

# Style, Character and Revelation in Parry's Fourth Symphony

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**PART III:**  
**CHARACTER AND EMOTION**

## CHAPTER 7

### Style, Character and Revelation in Parry's Fourth Symphony

Matthew Riley

The life, compositions, educational leadership, musical writings and genial personality of C. Hubert H. Parry (1848–1918) together form a rich case study in the interplay of music and Victorian Liberalism. As Director of the Royal College of Music from 1895 and as Heather Professor of Music at Oxford University in the 1900s, he shaped British musical attitudes and compositional style, and guided the values and activities of a network of composers, writers, administrators and journalists affiliated with institutions such as the College, the *Times* newspaper and *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* in its successive editions.<sup>1</sup> As a writer he brought art music into dialogue with Victorian intuitions and intellectual currents. He spoke and wrote with high earnestness, at times echoing evangelical rhetoric, and projected a strenuous morality and an idealist frame of mind that favoured inward over outward qualities but remained worldly in its social engagement. Despite his family background in the landed gentry, Parry espoused Liberal politics and rejected conventional religion for a broad, humanist spirituality. He explored the radical intellectual ferment of his time, drawing especially on John Ruskin's arguments for the morality of art and on the developmental evolutionism of Herbert Spencer, as well as, more obliquely, the ethics of John Stuart Mill.<sup>2</sup> On these terms he extolled German instrumental music (Beethoven, Schumann, Brahms), music drama (Wagner) and religious choral music (Bach), bringing Victorian values to bear on a canonic repertory and a practice of musical self-cultivation more readily associated with the German educated middle classes than the British. Much of his activity makes sense on the terms laid out in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). For instance, Parry undertook a far-reaching cultural critique; rejected narrow religious doctrines; welcomed democracy in principle; advocated education, citizenship and transcendent aesthetic values; believed in the social utility of aesthetic understanding; fought the erosion of those values in modern society; and led a new musical 'Establishment' in South Kensington. But, while Arnold in some respects paved the way for Aestheticism at the end of the century, Parry did not follow that path, instead turning to the literature of social realism and deepening his exploration of character and ethics.<sup>3</sup> At the end of his

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry: His Life and Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 503; and 'Parry, Stanford and Vaughan Williams: the Creation of Tradition' in Lewis Foreman (ed.), *Vaughan Williams in Perspective: Studies of an English Composer* (London: Albion Music, 1998), 35–47.

<sup>2</sup> Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 78–79; Jeremy Dibble, 'Parry as Historiographer' in Bennett Zon (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies*, vol. 1 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 37–51; Bennett Zon, *Music and Metaphor in Nineteenth-Century British Musicology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 151–64; Nugunn Wattanapat, *Sir Hubert Parry: An Intellectual Portrait* (PhD thesis, University of Durham, 2016), 136–44.

<sup>3</sup> Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 359–60.

life he rejected the thinking of Nietzsche, as he understood it.<sup>4</sup> Despite a principled open-mindedness, his response to musical modernism in the 1900s and 1910s was distinctly uneasy.<sup>5</sup>

Parry's symphonic music speaks clearly to this distinctive version of the late Victorian 'cultural turn'. His five symphonies were buried by the anti-Victorian reaction that followed World War I, and they lay unregarded and unperformed for most of the twentieth century. Even today they attract minimal critical or analytical attention in musicology. Yet they show all the processual and structural qualities that Parry prized in 'highly evolved' music and recognized as proof of noble and sincere character. In the revised version of his Fourth Symphony (1910) and in his Fifth ('Symphonic Fantasia 1912'), Parry labels his symphonic themes with moral qualities just as he did in his high-minded 'ethical cantatas' of the 1900s. The finest of the series is probably the Fourth in E minor (1889, 1910). According to the composer's programme note, the themes and formal processes of the symphony portray the development of a strong character out of unregulated instincts. At the same time the work presents an aesthetic problem, for on the surface its style is remarkably close to that of Brahms. On a conventional Classical musician's way of judging ambitious instrumental pieces of the era this is a weakness, as 'originality' is highly prized. Today, just as in Parry's day, echoes of earlier 'original' compositions, such as Beethoven's or Brahms's, evoke smiles, while emulation of the 'masters' is preferred to imitation. Despite Parry's insistence on sincerity and strength of character as the core artistic virtues, his music sounds 'derivative', as though another, stronger personality (Brahms) were speaking through him like a ventriloquist. This chapter examines this apparently glaring paradox in order to cast light on the fault lines, and also the subtleties, in Parry's Liberal thought and music. In the revised version of the Fourth Symphony there is evidence of a softening of the stark idealist oppositions of depth and surface found in Parry's writings and at times implicit elsewhere in his music. There are even parallels with the self-styled progressivist symphonic music of the era by composers such as Richard Strauss and Jean Sibelius. A close reading of Parry's writings indicates that beyond his secular humanism lay a spiritual sensibility, reflected sporadically but clearly in his writings in a tone of religious enthusiasm and in descriptions of the experience of great music as revelation. Here Parry reflected something of his social circle of Gladstonian Liberals, explored by Phyllis Weliver elsewhere in this volume, who experienced both art and politics as prophetic visions, and of artist friends with religious leanings such as the painter Edward Burne-Jones and the poet Robert Bridges.<sup>6</sup> The passages of the Symphony that he heavily revised in 1910 produce orchestral effects that can be described in terms of revelation. The chapter aims to open perspectives on Parry's musical thought and practice

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<sup>4</sup> Wattanapat, *Sir Hubert Parry*, 276–97.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Riley, 'Liberal Critics and Modern Music in the Post-Victorian Age' in Matthew Riley (ed.), *British Music and Modernism 1895–1960* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 13–30, 20–24.

