examine the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams through semiotic and psychoanalytic lenses, and thereby hopes to begin a trend of critical theoretical approaches to R.V.W.’s compositions.
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To those I failed to mention above: my omission is only a reflection of my limited memory, not of your impact or value. You, along with everyone listed earlier, have played an integral part in the conception and completion of this work by shaping its writer. Thank you.
For Maddy

*All is well.*
Introduction

Ralph Vaughan Williams lived from 1872-1958, an immensely turbulent stretch of time in both musical and socio-political environments. During that span, the musical world saw the reigning nineteenth-century Austro-German style of Brahms and Wagner yield to the aggressively new compositions of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and other modernists while the world as a whole experienced two global conflicts. Vaughan Williams first experienced this volatility around the turn of the twentieth century, when he saw his idols and mentors abruptly overshadowed by the radical new styles emanating from mainland Europe’s cosmopolitan hubs. The onset of WWI added to this already jarring transition; it thrust the composer, by then considered England’s musical figurehead, into the goriest and most politically divisive conflict in European history. While he survived the war, it combined with new musical developments to cast a shadow on his personality and future compositions.

Evidence of such darkening first appears in the composer’s Pastoral Symphony (1922), a work that alludes to his experiences in the trenches of WWI. The symphony does not easily divulge its references, though. They only appear after a significant interrogation of the serene musical surface, frequently noted for its organic evolution and

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1 R.V.W.’s most notable role models were Bach, Holst, Wagner, Stanford, and Perry, in no particular order. He studied with Stanford and Perry and thought enough of them to deliver a speech entitled “The Teaching of Parry and Stanford” on BBC Radio on January 1, 1956. Within the first two paragraphs, Vaughan Williams praises their “forward-looking” qualities and says that he “had the honour to be a pupil of both these great men.” A transcript of the speech may be found in David Manning, ed., Vaughan Williams on Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 315. Though a relatively early influence, Simon Heffer notes that Wagner “obsessed” R.V.W. in his early years in Vaughan Williams (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 24. Vaughan Williams was also steadily involved with conducting Bach performances, especially his favorite, the St. Matthew Passion. In “Bach and Schumann,” originally published The Vocalist 1 (1902): 72, R.V.W. praises nearly every aspect of Bach’s compositional style. The transcript may again be found in Manning, Vaughan Williams on Music, 129-32. Meanwhile, Holst was arguably Vaughan Williams’s closest friend, and he receives effusive praise as a human being and composer in “Gustav Holst: A Great Composer.” Originally published in The Listener 51 (1954): 965-6, it too may be found in Manning, Vaughan Williams on Music, 311-14.
sweeping beauty since the work premiered nearly one hundred years ago. The difference between the two levels indicates that the surface was designed to draw attention from the wartime references that the composer sought to purge. In that way, the symphony’s construction serves as a neat analogue for the burdened veteran putting on his “brave face” after he returns home, something Vaughan Williams seems to have done particularly well.

Though the war provided much of the material for the Pastoral, the evolution of the musical world influenced its presentation. The early twentieth century saw a mass exodus from what remained of common practice tonality and its associated forms. Vaughan Williams’s Pastoral participates in this trend, although more subtly than his counterparts on what is typically regarded as the modernist axis (Schoenberg-Stravinsky). In the following study, I will employ set theory, the combination of modal and tonic harmony, Wagnerian Steigerung, and deformations of sonata form, all of

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2 Ursula Vaughan Williams first introduced the idea that the Pastoral Symphony was about Ralph’s service in WWI. She describes a conversation in which R.V.W. told his friend Harry Steggles that the symphony was “really war-time music” and “not really lambkins frisking at all as most people take for granted.” Ursula Vaughan Williams, R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 121. Until that time, the work was heard as another pastorally-themed composition with four slow movements—Herbert Howells’s “ Vaughan Williams’s ‘Pastoral’ Symphony,” Music & Letters 3 (1922): 122-32 is typical of this reading. Examinations of the relationship between the pastoral surface and the darker allusions have been slower to emerge. Of these, Eric Saylor’s “‘It’s Not Lambkins Frisking at All’: English Pastoral Music and the Great War,” The Musical Quarterly 91 (2008): 39-59, and Daniel Grimley’s “Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral,” in British Music and Modernism: 1895-1960 (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 147-74, are the most prominent.

3 In her R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams, Ursula Vaughan Williams (his second wife) mentions his harrowing service in WWI, but offers little to no evidence of R.V.W.’s struggle in readjusting to civilian life. This lack of evidence leads one to believe that the composer’s external state after the war was one of contrived normalcy.


5 Daniel Grimley explores the Pastoral in terms of set theory, modal/tonal integration, and sonata deformations in “Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams, Modernism and the Symphonic Pastoral,” in British Music and Modernism: 1895-1960 (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 147-74, arguing that Symphony
which show Vaughan Williams’s departure from common practice and Romantic compositional procedures. In short, I will read the Pastoral as a complex work for a complex time.

It would be wrong, however, to read the Pastoral Symphony merely as a jumble of modernist practices and allusions to war under a pleasing musical surface. In fact, one of the symphony’s most intriguing elements is its attempt to provide shelter from the war and from the modernism that, for this composer, constituted its own horror. Vaughan Williams constructs for himself a locus amoenus, drawing on a longstanding literary trope, a pastoral “place of pleasance,” by alluding musically to several of its traditional elements. Scattered throughout the symphony are illustrations of the locus’s encapsulating boundaries, birdsong, and environment of unmolested pleasance. Vaughan Williams connected deeply with the English countryside, and he used music to mitigate trying situations. It would have been only natural for him to create a pastoral safe space during some of his most trying hours.

No. 3 represents a more cosmopolitan approach to symphonic writing, since it incorporates post-tonal elements (set theory) and sonata deformations (rotational form and introduction-coda frame). This view sharply contrasts earlier analyses that simply mention R.V.W.’s modal writing and his stock use of sonata form. My work will adopt many of Grimley’s findings and explain how they helped Vaughan Williams escape from harrowing wartime memories.

6 I speak here of industrial modernism, especially the development of machine guns, weaponized chemicals, and the mortars that changed the way wars were fought from WWI onward.

7 R.V.W.’s connection with pastoral England may be seen through his spirited efforts to transcribe and catalog folksongs, detailed in several articles by Julian Onderdonk, especially “Folksong Arrangements, Hymn Tunes, and Church Music,” in The Cambridge Companion to Vaughan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 136-56. Vaughan Williams was also an avid walker and cyclist, and he spent a great deal of time exploring his surroundings while growing up in rural Surrey and living in Dorking (email message to Eric Saylor, August 31, 2015).

8 Ursula Vaughan Williams details how her husband found solace from the rigor (and boredom) of army training by playing the pipe organ at Saffron-Walden and making music with the Machray family at Bishops Stortford in Ursula Vaughan Williams, R.V.W., 119. She also describes a creative outburst immediately following his first wife’s death (p. 310-14). Although he was likely relieved to be free of a difficult marriage, I assert that he engaged in musical activity to cope with her passing. In the following study, I will suggest that he used composition to 1) insulate himself from memories of WWI and 2) attempt to repel thoughts of his own death around the time of Symphony No. 9.
While the *Pastoral* successfully provided a reprieve from his wartime experiences, the composer failed to obtain a similar reprieve in writing Symphony No. 9 (1956-57). Time and again, his ninth symphonic effort reflects this inability to find solace, in passages that I read as manifestations of the Freudian “uncanny” (*das Unheimliche*)—the resurgence of once-repressed fears, signaled musically by themes that illustrate Stonehenge, the “ghost drummer of Salisbury Plain,” and Tess’s death and deliverance.10

The horrors manifested in Symphony No. 9 all engage in some way with death. This fear of the grave seems to have been especially present for R.V.W. in the years surrounding the symphony’s creation, when he knew that his remaining time was limited. As he was conceiving and beginning to compose the Ninth Symphony, his health began to decline, and Vaughan Williams eventually required a major operation in 1957. By the time of the symphony’s premiere a year later, he was physically unable to go to the podium to accept applause. All this was combined with his increasing deafness and the knowledge that the critical tide had turned against him. Reviews of Symphony No. 9 called it “silly” and “asinine,” while R.V.W. was described as unoriginal and “defiantly

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9 Tess refers to the central character in Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, which serves as a program for Symphony No. 9.

10 Work on the musical uncanny is relatively sparse, although Richard Cohn’s “Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57 (2004): 285-324 and Michael Cherlin’s “Schoenberg and Das Unheimliche: Spectres of Tonality,” *The Journal of Musicology* 11 (1993): 357-73 have creatively explored das Unheimlische as it relates to harmony and tonality, respectively. In addition, Isabella van Elferen explores the concept as it relates to gothic music in *Gothic Music: The Sounds of the Uncanny* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012). The following pages draw on her work with echo and Cohn’s examination of hexatonic poles to identify instances of the uncanny in Vaughan Williams’s Ninth Symphony.
despairing.” According to his friend and biographer Michael Kennedy, at that point, “he [Vaughan Williams] knew the tide had turned.”

Vaughan Williams displays his newfound focus on death through the hidden program of Symphony No. 9, which follows Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. The symphony describes the point when Tess witnesses the frightful Stonehenge, the bells that mark her execution, and her eventual deliverance from a difficult earthly life. Outside of the Tess narrative, Vaughan Williams includes a puzzling movement that describes the “ghost drummer of Salisbury Plain.” Though not every element belongs to the Tess program, they would all trigger an uncanny feeling, and that unheimlich trepidation would arise because the stimulus somehow relates to the primal fear of death.

In describing these uncanny stimuli, Vaughan Williams approaches them from several angles. He alludes to Stonehenge’s sacrificial purposes, its visual imposition on an otherwise placid landscape, and even illustrates his physiological response to the fear it created in him. This wide array of descriptions allowed R.V.W. to capture several aspects of the monument that for him possessed fundamental associations with death, especially his own. In broad terms, Stonehenge represented Druidic human sacrifice and

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12 Ibid.
the imposition of a long dead civilization on the modern world. More importantly, it represented the Great War, the conflict that constantly threatened Vaughan Williams’s life while costing him family, friends, and his optimism. Finally, Stonehenge was the last place Tess visited while she was alive; given the composer’s connection to her, R.V.W. could very well have made his own “final visit” in the symphony.

Tess’s death bells describe the focus and physical “freezing” of Clare and Liza Lu as they learn of Tess’ execution, while the hexatonic poles that signify Tess’ death itself create a jarring effect associated with musical deaths throughout history. Given the relationship between Vaughan Williams and Hardy’s protagonist, any evocation of Tess’s death may be read as an attempt by the composer to explore his own demise.

The ghost drummer, the only element outside of the Tess program, is described through ambiguous tonal movement and harmonic elisions; these capture the spirit’s place somewhere between the worlds of the living and the dead. Since the South Tidworth poltergeist (“ghost drummer”) does not appear in Hardy’s novel, its symphonic portrayal seems out of place. When viewed as an extension of Vaughan Williams’s death-focused mindset, however, the poltergeist fits well among the symphony’s morbid subject

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14 During the composer’s lifetime, Stonehenge was commonly believed to have been a site for Druidic human sacrifices. Although archaeological proof was not discovered until the twentieth century, the popular opinion persisted. Thomas Hardy was one such believer, as confirmed in Butler, Thomas Hardy After Fifty Years (London: Macmillan, 1978), 22. To that end, Hardy describes Stonehenge as a place of sacrifice in Tess of the d’Urbervilles, Vaughan Williams’s favorite novel.

15 Vaughan Williams was billeted on Salisbury Plain during WWI, and would have come to associate that locale, and the war itself, with Stonehenge by the time of the Ninth Symphony. Alain Frogley explores the connection between Salisbury Plain and the Great War in Vaughan Williams’s Ninth Symphony, 275.

16 Though she notes no particular difficulties in readjusting to civilian life, Ursula Vaughan Williams details the human cost of the war in Ursula Vaughan Williams, R.V.W., 122.

17 See note 17 for a description of their perceived relationship.

18 Vaughan Williams saw many personal similarities between himself and Tess and, though her never mentioned specific commonalities, he felt sufficiently close to retrace her footsteps during a summer walking tour of Salisbury Plain. For more, see Frogley, “ Vaughan Williams and Thomas Hardy: ‘Tess’ and the Slow Movement of the Ninth Symphony,” Music & Letters 68 (1987): 50.
matter. By including the ghost drummer, R.V.W. shows the extent of his musings on death: his fascination drove him to resurrect an obscure element of his past and include it in his final symphonic work.

The *Tess* elements combine with references to the ghost drummer to illustrate Vaughan Williams’s focus on death, a fixation he was once able to keep at bay through composing. That and his other attempts to obtain a musical reprieve form the heart of this study as it examines his efforts and their outcomes, whether positive or negative. By examining his strivings for psychological relief, this work considers yet unexplored facets of Vaughan Williams’s complex character. The composer himself rarely spoke about his personal life; this work hopes to offer new insight into how he coped with difficulty. By combining psychoanalytic and semiotic theories with traditional music analysis, the following pages attempt to reveal the complex psychological processes that underlie a sophisticated artist and career.
The *Locus Amoenus* in Symphony No. 3

In its heart of hearts, Ralph Vaughan Williams’s *Pastoral Symphony* is war music. Its consistently low dynamics, pastoral topics, and generally subdued aesthetic have typically misled its audiences toward the traditional notion of the pastoral, though. In early reviews, Philip Heseltine described the work as “a cow looking over a gate,” and Hugh Allen, however lovingly, likened it to “VW rolling over and over in a ploughed field on a wet day.”\(^{19}\) Even the most sensitive listeners tend to miss the screaming of shells and the moans of the dying, and understandably so—these do not exist in the foreground of Vaughan Williams’s third symphonic effort. They only emerge when one explores the work in terms of its environment: the trenches at Ecoivres during the Great War.

Although his surroundings were defined by bullets and death, Vaughan Williams does not dwell on such nightmares in his symphony; he composes reprieves from the war as well. In ways both explicit and referential, the *Pastoral* fulfills its composer’s need for refuge by hosting structures that shelter Vaughan Williams himself or sequester his traumatic memories. In movements I, II, and III, he creates and populates a *locus amoenus*—a pastoral place of pleasance—through rotational circularity, harmonic stasis, and references to prelapsarian locales.\(^{20}\) Movement IV redefines this locus, using it to isolate semiotic references to his wartime experiences. In two distinct ways, R.V.W. defuses the horrors of war through musical means, his preferred way of processing

\(^{20}\) In its strictest definition, the *locus amoenus*, which translates to “place of pleasance,” is an enclosed pastoral oasis in which characters find refuge among flowing water, birdsong, trees, etc. Although originally a literary construct, this study examines how a locus amoenus may be crafted musically.
adverse situations. Even in a less-than-deadly environment such as the boring pre-deployment months, he turned to music to alleviate difficulty.

