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Elgar, Wagner, and Catholicism:
Some Perspectives on *The Dream of Gerontius*

by

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Abstract

Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* recasts the traditional English oratorio narrative, aligning itself more with Wagner's music dramas, and framing it within an English Roman Catholic theology. The historical evidence suggests that whatever anxieties August Jaeger and the Three Choirs Festival committee had about the Catholic nature of the work, they were unfounded. Indeed, rather than alienating Protestants, its emphasis on the drama of the personal relationship between the individual and God, and a uniquely English image of Purgatory that emphasizes purification, may have made the Catholic nature of the *The Dream of Gerontius* more palatable. Given the literary and political role of Gerontius in English history the work becomes an allegorical framework for unity. Furthermore, it mediates opposing philosophies along three different poles: between the poem and the music, Catholic and Protestant, and the belief of a Christian life after death in an age of anxiety.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
 INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: GERONTIUS BEFORE ELGAR.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: THE LIBRETTIST: JOHN HENRY NEWMAN	10
CHAPTER THREE: <i>THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS</i> IN CONTEXT.....	13
CHAPTER FOUR: THE EVOLUTION OF THE ENGLISH ORATORIO: DESIGN AND STRUCTURE.....	20
CHAPTER FIVE: WAGNER'S INFLUENCE	37
CHAPTER SIX: ELGAR, CATHOLICISM, AND <i>THE DREAM</i>	61
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE GATES OF HORN: REVELATION AND REASON IN <i>THE DREAM OF GERONTIUS</i>	75
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION	85
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	89
APPENDIX A: THE LIBRETTO.....	96

List of Figures

Example 1, Handel's <i>Messiah</i> , "Hallelujah" Chorus, mm. 22-23	24
Example 2, Sullivan, <i>The Golden Legend</i> , Sc. II, mm. 84-99	30
Example 3, Sullivan's <i>The Golden Legend</i> , mm. 330-344	31
Example 4, Parry, <i>Job</i> , Sc. III, mm. 58-69	34
Example 5, Parry, <i>Job</i> , Sc. III, mm. 119-129	35
Example 6, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Part II, Fig. 61	43
Example 7, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Energy Motif	48
Example 8, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Part I, Cue 33	49
Example 9, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Demon Theme, Part I, Cue 62	49
Example 10, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Part I, Cue 21	50
Example 11, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Part I, Cue 60	51
Example 12, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Part I, Cue 67	51
Example 13, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Part I, Cue 68	54
Example 14a), Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Part II, Cue 118-20	55
Example 14b), Wagner, <i>Parsifal</i> , mm. 1687-90	55
Example 15, Elgar, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Part I, Fig. 103	66
Example 16, <i>The Dream of Gerontius</i> , Pt. I, Cue 64	68

Introduction

In 1900, Edward Elgar completed work on *The Dream of Gerontius*, a work that, together with the *Enigma Variations*, Op. 36 (1899), was to form the basis of his historical standing as the first major English composer since Henry Purcell. Outwardly, *The Dream of Gerontius* is an oratorio in the English tradition common toward the end of the nineteenth century. Drawing its text from Cardinal John Henry Newman's 903-line blank-verse poem of the same name, the oratorio relates the deathbed experience of a dying man, Gerontius¹, and the journey of his soul as it approaches God.

Oratorios by contemporaries of Elgar, such as William Sterndale Bennett (1816-75), Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924), and Hubert Parry (1848-1914), emphasized biblical subject matters, set pieces, and vocal parts. Elgar believed *The Dream of Gerontius* to be different from this traditional English practice in at least one important way. He viewed it less as an oratorio and more as a music drama in the Wagnerian tradition.² Indeed, the music graphically illustrates the story's dramatic content, employing a quasi-operatic style that nevertheless incorporates a considerable role for both the chorus and the orchestra. Chromatic saturation, the lack of a narrator, greater orchestral equality, *unendlichemelodie*, and an internalized psychological drama further

¹The name is derived from the Greek *yépwv*, meaning an old man. Newman reveals nothing about the character or history of Gerontius in the text, but in a letter to August Jaeger in the summer of 1900, Elgar indicates that he interprets the man to be worldly, earthy. He sought to represent Gerontius with a faithful, pious constitution but consciously avoided giving him any melodies that might be associated with sacred music. Otherwise, nothing is revealed about the character or his unusual name.