<sup>6</sup> Phyllis Weliver, 'Liberal Dreaminess and Burne-Jones's *The Golden Stairs*', *The British Art Journal*, 18.1 (2017, forthcoming); and 'Hubert Parry and *Prometheus Unbound*: Behaving and Composing as a Liberal', this volume.

beyond the at-times routine application of Spencerian evolutionism that is developed at length in his books and lectures, and to capture something of the more spontaneous aesthetic responses that were driving his project in the first place.

### **Symphony No. 4, 'Finding the Way': style and character**

Like most of Parry's orchestral works, the Fourth had a long compositional history: it was premiered in 1889 but not played again until a single performance at Bournemouth in 1904 and a more significant revival at a Royal Philharmonic Society concert in London in 1910, for which Parry replaced the scherzo, re-wrote the finale, altered the first movement's tonal scheme, some of its themes and its coda, and expanded the orchestration.<sup>7</sup> Two more performances followed before further, more modest revisions were made at the end of Parry's life, before the full score was published posthumously by Novello in 1921. The symphony was not performed again until a recording was made by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under Matthias Bamert in 1990.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the Third Symphony, which was premiered a few weeks before the Fourth in 1889 and was widely played in the 1890s, the Fourth had little impact on British musical life.

Parry's symphonic writing was a struggle,<sup>9</sup> and the compositional history of the Fourth Symphony indicates that it was no exception. Even the published score has equivocations over notes and scoring.<sup>10</sup> The programme he gave the Symphony for its 1910 performance and published in the Philharmonic Society concert programme is a struggle too, telling a story of raw instinctual energy being shaped into a strong character through experience, and the individual's ethical choices to embrace life and action in the face of doubts, temptations of idleness, and thoughts of fate and death.<sup>11</sup> The work's title is 'Finding the Way'; the four movements are entitled 'Looking for it', 'Thinking about it', 'Playing on it' and 'Girt for it'. Parry claimed that he had this programme in mind when he first composed the symphony twenty years earlier and that the revisions were undertaken to make his original intentions clearer. The text of the concert programme reflects yet another struggle: Parry's attempts to translate the meaning of his composition into words, which in this case he did not relish.<sup>12</sup> The thematic labels are significant, but the prose is over-written and breathless, following the events of the composition blow-by-blow and laboriously translating them into subjective life-experiences. It has the ring of a Victorian public-school-chapel sermon on manly

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<sup>7</sup> On the compositional history of the Fourth Symphony see Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 278–80, 434–41 and Michael Allis, *Parry's Creative Process* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 146–53. The 1889 and 1900 versions survive in autograph scores at the Royal College of Music library, Add. 4167 and Add. 4166.

<sup>8</sup> Parry, *Symphony No. 3 in C ('English'), Symphony No 4*, Chandos 8896, 1990.

<sup>9</sup> On Parry's compositional travails in general, see Allis, *Parry's Creative Process*, 17–24.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Brookes, 'Preface', in C. Hubert H. Parry, *Symphony in E minor* (Munich: Musikproduktion HÖflich, 2007). This is a reprint of the Novello edition of 1921.

<sup>11</sup> *Royal Philharmonic Society. Fifty-Seventh Season. Analytical and Historical Programme of the Fourth Concert*. Thursday February 10, 1910, 22–29. See commentary in Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 436–40.

<sup>12</sup> See the letter to Herbert Thompson, 10 September 1911, quoted in Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 436.

character and the tribulations of its development. It seems likely that musical criteria and processes were primary in the work's gestation and revision, which Parry later tried to capture in words to match an overall ethical concept, before the programme note ran away with him. In the end he arrived at a subjectivized and highly elaborated version of the heroic programme implicit in the whole post-Beethoven symphonic genre: a story of individual endeavour, suffering, fortitude and triumph.

The serious and expansive first movement—about sixteen minutes in length without an exposition repeat—begins, on the terms of Parry's programme, with burgeoning energy for life and action that is soon checked by doubts and pessimism and then dissipated by allurements, before recovering and proceeding with greater consciousness. The broad, vigorous main theme (Ex. 1(i)) shows a man striving to be 'up and doing'. In the rising figures that follow (Ex. 2(i)), 'The spirit which animates him seems to spring up with eagerness'.<sup>13</sup> But lacking a well-defined purpose, the energy soon expends itself, and the horns softly intone a phrase made up of motives that Parry calls 'The Questions' and 'Destiny' (Ex. 3). The idyllic subordinate theme (Ex. 4(i)) was associated by Parry with lines from Milton's pastoral elegy *Lycidas* (1637), indicating the abandonment of life's purpose for diversions and sensual pleasure (Were it not better done, as others use,/ To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,/ Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?). It is interrupted by an 'answer' (Ex. 5), developed at some length in restless, chromatically modulating sequences. This is the rejection of idleness that Milton calls 'scorn'; Parry speaks of 'distaste, discontent, nausea, distress'.<sup>14</sup> In the development and the recapitulation, the themes return—'the order of mental phases is inevitable'—but in some sense with greater self-awareness, the 'answer' in particular being transformed into a more joyous version. The movement ends with a coda in the tonic major and with references to the answer and the main theme in newly tranquil guises and to the pastoral subordinate theme, which brings it to a peaceful conclusion.