By all accounts, Vaughan Williams detested the inflexibility of army life, especially during his several pre-deployment postings. He did find a predictable comfort in music, however, one that serves as a precedent for his therapeutic use of creative activity during the trying years to come. Using his performance ability to combat the oppressive monotony, R.V.W. found a special reprieve in playing Bach on the pipe organ at Saffron-Walden. The organ in particular was “the most certain refuge from the soul-destroying routine of an army in training,” according to his widow Ursula, but the high point was surely weekend music-making with the Machray family at Bishops Stortford, meetings described by Ursula as “the happiest time of all his army days.”

Those happy days grew significantly darker with his unit’s arrival at Ecoivres and its first taste of the war. As a wagon orderly in the 2/4th Field Ambulance, Vaughan Williams was responsible for evacuating casualties from the front line and delivering them to Regimental Aid Posts or Collecting Posts, where the gravely injured would be transferred to Aux Rietz. At night, he moved the sick by ambulance to the Main Dressing Station along shell-riddled roads. Although nighttime was relatively safe for medics and orderlies, they were still under continuous observation; the constant threat of sniper and mortar fire only reinforced death’s central place in their new environment. R.V.W. would have needed a reprieve then more than ever, being a new initiate to

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22 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
uncertainty and death on that scale. It is little surprise then that the symphony began to germinate at Ecoivres. Even after the unit’s move to Greece and his commission as an artillery officer, the military life continued to suppress Vaughan Williams’s musical identity. Just as before, though, he had the means to remove himself.

To combat the growing disassociation from his musical life, R.V.W. taught a pickup choir in France and a small “orchestra” in Salonika, but these activities surely did not engage his creative faculties as personally as composing or performing. Without the means to mount a traditional concert or the time to sketch a new work, his early ideas for the *Pastoral Symphony* became a means of reaffirming his musical identity and basic humanity. In a war where every action was performed *en masse*, conceiving the work provided Vaughan Williams both a degree of individuality and a refuge from the death and chaos surrounding him.

His experience with death was wide-ranging and around-the-clock. Working as a wagon orderly put him in close contact with the deceased during the day and the gravely ill at night, giving him a constant and “vivid awareness of how men died.” Beyond facing the work-related casualties, he was forced to weather the deaths of his brother-in-law Charles Fischer and friends F.B. Ellis, Denis Browne, and perhaps most painfully, George Butterworth. R.V.W. considered the young Butterworth a leading figure in the next generation of English composers, and “the loss of Butterworth’s friendship and the unfulfilled promise of his music were a profound sorrow.” Though these departures were painful of their own accord, Vaughan Williams carried an extra burden: as an orderly, he understood how their deaths occurred and what they looked like. He escaped

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27 Ibid.
these and other losses by venturing into the pastoral, as did countless other British
soldiers during the war. Whether through gardening magazines from home or
descriptions of the countryside in their letters, countless servicemen found solace in their
personal corners of Arcadia.\textsuperscript{28}

In his search for refuge, Vaughan Williams constructed a \textit{locus amoenus}, the
pastoral, idealized place of safety originally presented in Theocritus and Virgil as a
remote garden. Although its precise depiction varies throughout history, the locus’s
seclusion and pastoral character remain fundamental attributes. Other elements of the
classical locus, emphasized to varying degrees, include birdsong, shepherds, trees, and
water. The variable attention paid to each of these elements results in several
manifestations of loci, such as the biblical Eden, Shakespeare’s “green world,” or
Tolkien’s Shire. Equally important is the locus’s distinction as an \textit{idealized} locale, and
thus a mental construct. As such, it provides an ideal source of refuge for the combat
survivor whose wounds may be mental and physical. R.V.W. is one of the first
composers to deploy a locus amoenus for his own protection; previous examples shielded
only characters, whether literary or operatic.

Instead of privacy for his amorous affairs or a place to herd his sheep, Vaughan
Williams sought a reprieve from his memories of war, and crafted a refuge of musical
components that exhibit unique affects, timbres, or constructions. These components are
embedded in the symphony’s turbulent musical landscape, which is marked by constant
shifting between flat and sharp-side harmonic fields, and each correlates to a facet of the
literary locus amoenus.

\textsuperscript{28} Paul Fussell gives an in-depth examination of the pastoral as a coping mechanism among the
British troops in Paul Fussell, \textit{The Great War and Modern Memory} (London: Oxford University Press,
The musical embodiments of reprieve considered here include formal circularity, harmonic stasis, and references to unspoiled locales. Formal circularities will be explored as they appear in the first movement, where they contribute to a rotational form that fits within a larger trend of using musical circularity to escape an undesirable environment. The harmonic stasis beneath the second movement’s trumpet solo will be construed in terms of the ritualized WWI stand-to-arms, abbreviated to stand-to, and by extension the pastoral sunset and birdsong. In referencing the stand-to, Vaughan Williams recalls the single point in the fighting day marked by human inactivity, a time when soldiers’ heightened acuity drew them to sunset and the sounds of birds. The third movement presents references to a prelapsarian locale by including sketches from earlier work inspired by *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In conjuring an unspoiled England, Vaughan Williams employs a favorite coping mechanism of burdened Great War veterans.

In Symphony No. 3, formal circularity, harmonic stasis, and prelapsarian references are often analyzed as descriptions of war, if they are given special attention at all. I, however, seek to redefine the aforementioned entities as manifestations of safety that contribute to R.V.W.’s personal locus amoenus. With these components newly defined, I will compare them to elements of the traditional locus, focusing on 1) its encapsulating boundaries, formed musically by formal rotations; 2) birdsong, included through a complex referential sequence presenting as harmonic stasis; and 3) its pleasant environment, provided by prelapsarian reference. These comfortable analogues will show Vaughan Williams’s inclusions to be part of an updated locus, a larger and personally meaningful structure, as opposed to a series of unrelated attempts to cope with war.
Movement I: Rotational Structure as Organic Boundary

The first movement presents a rotational structure, a design that underpins sonata form and several other musical frameworks including rondo, theme and variations, strophic song, and “ostinato-bass processes.” Often analyzed as a strict sonata, the movement nonetheless exhibits a consistently organic evolution, a trait that distances it from the schematic dimension of sonata form. A rotational analysis takes account of this quality more effectively, clarifying its importance at a deeper structural level. Rotational forms may be described as

“circular variations” that “typically function as a gestational matrix: they serve as a medium within which a different idea is planned, “grows into life,” and is eventually revealed or “born” in a fully formed telos (or goal) that is normally the climactic utterance.

Circular recurrence can create feelings of safety, derived from human familiarity with the natural cycles of day/night, the seasons, or the safety of the womb. Vaughan Williams was exposed to these ideas through his cousin’s marriage into the Cambridge Ritualists,

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29 James Hepokoski, “Clouds and Circles: Rotational Form in Debussy’s ‘Nuages’,” *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* 15 (2010): 13. Hepokoski writes that several forms, sonata included, “may be construed as differently patterned foreground manipulations of a deeply seated human impulse toward repetitive circularity.” While analyzing the movement as a sonata form may be accurate on one level, a reading as a rotational structure appears more fundamentally meaningful and in line with Vaughan Williams’s compositional tendencies.


who explored classical works in terms of ritualized struggle, rebirth, and regeneration. Even in the absence of direct conversation with Francis Cornford, the husband of R.V.W.’s cousin Frances Crofts Darwin and a member of the committee that commissioned *The Wasps*, Cecil Sharp could have acted as a conduit for the ritualists’ thoughts. Moreover, Vaughan Williams surely knew of the Mummers’ Plays, long a fixture in Britain, and their central feature: circularity through regeneration of a central character.

Cultural absorption of cyclical structures was not limited to Britain, however, as composers of various nationalities began to employ rotational circularity at the turn of the 20th century. James Hepokoski, writing of Debussy’s *Nuages* (1899), illuminates this trend, describing the current of emerging European modernism at the turn of the century, that of staging an emphatic withdrawal from the mechanistic and alienating instrumental rationality of an ever-advancing urban technological culture. Here the aim, in solidarity with a disaffected cultural elite, was to escape into philosophical, cultic, or aestheticist fantasies of displaced or discontinuous time, synthetically constructed alternative worlds of recurring temporal cycles.

The Third Symphony’s dates of composition, 1916-22, place it squarely within this current and clarify the composer’s attraction to circularity. A withdrawal from technology would have been only too understandable for Vaughan Williams at the time, faced as he was with the brutal effects of the machine gun, trench mortar, and weaponized chemicals.

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34 Ibid., 397.
35 Ibid., 396.
36 Ibid.
on his countrymen and friends. Acting as a member of the “disaffected cultural elite,” he fled to worlds of his own construction, seeking refuge. We see the beginning of his flight in the first movement, where he employs rotations as an escape and simultaneously creates his locus’ boundaries.

Daniel Grimley identifies four rotations (Ex. 1.1). The first spans sixty-two bars, beginning at the first measure and ending at $F^\#^2$. While the second comprises a relatively short thirty-nine measures and extends from $F^\#^3$ to $K^1$. The forty-six bars of rotation three cover $K^2$ to $Q^4$, and the final division starts at $Q^3$ and ends in the final measure at $T^5$. In addition, he names the germinal material for all rotations as $[0, 1, 3, 4, 7, 9]$, Forte number 6Z-49, asserting that the set can suggest the interplay of several modal fields with G mixolydian as a general “tonic.” In this case, the set creates a friction that drives the entire work. The false relations between $B^\#$ and $B^\natural (0,1)$ and $D^\#$ and $D^\natural (3,4)$ generate “much of the symphony’s harmonic argument” by causing a constant oscillation between sharp and flat. This process is akin to riding on a playground swing: the person pumps his legs to swing back and forth, gaining energy until he reaches a point where he can go no higher. Having reached that peak, he relaxes his legs and allows himself to swing back to an eventual stop, where he can start the process again.

In the first movement, the harmonic disagreement draws the circularities’ outlines in this way. Less organic compositions usually feature markers of evolution at a surface level, since the melodic ideas that show development tend to function as pure extensions

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37 Measures will be identified using this system, borrowed from Daniel Grimley, which identifies a measure by presenting a rehearsal letter followed by a number of measures before or after its appearance.
38 Later, I offer an alternate starting point that features another iteration of the opening measures and the telltale harp gesture, meaning all four rotations would start with similar material.
39 Grimley, “Landscape and Distance,” 152.
40 Ibid., 153.
of the harmony. Here, however, the themes may not be tied to the harmonic field at all, though they may sound consonant. This difference may derive from the fact that the theme is modal while the harmony is diatonic, or that the harmonic field is in flux. In either case, these disparities render thematic development an unreliable indicator of a rotation’s progression. In example 1.2., the surface theme appears to be a stable pentatonic and a precursor to sharpward movement, but the harmony actually dives flatward beneath it.

The harmonic argument, although still fluid, provides a series of progressively emphatic abutments of sharp and flat that help mark the rotational structures. These abutments are made clearer by increasingly unified statements of the two key areas, achieved by folding more voices into the two key statements or bringing the harmonic fields to the fore through complementary orchestration or other rhetorical gestures. As the juxtapositions are presented with greater clarity, the rotation gains energy and moves toward its expressive peak, where the harmonic areas are unified and presented closest to one another.

Rotation one begins this process with oscillating thirds (Ex. 1.3), from which the intensifying harmonic argument drives the rotation forward beneath the presentation of several themes. The argument soon builds to a climax at B⁵ where juxtaposed B²-minor and G-major chords illustrate their most pointed opposition yet (Ex. 1.4). Having emphatically juxtaposed both sets of half steps present in 6Z-49, the rotation reaches its expressive zenith.

Once a rotation vehemently states the opposed harmonic fields, it begins to relax and form the downward stroke of the circularity. As it calms, there is a loss of energy,

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41 Grimley, “Landscape and Distance,” 155.
due in part to a less-intense interplay between sharp and flat that is often supported by thinning and increasingly linear orchestration, harmonic weakening, or both. At the end of the rotation’s descent lies an altered restatement of the familiar opening (m. 1), marked by oscillating pitches and, in the third rotation’s case, a restatement of the first violin solo (m. 8). Subsequent iterations of the thirds are marked by changes in pitch level and orchestration (m. 63, m. 148) while the solo violin material is re-barred and less rhythmically active as it descends to its conclusion. The next rotation emerges from these restatements, and at that point, a circularity is completed and the next begun.

In rotation one, this process of descent begins with a plaintive English horn solo (Ex. 1.5) that emerges from the decaying chords of the climax; its appearance signals the rotation’s decline which is characterized by a series of woodwind and string solos. Under the last of these solos, that of the oboe at E+4, a falling gesture in the horns and harp moves to the string choir after a brief ensemble swell. The strings then dissolve into a static A-major chord as the thirds emerge at a different pitch level to start the second rotation (Ex. 1.6).

Rotations two, three, and four follow a similar trajectory that begins by recalling the opening measures’ oscillating thirds. By revisiting the opening, Vaughan Williams emphasizes both the rotational structure and the referents of the parallel thirds. He first provides structural clarity through a restatement of memorable material with great developmental potential. The distinctly wispy texture and telltale thirds of the first measures clearly delineate the rotations’ starts, due to their unmistakably breezy character and their distinction as the symphony’s first sounds. In addition to clarity, the first six bars provide fertile ground for the growth of the other rotations. Most of the first
rotation’s thematic material emerged from these opening measures, and that relationship continues in the second, third, and fourth rotations.

Beyond providing structure, the opening measures of each rotation serve to reference the pastoral. Perhaps the most overt allusion is the inclusion of parallel thirds, which evoke the untainted simplicity of an idealized locale, though the violin utterance could also reference an imagined, simpler time in both its timbre and pentatonicism. By placing pastorally-tinged material at exposed formal junctures, the composer reinforces Arcadia’s controlling force in the musico-programmatic structure. Although not explored in depth here, an informed reader or listener may infer any number of meanings arising from the composer’s varying treatments of the pastoral opening and the gestures therein.

After restating its pastoral thirds, the second rotation finds itself torn between the downward pull of $B^9$ minor and its new key of A major. As the thirds conclude, the rotation experiences its first flatward descent at $G^+$, articulated in part by the flute and violin solos in $B^5$ mixolydian and $C$ dorian, respectively. By engaging these two key areas, Vaughan Williams introduces energy via the conflict between the $B^9$ of A major and the $B^3$ in both new modes, while saving the $D^7/D^9$ dichotomy for the climax. Moving forward, the movement rises sharpward again at $H^{*6}$ before falling flat one and a half bars later in preparation for a final rise to the cycle’s apex.

The peak of the second rotation begins late in the movement at J, after a substantial buildup that seems nonetheless to represent a gesture of failure. Based on the

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43 This possibility becomes especially tantalizing when considering the thin and warped orchestration at the start of the third rotation.
figure at B\(^{+5}\) that Vaughan Williams himself described as a “cadence” (Ex. 1.7), the climax lacks a concentrated statement of juxtaposed B\(^{7}\)/B\(^{3}\) and D\(^{7}\)/D\(^{3}\) and thus may be deemed incomplete. Here, any abutment of sharp and flat is offered in passing, either vertically in the woodwind/brass sixteenth notes or linearly in the string choir.