²Edward Elgar, *Elgar and His Publishers: Letters of a Creative Life*, J.N. Moore, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 226.

strengthen similarities with such operas as *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) and *Parsifal* (1882).

Like *Parsifal*, the central themes in *The Dream of Gerontius* center on death, judgement, and salvation. Geoffrey Rowell, an English historian specializing in nineteenth-century Anglo-Catholic history, has noted that the judgement and purgatory which the Soul of Gerontius faces in Part II, however, emphasizes a purificatory rather than a penal process of purgatory.³ This emphasis on purification is unique in nineteenth-century Catholic theology and originates with Cardinal John Henry Newman, the librettist for *The Dream of Gerontius*. No other English oratorio in the second-half of the nineteenth century addresses death, judgement or salvation as its primary subject matter. Thus, a second difference in *The Dream of Gerontius* from the traditional English oratorio is its Catholic world view with a uniquely English emphasis on purification after death.⁴

A discussion on the relationship between the work and its Catholic influence would be expected in the recently published book (1995) by noted scholar Percy Young, *Elgar, Newman and the Dream of Gerontius in the Tradition of English Catholicism*. Such an analysis is lacking, however. Young introduces the idea of a possible relationship between Catholicism and the work's origin, but the author's discussion is unfortunately disjunct, failing to effect a clear understanding of how the three subjects in his title relate to the oratorio. In an article which was the genesis to the book, he writes that his chief

³Geoffrey Rowell, "The Dream of Gerontius," *Ampleforth Journal*, 73 (1968): 190-94.

⁴John Henry Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1869), 358. See

strategy is to analyse the mid-century reception of the poem by theologians and literati to establish "... the context in which Elgar's climax of praise [can] be measured."⁵ This is significantly different from the purposes of this study. Thus, the possibility still remains to show how *The Dream of Gerontius* reflects an English Catholic tradition.

This thesis seeks to clarify to what degree Elgar's work is a touchstone to Catholic theology, how it was received in a mostly Protestant environment, and its indebtedness to Wagner. Chapter 1 is a discussion of Gerontius as a character in history and literature before becoming the subject of Elgar's oratorio. Chapter 2 is a brief biography of the librettist John Henry Newman and attempts to place the poem on which the work is based in context. This is followed by a review of other sources which have discussed *The Dream of Gerontius*, and their attempts to discuss the Catholic aspect of the work treated, with some differences, by the librettist and composer. Chapter 4 discusses the role and weight of choral versus solo parts in antecedent works. Chapter 5 is a discussion on Wagner's influence on Elgar in general and the similarities between *The Dream of Gerontius* and other works by Wagner which have psycho-spiritual subject matters. In Chapter 6, the influence of Catholicism on Elgar, and *The Dream of Gerontius*, reveals a particularly English Roman Catholic theology indebted to John Henry Newman. The final chapter attempts to understand the work as theological statements by Newman and Elgar.

⁵Percy Young, "Newman, Elgar and 'The Dream'" *Elgar Society Journal* 6/4 (January, 1990): 4-12.

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which prevented Constantine from holding the barbarians in check, eventually led to the independence of the Britons.