On this interpretation, the development of character out of instinct has to do with symphonic form and process and thematic development and transformation: hallmarks of the highly evolved music of the modern era that Parry admired. By contrast, the listener's first impression of the Fourth Symphony is its remarkably Brahmsian thematic surface. The first three movements are strewn with undigested allusions to Brahms, which include even the themes that Parry associated with instinctual energy (compare Ex. 1(i) and (ii); Ex. 2(i) and (ii)). Parry's main-theme energy is the main-theme energy of Brahms, especially in their respective sequential developments, while his subordinate-theme idyll recalls idyllic moments from Brahms's symphonies (compare Ex. 4(i), (ii) and (iii)). The examples could be multiplied; for instance, later in the

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<sup>13</sup> *Analytical and Historical Programme*, 23, 24.

<sup>14</sup> *Analytical and Historical Programme*, 25.

symphony, Parry virtually quotes the main theme of the first movement of Brahms's Third Symphony (compare Ex. 6(i) and (ii)). Despite his strenuous ethics, Parry seems not to have had a strong internal filter that would have blocked such allusions. On the terms of the Romantic aesthetic of originality, which still conditions the responses to the post-Beethoven symphonic repertory of most musicians and audiences today, the Fourth Symphony is stylistically derivative, failing to assert an independent musical personality.<sup>15</sup> Brahms's influence is apparent also at the local level of musical process, especially in the first movement: the building of climaxes, the studied metrical conflicts (extended syncopation, apparently shifted bar lines, hemiola effects), and the thematic processes that Arnold Schoenberg later termed 'developing variation'.

From the perspective of the Symphony's first premiere in 1889, it could at least be said that Brahms's E minor Symphony (like Parry's, his No. 4) was only three years old. But by 1910 the musical world had moved on. The idea of 'original genius' was at this point reified, and for two decades already, composers of symphonic music such as Richard Strauss, Mahler and Sibelius had vied with one another to demonstrate their progressive credentials with expanded dimensions, new instrumental and choral forces, sensational effects, philosophical texts and programmes, and alterations to traditional formal schemes. Later in 1910 Parry would attend two performances of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, as well as Strauss's *Salome*.<sup>16</sup> In London, Roger Fry's first 'Post-Impressionist' exhibition opened in November, Diaghilev's *Ballets Russes* gave its first season in 1911, while Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces* Op. 16 caused a stir at their world premiere in 1912. All these streams could be described loosely as 'post-Liberal', concerned as they were with Nietzscheanism, pantheism, decadence, symbolism, Theosophy and the 'metaphysics of the artist'.

One did not need to be a progressive, though, to notice the Brahmsian sound of Parry's symphonic writing. Sympathetic reviews of his symphonies in the 1880s already drew attention to it. Even his mentor and colleague Sir George Grove, who appointed Parry as the first Professor of Music History at the Royal College of Music in 1883 and as his own successor as Director in 1895, observed the connection in 1883 in an otherwise adulatory letter about the first movement of Parry's Second Symphony. Charles Stanford's performance on the piano made a 'very great impression', and Grove described the music as 'splendid', 'clear', 'tuneful', 'fresh', 'original' and 'great'. Nothing reminded him of any other composer's work 'Except [for] a Brahmsy\* bit once or twice'. At the bottom of the letter he added as an afterthought—ostensibly clarificatory, but revealing a certain discomfort—'\*and they were reminiscences of the composer and not of passages'.<sup>17</sup> In fact from the outset of the Second Symphony the stylistic influence of Brahms is

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<sup>15</sup> On the legacy of this aspect of Romantic thought, see Mark Evan Bonds, *After Beethoven: Imperatives of Originality in the Symphony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> Dibble, C. *Hubert H. Parry*, 434.

<sup>17</sup> 28 February 1883, Shulbrede Priory, cited in Dibble, C. *Hubert H. Parry*, 109.

glaringly obvious to any knowledgeable listener. Hubert Parry was a highly literate, intelligent and sensitive musician, who by 1910 could not possibly have been unaware of the Brahmsian impression made by his orchestral music. Yet when the opportunity arose he did not ameliorate it; if anything the 1910 version of the first movement of the Fourth Symphony underlines it.<sup>18</sup>

To address these paradoxes requires a closer look at the first movement, and a hearing of the music that runs against the grain of Parry's programme note. The tale he relates there is true of Hubert Parry himself: the blind pugnacity on the Eton playing fields, which sometimes led to serious injury or concussion; the thrill of mortally dangerous yachting manoeuvres; the alternation of these upsurges of instinctive but undirected energy with phases of bleak depression; and the almost desperate summoning of the will to continue.<sup>19</sup> The music tells a rather different story. The tone is initially angry, not just energetic, like the Brahms D minor Piano Concerto that it echoes; the languorous idyll is prolonged, and is not answered quite as swiftly as Parry's programme implies it must be with 'soundly constituted mortals'. The 'answer' moreover sounds like a lament as much as the expression of distaste or nausea. And the programme hardly does justice to the gorgeous coda, one of the most appealing passages in Parry's orchestral music. Here he permits himself a rare sensory fullness and a visceral sense of physical relaxation, discharging the stress and tension built up in the rest of the stormy movement in a way that echoes moments of transfiguration in Wagner and Strauss. In the recapitulation the return of 'distaste, discontent, nausea and distress' is already a brighter and purposeful version, which builds in energy before the main theme returns vigorously in E major to begin the coda. After portentous preparation by the Questions, the answer returns again, now serene and radiant in the major mode, played in counterpoint with the movement's main theme, the outlines of both themes softened and the tempo relaxed (*tranquillo, meno mosso*; letter Y, bar 36). The harmonic alternation of tonic and subdominant in major here connotes the musical pastoral as well as religious consolation ('Amen' progressions are often 'plagal'), while the rich scoring and widely spread texture—violins gently descend from a high b''—introduce new, warm colours. The movement ends with reference to the idyllic subordinate theme and concludes harmonically with a broad plagal progression as the first violins ascend into the heights (again b''): a kind of benediction. To be sure, these closing bars are Brahmsian too, standing in a line of such endings in Parry's oeuvre which recall the final bars of Brahms's *Schicksalslied*, including those of *The Glories of our Blood and State* (1883), *Elegy for Brahms* (1897) and *Ode on the Nativity* (1912).<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the coda conveys much more than a steadfast refusal to give way to pessimism or idleness. In fact it gloriously transcends the vigour/idleness dichotomy itself.