Since it lacks the harmonic focus of a typical climax, this peak is best identified through Vaughan Williams’s description of it and its place in the larger argument of sharp vs. flat, not vertically concentrated statements of B\(^{7}\)/B\(^{3}\) and D\(^{7}\)/D\(^{3}\). In a rotation that seems purely developmental in terms of key area and structure, specific juxtapositions are unlikely to return in their earlier form, but the larger harmonic argument—the push of sharp-side key areas vs. the pull of flat-side key areas—persists. In the climax at J, C\(^{b}\) minor and C minor occupy the same bar, while B\(^{9}\) minor and F\(^{b}\) minor are forced to coexist in the next measure. The two pairs are linked by half step in all voices, save the harp and first horn in J\(^{+2}\), showing the stark opposition of sharp and flat fields that has come to mark the rotational climax (Ex. 1.8). The upward motion is short-lived, though, as further restatements of the “cadential” theme are presented by a series of flat minor chords within the larger modal context of B\(^{7}\) dorian (Ex. 1.9).

This dive marks the beginning of the rotation’s decline. From J\(^{+3}\) to J\(^{+5}\), chords progress by larger intervals, lacking the decisive semitone motion from just two bars prior and operating in a more modal context. It appears that the division of the harmonic fields has already softened, and the downward arc of the circularity is nearly complete. The last gasp of harmonic argument occurs at K\(^{-4}\), where, instead of a return to A major, a

feeble F♯-minor sonority appears. In addition to concluding the rotation’s harmonic argument, it ushers in a warped restatement of the symphony’s opening, thus beginning rotation three (Ex. 1.10).

Nearly unrecognizable in its new form, this incarnation reinterprets the opening thirds, now presenting them in a unison F♯-minor sonority in the flutes and A clarinet. Underneath, the basses and bassoons play an altered version of the harp/low strings’ first entrance, this time finishing the gesture’s upward climb (Ex. 1.11). The horn soon echoes, and the viola’s oscillating augmented seconds (minor thirds), played in metrically disquieting quarter-note triplets, introduce an oboe rendition of a now familiar violin solo (Ex. 1.12).

Following the oboe solo, the rotation is marked by extreme harmonic instability that once again drives it forward. After a brief episode of sharp-side harmony (K+4 to K+7), the rotation shifts flatward again, sounding transitional G-major and E♭-major sonorities simultaneously at K+8. Three measures later, the cadential figure renews the opposition between B♭ and B♭, sounding B♭-minor and G-major chords back-to-back. As in the first rotation, English horn and viola solos follow in B dorian45 before the harmony slips down again at O^7. Seven bars later at O, the harmonic instability intensifies, often alternating harmonic fields every other measure, or even every other beat. This oscillation continues until B♭-minor finally yields to a triumphant G major at rehearsal P (Ex. 1.13). Having finally reached a climax in the original home key, the rotation begins its downward trajectory. Vaguely reminiscent of the first rotation, the descent features a brassless texture and a series of solos, this time atop a stable G-mixolydian string bed.

45 Grimley, “Landscape and Distance,” 152.
As flute and horn statements conclude the series of solos, the fourth rotation begins with the opening thirds stated in the low stings and A clarinet, at last anchored deeply in G major (Ex. 1.14). By the sixth measure, the thirds slip by step into B♭ dorian and remain on the flat side until a brief resurgence at Animando. Following a brief slide, all voices build upward in stretto at S−4 and soon arrive at a grand G major, one of the few instances of a forte in the entire symphony (Ex. 1.15). It would seem that the argument is resolved, but a sudden lurch to the B♭-minor cadential motive creates the most jarring juxtaposition yet and signals the rotation’s decline (Ex. 1.16).

The descent here is quick, as with previous rotations, but the rhetorical ambivalence at its conclusion distinguishes this circularity from its earlier iterations. By T+2, the cadential gestures have yielded to a root-position G-major chord throughout the strings, signaling what appears to be a satisfying conclusion. The English horn solo above it presents an intriguing question, however: does this solo, used time and again as a transitional figure, cause the last rotation to remain open as Daniel Grimley asserts? To an extent, its dorian presence over the G-major chords robs them of their tonal finality, and it certainly makes for a tenuous closure. However, the final measures by the celli and basses, present in some form in the beginning of every rotation, provide just enough closure to salvage the rotational form. They reiterate the first discernible motive in the whole symphony (the harp gesture, m. 4) and, even though the rotation does not end on the ideal tonic of “G,” the motivic restatement possesses the referential power to seal the rotation.

The four circularities as described above equate to the boundaries of the locus amoenus not only through their encapsulating shape, but also through their organic
substance. If Vaughan Williams’s escape were presented solely in terms of theoretical rotational circularity, a locus would not necessarily be present. In such a case, the place of refuge might be conceived of as a sort of synthetic structure, a citadel dropped into the pastoral environment of the symphony. Such a reading would become especially plausible if the rotations were based on a fixed number of measures or defined by the evolution of surface-level themes, since the rotations would appear to be applied to the musical surface. However, these rotations are created through harmonic argument; they emerge from the musical soil itself. Compare this to the most celebrated examples of the locus: Calypso’s Grotto, clearings in Shakespeare’s Forest of Arden, Klingsor’s garden, or, again, Tolkien’s Shire. Their sheltering boundaries are outgrowths of the land itself, whether mountains, forests, flowers, or other topographical contour. In the first movement, the same principle is articulated musically.

Movement II: Bugle Solo as Birdsong at “Stand-To”

Movement two turns away from escapist circularities, instead employing harmonic stasis to invoke refuge. This harmonic immobility describes a type of reprieve that existed only at stand-to, a paradoxical time of anxiety and safety which was a twice-daily facet of R.V.W.’s routine in the service. In this movement, harmonic stasis exists as a fixed E♭ sonority beneath the natural trumpet solo, a sonority that featured modal coloring only a few measures prior. The harmonic stillness has a striking effect on the movement, one best understood when considered in terms of the polytonal harmonic scheme preceding it. Such an examination also serves to reinforce the parallels between this stagnancy and stand-to, both of which are surrounded by constant activity.
The movement’s polytonal harmonic motion begins immediately, with an insistent F-minor string sonority supporting a pentatonic horn solo in C (m. 2). From the strings emerges a series of first-inversion triads “that results in chromatic false relations of the kind explored in the opening movement,” and they once again destabilize the newly established key area. A brief movement through G minor and A minor underpins another oboe/clarinet duet in C pentatonic before a brief return to F minor, its stability partially undermined by the rhythmically free duet above it.

The modal ambiguity continues until G⁴, where the harmonic agreement between accompaniment and soloist articulates refuge from earlier tonal strife. While earlier triads are frequently inverted (A²) or presented under tonally disparate material (A⁺⁴), here we find root-position Eᵇ-major chords beneath a definitively Eᵇ melody (Ex. 1.17). Brief modal excursions are present, but the constant restatement of Eᵇ after these small, framing gestures is sufficient to establish it as the movement’s first stable tonal center. At last, we are treated to a partial reprieve that resolves the tonal/modal disagreements.

All harmonic motion soon evaporates, and the Eᵇ sonority remains as a drone under the unmetered trumpet solo, wreaking havoc with the listener’s sense of time (Ex. 1.18). The choice to leave the solo unmetered deserves further examination, since a simple “rubato” or “freely” could have achieved a nearly identical aural result. Instead, Vaughan Williams omits the barlines, thereby depriving the reader and listener of the surest way to ascertain the passage of time, much like a soldier who must wait anxiously

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46 Ibid., 163.
47 As described by the composer, the D’s represent missed notes by the bugler at Ecoivres, and his mistakes are not factored into this analysis.
48 The solo closely resembles aspects of the “Last Post,” an Eᵇ bugle call in the British cavalry during WWI. It was commonly used in the field to signal the end of the day or at military funerals to usher the fallen to their final rest.
for an attack that may never materialize. If Jonathan Kramer is correct that time is merely a relationship between people and the events they perceive,\textsuperscript{49} then R.V.W. uses the solo to represent stasis by forcing the listener, or reader, to acknowledge a single event. What could have been a linear, teleological solo becomes an extension of the static chord beneath it, rising from it like a vapor. This presentation of the bugle solo as a single element demands listeners’ complete focus. In this way, they experience a soldier’s heightened acuity, a common mention in their writings from the front. In brief, R.V.W.’s audience experiences the bugle as he did.

Due to its sudden harmonic calm, several scholars have noted the passage’s resemblance to stand-to, a ritualized occurrence that was, for the combatants, inseparable from the idea of sunset. At dawn and dusk, everyone in the trenches, including visitors, readied their weapons and stood still, observing the German lines for signs of an attack.\textsuperscript{50} If there were no offensive, and usually there was not since each side was busy observing the other, the men went about preparing their breakfast or digging trenches after the evening watch.\textsuperscript{51} It was also a time of heightened anxiety, but still a reprieve from the otherwise constant danger. Just as stand-tos were the only time of stillness in the daily routine, the segment in question is the only example of absolute harmonic stillness in the symphony, not to mention a passage that quotes a bugler’s practice at sunset. In addition, both stand-to and the movement’s harmonic stasis are followed by jarring movement. Just as the men would be thrust back into the unforgiving world after their observation,\textsuperscript{52}

\textsuperscript{50} Fussell, \textit{The Great War}, 46.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Most attacks occurred at night, so the time after the evening stand-to can be interpreted as especially brutal, a thought that may find its expression in the explosive entrance after the trumpet solo.
so Vaughan Williams follows his trumpet cadenza with a pentatonic outburst in D♭ (Ex. 1.19).

After considering the trumpet solo’s origins at sunset, it may initially be construed as contributing to a deformed pastoral topic. In such a reading, the trumpet corrupts the trope of the nightingale/thrush at dusk, or, more broadly, the birdsong at the beginning and ends of days. Here, the bugle with all its martial connotations seems to replace the innocent birds and their offerings; it depicts a once-pleasant environment invaded and violated by man. The birds that once contributed to the serene pastoral environment are replaced by harbingers of war, and the entire pastoral ideal is thus threatened.

The other interpretation of the trumpet solo, and the one endorsed in this study, is that it indexes birdsong, i.e., it does not replace it. In light of the first movement’s circularities, shown to be gestures of escape, R.V.W. likely employs harmonic stasis as a further attempt at reprieve, not to remember human corruption of an environment he cherished. Additionally, this interpretation shows how harmonic stasis contributes to R.V.W.’s locus.

To understand this second interpretation, one must conceive of birdsong within the series of references as the item that soldiers most closely associated with evening stand-to. To recapitulate the referential series thus far, the trumpet solo imitates, in the composer’s own words, a bugler he heard practicing at sunset, a time that soldiers tied to evening stand-to. Paul Fussell corroborates birdsong’s place in the sequence, writing in *The Great War and Modern Memory* that: “the [lark] became associated with the stand-to at dawn and the [nightingale] with stand-to at evening.”53 Countless letters further

solidify the relationship between birdsong and stand-to, especially a particularly intimate
account from Arthur Bliss:

I found in France, as so many others did, that the appreciation of a
moment’s beauty had been greatly intensified by the sordid contrast
around: one’s senses were so much more sharply on the alert for sights
and sounds that went unnoticed in peacetime because taken so for granted.
But a butterfly alighting on a trench parapet, a thrush’s songs at “stand to,”
a sudden rainbow, became infinitely precious phenomena, and indeed the
sheer joy of being alive was the more relished for there being the continual
possibility of sudden death.\(^{54}\)

Although presented here as a complicated referential scheme, sunset, stand-to, and
birdsong would all have been taken as a singular occurrence by R.V.W. since they
coexisted nearly every day at the same time. By including one, he includes the whole
environment.

Movement III: Prelapsarian Reference as Unmolested Pleasance
The third movement features several potential manifestations of reprieve, one of which is
especially intriguing: the reference to prelapsarian locales. Others exist, though, and merit
a brief examination. One of the least-grounded examples of reprieve arises from the
inclusion of circularity, although not in the form of rotations. Movement III is divisible
into a series of formal circularities\(^{55}\) that frame pastoral-sounding material, but these
structures seem to be more a byproduct of the larger form than an elective inclusion. In
this reading, the “comforting, homely image of the pastoral” suggested by a thicker, bass-

\(^{55}\) The form is a clear double scherzo/trio (ABABA) plus coda, laid out as overlapping circularities
divisible into a number of smaller ternary units.
oriented orchestration in the unusually plodding scherzo sections combines with overlapping ternaries to offer one, albeit fleeting, escape.

A complementary reading derives from the juxtaposition of the laborious scherzo and the lighter trio. The latter, in a spritely 3/4, leans heavily on the first beat, giving it the character of a compound-meter folk tune. This allusion to a purer English countryside places a vision of Arcadia beside darker, rhythmically uneven material that brings to mind the slogging reality of stretcher bearing. As Eric Saylor notes, “the pastoral language can gain power when Arcadia is positioned, not as an escapist safe haven, but as a brighter, more appealing world that exists parallel to (or interspersed within) the grimmer trappings of modernity.” It appears, then, that Vaughan Williams holds his memories of a musical countryside alongside the darker, merciless reality produced by men. Upon further examination, however, the “laborious” material that figures so prominently into this reading is not a reference to struggle, but to a prelapsarian locale.

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56 Grimley, “Landscape and Distance,” 165.
While the interpretation correctly identifies juxtaposition as an agent of refuge, it misinterprets the purpose of the heavier triplets that appear in each scherzo.

The most intriguing and historically-grounded manifestation of shelter is found spread across the scherzo and coda of movement three, where R.V.W. includes pre-war sketch material inspired by *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Since the composer destroyed most of his sketchbooks, we are left with Donald Tovey’s assertion that his friend Vaughan Williams intended the scherzo material “for a ballet of oafs and fairies.” Tovey’s information comes from a purported conversation with the composer, and although it is tempting to blindly accept such information, we must proceed with caution—Vaughan Williams had a propensity to mislead if he thought it necessary.

R.V.W. seems to have been truthful in this case, though, since similar gestures appear in movement III and the gathering and dance of fairies in *Sir John in Love*, his opera based on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Ex. 1.20, 1.21). The first gesture transferred to the symphony appears in the fifth measure of the “Dance of the Fairies” and the first measure of the symphony. It contains a triplet that rises by step after the first eighth note, then drops down again on the second beat. The size of the drop varies between works; it spans a fifth in the symphony and a second in the opera, but such variation is typical when Vaughan Williams “cribs” from other compositions. After the first triplet has spoken, a second triplet in the upper voices descends by step after the first eighth note, which R.V.W. changes to duple eighth notes in the symphony, giving the measure a decidedly awkward gait.