The source of “The Dream of Gerontius” is a poem of the same name by Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-1890) published in 1865.³ Newman was an influential theologian who led the Oxford Movement in the 1830s and stressed Roman Catholic elements in the Church of England.⁴ Newman designated his position the “via media” since the English Church, he maintained, lay at an equal distance from both Rome and Geneva. On October 9, 1845, he was received into the Roman Catholic church, although he was suspect among many of the Roman Catholic clergy. Consequently, his early career as a Roman Catholic priest was marked by a series of frustrations. The history of his religious evolution was put forward in *Apologia pro Vita Sua* in 1864—one year before “The Dream of Gerontius.” It was read and approved far beyond the limits of the Roman Catholic church by its fairness and candor, and the beauty of some passages helped him recapture the almost national status he had once held.⁵ It is not known how Newman became aware of the story of Gerontius, or of its place within English literature or mythology. However, the ethos of the poem represents fundamental Catholicism. Indeed, it was considered somewhat archaic and reactionary by many late-Victorian Catholics of a liberal disposition.

Newman's *Dream of Gerontius*, published a year after the *Apologia*, was written in one night. On 16 June 1865 Newman wrote:

³John Henry Newman, *The Dream of Gerontius* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1865, rpt. 1904 and 1914). Cardinal Newman began writing the poem on 17 January 1865. It took him twenty-two days to complete, and it was published the following November. The poem was dedicated to the memory of John Joseph Gordon who was a friend and colleague from the oratory who had died in 1853. In 1887, the poem was offered to Dvorak for a Birmingham commission, but he declined.

⁴Edward Block, *Critical Essays on John Henry Newman* (Victoria: University of Victoria Press, 1992); Owen Chadwick, *The Spirit of the Oxford Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 199); Lewis Charles Bernard Seamen, *Victorian England: Aspects of English and Imperial History, 1837-1901* (London: Methuen, 1973); Kenneth Thompson, ed. *Newman: Prose and Poetry* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957); Michael Wheeler, “*The Dream of Gerontius*,” *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Nigel Yates, *The Oxford Movement and Anglican Ritualism* (London: English Historical Association, 1983).

⁵The work thus assured Newman's stature in the Roman Catholic church. In 1879 Pope Leo XIII made him cardinal-deacon of St. George in Velabro.

I have said what I saw... I have set down the dream as it came before the dreamer. It is not my fault if the sleeper did not dream any more. Perhaps something awoke him. Dreams are generally fragmentary. I have nothing more to tell.⁶

On 11 October he also wrote, "On the 17th of January last it came into my head to write it, I really cannot tell how. And I wrote on till it was finished..."⁷ The first draft was written on fifty-two scraps of paper. A fair copy was initiated on 17 January and completed 7 February 1865. A copy was sent to Father H.J. Coleridge, editor of *The Month II*, who decided to publish it in the May and June issues in two parts. It was separately published in London in the same year by Burns and Oates. Twenty years later Newman's poem had enjoyed great popularity. It was reprinted twenty-seven times before his death.

From this reprinting survives one of the most important testimonials to the impact of Newman's text. In 1885, Prime Minister Gladstone of England, sent General Charles "Chinese" Gordon as an observer to the Sudan.⁸ Gordon and the garrison were killed at Khartoum in a battle against superior numbers. Afterwards, the general's head was severed and placed on a pike. An enraged English public accused Gladstone of having martyred the famous hero by forbidding him to wage war after sending him into the war zone to take charge.⁹ Before the Battle of Khartoum, and with a premonition of his own death, Gordon spent a portion of the night reading, "The Dream of Gerontius," making personal notes throughout. When his personal belongings were returned to England, Gordon's annotations were added to the original poem and published. By 1898, when Elgar was asked for a sacred work for the Birmingham Festival of 1900, the poem had already been subverted in its marriage to British imperialism and national fervor. The

⁶As quoted in Percy Young, *Elgar, Newman, and The Dream of Gerontius*, p. 95.

⁷Ibid.

⁸General Gordon received his nickname for suppressing the Taiping Rebellion.