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, the preparation of the transformed 'answer' (letter Y, bars 15–34) in the revised coda could be compared to passages from Brahms's Symphony No. 1/i, letter A, bars 1–4 and Symphony No. 3/ii, from letter D.

<sup>19</sup> Dibble, C. *Hubert H. Parry*, 20–21, 34, 41, and 335–36.

<sup>20</sup> Earlier in the coda at least two passages from Brahms's symphonies are recalled too; see note 16 above.



The tonal and formal structure of the movement reveals further affinities with progressivist practices. Whereas the 1889 first movement was cast in a conventional sonata form, the original subordinate theme appearing first in the expected relative major (G major) and returning in the recapitulation in the tonic major (E major), the 1910 subordinate theme is slower, longer, softer, more sensual and more deliberately prepared, while its recapitulatory return occurs in C major, the overall submediant. This is a ‘non-resolving recapitulation’,<sup>21</sup> an instance of a sonata ‘deformation’ applied with some frequency in the late-nineteenth century (including in the first movement of Brahms’s Third Symphony),<sup>22</sup> but nowhere apparent in the textbook procedures of Parry’s earlier symphonies. This type of deformation flouts one of the essential functions of Classical sonata form: to resolve the tonal tensions of the exposition with the transposition of the subordinate theme or themes in the recapitulation in such a way that the theme’s perfect authentic cadence now confirms the home key rather than an alternative.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the 1910 version of the subordinate theme does not make an authentic cadence even in the exposition, another notable deformation, and one found seldom even in the Romantic symphonic repertory.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, the 1889 version made a clear cadence in G major before building rather tamely to the return of the main theme, also in G major, and made an equally clear cadence in E major in the recapitulation. The 1910 version is much more fluid at these moments. The transfigured coda of the 1910 version is also new and reflects the overall alteration of the sonata-form schemata; the 1889 version had a coda in E minor that simply returned to the main theme (untransfigured) in that key and mode, and turned to major only in the final bars for a *tièrce de Picardie*.

The Symphony’s finale further complicates the picture. Allusions pour in here too, but they are restricted to just two themes, and are not Brahmsian, but refer mainly to choral music by other German composers and to highlights of the English choral tradition. This movement was thoroughly re-written for the 1910 performance, only the opening themes surviving from Parry’s earlier version. According to the programme, which is relatively obscure here, the finale shows how ‘man girds himself for his life’s doings’, and the opening theme in particular represents ‘the girding’ (Ex. 7(i)).<sup>25</sup> The initial figure recalls a number of chorus incipits from canonic English oratorio

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<sup>21</sup>James Hepokoski, ‘Back and Forth from *Egmont*: Beethoven, Mozart and the Nonresolving Recapitulation’, *19th-Century Music*, 25 (2002): 127–53, reproduced in James Hepokoski, *Music, Structure Thought: Selected Essays* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) [page range?].

<sup>22</sup> On the concept of ‘deformation’, especially on standard types, see James Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Hepokoski later developed the concept in more general, less culturally and historically-specific terms (James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 9–10). [Worth noting the criticisms of the idea of deformation here?]

<sup>23</sup> Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 16–20.

<sup>24</sup> But see Joel Haney, ‘Navigating Sonata Space in Mendelssohn’s *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*’, *19th-Century Music*, 28.2 (2004): 108–32; and Seth Monahan, ‘“Inescapable” Coherence and the Failure of the Novel-Symphony in the Finale of Mahler’s Sixth’, *19th-Century Music*, 31.1 (2007): 53–95. 61–68.

<sup>25</sup> *Analytical and Historical Programme*, 28.

repertory (Ex. (ii), (iii) and (iv)). The crux of the 1910 version comes when a new theme, which Parry thought of as ‘a Dedication’ (Ex. 8(i)) enters half-way through the movement (‘What this means, this is not the place to discuss’, he adds mysteriously).<sup>26</sup> In the language of sonata-form analysis this type of event is a ‘breakthrough’ deformation: a powerful intervention that disrupts and transforms the course of a movement that had seemed set to unfold as a standard sonata form.<sup>27</sup> The breakthrough comes like a call from ‘beyond’. Often, as in this finale, the breakthrough occurs near the end of the development, in which case the recapitulation is fundamentally altered or even replaced. An early example is found in the finale of Schumann’s Second Symphony, which introduces a quotation from Beethoven’s ‘An die ferne Geliebte’ during the development. This tune later replaces the main theme at the reprise and dominates the rest of the movement, from which the themes of the exposition are entirely absent. Parry’s ‘Dedication’ certainly sounds like a call from beyond, opening up another set of intertextual allusions, including the Schumann breakthrough theme (Ex. 8(ii), (iii) and (iv)). Like Schumann’s Beethoven melody, Parry’s theme first enters softly in a key that stands in a chromatic mediant relationship to the movement’s tonic (for Schumann the flat mediant, for Parry the flat submediant). It is almost entirely diatonic, and its reiterative structure at several levels projects a different musical temporality from the dynamic developmental processes of the rest of the movement. The theme is played consecutively three times almost in full, in C major (twice) and A minor, while, at a lower level, a two-bar Baroque-style ‘ground bass’ is presented five times within the first thematic statement alone. These iterations gradually build in force, recalling the instrumental introduction of the ‘Ode to Joy’ melody in the finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. The connection is underlined by the bassoon counter-melody that accompanies the first iteration, which instantly recalls the one in the second iteration of Beethoven’s theme. The ‘Ode to Joy’ is itself a kind of symphonic breakthrough, marking the rejection of the symphony’s earlier themes and leading to the entrance of choral voices. Indeed Parry’s finale stands in a line of post-Beethoven symphonic finales with metaphorically choral breakthroughs including those of Schumann’s Second and Third Symphonies and Mendelssohn’s Third. In Parry’s recapitulation the breakthrough has a suitably transformative effect on the rest of the movement, in that the secondary themes do not recur in the recapitulation. Instead the main theme and ‘Dedication’ are combined in a jubilant conclusion, an outcome similar to that found in