The second gesture represents R.V.W.’s most literal borrowing of material from *Sir John in Love* (Ex. 1.22, 1.23). Both feature a dotted-eighth/sixteenth rhythm followed
by two sets of eighth notes which are grouped to form a measure that feels more like 6/8 than 3/4. In the symphony, the first three pitches are slurred and the next three are staccato, while *Sir John in Love* features two slurs, each spanning three notes. The only difference lies in the interval between the last two notes: an ascending minor third in the *Pastoral* and a descending perfect fifth in the opera. Otherwise, the *Sir John* and *Pastoral* excerpts are identical, simply transposed by a minor third.

The last comparison of sketch material in the opera and symphony takes into account not only gestural similarity, but also each segment’s location at the end of its respective scene or movement. Both selections (Ex. 1.24, 1.25) contain a sweeping descent, featuring motion primarily by step or third, and both end with a measure of distinctly articulated eighth notes. In *Sir John*, the descent is slurred, so the eighth notes are marked staccato; in the *Pastoral*, the inverse occurs. These larger descent gestures are further linked by the individual utterances that comprise them. Each operatic statement spans two bars while symphonic statements occupy one, and the first expressions of each work occupy similar registers, as do the second, third, and fourth pairs. At the conclusion of the fourth statements, both works feature comparable ritardando effects. While “poco rit.” explicitly appears in the *Pastoral*, in *Sir John* the ritardando is found not as a direction, but in the notes themselves. By transitioning from eighth notes to quarter notes, then proceeding to a rest before sounding the final pitch of the descent, Vaughan Williams produces a convincing ritard-like effect.

Further evidence for the *Pastoral*’s descent as a quote of *Sir John*’s fairy scene is found in the gesture’s placement in both works. Just as the descent signals the end of the fairies’ scene, it also signals the end of the *Pastoral*’s lighter coda material. After the
gesture concludes, Vaughan Williams returns briefly to the scherzo material only to provide rhetorical closure for the movement; the coda itself was ended by the fall.

Although the sketch material adds similar character and gestures to both works, its purpose is drastically different in each. In *Sir John in Love*, the music adds to a lightheartedly festive atmosphere. In Symphony No. 3, it is a reference to an unspoiled environment, deployed to provide an alternative to memories of war.

Vaughan Williams’s recourse to a prelapsarian environment represents a common coping mechanism among WWI combatants. Paul Fussell writes that, interspersed between memories of graphic death and destruction, “moments of brief recurrence to the pastoral ideal” are featured throughout Great War memoirs—Vaughan Williams makes a similar inclusion in his symphony. Fussell goes on to describe these moments of remembrance as “pastoral oases,” an especially accurate description of the Shakespearean material’s purpose in the *Pastoral*. Eric Saylor seems to speak of the same tendency when he writes that Arcadia gains power when interspersed with the negative. Taking these two historically-based perspectives into account, it becomes clear that Vaughan Williams placed his vision of an undisturbed Windsor Forest alongside the darker, merciless reality crafted by man to provide himself refuge through a pastoral oasis.

This focus on unspoiled times, along with the formal circularities and harmonic stasis examined earlier, reminded the composer that beauty and peace, however fleeting, still existed during his war. He inserts references to the disparate, the positive, and the beautiful as alternatives to his memories of death and constant stress; these references form the elements of his personal locus amoenus. Through formal circularity, he

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59 Both the “Dance of the Fairies” and the opening scherzo of the third movement share an unexpectedly heavy character and earn a “pesante” designation in both cases, an unconventional marking for a fairy dance and scherzo.
participates in a larger escapist trend and creates the organic boundaries in which his locus, and the traditional loci, are contained. Through harmonic stasis, he remembers temporary safety through human inaction at stand-to, also referencing birdsong, peaceful pastoral sunset, and temporal ambiguity in one fell swoop. These elements, also found in the traditional locus, are thus included within the newly formed boundaries. Finally, through his reference to the lighthearted, comedic atmosphere of Windsor, he populates his locus with the traditionally pleasant environment, one untouched by outside corruption. For R.V.W. especially, one so attuned to the English countryside in his personal and professional lives, creating a locus was a way to mentally exist in an environment he loved while helping him come to terms with its destruction around him. By committing his thoughts to ink after the armistice, the composer provides a window into the process by which he, and others in similar circumstances, might find solace when consumed by humanity’s darkest invention.

Movement IV: Redefining the Locus

The consolation of the locus amoenus is short-lived, however. The symphony’s final movement explores yearning and fragmentation as it deforms and eventually restores its central motive, creating musical parallels to the human condition in war. Vaughan Williams places the fourth movement’s material, yearning and fragmentation included, inside the largest-scale circularity yet: an introduction-coda frame.\(^6\) One of Hepokoski and Darcy’s sonata deformations, the introduction-coda frame recalls introductory material in the coda, often encapsulating some sort of sonata form and possibly implying

\(^6\) Grimley, “Landscape and Distance,” 168.
a narrator at a higher level of consciousness. The inclusion of a human voice and the fact that R.V.W. has already narrated his experience with the bugler makes this reading a strong possibility.

The composer’s choice to frame unsettling material suggests a transformation in the meaning of circularity in the symphony, even the birth of a *locus terribilis*, a locale marked by horror and violence first encountered in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. For the first time in the work, the composer does not provide contradictory material to draw focus from the darker inclusions; there are no fairies here, and the solo violin and pentatonic clarinet are violently bisected in the development. This lack creates a bleak, Hardy-esque picture, one that must be contained by the boundaries of the frame, in the anti-locus.

Beginning at A♭, the listener begins to experience yearning and failure through the progression of the docile woodwind sarabande (Ex. 1.26). This gentle theme gathers momentum, picking up brass sonorities and climbing upward only to recede fifteen bars later, on the verge of climax. As the sarabande recedes, it offers a nascent version of the movement’s principal motive: two stately pairs of descending fourths joined by a descending whole step. In this early statement, however, the last downward fourth is inverted to an upward fifth (Ex. 1.27). Immediately after the motive sounds, the process begins anew at C♯, this time progressing through eighteen bars and two meter changes. As the sarabande material recedes after a second failed climax, the motive is presented

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61 James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 304. The composer took a liking to Wagner during his time at the Royal College of Music, and surely knew of the overture to *Tannhäuser* which represents a clear introduction-coda frame. Also of note is his oddly Wagnerian treatment of the sarabande material. With each passing statement, it evolves in waves, typifying the idea of *Steigerung*, a German device used to great effect by Wagner and clearly seen again in the *Tannhäuser* overture.

more confidently by the horn and echoed by slight variations in the A clarinet and English horn. Just as the French horn attempts an augmentation of the motive, a manic development severs the last pitch.

Characterized by unpredictable alternations of agitated sul tastoponticello string statements and lento sonorities, the development embodies conflict and perversion, both within its boundaries and in its relation to the rest of the movement. In this section lies a smaller example of Saylor’s interspersed pastoral, with episodes at H⁴ and J² that feature simple violin (a drone, no less) and E-pentatonic flute solos, respectively. Recurrences of the agitated string statement (Ex. 1.28) come at irregular intervals, and soon it becomes difficult to sort out which segment is disrupting the other. It is not difficult, however, to see the cold, jagged string gestures as the steel that perverted the pastoral landscape in so many forms during the war.

Musical perversion exists as well, and it appears to warp the very germ of the movement (the descending fourths motive) after deforming the sarabande material to which it was connected, similar to man’s reaction to a landscape corrupted by trenches and barbed wire. The familiar woodwind sarabande reappears at m. 72, but up a half step⁶³ and at a biting forte (Ex. 1.29). After the corrupted sarabande, our fourths motive returns only once in its common form, and even then rhythmically altered and down a semitone, at H⁴ (Ex. 1.30). At this point, we begin to see the effect of a large, turbulent environment on a smaller entity. The vacillation between pastoral and profane finally stops with a unison transition, providing the focus necessary to lead the listener, and composer, to a cathartic recapitulation.

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⁶³ Half steps provoke a similar anxiety in Der Erlkönig, where the boy’s pleas for help increase by semitone as his pursuer draws closer.
The recapitulation’s closure begins with the sarabande’s long-awaited climax (m. P+2), a triumphal statement of the motive after a twenty-one-measure buildup.

Descending fourths blossom throughout the orchestra, appearing in every part except harp and timpani, before melting into a poignant call and response between woodwinds and brass, Bruckner-esque in its isolation. As the brass answer decays, a final statement of the sarabande fades to support the untexted and unmetered vocal line reminiscent of the introduction. Before long, the symphony and the memories it articulates fade away.

To try and attach a simple meaning to the abandoned climaxes or any single gesture would be heavy-handed. In doing so, we would try to attach a single meaning to war, an enterprise far too personal to define in broad terms, or maybe words at all. Perhaps this is why Vaughan Williams chose to compose his story. Musical gestures can have several referents; in this case, such ambiguity provides R.V.W. a broader palate with which to describe the swirling chaos of the trenches. Amidst the bedlam of Vaughan Williams’s war, men struggled to retain their personal humanity, even though they lived and died in human flocks.64 Nowhere is the desire for individuality expressed more clearly than in this fourth movement, where a single motive struggles to be known amidst a chaotic, grotesque din. It begins innocently in its purest form, undergoes a change amidst chaos, then powerfully reemerges. Whether that final climax is a survivor’s thanksgiving, freedom through death, or an elegiac outpouring is immaterial. Vaughan Williams has made a connection to the human condition in war, and left it to the listener to sort out.

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64 Fussell, The Great War, 240.
In brief, the bulk of the fourth movement centers around abandonment and fragmentation. For this reason, it appears that Vaughan Williams chose to contain the traumatic environment/experiences in his circularity, not himself. With the horrors imprisoned, he can step away and find refuge. The distance required for such rest is provided in part from the fracturing of the sonata form that occurs when the vocal timbre is introduced; to fracture is to create distance between the parts that once formed a whole. Further separation comes from the unmetered vocal solo, which recalls the second movement where a similar utterance over harmonic stasis seemed to suspend time. When employed here, such temporal ambiguity separates the composer and listener from the disheartening place where gestures progress only to fall short and are severed by cold intrusions. Circularity creates shelter again, but reprieve now lies outside its borders, where death, so long a part of Arcadian lore, cannot follow.

As Paul Fussell notes, countless soldiers escaped to the pastoral to deal with the war’s calamities. Here it seems that Vaughan Williams uses an aspect of the pastoral to leave it entirely, thereby obtaining yet another creative reprieve from the horrors that threatened to subsume him.
Failed Reprieve: Das Unheimliche in Symphony No. 9

Whereas in my first chapter I examined Vaughan Williams’s successes in creating musical reprieve, in this second chapter I will explore his failures. These shortcomings and their results appear most vividly in Symphony No. 9, a work created in the composer’s final years of life, 1956-57. Its position as Vaughan Williams’s last major composition has led many scholars to emphasize the symphony’s retrospective qualities, which certainly are prominent. Yet along with these happier elements of R.V.W.’s life, several once-repressed thoughts and memories roar back to torment the old composer.

The symphony’s dealings with personal difficulties place it in much the same vein as the Pastoral; the two may have been conceived for similarly cathartic purposes. Both seem to be responses to trying periods in the composer’s life and both provide an escape into alternative environments. The difference, however, is that Symphony No. 9 engages the difficulty instead of sequestering it or constructing a personal refuge from it. Still, Vaughan Williams engages not directly, but through aspects of his favorite childhood book: Thomas Hardy’s Tess of the d’Urbervilles. Returning to the novel in his late years, Vaughan Williams found that it dredged up several long-repressed thoughts regarding his own mortality. As we will see, through Stonehenge, the ghost drummer, Salisbury Plain, and Tess’s own death, the old composer quietly came face-to-face with WWI and the inevitability of his own passing.

Vaughan Williams deployed an elaborate set of defense mechanisms to shield him from such repressed horrors, as does every human. Some of his psychological deterrents arose in response to certain situations, as seen in the preceding chapter’s musical locus amoenus, while others common to all mankind—specifically, reaction formation and
isolation\textsuperscript{65}—attempted to provide a broader sense of reprieve. These general defense mechanisms shield a person from disturbing eschatological fears, namely death, the loss of control, and uncertainty about whether an entity is alive or not. One such defense is Freudian repression: the process by which the ego withdraws its interest in a prohibited concept or idea and prevents it from becoming conscious.\textsuperscript{66} This process may fail, however, when a person comes into contact with certain stimuli that somehow remind him or her of the repressed idea and the fear associated with it. I assert that Vaughan Williams began to experience the reemergence of unwanted ideas and that he used their reappearance as creative capital, inserting them into his final symphony. In short, this chapter seeks to illuminate the musical evidence of R.V.W.’s failed Freudian defenses.

Psychoanalytic Context

In order to appreciate the musical manifestations of these protective processes, it is necessary to understand the theories from which they emanate. Freudian theory as it applies to this study rests on three central pillars: the separation of the mind into unconscious, preconscious, and conscious areas, the division of the psyche into id, ego, and superego, and the idea of repression. Regarding the separation of the mind, the unconscious holds ideas and thoughts that cannot be perceived by the conscious mind, although they still develop and produce effects that may become conscious.\textsuperscript{67} Situated above the unconscious mind is the preconscious, which consists of ideas that are not at

\textsuperscript{65} Leopold Szondi, \textit{The Foundation for the Union of Depth Psychologies}, trans. Arthur C. Johnston (Bern: Verlag Hans Huber, 1956), 268-71. Reaction formation is defined as the process in which anxieties are minimized by exaggerating an opposite (opinion, answer, etc.). Isolation refers to the creation of a mental space between the subject and an unwanted thought by breaking associations between it and other thoughts.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 298.

the forefront of the mind in a given moment, but may be easily recalled and brought into
the immediate consciousness—in short, memory. The conscious mind is the level on
which our current thoughts exist; it contains perceptions “of the most immediate and
certain character.”

Around 1923, Freud enriched these divisions by introducing the complementary
concepts of the id, ego, and superego. Of these new divisions, the most basic, primitive
part of the psyche is the id, which contains life and death instincts; the id also resides
entirely in the unconscious mind. It strives to fulfill desires immediately without regard
for intervening forces such as logic. To that end, the id is responsible for keeping the
subject alive by satisfying primal urges. The ego, meanwhile, acts as the bridge between
the id and reality. In brief, it serves to regulate the id, allowing only desires that are
realistic to be fulfilled. As we will see shortly, the ego also serves to protect the subject
from external threats to its central identity, although this process can fail when a
seemingly familiar and “safe” stimulus bypasses ego defenses to reawaken primal fears.
Finally, the superego incorporates the teachings of parents, cultural behavioral norms,
and moral traditions to further restrict the id’s desires to those that are socially
acceptable. The ego and superego can be seen as a pair of colanders that gradually refine
the desires of the id to those that are socially and morally acceptable.