⁹Gladstone refused to annex the Sudan, but in 1898, when the Conservatives were in power, General Herbert Kitchener was sent there, and his men, armed with machine guns, mowed down charging Muslims at Omdurman. The casualties were reported to be eleven thousand Muslims and twenty-eight Britons. Many Britons felt this was appropriate revenge for Gordon's death.

association between the poem and Gordon grew in Elgar's mind. He planned a "Gordon" symphony, and one of his sketches, dated 20 October 1898, shows that this became the "Committal" theme in *The Dream of Gerontius*, heard in the Prelude to Part I and the choral, "Go, in the name of Angels and Archangels."¹⁰

One of Elgar's other ideas was to write about St. Augustine as a subject. In January 1899, he told Joseph Bennett, the critic of *The Daily Telegraph*, that this idea had been rejected as "too controversial: this is as I feared."¹¹ Another project was what he called "a scriptural thing"—undoubtedly *The Apostles*, which was deferred for another three years. For whatever reasons Elgar decided to write *The Dream of Gerontius*, his decision to compose the oratorio did not emerge suddenly. He once wrote that:

It seems absurd to say that I have written the work to order for Birmingham. The poem has been soaking in my mind for at least eight years. All that time I have been gradually assimilating the thoughts of the author into my own musical promptings.¹²

Elgar had been pondering a setting of Cardinal Newman's poem since Father Knight had given him a copy with Gordon's annotations sometime before 1887.¹³ Elgar and Fr. Knight discussed the possibility of reducing it to a libretto several times.¹⁴ During the Three Choirs meeting at Worcester in September 1899, Elgar's wife Alice noted in her journal "E. walked with Father Bellasis," of the Birmingham Oratory. Bellasis and Newman had been friends. This walk may lead one to think this was the beginning of *Gerontius*, but Dorabella, a close friend of the Elgars, says that she heard "a good deal" of the piano score of *The Dream of Gerontius* while on visits to Craeg Lea and Birchwood in May, June, and July of 1899.¹⁵ Possibly Fr. Bellasis and Elgar discussed whether he could obtain permission to use the libretto. Together, they consulted Fr. Neville about the

¹⁰ Robert Anderson, "Foreward," *The Dream of Gerontius* (London: Novello & Company, 1992): iii.

¹¹ Letters published in *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 September 1937.

¹² *Musical Times*, October 1900, p. 648.

¹³ Elgar knew the poem as early as 1887 because he lent his copy with Gordon's annotations to Alice Roberts, his future wife, when her mother died in the early summer.

¹⁴ Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 76.

¹⁵ Kennedy, p. 76.

cuts Elgar proposed to make, a discussion that can hardly have been conducted on a purely literary basis.¹⁶

Newman's poem is a setting in stanzas inspired by the death of the Rev'd. John Joseph Gordon, Priest of the Order of St. Philip de Neri.¹⁷

Elgar heavily edited the original poem, which is in seven sections. He largely retained the first section portraying the deathbed scene, while the remaining six sections dealing with the afterlife were telescoped into a second part approximately twice the length of the opening. This new emphasis gives greater weight to the drama of Gerontius' death, in which a variety of forms and rhythms are used throughout.¹⁸ The system of versification and rhyming changes throughout the poem, such that each series of texts is set apart thematically. The first supplicating lyric is in iambic pentameter; blank verse is used whenever the Spirit speaks. A third, ternary form can be heard in the Song of the Demons. Interestingly, references to Mary and Joseph, which are present in the poem, are significantly reduced—though not removed altogether.¹⁹

In literature, a dream vision is a type of poetic narrative or narrative framework that was especially popular in medieval literature. It was so named because the poet pictured himself falling asleep and envisioning in his dream a series of allegorical people and events. The earliest known dream poem in English is *The Dream of the Rood*. In a dream the poet beholds a beautiful tree—the rood, or cross, on which Christ died. The rood tells him its own story. Forced to be the instrument of the Saviour's death, it describes how it suffered the nail wounds, spear shafts, and insults along with Christ to fulfill God's will. Once bloodstained and horrible, it is now the sign of human redemption.