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<sup>26</sup> *Analytical and Historical Programme*, 29.

<sup>27</sup> This term originated in German-language scholarship on Mahler, and was adapted and broadened by James Hepokoski. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: A Musical Physiognomy*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Bernd Sponheuer, ‘Der Durchbruch als primäre Formkategorie Gustav Mahlers: Eine Untersuchung zum Finalproblem der Ersten Symphonie’ in Klaus Hinrich Stahmer (ed.), *Form und Idee in Gustav Mahlers Instrumentalmusik* (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichshofen, 1980), 117–64; James Hepokoski, ‘Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero? Strauss’s Don Juan Reinvestigated’, in Bryan Gilliam (ed.), *Richard Strauss: New Perspectives on the Composer and his Work* (Durham, NA and London: Duke University Press, 1992), 135–73, 142–52; and *Sibelius, Symphony No. 5*, 6, 67–70.

the Schumann Second Symphony. These development breakthrough events were not employed by Brahms in symphonic and chamber music.<sup>28</sup> In comparison to the other movements, then, the 1910 finale's intertextual frame of reference is distinctive, not least because the otherwise pervasive presence of Brahms is no longer felt.

In these cases, the allusions to other compositions—all still within Parry's canon of German or here sometimes 'Anglo-German' masterpieces—are, on a conventional hearing, less problematic than in earlier movements, given the precedents for deliberately stepping outside the composer's primary 'voice' in finales and at moments of narrative crisis (for instance, the Beethoven allusions in Schumann's Second and Brahms's First Symphonies) and the established connections with Romantic practices of formal deformation and symphonic/choral transformation. Indeed the 1910 finale is rather up to date, matching the breakthrough deformations found in most of Mahler's and Sibelius's symphonies and in Strauss's *Don Juan* and *Tod und Verklärung*.<sup>29</sup> In this respect it contrasts sharply with the 1889 version, which, like the first movement at that stage, was a textbook sonata form. The 1889 subordinate theme, initially presented in the exposition in the dominant key—the default for a major-key movement—returned in the recapitulation transposed into the tonic. In the 1910 version, the conventional dominant key in the exposition is avoided; the keys of the secondary material (submediant, flat mediant) are unusual and their treatment is unstable. And of course those materials do not return in the recapitulation at all. These aspects of the finale parallel the technically progressive revisions to the first movement and place the 1910 version, to put it crudely, somewhere between traditionalist-Brahmsian and progressivist-Straussian practices.

### **Style, Character and Musical Revelation in Parry's Writings**

In line with his early studies of Ruskin, Parry believed that in art music the character of the composer could be discerned in the composition and had a moral effect on its listeners. At the same time the human instinct for sympathy—a concept he drew in turn from Spencer, as Bennett Zon points out in his chapter in this book<sup>30</sup>—adapts the artistic utterance to its environmental conditions, and this adaptation gives rise to musical style. In his book *Style in Musical Art* (1911), published just after the premiere of the Fourth Symphony but based on lectures given at Oxford University in the 1900s while he was Professor of Music there, Parry explains that style, despite its importance, is 'an external attribute—a means to an end, and in no wise comparable to actual qualities of character or action in man, or the thought embodied in what is said in poetry, or the

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<sup>28</sup> The horn call in the First Symphony's finale might be likened to a breakthrough outside the sonata-form scheme.

<sup>29</sup> Parry knew *Tod und Verklärung*, and quotes an extract from it in C. Hubert H. Parry, *Style in Musical Art* (London: Macmillan, 1911), 345.

<sup>30</sup> Bennett Zon, 'Spencer and Sympathy in the Oxford School of Music Criticism', this volume.

idea embodied in art'.<sup>31</sup> Style has no existence in and for itself.<sup>32</sup> Instead it reflects the instinctive adaptation of the artist's idea to the external realities of the materials of production, audience attitudes and performance occasions. Style is—or should be—secondary, recording at the phenomenal level the workings of the deeper processes of character and instinct. At the beginning of *Style in Musical Art*, Parry brings up the phrase '*Le style c'est l'homme*' with undisguised horror.<sup>33</sup> The 'excessive over-valuation of style', he argued, thinking of late-imperial Rome and China, 'is a decisive indication of decadence'.<sup>34</sup> It is little surprise that Parry took a strong dislike to Oscar Wilde at a week-long society event in 1891, dismissing his social charisma and conversational facility in a diary entry.<sup>35</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century, Parry felt urged to condemn time and again the musical fashions, populism and sensationalism that he saw around him as fatal abuses of style. Unscrupulous charlatans were exploiting the undeveloped tastes and lower instincts of the majority, dragging contemporary music down to a vulgar and primitive level. At times he lapses into Biblical phraseology and over-heated pulpit rhetoric, speaking of false prophets and the spiritual desolation of the masses, who fall down before idols.<sup>36</sup> In the years before World War I Parry was an angry man, his prized open-mindedness tested to the limit. Near the end of his life he was still working through the some of the same antitheses that concerned him in the Oxford lectures, producing a lengthy philosophical manuscript entitled *Instinct and Character*—a title that also encapsulates his programme for the first movement of the Fourth Symphony.<sup>37</sup>