This second set of divisions, consisting of the id, ego, and superego, exists within
the first set containing the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious. The two groups

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68 Ibid., 122.
70 Until the point of ego development, infants consist solely of the id.
71 Freud, The Ego, 6. The ego develops in early childhood as children begin to discover that not all
needs can be met immediately.
72 The superego is the last to develop, after the child has experienced parental enforcement of rules
and social constructs.
should not be seen as totally disparate entities, since the first group (unconscious, preconscious, conscious) provides the environments in which the id, ego, and superego exist. For example, the unconscious contains the id, while the ego and superego exist in unconscious, preconscious, and conscious minds.73

Just as the ego and superego exist both in the subconscious74 and conscious minds, human thoughts themselves experience a similar freedom. They may travel between conscious and unconscious minds with the aid of repression or recall. This study will focus on both sides of this process: when ideas are moved from the conscious to the unconscious and vice versa. The process of transferring ideas from the conscious to the unconscious occurs through repression: when an idea is rejected and kept from the waking mind.75 Repression features two parts. The first, primal repression, moves the core idea from the conscious to the unconscious mind. In the second, repression proper, the subject also represses “trains of thought [that] originating elsewhere, have come into associate connection”76 with the core idea.

Repression occurs when a person relegates a particular memory into the unconscious mind via the ego, the mind’s defensive structure, out of necessity. Commonly repressed ideas include memories of abuse (especially sexual), and thoughts/fears about death and helplessness, since they both strike at the core of one’s attempts to preserve their life and being. Primal fears, Freud would argue, are present in the subject from birth, when he or she is composed entirely of the id and long before ego

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73 Freud, The Ego, 8. It must exist in all three areas in order to effectively temper the desires of the unconscious id with reality, which is experienced in the conscious mind.
75 Freud, “The Unconscious,” 105.
76 Ibid., 106. When repression is viewed as a two step process, it better explains how seemingly distant stimuli may dredge up the same idea.
formation. By the time the subject matures and develops an ego to combat the fears, the horrors have already taken root in the unconscious, essentially rendering the ego useless to combat them. The fears do not have to undergo repression since they never existed in the conscious mind.

Trepidations and negative thoughts stored in the unconscious mind—repressed, that is—are not there permanently, however, and they may be recalled by exposure to certain stimuli. These stimuli may be thoughts, visual images, or aural cues that cause the subject to call into question the nature and boundaries of reality. In the absence of these stimuli, the subject achieves a measure of reprieve from the disarming eschatological thoughts, as repression is still active, but when the ideas reappear, he or she is faced with das Unheimliche, or “the uncanny.”

Freud’s view of the uncanny first appeared in his essay “Das Unheimliche” (1919), which describes it as “the species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.” He was not the first analyst to write on the matter, however. Ernst Jentsch wrote on the uncanny thirteen years earlier and came to the conclusion that unheimlich stimuli cause fear simply because they inspire uncertainty in the witness. Though Freud and Jentsch’s term has no literal English translation, the closest approximation, “un-homelike,” does little to describe its paradoxical definition: something at once terrifying and intimately familiar. The fear that

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77 We will explore what I believe to be the extensive role of the visual element in uncanny experiences later through Lacan and his formulation of the ego via the specular register.
79 Ernst Jentsch formulated the idea of the uncanny, but Freud greatly expounded upon his ideas, replacing Jentsch’s fundamental condition of intellectual uncertainty with fear of castration, ignored here in favor of Lacanian specular considerations.
arises from such an experience derives its power from “revealing to the ego that even the most intimately familiar contains (or hides) a window that opens directly to the horror of the Real.”

According to psychoanalytic theory, these fears are especially potent and unavoidable since they take shape before ego formation, and therefore they have already entered the unconscious mind before the ego develops as a shield around it. When certain stimuli are presented, these fears activate from within and cause an especially horrifying effect in the subject.

The following concrete examples may help to clarify the frustratingly abstract concept of the uncanny. Freud outlines several instances in his essay, two of which will be useful here. First, an uncanny sensation may arise when one has difficulty ascertaining whether an object is living or inanimate, such as with wax dolls or “automata.” Witnessing an epileptic seizure also falls under this category, since the observer must reconcile seemingly mechanical motions in an organic body. For Freud, the fear that results from these observations derives from a universal fear of losing control of oneself, of being robbed of one’s selfhood and being symbolically castrated. I would add that it reflects human uncertainty regarding one’s inner workings—psychic, emotional, and otherwise.

A second example arises when one witnesses a transition from life to death, from death to life (as in a fictional tale), or when a subject appears to hover in between the two states. It may also occur when “the dead behave as living subjects or are treated as living

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81 Sadeq Rahimi, “The Ego, the Ocular, and the Uncanny: Why Are Metaphors of Vision Central in Accounts of the Uncanny?,” The International Journal of Psychoanalysis 94 (2013): 472. “Real” here is being used in the Lacanian sense, referencing an unknown place of horror outside the realm of human perception, in stark contrast to our everyday definition of the word.

objects." This feeling derives from the innate fear of death, the process of dying, and the uncertainty regarding a potential afterlife. Uncanny feelings may also arise when something “regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality,” playing on deep superstitions once held by primal ancestors that still exist today, albeit significantly weakened. The Unheimliche may also appear when faced with a döppelganger, thereby dredging up the need for preservation and thus the fear of extinction.

These ideas persisted relatively unchanged until the mid-twentieth century, when Jacques Lacan, a noted French psychoanalyst, introduced several complementary theories that now enrich our understanding of the uncanny. While Lacan espoused many of Freud’s ideas and adopted his concept of the ego, he had a different theory of how it formed, leading to one of the central components of his thought. According to Lacan, the ego forms during the “mirror stage,” the time when a baby notices either its own reflection or another baby and thus develops an awareness of self. When the child sees the image, he becomes able to conceive of himself as a unified being (as opposed to fragments) and to recognize his relation to space and the larger world, since movement and location are no longer abstract concepts. Indeed, he sees himself in the other child, thus experiencing a fundamental alienation (his word) from himself; for Lacan, alienation is the price for ego development. In theorizing the uncanny, Lacan argued that its effects would be more potent if they were seen, since they would bluntly defy the specular mechanism that first created the supposedly all-protecting ego, thus increasing the level

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84 This protective instinct may be seen in the infant swimming reflex.
85 Freud, “Unheimliche,” 149.
86 Unlike with Freud, Lacan believes that the ego is developed precisely at the point when the child sees the mirror image. Freud, on the other hand, conceived of ego development as a process throughout early childhood.
of horror. Such potency is due to the fact that two of his “registers”—the Imaginary and the Symbolic (described below)—have a Saussurian signifier/signified relationship: they are “two sides of the same coin”. Therefore, uncanny stimuli that are seen are immediately felt in the unconscious and the ego does not have a chance to respond.

Lacan’s “mirror stage” takes place in the Imaginary register, one of three that define his contribution to psychoanalysis. Along with the Imaginary are the Symbolic and the Real, and each register plays a part in shaping the subject. Briefly stated, the Imaginary register contains all that may be directly experienced; it is “the realm of the senses in that it houses the conceptions that issue directly from sensorial perception.”

His second register, the Symbolic, consists of language, social structures, and laws. Furthermore, to use semiotic language, the Symbolic may be understood as the signified to the signifiers of the Imaginary register. Lacan further asserts that the Symbolic reaches into the unconscious mind since the unconscious is nothing more than a chain of signifiers. In stark contrast to the Symbolic and Imaginary, the Real refers to everything outside of human senses that resists symbolization. Later in Lacan’s career, he “saw the Real in [physical] behaviours associated with the death drive and in the repetitive-compulsive element of neuroses.”

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88 Sadeq Rahimi speaks to this in “The Ego, the Ocular, and the Uncanny,” 453-76, writing that “…the relationship between the uncanny and the visual remains critical. After all, the basic argument here is that the very uncanniness of the uncanny is due to its association with the ‘moment’ (process) of ego formation, and the idea that the uncanny is horrifying because it reveals a hidden truth about the self that the entire symbolic edifice keeps covered by default, namely the illusoriness of the ego and, specifically, its lack of unity and cohesion in any grounded or permanent manner, and the ever presence of the Real.”

89 It can not be expressed strongly enough that these three registers are not analogous to the id, ego, and superego. These distinctly Lacanian constructs only delineate the zones in which the psyche exists to varying extents.

90 Ibid., 91.

91 Ibid., 95.

92 This thought makes Lacanian theory especially useful here by providing a link from semiotics to thoughts that may have reasonably been in the composer’s unconscious.

Lacan’s registers help clarify Freud’s sketchy relationship between the uncanny stimulus and the repressed fears themselves. With Freud, readers must trust his assertion that a stimulus sympathetically activates a repressed fear—he does not propose a “route” to the unconscious based on how the mind typically relates to reality. Lacan, on the other hand, shows a direct relationship between the Imaginary, where most uncanny stimuli exist, and the Symbolic. By placing the Symbolic register in the unconscious mind and showing its relationship to the Imaginary to be that of signified/signifier, Lacan shows that the uncanny stimulus directly relates to the unconscious mind. In addition, his explanation offers a reason why uncanny fear so often derives from visual stimuli: since it and the unconscious fear are “two sides of the same coin,” the visual has a direct line to the unconscious, unlike aural or other sensory input.

Furthermore, Lacan’s concept of the real seems to bolster Jentsch’s assertion that uncertainty causes uncanny fear. Since the Real may be seen in what a signifier fails to explain when it comes into being, it can be interpreted as the very uncertainty that causes the unheimlich fear in Jentsch’s model. Lacan saw the Real not only in behaviors associated with the death drive, but also in repetition compulsion and whatever stimuli led to “absolute terror,” which he believed was the “character of the Real.” Lacan’s real links uncertainty and the uncanny, since it describes the feeling of uncertainty itself and appears in compulsions and other actions associated with das Unheimliche.

In summary, the uncanny is a feeling of terror that occurs when an external stimulus awakens a repressed fear, in this case the fear of death. Unheimlich fears are

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94 Ibid., 98.
95 Repetition compulsions feature prominently in Freud’s “Das Unheimliche.”
96 Bailly, Lacan, 100.
97 Ibid.
often triggered by visual elements, since they belong to the Imaginary register and therefore have a direct and indefensible path to the subconscious’s repressed thoughts via a signifier/signified relationship. A stimulus may also inspire fear by creating uncertainty in a witness; that equivocation in turn activates any number of doubts about the subject’s selfhood or inner workings. Though neither a visual connection nor uncertainty are absolute conditions for the uncanny sensation, they will play a central role in the following analysis.

Death and the Uncanny in Symphony No. 9

Symphony No. 9 is the first truly dark work of Vaughan Williams’s final fifteen-year period, and it seems to showcase his late preoccupation with the grave; the inclusion of several elements referencing the death-related uncanny support this reading. His final symphony is made all the darker by its surroundings, since several of the late works (The First Nowell, Symphony No. 8, and Hodie) seem downright cheerful. Alain Frogley noted this striking dissimilarity as well in Vaughan Williams’s Ninth Symphony, writing that

… there is no preoccupation with death in the late works. We shall see that it does play a central role in the programme of the Ninth Symphony; only towards the very end, however, might one interpret the focus as primarily autobiographical.98

With this dark distinction in mind, the following pages seek to frame the Ninth Symphony in terms of its composer’s thoughts on death. This will be achieved though a

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psychoanalytic approach, presenting specific aspects of Symphony No. 9 as unheimlich and therefore articulations of R.V.W.’s primal relationship with the grave. By using his beloved *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* as a program, Vaughan Williams could make reference to his earlier life and explore death through the story’s heroine. The composer thought he shared many personality features with the character, and therefore felt a great closeness with her. In this regard, the whole of the symphony may be read as autobiographical, even if it was not consciously composed in that manner.

Instances of the uncanny in Symphony No. 9 engage with several fears described earlier, but they seem to have the strongest connection with the dread and uncertainty associated with death. The focus on existential angst is a logical outgrowth of Vaughan Williams’s advanced age and the surviving evidence of his mental state during the composition of the Ninth. Though the composer was famously tight-lipped about most everything, certain actions and comments show a preoccupation with his impending end, professionally and personally, in the years directly preceding the Ninth. Of these plaintive remarks, his words to Evelyn Rothwell (Mrs. John Barbirolli) are especially poignant: “I have so much music in my head I know I will never have time to write it down.”

The comment to Mrs. Barbirolli, whether prophetic or realistic, came just as his body began to fail. His physical decline began with an increased loss of hearing that stemmed from his artillery service in WWI. By the time of his eighty-fifth birthday and  

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99 In his comments on the symphony’s final movement, Frogley shows several textural, harmonic, and developmental relationships between the movement and the song “Procris,” of a cycle posthumously named the *Last Four Songs*. The song, written during the year of the symphony’s premiere, details a woman who “knew darkness” and “will not see the green spring turn to summer.” Frogley notes that “the latter reference must obviously strike deep in a person in his eighty-sixth year.” For further explanation, please reference Frogley, *Vaughan Williams’s Ninth* 293.

Symphony No. 9, R.V.W.’s hearing loss led him to rely more heavily than usual on his assistant Roy Douglas for feedback on orchestration and balance during rehearsals of new works.\(^\text{101}\) Though the creative burst that preceded the symphony yielded several songs and *The First Nowell*, the composer’s wistful comments and increasing dependence on colleagues adds a darker undertone to this period. While other interpretations of this creative explosion paint it as a reinvigoration,\(^\text{102}\) I will suggest that it represented the aging musician’s last effort to exhaust his remaining stores of energy.

As his physical wellbeing suffered during the final fifteen years of his life, R.V.W. showed “a yearning for some lost and precious thing,”\(^\text{103}\) according to his friend Michael Kennedy. While Kennedy used the phrase to describe the slightly earlier Oboe Concerto (1944), he has nevertheless identified the oft-ignored retrospection that pervades Vaughan William’s final works. From the time of *An Oxford Elegy* to Symphony No. 9, several of his works (*The Pilgrim’s Progress, Sinfonia Antartica, Ten Blake Songs, Epithalamion*) engaged with past events, most notably Robert Falcon Scott’s failed Antarctic expedition, or with Vaughan Williams’s favorite literary works; Matthew Arnold’s “The Scholar-Gipsy” provides the text for *An Oxford Elegy*. The Ninth Symphony certainly follows this model and uses a favorite old text as its program. Furthermore, it includes allusions to his earliest works, seen most clearly in thematic similarities to *The Solent* (1902-03).\(^\text{104}\) Looking back surely served as a sort of defense (reaction formation) from an uncertain and frightening future, especially if his agnostic


\(^{103}\) Kennedy, *Works*, 347.

\(^{104}\) Frogley, *Vaughan Williams’s Ninth*, 272.
beliefs persisted. Although he spoke of not being able to orchestrate as well as he did in Symphony No. 5 to John Barbirolli,\textsuperscript{105} he certainly tried. In her book \textit{Ralph Vaughan Williams}, the composer’s close friend Simona Packenham wrote that “at the age of eighty it seems as if, almost deliberately, Vaughan Williams had chosen to compose a work \textit{[An Oxford Elegy]} that reaches back to the earliest of his moods and styles.”\textsuperscript{106} This work was completed seven years before he began the Ninth Symphony, and may be seen as the start of a backward-looking period.