¹⁶Moore, p. 296.

¹⁷The poem was also reprinted in 1874 in *Verses on Various Occasions*.

¹⁸As of yet, no scholarly discussion on Elgar's treatment of the poem has been written. It would be revealing to analyze, for example, to what degree Newman's rhythmic designs in the poem translate in Elgar's musical setting.

¹⁹This might be because August Jaeger, a friend and colleague from Novello, encouraged Elgar in a letter dated February 1890 to soften his Catholic references in order that the oratorio would be more palatable to the Festival Committee.

The poem was originally known only in fragmentary form from some 8th-century runic inscriptions on the Ruthwell Cross, now standing in the parish church of Ruthwell in Scotland. The complete version, found in the tenth-century codex known as the Vercelli Book, was discovered in 1822. Whether Newman was aware of *The Dream of the Rood* is unknown, though given his interest in literature and theology it is not unreasonable to imagine he did.

The Dream is primarily about the nature of one man's soul, and Elgar's setting of it reflects the inward, spiritual nature of its subject matter. This position is placed within its cultural and theological context by the Newman scholar Robert Carballo who writes:

The Dream is intrinsically a theological poem which dramatizes a recurrent theme of Newman's sermons: that in this world we mortals have no lasting city. What makes it different from much religious poetry in the nineteenth century is the artistry with which a subject of the highest didactic nature is handled without the trappings of didacticism so offensive to the modern critical taste. Newman does not preach in *The Dream*; rather, he contemplates through the poetic imagination the eternal verities of his faith by dramatizing one man's metaphysical transformation. In fact, *The Dream* should be read as an epic journey rather than as a sermon in verse.²⁰

Elgar's setting of the "dream" of Gerontius, then, makes more acceptable the fantastic and sometimes bizarre world of personifications and symbolic objects characteristic of religious allegory.

²⁰Robert Carballo, "Newman's *<Dream of Gerontius>*: Towards a Non-Didactic Poetry of Dogma." See <http://ic.net/~erasmus/RAZ22.HTM>. The only known source for this essay exists in this electronic form.

Chapter 2

The Librettist: John Henry Newman

John Henry Newman was the principal architect of the Catholic revival within the Church of England in the 1830s.¹ This became known as the Oxford or Tractarian movement. He went on to become one of the most influential Roman Catholic philosophers and theologians of the nineteenth century.² Although primarily a theologian, Newman regarded his defense of religious belief in philosophical terms. The justification of his faith by non-demonstrable certainty was one of his most important contributions to theology.

Newman was born the eldest son of a London banker in 1801. His mother was a moderate Calvinist who deeply influenced his early religious views. Newman went to Trinity College, Oxford, in 1817, and afterwards was elected a fellow of Oriel College at Oxford in 1822. There, he became a close friend with Edward Pusey and Hurrell Froude. In 1824 he was ordained, and became the vicar of the university church of St. Mary the Virgin. Two years later he broke with Evangelicalism. In 1832 Newman accompanied Froude and his father on a Mediterranean tour, where many of the poems in *Lyra Apostolica* (1834) were written as well as "Lead, kindly Light." He was present at John

¹Sources for the following biography include: M.J. Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment: The Role of the Will in Newman's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). This is the best full-length book on certain aspects of Newman's philosophy. It is readable but philosophically demanding. See also, J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 69-91; A. Kenny, "Newman as a Philosopher of Religion," in *Newman: A Man for Our Time*, ed. D. Brown (London: Clarendon Press, 1990): 98-122; Ian Ker, "Introduction," in *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), i-iii; Ian Ker, *The Achievement of John Henry Newman* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); B. Mitchell, "Newman as a Philosopher," in *Newman After a Hundred years*, ed. Ian Ker and A.G. Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991): 223-46; H.H. Price, *Belief* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969): 13-56, 316-48.