That manuscript was rejected for publication, and, on the face of it, Parry's later writings could be interpreted as a minor 'death of Liberal England'—as George Dangerfield famously put it—in music. Parry was trying to sustain an aesthetic of form/content harmony into the 1910s, reformulated in terms of an optimistic Spencerian developmentalism with a strong moral twist. *Style in Musical Art* could almost be deemed a lengthy gloss on the first few paragraphs of Ruskin's 1870 Oxford lecture 'On the Relation of Art to Morals'.<sup>38</sup> Yet there is more to Parry's position than this, confirmed idealist though he certainly was. In an earlier book entitled *The Evolution of the Art of Music*

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<sup>31</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 398.

<sup>33</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 401.

<sup>35</sup> Diary 27 July 1891, quoted in Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 292.

<sup>36</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, for instance at 417, but throughout the book, especially Chapters 7, 20 and 21. See also Hubert Parry, 'The Meaning of Ugliness', *Musical Times*, 52 (1 August 1911): 507–11; and 'Things that Matter', *Musical Quarterly*, 3.1 (1915): 313–28 (esp. p. 327); and for commentary see Matthew Riley, 'Liberal Critics and Modern Music', 20–24.

<sup>37</sup> Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 493–94. For discussion of the manuscript see Wattanapat, *Sir Hubert Parry*, Chapter 7, 265–317.

<sup>38</sup> John Ruskin, 'The Relation of Art to Morals', Lecture III of *Lectures on Art; Delivered before the University of Oxford in Hilary Term, 1870* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1870), reproduced in E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (eds), *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 20, (London: Allen, 1903–12), 73–75. Bennett Zon would start earlier, as he regards *The Evolution of the Art of Music* (see note 37 below) as already exemplary of the backwardness of Victorian understandings of music history, 'clinging to the assurances of the past in the face of increasingly manifest cultural and intellectual opposition' (Bennett Zon, 'C. Hubert H. Parry, *The Evolution of the Art of Music* (1893/96)', *Victorian Review*, 35.1 (2009): 68–72, 71).

(1893/96), his most systematic exposition of his ideas about music history, Parry explains, along lines developed by Spencer, that the history of music begins with the expression of emotion in the cries of animals. However, in music, as in all the arts, ‘expression’ must reach an accommodation with ‘design’.<sup>39</sup> At any moment in music history expression may dominate over design or vice versa, except when the ideal harmony is attained: ‘The Perfect Balance of Expression and Design’, as the title of his Chapter 12 has it. However, despite these classically idealist touches, reminiscent of Hegel, it soon becomes clear that Parry’s interest—one might better say passion—is not for ‘balance’ as such but for musical actions that undertake the corrective swing from excessively developed design back to balance. Mannerism, empty convention, over-abundant decoration, in short, style as an end in itself, is corrected by the breakthrough of content, or, as Parry would say, the ‘idea’. The chapter on ‘The Perfect Balance’ is concerned mainly with Beethoven, who is contrasted favourably with Mozart, as the latter merely polished an existing stylistic vocabulary. Parry speaks of a ‘fervour of spirit’ at the end of the eighteenth century analogous to the ‘fervour of religious enthusiasm’ of the Reformation. ‘For it was the same protest against the conventions and formalities by which the true spirit of things was hidden, and the development of man’s nature and aspirations checked and thwarted.’<sup>40</sup> The spirit of protest in its old form is represented in music by J. S. Bach and by Handel at his best (not in opera, in other words—a genre that largely revolted Parry), while the modern version is found in Beethoven. To gloss Parry a little, one might say that in the best art, the ideas and actions of the strong character in all their burning sincerity appear to human beings adapted to the historical and material circumstances in which they must find their realization. Despite his talk about ‘balance’ and stylistic synthesis, then, Parry responds most intensely to the moments in music history when an over-stylized surface is dissolved by the force of the inward musical vision.

In this light, despite his denunciation of organized religion and all religious doctrine, something of Parry’s response to music can only be understood as spiritual, the positive side of his Biblical diatribes directed at contemporary vulgarity and sensationalism. There are true musical prophets as well as false. In *Style in Musical Art* and also in *The Music of the Seventeenth Century* (1902) and *Johann Sebastian Bach: the Story of the Development of a Great Personality* (1909) he exalts ‘Teutonic’ spirituality: an inward, ‘chaste’ experience of the divine without reference to external sensory phenomena, which captures all his favourite moral qualities: ‘The effect of Teutonic instinct is to bring music into touch with realities, to express something which is human, to add immeasurably to

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<sup>39</sup> C. Hubert H. Parry, *The Evolution of the Art of Music* (London: Kegan Paul, 1896), 1–7. The book was first published in 1893 as *The Art of Music*. On Parry’s historical writings, see Dibble, ‘Parry as Historiographer’.

<sup>40</sup> Parry, *Evolution of the Art of Music*, 249.

the power of great thoughts, and to stir noble emotions.<sup>41</sup> That instinct is redemptive and, specifically, revelatory: ‘To give men trembling on the verge of materialism a new revelation of spiritual possibilities, and extinguish pessimism by giving a new meaning to life.’<sup>42</sup> From this perspective, musical evolution records the development of the techniques of manipulating musical material and of principles of design until music is ready to receive a higher message than mere emotional cries. Humanity must then await a prophet who can express these spiritual realities, and their expression through music is revelatory.