A decline in R.V.W.’s physical well-being accompanied these protective retrospections. Aside from his deafness, Vaughan Williams had to cut short an Austrian vacation due to a severe case of anemia, and he “had to rest and take all sorts of pills.”\textsuperscript{107} Though he recovered in short order, he soon required an X-ray at Middlesex Hospital to discover the cause of a second, unrelated malady. Though Ursula Vaughan Williams does not disclose the nature of the illness, it required major surgery.\textsuperscript{108} By the time of the Ninth’s premiere, the composer was no longer able to accept applause at the stage; he instead recognized the audience applause from his box.\textsuperscript{109}

The remainder of this chapter now examines how Vaughan Williams expresses his increasingly intimate relationship with death through the symphony’s musico-programmatic agenda. The analysis will be broken into three sections, each exploring an uncanny event, either in the \textit{Tess} program, in the composer’s life, or in a combination of the two. Section one examines the musical portrayal of Stonehenge, the second explores

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 344.
\textsuperscript{107} Ursula Vaughan Williams, \textit{R.V.W.}, 381.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 382.
\textsuperscript{109} Ursula Vaughan Williams goes out of her way to say that Ralph “looked well” that night, a comment not seen in her earlier writings about their life together. \textit{Ibid.}, 391.
the “ghost drummer of Salisbury Plain,” and the third considers musical descriptors of Tess’s death. Each section will lay out what precisely makes each situation uncanny, what relationship the situation has to Vaughan Williams’s own life, and how the uncanny is articulated musically.

Stonehenge

Stonehenge occupies a place in the Hardy novel, the symphony, and the composer’s biography, placing it at the heart of this investigation. In Tess, Stonehenge makes its first appearance in the dead of night, when Angel Clare and Tess stumble upon it after escaping the boarding house where Tess murdered the man who raped her. After nearly running into the structure, she notices the eerie “tune” created by the wind blowing through the stones. The heroine sleeps on the altar in the center of Stonehenge until she is arrested in the morning, an allusion to the human sacrifices of centuries past.110

Vaughan Williams experienced a similar shock upon experiencing Stonehenge for the first time. The composer first saw the edifice when bicycling on Salisbury Plain sometime before 1903, and “found it a terrifying place.”111 He also felt as though he had already been there112 and was experiencing a strange sort of reunion. Even if its “dark

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110 The Celts who constructed Stonehenge are well known for the human sacrifices carried out by the Druids, their priest class. Druids would commonly stab the sacrificial person, then interpret either the victim’s death spasms or eviscerate him and “read” the pattern of the entrails. Such sacrifices commonly occurred during prophetic rituals or to worship one of their many gods. Benjamin Hudson, “Druidic Prophecy” (lecture at The Pennsylvania State University, October 12, 2015).

While some of the first archaeological proof appeared in 2000, detailed in Chris Hellier, “Stonehenge Skeleton Mystery,” Archaeology 53 (2000): 15, Thomas Hardy clearly believed that such sacrifices occurred at Stonehenge. Aside from Tess laying down on an altar in the middle of the monument and subsequently mentioning sacrificial precedents, Hardy scholars have noted that “for Hardy, Stonehenge is a place of human sacrifice” in R.M. Rehder, “The Form of Hardy’s Novels,” in Thomas Hardy after Fifty Years (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 22.

111 Vaughan Williams, R.V.W., 65.

power was somewhat lessened in subsequent meetings, the composer would always remember his unsettling first impression.

From a Freudian perspective, R.V.W. felt fearful because Stonehenge injects the dead and their edifices into the modern world, where they no longer belong. Centuries of wind and geologic shifting should have reduced Stonehenge to a haphazard pile of pebbles and dust. But the stone edifices still stood, and they reminded Vaughan Williams of their dead builders and the victims of human sacrifice. Freud would argue that seeing such a structure would trigger, unconsciously, the primal fear of and fascination with death, since an object representative of death intrudes upon the present environment where it is out of place. The experience activates the primal fear of death and forces this deeply familiar element into the subject’s immediate surroundings. Moreover, RVW’s terror was intensified by Stonehenge’s location, the sweeping expanse of Salisbury plain. The stones and their dark connotations stood as the only features of note in what is an otherwise serene environment, thus visually reinforcing the monument and its anachronism.

The monument’s appearance was only partially responsible for Vaughan Williams’s uncanny experience; the remainder of the horror likely emerged from his feeling of an unwanted reunion. The composer’s feeling of “having been there already” illustrates the fear of involuntary return, an experience carefully described in Freud’s

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{This same relationship may be seen in the viewing of a skeleton or deceased body—death intruding on the world of the living.}\]

\[\text{Anthony Vidler speaks of the same idea when he explores Poe’s description of the House of Usher, concluding that the house was “the more disquieting for the absolute normality of the setting, its absence of overt terror.” See Anthony Vidler, The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 18.}\]

\[\text{We will see this repetition later during the examination of movement II, and it becomes particularly intriguing when viewed in terms of the repetition neurosis and death drive.}\]
essay on the uncanny. When this tacit fear is stimulated, the subject feels helpless and may attribute their seemingly inevitable return to the authority of some unforeseen power.\footnote{Freud, “Unheimliche,” 144.} With this further aspect of the uncanny accounted for, one may state that Vaughan Williams’s initial interaction with Stonehenge was unheimlich in every aspect.

Symphony No. 9, Movement Two: Vaughan Williams’s Musical Stonehenge

Vaughan Williams’s depiction of the uncanny can be studied in the harmonic structure and thematic material of movement two, the division that contains most of the \textit{Tess} program and musical depictions of Stonehenge. The movement has two main themes. The first consists of an unsettling flugelhorn solo with a tonal center that shifts between G and D\textsuperscript{♭} (Ex. 2.1).

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Ex2.1.png}
\caption{Ex. 2.1. Stonehenge Wind Song (Flugelhorn Solo)}
\end{figure}

Though the first three bars of the theme do have a strong pull toward G, the “insistence on D\textsuperscript{♭} in bars 4-6 creates the impression that the theme pivots on two opposing poles, G and D\textsuperscript{♭}.\footnote{Frogley, \textit{Vaughan Williams’s Ninth}, 116.} After examining the complete working materials for Symphony No. 9, Alain
Frogley came to the same conclusion, and contends that Vaughan Williams strengthens the position of D♭ as a bona fide tonal area (as opposed to a chromatic inflection in a mixolydian theme) as the movement progresses, pointing out that

As the movement unfolds, the tonal duality of Theme I is explored in subtly changing environments. The second appearance uses only the last two bars, underpinned by a sustained D♭ in octaves. The third appearance harmonizes the same fragment more richly but no less ambiguously... in addition, the A♮ of the final bar of the original version of the theme is flattened here, strengthening the influence of D♭. 119

The solo embodies an uncanny aural experience. While on vacation in Austria in 1957, R.V.W. was on the Königsee with his wife Ursula in a boat, and once they reached the middle of the lake, “the pilot stopped, unpacked a flugelhorn and played a halting phrase, which the mountain echo sent back, beautifully improved—‘A good sound,’ Ralph said. ‘I shall put it into the symphony.’”120 Though the solo as performed in concerts can not retain the timbre or spacy quality of the echo, the composer still linked the solo and the echo quality, so much so that he tried to replicate it in early rehearsals. He requested that the passage be played without any vibrato until the flugelhorn player demonstrated to him that it would sound terrible.121 Still, his early insistence on replicating the original effect demonstrates its connection to the work.

In this echo we see our first example of how Vaughan Williams depicts Stonehenge’s uncanny elements. Isabella van Elferen comments on the power of echo to

119 Ibid.
120 Ursula Vaughan Williams, R.V.W., 381.
121 Ibid., 391.
articulate the uncanny, claiming that it suggests disembodiment and often “acquires metaphysical interpretations.” She goes on to suggest that echo often conveys “isolation and unwilling solitude,” an insight that recalls Jentsch’s and Freud’s definitions of the uncanny. At bottom, van Elferen implies that echo activates one’s fears: of death, of the helplessness that accompanies isolation, and of the discomfort that accompanies uncertainty.

Vaughan Williams uses this echo sonority and its uncanny associations to present the “song” that Tess hears at Stonehenge.

They had proceeded thus gropingly two or three miles further when on a sudden Clare became conscious of some vast erection close in his front, rising sheer from the grass. They had almost struck themselves against it. “What monstrous place is this?” said Angel. “It hums,” said she. “Hearken!”

He listened. The wind, playing upon the edifice, produced a booming tune, like the note of a gigantic one-stringed harp. No other sound came from it...

In this instance, Tess would have experienced Stonehenge’s song as uncanny because of its disembodied nature, emphasized by the moonless night. Songs are supposed to come from people or instruments; in the absence of both, she would have been filled the uncertainty that Jentsch describes. In turn, this uncertainty would awaken the “surmounted superstitions” of primitive man that Freud explores in his essay. These superstitions would have been made more frightening because they involved the human

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123 Ibid.
125 Freud, “Unheimliche,” 143.
sacrifices made at the very place where Tess and Angel stood.\textsuperscript{126} With this information in mind, one can easily imagine that the characters—alone, at night, and just having heard a disembodied song—would think of the reanimated dead (another uncanny experience, which I will explore in the following section). This reading has the advantage of aligning with the novel’s widely acknowledged preoccupation with metaphysical forces that act on the characters.

The second theme, a primitivist march (Ex. 2.2), expresses its barbarism through crude parallel motion, disjointed harmonies, sharp juxtaposition of staccato and legato articulations, and a new, “heavier” tempo of 100 bpm.\textsuperscript{127}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Ex_2.2.png}
\caption{Ex. 2.2. Stonehenge Barbaric Dance}
\end{figure}

G clearly acts as tonal center, now in minor, but with a bizarre harmonic progression that throws an odd light on the tonic. The first measure’s harmonic motion, i—VI—VII\textsuperscript{+},\textsuperscript{128} marked by the raised fourth, is followed in the second measure with a curious Neapolitan

\textsuperscript{126} Thoughts about human sacrifices are seemingly reinforced through the “Barbaric March” theme that is interwoven with the wind song—this second theme will be explored shortly.

\textsuperscript{127} This tempo, usually placed in the “andante” range, adds additional weight to the eighth notes due to the space placed between them at this tempo. If the pulse were quicker, the theme would be imbued with forward motion contradicting Vaughan Williams’s apparent intention.

\textsuperscript{128} Harmonies built on the subtonic had long been an element of R.V.W.’s style by the time of the Ninth, and were often used to reference the pastoral via modal coloring. Here, it seems like he used it to evoke simplicity, not in a pastoral sense, but the barbarism of the early Britons at Stonehenge.
inflection: i—VI—♭II—i. There is no precedent for this compact harmonic eccentricity in any of RVW’s contemporary works, nor in earlier ones for that matter. As several scholars note, this strange theme almost certainly refers to the barbaric sacrificial rites mentioned in Hardy’s text:

The uniform concavity of black cloud was lifting bodily like the lid of a pot, letting in at the earth’s edge the coming day, against which the towering monoliths and trilithons began to be blackly defined.

“Did they sacrifice to God here?” asked she.

“No,” said he.

“Who to?”

“I believe to the sun.”

While unconventional triadic harmonies appear throughout his catalogue, they are invariably used within a larger (typically modal) context. Here the VII+ or the ♭II are entirely uncharacteristic of their surroundings.

That dissimilarity is amplified when joined with the motive’s unique rhythmic characteristics, which likewise set it apart from surrounding material. In fact, in a symphony marked by extreme syncopation, fluid mixture of triple- and duple-based rhythms, and contrapuntal density involving the previous two elements, the uncanny is regularly marked by extreme rhythmic clarity. In this instance, the march’s stability clashes with the wind song motive that surrounds it. The metrically evasive flugelhorn solo skirts the downbeat on alternate bars while incorporating agogic syncopations and quarter-note triplets, causing listeners to grasp for an underlying structure. In addition,

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129 Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 402.

130 In these cases, rhythmic clarity certainly functions as an analogue for the mental focus brought about by run-ins with uncanny stimuli.
the wind song spans seven bars; its uneven number of measures and a failure to repeat its internal rhythmic pattern lend the theme an air of unpredictability. A pair of similar, two-measure rhythmic motives comprise the theme’s opening four bars, thus preparing the listener for what should be a regular, eight measure phrase unit. By straying from this rhythmic pattern in the final three measures, however, the wind song gains an eerily unstable character. In contrast, the march’s percussive rhythm and stable underlying pulse do much to set it apart from the surrounding texture; the relative harmonic clarity only emphasizes this. Combined with the theme’s peculiar harmonic footing, the two qualities create a fundamental dissimilarity between the march and wind song motives that articulates an uncanny encounter with Stonehenge.

This larger-scale dissimilarity presents itself as a block form in the first fifteen measures of the second movement. The two themes alternate without transition or elision, with the jagged barbaric dance theme first intruding upon the flugelhorn solo at m. 8. In doing so, it roughly introduces a faster tempo and G-minor sonority, as if the earthly flugelhorn solo had been forcibly subsumed by tribal dance and ritual sacrifice. The composer had every means to dovetail such sections and create organic continuity, as we have seen in the Pastoral. He elected not to use them in this case, opting instead for brute juxtaposition to describe his run-in with Stonehenge.

By presenting two disparate themes back-to-back, Vaughan Williams depicts the shock he felt upon seeing the monument, while highlighting, through abrupt stylistic

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131 The alternation between themes brings up questions of temporality, specifically whether the wind song interrupts the barbaric dance or vice versa. One might also ask if one theme exists in the present and while the other belongs to the past. While the barbaric dance definitely illustrates ancient events, the thoughts of those happenings could still exist in Tess’s or Vaughan Williams’s present minds. Then again, perhaps both exist in a swirling, conflicted present. While it is probably impossible to temporally arrange the themes, especially since the wind song belongs to the novel and the barbaric dance could exist in R.V.W.’s life or Tess’s, their juxtaposition nevertheless leads to an intriguing line of questioning.
changes, the precise element that caused the discomfort. The composer introduces the flugelhorn solo that represents natural processes (however unsettling), then allows a reminiscence of barbaric sacrifice to emerge cruelly and without warning or permission. This process repeats itself at irregular intervals in the first fifteen measures of the piece, suggesting that the interruptions are random and uncontrolled. As discussed above, these barbaric associations are the element that would have made Stonehenge uncanny for the composer and Tess alike.  

Vaughan Williams also uses repetition to illustrate the unheimlich feelings associated with Stonehenge. As Michael Klein notes, “musical narratives of the uncanny… tend to have strong musical signs of obsessive compulsion.” Throughout the second movement, Vaughan Williams calls on the barbaric dance and wind song motives time and time again, with their repetition especially noticeable in the opening measures. In fact, either the wind song or the barbaric dance functions as a harmonic or structural interruption at least ten times in the course of the movement.