²See especially, John Henry Newman, *The Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman*, ed. E.J. Sillem (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1869). The first volume, a somewhat wooden and wordy introduction to Newman's philosophy, includes a survey of the background influences.

Keble's sermon at Oxford on National Apostasy (July 1833), which he regarded as the beginning of the Tractarian movement.

Between 1839 and 1841 Newman preached numerous sermons. All but five of them specifically addressed the relation of faith to reason and were subsequently published in *Sermons, Chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief, Preached Before the University of Oxford* (1843).³ They challenged the perceived stronghold of rationality over faith in a post-Lockean era. Thereafter, Newman threw himself energetically into writing for the *Tracts for the Times* and composed numerous articles. Tract 90 (1841) is the most famous of them. In it, he contends that the intention of the Thirty-nine Articles of Faith of the Church of England is Catholic in spirit, and that they were aimed at the supremacy of the pope and the popular abuses of Catholic practice, not at Catholic doctrine. However, Tract 90 provoked an explosion. The Tractarian movement effectively ended, and many of the writers, theologians and lay people who supported the movement converted to Catholicism. Newman struggled for two years before making his decision, but in 1843 he resigned.

After being received by the Roman Catholic Church in 1845, Newman published his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, which is possibly his most famous theological work. He went to Rome for a year and a half, where he joined the Oratorians and became a priest. Newman's quasi-liberal spirit, however, made him suspect among the more rigorous Roman Catholic clergy, and his early career as a Roman Catholic priest was marked by a series of frustrations. On his return in 1847 he established an Oratorian

³John Henry Newman, *Sermons, Chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief Preached Before the University of Oxford* (London: Rivington & Parker 1843); Reprinted as *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford, Between A.D. 1826 and 1843* (London: Rivingtons, 1872).

branch in England at Birmingham. The lectures on *Anglican Difficulties* (1850) drew public attention to Newman's great power of irony and the delicacy of his literary style.

Between 1851 and 1858 he served as the Founding President of the new Catholic University of Ireland which became the impetus for his next major work, *The Idea of a University* in 1873. In it, Newman propounds a philosophy of education that is concerned with the development of the whole mind. He was suspicious of any curriculum that developed only those faculties of utilitarian value—not because he was opposed to such study but because of his belief in the importance of the development of the whole mind.

In 1864 a casual remark by Charles Kingsley in *Macmillan's Magazine* on the indifference of the Roman Catholic Church to the virtue of truthfulness led to a correspondence which resulted in the publication of *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. Kingsley offered a clear challenge to justify the honesty of his life as an Anglican. The *Apologia* was read and approved far beyond the limits of the Roman Catholic Church. By its fairness, candor, interest, and the beauty of some of its passages, it helped him recapture the almost national status he had once held. Newman's defense of the reasonableness of religious belief was articulated in *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* in 1870.⁴ These two works thus assured Newman's stature in the Roman Catholic Church. In 1879 Pope Leo XIII made him cardinal-deacon of St. George in Velabro.

⁴John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, 1870); there is a modern critical edition by Ian Ker, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), as well as various paperback reprints. This work seeks to answer if certainty in religious belief involves the same kind of informal reasoning that is unhesitatingly employed in other intellectual matters. This was Newman's final attempt to answer the problem. He begins by distinguishing between the assent one makes to a proposition and the conclusion one draws from an inference: assenting and inferring are thus two distinct kinds of activity, however close they may sometimes seem to be. A clarification of his meaning, as well as a summary of his contribution to both theology and philosophy in general has been offered by Ian Ker, "Newman, John Henry," *Catholic Encyclopedia* 3rd ed.