Parry speaks of musical revelation most often in connection with Beethoven, and does so consistently over a quarter of a century. Near the start of his chapter on Beethoven in *Studies of the Great Composers*, he says that ‘when some exceptionally splendid genius appears, who is fully in sympathy with the best tendencies of his day ... he becomes as it were a prophet, and raises those who understand him above themselves, and ennobles and purifies at least some of those traits and sympathies which combine to make the so-called spiritual element in man’.<sup>43</sup> According to *The Evolution of the Art of Music*, ‘Self-dependent instrumental art on the grandest and broadest lines found its first perfect revelation in his hands’, while even his early compositions throw up ‘sudden revelations of the spirit’.<sup>44</sup> And in *Style in Musical Art*, he explains that ‘It was the spiritual fervour of Beethoven which exalted the sonata to its highest phase, and there it hung posed for a short while at the extreme limit of possible adjustment of spiritual exaltation and perfection of design’.<sup>45</sup> J. S. Bach was of course also in this company, and Schumann and Wagner are occasionally mentioned in the same terms.<sup>46</sup>

There is no doubt that Parry regarded Brahms as a musical prophet too, referring on one occasion to Brahms’s ‘deep mysticism’ as a manifestation of the Teutonic instinct,<sup>47</sup> although he was less expansive on this theme than when writing about Beethoven. As a music historian he had a more limited perspective on Brahms, after all, as the composer was still alive at the time of *Studies of Great Composers* (1887) and *The Evolution of the Art of Music* (1893/96), and his oeuvre was incomplete. Already in *Studies of Great Composers*, however, Parry claimed that ‘The list of great composers closes with him’,<sup>48</sup> and he returned to that theme in a commemorative start-of-term address to the students of the Royal College of Music shortly after Brahms’s death in 1897. Brahms was a

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<sup>41</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 170. For further Teutonism, see C. Hubert H. Parry, *The Music of the Seventeenth Century, The Oxford History of Music* Vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 118–19; and C. Hubert H. Parry, *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Story of the Development of a Great Personality* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1909), especially Chapter 1 (‘Convergences’), 1–19 and Chapter 11 (‘The Latest Cantatas’), 373–453. See also Dibble, ‘Parry as Historiographer’, 49.

<sup>42</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 170.

<sup>43</sup> C. Hubert H. Parry, *Studies of Great Composers* (London: Routledge, 1887), 156.

<sup>44</sup> Parry, *Evolution of the Art of Music*, 272, 253.

<sup>45</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 95.

<sup>46</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 170; *Studies of Great Composers*, 321. (‘The spirit which lived in Bach and Beethoven lived also in him [Schumann].’)

<sup>47</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 171.

<sup>48</sup> Parry, *Studies of the Great Composers*, 367.

‘particularly heroic tone-poet’, ‘the last of the great German heroes of musical art’. His music is marked by ‘strong and noble individuality’.<sup>49</sup> Brahms, Parry averred, stands as an encouragement to ‘us’—the English—as he was ‘no expansive, neurotic, ecstatic, hysterico-sensitive bundle of sensibilities, but even as full of dignified artistic reserve and deliberate artistic judgement as the most serious of our own people’.<sup>50</sup> Brahms thus presents a model for the good musical citizens that Parry hoped the College would produce. His diary records that in the address he was ‘too much overcome in talking about Brahms’, ironically displaying precisely the nervous susceptibility to which he believed his hero immune.<sup>51</sup>

A relevant perspective on Brahms comes from J. A. Fuller Maitland, a friend and musical colleague, second general editor of *Grove’s Dictionary* and music critic of the *Times*, whose position on many aspects of music was close to Parry’s. Maitland authored the entry on Brahms for his edition of the *Dictionary*, which begins, echoing Parry, with the words ‘Brahms, Johannes, the last of the great line of German masters’.<sup>52</sup> In his book *Brahms* (1911), Maitland recounts that the acquaintance of each of Brahms’ compositions over many years ‘has been eagerly welcomed as a new revelation of a spirit already ardently loved’.<sup>53</sup> This remark comes at the end of a preface entitled ‘Introductory Note on Enthusiasm’, which encapsulates the author’s stance despite the book’s critical and analytical perspectives. Parry would presumably have approved of Maitland’s indulgence of Brahms’ neglect of surface glitter, as for instance when Maitland noted ‘how very much more important the matter of his ideas was to him than the manner of their presentation; what he had to say was always far more important than how it was to be said’.<sup>54</sup> With his muddy orchestration, Brahms ‘is sometimes asserted to have sacrificed too little to effect’.<sup>55</sup> The first of these formulations was coined by the literary critic Arthur Clutton-Brock with reference to Shelley, whose utopian visions Parry set in his early, radically-minded cantata *Prometheus Unbound* (1880);<sup>56</sup> Maitland, perhaps predictably, later applied it to Parry himself (‘He always thought more of what he wanted to say than of his manner of saying it’).<sup>57</sup> Parry may well have been thinking of Brahms, then, when in his chapter ‘The Perfect Balance of Expression and Design’, he admitted that ‘the men who have most to say that is worth saying find the greatest difficulty in saying anything at all’.<sup>58</sup> Evidently both men were willing to forgive a little clumsiness for the sake of sincerity, another sign that a theoretical

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<sup>49</sup> C. Hubert H. Parry, *College Addresses* (London: Macmillan, 1920), 44.

<sup>50</sup> Parry, *College Addresses*, 46; see also Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 345.