When viewed through a psychoanalytic lens, the constant and uneven repetition of these uncanny elements could easily describe the feeling of return expressed by the composer. That reading would not necessarily rule out interpreting the repetition as Michael Klein does, however: as manifestations of repressive cycles. Where I differ with Klein is in relating the uncanny to these elements based on external referents; Klein’s studies limit themselves to the music itself. In his analyses, a particular element appears,

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132 The blunt arrangement may also serve as an analogue for the visual experience discussed in earlier pages, where the viewer would be taken aback by the monument’s imposition on an otherwise peaceful plain.


134 Measures 8, 10, 12, 15, 17, 23, 27, 33, 48, 117.
is transformed through cyclical musical processes, then reappears significantly changed against a familiar backdrop.

As an alternative explanation for R.V.W.’s thematic repetition, I would suggest that it represents a type of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, linked to the Freudian death drive. By the time of Symphony No. 9, Vaughan Williams would have associated Salisbury Plain with his ordeals in WWI, since he was billeted there during the early stages of the conflict. Therefore, references to the locale (via Stonehenge themes) may be interpreted in terms of the Hardy narrative and his wartime struggles. His compulsive repetition of material associated with war and death is consistent with Freud’s description of “war neuroses” (PTSD), a term coined in the wake of the WWI to describe a condition that plagued men with the composer’s front-line experiences. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Freud elaborates on the condition, explaining that subjects suffered “mainly from reminiscences” and that “the same symptoms sometimes came about” repeatedly “without the intervention of any gross mechanical force.” Freud connected war neuroses to his concept of the death drive, which balances with the life-drive (Eros) and drives humans toward death, sometimes through self-destructive behavior. In patients with severe war neuroses, their compulsive reliving of battle represents a self-destructive behavior that would eventually manifest itself in self-mutilation or suicide, a situation common among combat veterans today. Vaughan Williams’s repetition of the dance and wind song material embody the kind of experience

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135 Vaughan Williams further links Salisbury Plain and WWI by titling his second movement, which contains the Stonehenge themes, “Pastoral” in late manuscript copies. Please refer to Frogley, Vaughan Williams’s Ninth, 275 for more information.

136 We would describe the condition today as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

described by Freud—the war’s unwanted intrusions into his postwar life. Compelled by his psyche to deal with repressed wartime experiences, he tried to compose a way out, as he had done during the war. He did so with blunt repetitions that represent a profound struggle.

The composer’s treatment of harmony in the initial wind song and barbaric dance alternation also describe the uncanny experience through their relative immobility. The flugelhorn solo resists traditional analysis, instead occupying two tonal areas a tritone apart (G/D♭), while the following dance theme occupies a generally static G-minor area. When these two themes are juxtaposed, they fail to generate harmonic momentum, focusing the listener’s attention instead on thematic peculiarities. If the first theme is heard to exist between the two keys, as is commonly thought, then the feeling of immobility is only compounded, since the stasis would be perceived both within a key and between the themes. Vaughan Williams used harmonic stasis similarly in the second movement of the Pastoral during the bugle solo—with the static E♭-major chord to describe the frozen sensation of soldiers anxiously focused on the enemy lines at stand-to. Here he drew on it again to describe the anxious stasis of a subject focused on an uncanny stimuli.

Since the body tenses and focuses (“freezes”) when exposed to fear-inducing stimuli, R.V.W.’s use of harmonic stasis could readily describe the human condition when confronted with uncanny terror. When experiencing the uncanny, and therefore fear, the body undergoes profound physiological changes, two of which directly

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138 If it is perceived to be in D♭, then the progression via tritone from D♭ to G and back again would yield stasis as in Boris Godunov’s coronation scene. If the wind song is perceived to be in G, then the first fifteen bars stay in the same key and present stasis in that way.
correspond to the aforementioned harmonic stasis. First, psychological focus narrows to encompass only the immediate situation; all other small tasks are subjugated to discerning the nature of the threat. Second, muscles throughout the body tense due to a sudden injection of epinephrine and norepinephrine,\textsuperscript{139} which causes a certain “freezing” effect in the subject and prepares him or her to either engage the stimulus or flee.\textsuperscript{140} Through a lack of harmonic motion and thematic development, Vaughan Williams achieves both of these effects, again robbing the listener of forward motion in order to focus all attention on these two responses to the uncanny. Just as in the \textit{Pastoral Symphony}, he evokes the focus and anxiety associated with his life experiences by musically articulating internal processes.

### Movement III: The Ghost Drummer of Salisbury Plain

The third movement\textsuperscript{141} evokes another uncanny occurrence on Salisbury Plain: its so-called “ghost drummer.” A local legend from the Tidworth area, the ghost drummer was said to be a poltergeist summoned in a South Tidworth home by an army drummer skilled in black magic. The spirit “made a terrible sound of a beating drum, a sort of diabolic military tattoo.”\textsuperscript{142} Vaughan Williams surely knew this legend; his uncle was a rector in

\textsuperscript{140} “What is the Fight or Flight Response,” University of Nottingham, accessed March 10, 2016, https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/counselling/documents/podcast-fight-or-flight-response.pdf. Commonly called the “fight or flight” reflex, this reaction prepares every facet of the body for some sort of action by increasing blood flow to vital areas and regulating the production of stress hormones. These stress hormones also allow the memories of the stressful event to be stored long-term to prepare the subject for future engagements. For more, see “The Body-Mind Connection of Stress,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed March 10, 2016, https://www.cdc.gov/bam/teachers/documents/stress_body_mind.pdf.
\textsuperscript{141} The composer supposedly told Michael Kennedy that the barbaric dance theme in the second movement was also meant for the drummer. While that may also be true, the third movement certainly stakes a more likely claim to the drummer, as this section will show.
\textsuperscript{142} Frogley, \textit{Vaughan Williams’s Ninth}, 274.
North Tidworth, and Ursula Vaughan Williams noted in her biography that he visited the area on several occasions.\textsuperscript{143}

Though the idea of such a ghost is self-evidently terrifying, it may take Freud, Lacan, and Jentsch combined to offer a complete explanation of that terror. At this juncture, it would be difficult to ascribe the fear of a spirit to the castration complex, which for Freud underlies the whole issue of the uncanny. Jentsch’s explanation, that the uncanny derives its power from uncertainty, seems more compelling. In Vaughan Williams’s work this reading would mean that the uncertainty derives from the human viewer failing to ascertain whether the spirit is a part of the living world or some other. In other words, the encounter would blur the line between imagination and reality,\textsuperscript{144} since spirits live first and foremost in the imagination, usually the result of fairy tales or other childhood stories. Furthermore, such a meeting would revive old “surmounted”\textsuperscript{145} beliefs espoused by our primitive ancestors, creating extreme cognitive dissonance and awakening a long-suppressed fear.\textsuperscript{146} The unwanted reemergence of these beliefs would lead the subject to think: “Then the dead do continue to live and appear before our eyes on the scene of their former activities!”\textsuperscript{147}

Building on Freud’s and Jentsch’s theoretical basis, Lacan offers an explanation for the depth of terror typically associated with ghosts. In short, the sense of dread can be explained by the fact that the uncanny stimulus is seen, thus situating it inside the ego, itself formed by vision in the mirror stage. The terrifying element is, in effect,

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{144} Freud, “Unheimliche,” 150.  
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 157.  
\textsuperscript{146} Freud’s earlier suggestion that the uncanny is caused by castration anxiety seems a bit off the mark in this case. Since this stimulus centers more around repressed tendencies than castration, Jentsch offers a better explanation.  
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid.
undermining the very structure that is supposed to protect the subject. It therefore becomes “associated with the developmental processes of ego formation and self-identity,” injecting fear into both defense mechanism and the core of the subject himself.

Just as the visual uncanny relies on Jentschian uncertainty, the crux of Vaughan Williams’s depiction uses tonal uncertainty, as we have already seen in the first movement. In the third movement, however, uncertainty arises from the blurring of major and minor key areas as opposed to a tritone oscillation between major harmonic fields.

The first example of such blurring occurs at m. 8 (Ex. 2.3) and sets a precedent for similar figures that appear throughout the movement.

Ex. 2.3. Phrygian Theme with Major/Minor Abutment

The first of several phrygian passages in the movement, it features the lowered second scale degree but also a curious alternation between the major and minor third. In his landmark analysis of the Vaughan Williams symphonies, Lionel Pike notes the same figure and comments that “the Phrygian second…is often applied to the third degree of the scale so as to turn major into minor and vice versa.”

Though a phrygian inflection is understood to affect the second scale degree, Pike seems to be describing the strange

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149 Rahimi goes on to describe the visual uncanny as a variation on “the double,” a topic that deserves further exploration, but is outside the scope of this study. One wonders if there may be an added sense of fear that derives from seeing the protective barrier under siege, or if this reading is plausible. Once again, further research would be needed.

semitone relationship between the natural and lowered third scale degree. When used with such regularity, this semitone juxtaposition essentially demolishes the boundary between major and minor within a larger phrygian context, just as the appearance of a spirit would confuse the boundary between the living and dead even though it would be understood as dead first—the living do not possess the ability to efface reality and illusion in such a way. Given the mode’s longstanding association with death, the major/minor “flickering” within phrygian boundaries neatly describes a spectral being occupying an uncertain location and creating confusion in a potential witness. Further examples of the direct abutment of major/minor thirds (excerpted from their larger phrygian contexts) may be seen in the example below (Ex. 2.4)

Ex. 2.4. Other Major/Minor Third Abutments

While numerous composers integrate major and minor sonorities, here the blending occurs in an obvious attempt to portray the ghost drummer. Although Michael Kennedy asserts that R.V.W. told him the barbaric march depicts the ghost drummer, I believe that the composer was misleading the press in that instance, as he commonly did. Even if the march does have elements of the spectral musician in it, that does not

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preclude its inclusion in movement III. Frogley asserts that the drummer does appear in
the third movement,¹⁵² and several allusions to military percussion support his statement.
While the regular 6/8 rhythms and rolls give the percussion a decidedly march-like feel,
R.V.W.’s use of the term “side drum” refers to a deeper, military-style drum worn across
the body. These instruments are markedly different in appearance and sound from the
smaller, concert-style instruments typically found in orchestras. Aside from the side drum
itself, it is typically accompanied by triangle, an instrument “so often the musical symbol
of things military.”¹⁵³

Thirty-three measures after the phrygian eeriness, Vaughan Williams continues to
obscure modal boundaries, but with far greater complexity and a different focus (Ex. 2.5).

Ex. 2.5. Reinterpretative Harmonies (m. 41)

Here, RVW again oscillates between major and minor, while keeping a common “A” for
the first three measures. The F-naturals and C-naturals, however, move to F-sharps and
C-sharps and back again, changing the quality of the chords from major to minor around
the held pitch. Unlike the first example of major/minor oscillation that seems to describe
the larger sense of uncertainty used to define the uncanny, this example may be
understood to affect a single entity (A♮). The changing extremities act upon the static

¹⁵³ Frogley, Vaughan Williams’s Ninth, 274.
pitch and obscure its nature: is it a part of D major or F# minor? Whether one adopts the quasi-narrative suggested above or not, the section represents an unusual articulation of tonal obfuscation, one that gains its peculiarity through an initially held pitch. That pitch seems to drift between the worlds of major and minor, as the ghost drummer being depicted would appear to exist in two different places. Jentsch’s uncertainty thus finds a straightforward articulation.

In stark contrast to the movement’s melodic and harmonic ambiguity, R.V.W. again uses rhythmic regularity to define the uncanny, this time describing the spectral drummer. With the exception of an occasional syncopated flourish or duplet gesture, Symphony No. 9’s third movement exhibits a striking regularity, regardless of time signature. Nearly all melodies fit squarely into a bar of 6/8 or 2/4, and are often accompanied by a steady snare drum march and/or mechanically regular accompaniment in the strings (Ex. 2.6, 2.7).
There are instances where 6/8 and 2/4 exist simultaneously, which may suggest the dissonance created by the spectre in the world of the living. In such cases, the rhythmic regularity nonetheless brings an uncanny element to the fore, albeit through contradiction of the prevailing metrical environment.

Tess’s Death and the Uncanny Redefined

In movements two and four, R.V.W. uses rhythmic and harmonic means to articulate Tess’s death and its effects, but divides the illustrations between the two movements. This somewhat bizarre fracturing raises intriguing questions about the aging agnostic composer and his personal hopes for redemption.

Vaughan Williams first explores the uncanny effects of Tess’s death in movement II by imitating the eight chimes of the clock (that announce her execution hour) with eight strokes of “deep chimes” coupled with low tam-tam (Ex. 2.8, Appendix II). Again a drastic departure from the rhythmic fluidity surrounding it, the steady chimes allow the ear to shift to the rhythmically active (and more engaging) “Tess” theme that floats above
it in high string tremolos, mixed with the wind song motive in the brass. It is a short leap to read this iteration of the Tess theme as the heroine’s spirit, as demonstrated by Alain Frogley in his landmark work, *Vaughan Williams’s Ninth Symphony*.

While the first seven strokes create a sense of regularity, they also highlight the material that interrupts the final pitch and alludes to the physical response to the uncanny. Without the expected eighth chime, the broken regularity of the bells serves to increase the impact of the barbaric dance, once believed to be surmounted but now returning where the eighth chime should have sounded. This musical lurch maps neatly onto Clare and Liza-Lu’s actions in the text, where their reactions to discovering Tess’s death are described as follows:

> The two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in prayer, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless: the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength, they arose, joined hands again, and went on.\(^{155}\)

Here we see the freezing and focus described earlier, and both these are illustrated by greatly stretching the amount of musical time between the final two chime strokes and populating it with thematic references to a deceased friend, surely the object of Clare and Liza Lu’s thoughts.

Two movements later, Vaughan Williams depicts Tess’s death again, but through hexatonic poles (Ex. 2.9, Appendix II), which he would have known through his fervent

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\(^{154}\) Liza-Lu and Clare are alerted of Tess’s execution when they witness a black flag waving in the prison, which would have been flown at 8:00, the customary hour for capital punishment. In this symphony, Vaughan Williams uses the chimes to signal the heroine’s execution, since the ruffling of a flag is far more difficult to depict. Though the two characters do not witness Tess’s death firsthand, this study asserts that a subject can have an uncanny reaction to a representation of death in a Saussurian sense, since the act itself and its representation are inextricably related.

\(^{155}\) Hardy, *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, 405.
studies of Wagner. Richard Cohn pioneered the idea of hexatonic poles in his writings on Neo-Riemannian theory, describing a pole as a pair of triads, one major and one minor, where each pitch is a semitone apart from its nearest counterpart in the other triad.\textsuperscript{156} As Cohn shows throughout his piece, hexatonic poles have been used to illustrate uncanny situations, especially a character passing from life to death,\textsuperscript{157} dating back to Haydn’s \textit{Creation}.