Chapter 3

The Dream of Gerontius in Context

In 1900, August Jaeger, Elgar's publishing manager at Novello attempted to promote his friend by offering to write an essay to accompany the newly composed *The Dream of Gerontius*. In this essay, he identifies and explains the existence of more than fifty leitmotivs in the oratorio.¹ As shall be shown below, this use of leitmotivs is a chief characteristic that is explored by scholars when drawing comparisons between Elgar and Wagner. Later, in a personal letter to Jaeger dated August 28, Elgar attempts to correct and clarify his compositional technique gently suggesting that his use of recurring motives is not as conscious or as sophisticated as *leitmotivs*. Jaeger's analysis is published unaltered, however, and evidence of his influence has gone virtually unchallenged since.

Most discussions on the Catholic perspectives of *The Dream of Gerontius* have concentrated on the often-quoted passages from Elgar's letters to Jaeger in which he shows his apparent disregard for public reception to the Roman Catholic elements. While Percy Young's book, *Elgar, Newman, and 'The Dream of Gerontius' in the Tradition of English Catholicism*, promised to show the relationship of Roman Catholicism between the composer, the librettist, and theological background of nineteenth-century England, the inter-relationships between these subjects are never successfully developed. This chapter seeks to show how the Wagnerian and Catholic perspectives in *The Dream of Gerontius* have been treated by earlier scholars.

¹August Jaeger, *The Dream of Gerontius: Analytical and Descriptive Notes* (London: Novello, 1900; reprint, Sevenoaks: Novello, 1974).

Much of the historical literature, such as the first biography of Elgar by Basil Maine in 1932, assigns *The Dream of Gerontius* great respect, but makes only superficial references to the work.² Diana McVeagh's 1955 study, *Edward Elgar: His Life and Music*, gives the oratorio a slightly more thorough examination, but in the span of six pages she offers only a cursory overview. The primary musical analyses of the oratorio by Maine and McVeagh incorrectly emphasizes the role of the Wagnerian leitmotivs in the work, and are clearly influenced by Jaeger's analysis.³

Several Master's theses not only concur with Jaeger's analysis but plagiarise him shamelessly. Mary Dann's "Harmonic Technique of Edward Elgar Based on 'The Dream of Gerontius'" in 1937 is one such source as is Joseph Doyle in his "Analysis of the Function of the Chorus in Elgar's Oratorio, 'The Dream of Gerontius' as it Evolved from the Handelian Pattern in 1969."⁴ Herman Fischer's "A Comparative Study of Edward Elgar's 'The Dream of Gerontius' and Horatio Parker's 'Hora novissima,'" is less derivative but nonetheless uses Jaeger as the basis for extending his analysis.⁵ Jaeger's influence can be seen as recently as 1994 in Andreas Friesenhausen's "The Dream of Gerontius" von Edward Elgar: Das englische Oratorium an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert," which also maintains Elgar's leitmotivic technique as a primary Wagnerian characteristic.⁶

²Basil Maine, "Gerontius: An Excerpt," *Monthly Musical Record*, 4 (1932): 225.

³Diana McVeagh, *Edward Elgar: His Life and Music* (Westport: Hyperion Press, Inc., 1979), 135; Maine, 225.

⁴Mary Dann, "Harmonic Technique of Edward Elgar Based on 'The Dream of Gerontius'" (Master's Thesis, University of Rochester, 1937.); Joseph Doyle, "Analysis of the Function of the Chorus in Elgar's Oratorio, "The Dream of Gerontius" as it Evolved from the Handelian Pattern" (Master's Thesis, California State University Fullerton, 1969).

⁵Herman Fischer, "A Comparative Study of Edward Elgar's 'The Dream of Gerontius' and Horatio Parker's 'Hora novissima'" (Master's Thesis, University of Maryland, 1959).

⁶Andreas Friesenhausen, *The Dream of Gerontius* von Edward Elgar: Das englische Oratorium an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert, (Köln-Rheinkassel.: Dohr, 1994).