<sup>51</sup> Parry, *College Addresses*, 47; see also Dibble, *C. Hubert H. Parry*, 346.

<sup>52</sup> J. A. Fuller Maitland, ‘Brahms’, in J. A. Fuller Maitland (ed.), *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5 vols., 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Macmillan, 1904), vol. 1, 382–91, 382.

<sup>53</sup> J. A. Fuller Maitland, *Brahms* (London: Methuen, 1911), vii.

<sup>54</sup> Maitland, ‘Brahms’, 385.

<sup>55</sup> Maitland, ‘Brahms’, 386.

<sup>56</sup> See Weliver, ‘Hubert Parry and *Prometheus Unbound*: Behaving and Composing as a Liberal’, this volume.

<sup>57</sup> J. A. Fuller Maitland, *The Music of Parry and Stanford* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1934), 7.

<sup>58</sup> Parry, *Evolution of the Art of Music*, 250.

‘perfect balance’ does not quite capture Parry’s position in practice, and also that his commitment to the Spencerian concept of sympathy—the instinct for social adaptation that gives rise to style in the first place—had its limits. These attitudes to Brahms are, paradoxically, consistent with Parry’s otherwise perplexing lack of fastidiousness about the presence of Brahms’ ‘strong and noble individuality’ on his own symphonic surface. Sins of style are more readily forgiven than sins of character.

*Style in Musical Art* momentarily gets to the nub of the problem raised by the Brahmsian symphony he had revived the year before its publication. Here the outlines of a more nuanced liberal position may be discerned. In the first of his two chapters on ‘Quality’, Parry reflects on the misuse of things that have a specific purpose for mere effect. This is a subtle sign that ‘artistic morality’ is failing, and means that no ‘individual personality’ is to be found.<sup>59</sup> The results are musical equivalents of the ‘villa residences’ that are built in thousands by speculators. ‘And this brings us to the edge of that interesting question how far the expression of some one else’s personality, however great, can serve as a certificate of high quality’.<sup>60</sup> Many can imitate the work of masters, but the results lack substance and thus permanence. However, such imitation may be useful when it helps to introduce the unaccustomed manner of a great personality to ‘ordinary minds’ that prefer the familiar. This is evidently a delicate matter for Parry. He adds: ‘In a very subtle fashion their artistic relation to the man who inspires them, and the activities induced by that inspiration, represent the same universal processes as those of disciplines in the sphere of religious ideas. Like the disciplines of the founder of a new religion, they repeat his phrases; and though they have not the force of the original they convey something that really moved their souls’.<sup>61</sup> Parry’s point here makes space for a legitimate imitation of the masters. Not everyone is prepared for revelation when it comes, and a circle of disciples may be needed to communicate the message and the vision, even if their works do not live up to the standards of their mentor and in time are forgotten. This is indeed a ‘very subtle’ matter for Parry, as it means a relaxation of the stark opposition of character and style that otherwise dominates his book and, by extension, much of his thought and writings. It is acceptable to imitate the style of a master if it is done in the spirit of discipleship and modesty: an alternative sincerity that accepts a more substantive role for style.

## Conclusion

By 1910 Parry’s intellectual world was in flux: he was reflecting on contemporary music and art which he found difficult to absorb, and was thinking hard about style. Theoretically his default was idealism and formalism: instinct must be channelled through form and musical process; strong

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<sup>59</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 385

<sup>60</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 385–86.

<sup>61</sup> Parry, *Style in Musical Art*, 386.



characters are true to themselves; the idea is primary, style secondary. These convictions were however coming under strain, not least because Parry's own musical instincts at times worked against his system. Despite his sometimes intransigent rhetoric, there are signs that by the early 1910s, especially in the way the Fourth Symphony turned out, Parry was working his way out of strict idealism and formalism by means of a spiritual, revelatory conception of music consistent with the visionary thinking of late-nineteenth-century Liberals, and with the themes of his ethical cantatas and of *Prometheus Unbound*. Around this time he seems to have halted a decline in his health, accepted his limitations, and found a new creative energy with a spiritual dimension, which led to the Fifth Symphony (1912), a further exploration of progressive symphonic techniques, the Chorale Preludes (1912, 1916) and Chorale Fantasias (1915) for organ and the a capella *Songs of Farewell* (1916–17).

For Parry, the Brahms style seems to have been the sound of spiritual revelation in modern orchestral music; at least, when he was inspired to work at orchestral composition the ideas came to him in this form and he accepted them, including even themes he said represented instinctive energies. This musical discipleship meant that Parry did sometimes let style come first, if only to serve a higher idea in the end. At the same time, musical revelation happens in the Symphony by means of striking, disruptive events that rely on sensational effects of the post-Wagnerian orchestra. In this respect the 1910 version runs parallel in some ways with progressivist Continental symphonic composition of the era, about which Parry expressed ambivalence, and which might be loosely termed 'post-Liberal'. Whereas the 1889 version is broadly consistent with the aim of a balance of expression and design, given its Classical formal processes, tonal resolution and thematic returns in the outer movements, the 1910 version is much less orthodox, setting up standard patterns only to override them, and tipping the balance to the side of expression. The first movement's non-resolving recapitulation, the shifting of its tonal resolution to the ravishing, transfigured coda, and the breakthrough of 'Dedication' in the finale, which sets the movement on a new course, all work against the seamless integration of form and content and the synthetic formation of character out of instinct. Hubert Parry, wary of the strong forces at work in himself and in his world, may often have girded himself tightly in received Victorian wisdom, even Victorian cliché, but in the Fourth Symphony he was able to draw more deeply on the symbolic resources of his Liberal milieu.