Vaughan Williams’s decision to use such poles is certainly understandable, given the historical trend of using them to signify unheimlich situations. In his acclaimed article “Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age,” Cohn explores Wagner’s use of poles to illustrate the uncanny. He states that poles derive their signifying power from the fact that such drastically different sonorities can be derived from each other through double modal mixture.\textsuperscript{158} An unexpected sonority, seemingly worlds away in terms of key area, presents itself as completely foreign and unexpected (on the surface level it is a purely chromatic chord), but its origin is in fact deep within the tonic (Ex. 2.10).

\textsuperscript{157} Cohn, “Uncanny Resemblances,” 294-300. Haydn also chooses the poles of C minor and E major.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 303. The term originated in Schoenberg’s \textit{Harmonielehre} (1922).
One of his first examples involves Kundry’s “de-souling,”\footnote{Ibid., 296.} after which she looks at Parsifal “as a dead woman with the hypnotic gaze of the hyper-living.”\footnote{Ibid.} To accompany this bizarre depiction of the space between life and death, Wagner juxtaposes $D^\#$-major and $A$-minor sonorities. A second example involves the dead Siegfried raising his hand, still holding the ring, in a threatening gesture against Hagen.\footnote{Ibid., 297.} To describe the uncanny stemming from Siegfried’s ambiguous state, Wagner presents a $B^\#$-minor sonority accompanied by its $D$-major pole.

Symphony No. 9’s use of $C$-minor/$E$-major hexatonic poles at its conclusion is a remarkably nuanced gesture that signifies on several levels. First and foremost, it operates in the traditional sense: it depicts an uncanny situation, in this case an agent’s passage from life to death.\footnote{The poles are located in the final measures of the symphony, just as Tess’s death is located in the final paragraphs of the book. Every programmatic element in the symphony is arranged in order that...} As we have seen with Cohn, the poles used by Vaughan...
Williams have been used to depict identical situations throughout music history, most notably in the works of Wagner and Haydn. Just as one would expect when witnessing a person’s death, their effect is jarring. As seen in the example, the fluid C-minor material (m. 209-14), marked by quarter note triplets and syncopation resulting from unusual phrase groupings, tapers a niente in the celli and basses. Nothing in this minor section even hints at a key change, and Vaughan Williams actually changes keys in the rest before the full ensemble crashes in with a unison, fortissimo E-major sonority (m.215). Here, C-minor brightens into major, with second inversion C-major sonorities alternating with similarly inverted E-major chords. The result is maximally disarming, as the suddenly brilliant sonority is reinforced by a second major harmony. This shift (C-minor/E-major) could represent Tess’s violent death (likely by hanging), or the physiological shock felt by Angel and Liza-Lu upon witnessing the flag that represented her death (“freezing,” focus, etc.). In either event, it illustrates the uncanny.

The above reading is supported by the historical deployment of hexatonic poles as well as its placement in the musical program and the Hardy text itself. When one goes deeper than the Tess program, however, these poles carry additional meanings and pose questions about the composer himself. Meaning can derive from the keys themselves and their traditional associations. Vaughan Williams knew the associations of certain key areas well, due to his intense studies of Bach and other common-practice era compositions. Here, he appears to use C minor with all its traditional associations: human

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they appear in the book (“wind song”→ arrival at Stonehenge→bells to signal execution time→hexatonic poles to signify the death itself).
strife and suffering that tends toward darkness.\(^{163}\) Since the Hardy program features a heroine who constantly suffers at the hands of humans and gods alike, there is little doubt that the composer used the key intentionally. C minor’s pole of E major was typically used by the composer to depict “moments of spiritual transcendence and glimpses of the beyond,”\(^{164}\) and he clearly has reason to maintain that association. By the time the symphony concludes in E major, Tess would have been freed from her suffering through death and God.\(^{165}\) Frogley summarizes this redemption as follows:

> Whatever the precise interpretation of the ending of the Ninth Symphony, in the light of the programmatic associations it seems clear that the symphony traces a progression, if not definitively from darkness to light, then from something approaching exhausted despair to determined endurance, with a hope—however fitful and ambivalent—in God as the sustaining power and promise of eternal light and peace.\(^{166}\)

With this knowledge in hand, one may interpret the Tess’s death as inspiring an uncanny fear, which it would, but immediately followed by a peaceful deliverance.

While Tess’s death occupies its proper place as the last of all the programmatic elements, it is still separated from the chimes by the entire third movement and much of the fourth. This raises the question, “why did the composer insert so much material

\(^{163}\) Wilfred Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989), 262. Mellers supports this traditional association, asserting that it derives from more flats added to the key signature, thus pointing to a lowered, subterranean locale.

\(^{164}\) Frogley, *Vaughan Williams’s Ninth*, 290-91.

\(^{165}\) As Frogley also notes, this use of E major is seen in the slow movement of Symphony No. 1 to contemplate the stars “and the infinite majesty and interconnectedness of creation” and the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* to suggest spiritual revelation. More interesting is its use to describe the Holy City of *Sancta Civitas* and the Holy Spirit in *Hodie*. Considering this, one must wonder if Vaughan Williams’s agnosticism was as complete as so many claim. His use of this highly charged key at a time when his health was failing shows thought regarding death and a God-centered afterlife.

\(^{166}\) Frogley, *Vaughan Williams’s Ninth*, 292.
between the chimes and the poles that describe the same event?” It would have been simple to keep the entire program in the second movement, after all.

I wish to propose that Vaughan Williams saved the redemptive sonorities until the end so that they would illustrate both the conclusion of Tess and his hopes for a postmortem redemption of his own. By placing the poles where he did, he put a neat bow on his programmatic work in an aurally shocking fashion, but also found a way to illustrate his own hopes for an afterlife. As Alain Frogley and Hugh Ottoway both note, Vaughan Williams’s late compositional style developed from changes in his spiritual outlook, and perhaps that outlook was more hopeful for redemption than the aging “agnostic” would have cared to admit.

For all its uncanny facets and focus on death, Vaughan Williams’s final symphony may ultimately represent the composer’s hope for reprieve from those anxieties. In his last large work, R.V.W. includes the uncanny horrors Tess (and he) experienced at Stonehenge, a description of the “ghost drummer of Salisbury Plain” (thus tangentially referencing WWI again), and a final illustration of Tess’s death spread between two movements. When recounted in this way, the symphony becomes strikingly autobiographical; nearly every element (with the exception of the hero[ine]’s death) featured at one point into Vaughan Williams’s own life.

What we hear in the Ninth, then, may be a final attempt at catharsis, the composer attempting to come to terms with his approaching death. Part of his search for reprieve

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168 Frogley, Vaughan Williams’s Ninth, 294.

169 The Ninth Symphony also contains quotations or inspiration derived from several religious works, including his The Pilgrim’s Progress, Job, and Sancta Civitas, Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, and Elgar’s The Apostles. See Frogley, Vaughan Williams’s Ninth, 277-94 for a more detailed discussion of these elements.
appears to be a final emphasis on redemption, both Tess’s and his own. Whether the final E major represents confidence in his eventual deliverance or merely a hope for it, the gesture adds an intriguing conclusion to a colorful work and an equally vivid life.
Conclusion

History remembers Vaughan Williams as the creator of some of Britain’s greatest symphonic works, a codifier of its folk tunes, and a champion of Englishness in times of political, social, and musical upheaval. Rarely is he painted as a human being first. Though this study used musical means to describe his success and failures at achieving reprieve, its goal was to illustrate that these works point to a universally human need, whether that need was fulfilled or not.

In Symphony No. 3, we saw Vaughan Williams successfully create a *locus amoenus* to shield himself from one of the most gruesome conflicts in history. By using a rotational form, commonly used in attempts to transcend a particular environment, he created the locus’s protective boundaries. To populate the space within the walls, R.V.W. adds references to birdsong and the general environment of unmolested pleasance. Birdsong appears through the harmonic stasis of movement II, where the unmoving sonority beneath the bugle solo alludes to birdsong through a referential series that includes the bugle solo, sunset, stand-to, and birdsong. Finally, Vaughan Williams includes references to *Sir John in Love*, his take on the Falstaff tale that takes place in the comedic environment of Windsor. In doing so, he fills the locus with its traditional unmolested environment of pleasance.

The fourth movement redefines the locus, using it to contain semiotic references to the war. Its boundaries in the fourth movement are formed not through rotational circularities, but through an introduction-coda frame as proposed by Hepokoski and Darcy. In this arrangement, the composer finds solace outside the boundaries of the
circularity; the inclusion of a voice in the introduction and coda implies a higher-level agent and supports this reading.

Regardless of the circularities’ purpose, they speak to a universal need for protection and reprieve. Though his musical thoughts could not protect him from a mortar or bayonet, they surely aided the composer in coming to terms with his war and readjusting to post-war life. Unfortunately, the soothing elements of the Pastoral seem to have protected the composer from tangible, war-related elements and not the deeper eschatological fears that plagued him late in life.

We see the primal fear of death appear in Symphony No. 9, written in the two years before Vaughan Williams’s passing in 1958. Here, steady references to uncanny elements rooted in the fear of death illustrate a single-minded preoccupation with dying, activated by revisiting Tess of the d’Urbervilles as he composed the work.

Stonehenge is the work’s first uncanny element, and the monument was experienced by both R.V.W. and Tess. The composer described being terrified when he first saw it; that terror likely derives from the human sacrifices that occurred there, and more broadly from its status as a relic of the dead in a modern world where it does not belong. Both of these associations would have stimulated R.V.W.’s innate fear of death.

The second uncanny stimuli is the ghost drummer of South Tidworth, which the composer knew of from several trips to visit family in the area. This element has no connection to the Tess program at all, thus further illustrating the composer’s cyclopean fascination with dying. Any witness to the spirit would be plagued by uncertainty à la Ernst Jentsch, specifically as to whether the spirit was alive or dead. It would, of course, also resonate with the repressed fear of death.
Descriptions of Tess’s death and redemption comprise the symphony’s final unheimlich elements. As with the other examples, Vaughan Williams depicts Tess’s death with extreme rhythmic clarity and elongates the space between the final two bells to create an analog for the focus and “freezing” of Clare and Liza Lu. To describe her redemptive passage from life to death, he employs hexatonic poles of C minor and E major, used as early as Haydn to depict uncanny situations,\textsuperscript{170} especially the deaths of characters.

By depicting Stonehenge and using the redemptive key of E major,\textsuperscript{171} Vaughan Williams includes himself in Tess’s narrative. The first tie-in is fairly straightforward: he and Tess both shared an uncanny experience at Stonehenge. The second, involving the key of E major, is less concrete, but incredibly likely: since R.V.W. saw much of himself in Tess, he displayed his own wishes for a peaceful afterlife by composing a musical redemption for her. In this way, he again expressed his need for a reprieve, this time from thoughts of death. Ironically, the only way to achieve such solace would be to die, since he could no longer rely on composing for relief.

A comparison of the two works, their methods for providing reprieve, and the outcome of those efforts offers useful insight into R.V.W.’s creative process. Perhaps more importantly, it provides an additional, humanizing perspective on a great composer:


\textsuperscript{171} Alain Frogley writes in \textit{Vaughan Williams and the Ninth Symphony} (p. 291) that “by the time of the Ninth Symphony, E major…had a long history in Vaughan Williams’s music of association with moments of spiritual transcendence and glimpses of the beyond.” He also points out that E major was the key of the Holy City of St. John’s vision in \textit{Sancta Civitas} and that it appears in the second movement of Symphony No. 1, where it invokes a “contemplation of the stars and the infinite majesty and interconnectedness of creation. Frogley further comments that the key appears in the \textit{Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis} at a climax “strongly suggestive of spiritual revelation,” and that, in \textit{Riders to the Sea}, it is linked to the “peace and mystery of the infinite beyond” by underscoring a character who peacefully awaits her death.
he, like everyone else, attempted to distance himself from distressing thoughts. After his successful reprieve via the *Pastoral Symphony*’s locus amoenus, however, R.V.W. failed to find relief in composing Symphony No. 9. His lack of success lends the work a universal familiarity, though—everyone has experienced the unwanted intrusion of upsetting thoughts. With this linkage established, this study has hopefully integrated the composer, his composition, and its audience, thereby providing a deeper and nuanced look at an insightful figure working in a dynamic time.
APPENDIX A: Musical Examples for Symphony No. 3

Movement I

Ex. 1.1: Rotation Layout

Ex. 1.2: Modal/Tonal Incongruity (mm. 8-11)
Ex. 1.3: Opening Thirds (mm. 1-4)

Ex. 1.4: Rotation I Climax (mm. 25-29)
Ex. 1.5: English Horn Solo (mm. 28-32)

Ex. 1.6: “Rotation II, Opening Thirds (mm. 63-66)
Ex. 1.7: “Cadential” Figure (mm. 25, 93)

Ex. 1.8: Rotation II Climax (mm. 91-92)
Ex. 1.9: Rotation II Climax (mm. 93-94)
Ex. 1.10: Rotation III, Opening “Thirds” (mm. 97-103)

Ex. 1.11: Bassoon/Bass Motive (mm. 97-98)
Ex. 1.12: Oboe Solo (mm. 102-106)

Ex. 1.13: Rotation III Climax (mm. 140-141)
Ex. 1.14: Rotation IV, Opening Thirds (mm. 148-150)
Ex. 1.15: Rotation IV Climax (mm. 177-178)
Ex. 1.16: Rotation IV Climax (m. 179)
Movement II

Ex. 1.17: Metered E♭ Trumpet Solo (mm. 67-72)

Ex. 1.18: Unmetered Trumpet Solo (m. 73)
Ex. 1.19: Pentatonic Outburst (mm.75-77)

Ex. 1.20: Pastoral Symphony, Mvt. III (m.1)

Ex. 1.21: Sir John in Love, Dance of the Fairies (6 after reh. 18)
Ex. 1.22: *Pastoral Symphony*, Dotted Eighth/Sixteenth Motive (mm. 179, 185, 188)

Ex. 1.23: *Sir John in Love*, Dotted Eighth/Sixteenth Motive (14 before rehearsal 12)

Ex. 1.24: *Pastoral Symphony*, Descent Motive (end of coda, mm. 217)
Ex. 1.25: *Sir John in Love*, Descent Motive (20 after rehearsal 11)

Movement IV

Ex. 1.26: Sarabande (mm. 14-16)
Ex. 1.27: Nascent Motive (mm. 20-21)

Ex. 1.28: Sample String Interjection (mm. 99)

Ex. 1.29: Developmental Sarabande (mm. 72-73)

Ex. 1.30: Transformed Fourths Motive (m. 77)
APPENDIX B: Musical Examples for Symphony No. 9

Ex. 2.8. Tess’s Death Chimes
Ex. 2.8. Tess’s Death Chimes (cont.)
Ex. 2.8. Tess’s Death Chimes (cont.)
Ex. 2.9. C-minor/E-major Poles
Bibliography