Over the last fifteen years, there has been a marked increase in attention paid to Elgar. This has included both new biographies, such as the succinct *Portrait of Elgar* by Michael Kennedy, and the collected correspondence of Elgar by Jerrold Northrop Moore and Percy Young, respectively.⁷ Several interesting collections of essays have recently been published, especially an ongoing series by Edward Monk with Scolar Press.⁸ Such topics include historical, analytical, and literary analyses of all periods of Elgar's work.

Ever since its first performance, Elgar's setting of John Henry Newman's *The Dream of Gerontius* has been particularly admired for what Michael Wheeler has termed the "exceptional imaginative sympathy" generated between the setting and the text. He points to the general belief that this derives from the shared beliefs and spiritual outlooks of poet and composer.⁹ In his essay, Wheeler explores Elgar's setting of the poem and his use of leitmotiv techniques to demonstrate the composer's,

awareness of the depth of Newman's unique spiritual insight into the nature of death, judgement, and purgatory, and... (an) understanding of his theology, particularly in relation to the agony in the garden and ministry of the angels.¹⁰

Because Wheeler is concerned primarily with the response of creative writers to Victorian theological questions of death and judgement, he does not explore Elgar's music. In fact, neither the specifically Catholic musical antecedents of the work nor the background or depth of Elgar's own religious faith have ever been adequately explored.

⁷William Robert Anderson, *Elgar in The Master Musician Series* (London: Dent, 1983); Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, 1987); Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers: Letters of a Creative Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Percy M. Young, *Letters of Edward Elgar and Other Writings* (Westport: Hyperion, 1979).

⁸John Allison, *Edward Elgar Sacred Music* (Bridgend: Seren Division of Poetry Wales Press Ltd., 1994); Raymond Monk, ed. *Elgar Studies* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1990), and *Edward Elgar: Music and Literature* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1993).

⁹Michael Wheeler, "The Dream of Gerontius," in *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 96.

In setting out to place the work in the context of the traditions of English Catholicism, Percy Young's book, *Elgar, Newman, and 'The Dream of Gerontius' in the Tradition of English Catholicism*, promised to fill a substantial gap in our understanding of what is generally perceived, together with the *Enigma Variations*, as the composer's greatest achievement.¹¹ Young introduces the idea of a possible relationship between Catholicism and the work's origin, but the author's discussion is unfortunately disjunct, failing to effect a clear understanding of how the three subjects in his title relate to the oratorio. That the book ultimately falls short of delivering the promise of its title is largely due to Young's decision to approach his subject with such a broad lens. His discussion includes an extended chronological survey of the evolution of Catholic liturgical music in England in the context of related developments in fields as diverse as politics and architecture. He begins this discussion as early as the 1760s with the resurgence of the Roman Catholic embassy chapels. However, as Christopher Grogan notes in his review,

For all the breadth of its coverage... the survey lacks any real sense of direction or purpose. Neither Elgar nor Newman is mentioned during the first sixty pages, and Young does little to convince the reader that his chronicle is central to the book's underlying aim of elucidating the background to *The Dream of Gerontius*.¹²

In Chapter 6, Young introduces the theologian John Henry Newman. Entitled, "Words and Music," the chapter shows promise in developing links between the first five chapters and the librettist, but fails to concretize the connections. Young does give an account of Newman's musical education: he was an enthusiastic amateur, and firmly

¹⁰Wheeler, 96.

¹¹Percy Young, *Elgar, Newman and 'The Dream of Gerontius' In the Tradition of English Catholicism* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995).

believed that music comprised “the outpourings of eternal harmony in the medium of created sound.”¹³ As such, music was an important point of contact between man and God. Although Young makes a persuasive case for Newman as a musician, he fails to fix any relationship between the first five chapters and the discussion of Elgar that follows. Moreover, he introduces the centrality of music to Newman’s poem but fails to demonstrate either why that is or why Elgar may have chosen to set the work on the strength of its musical references.

Elgar is finally introduced in Chapter 7. There are numerous factual mistakes around his family’s history and early childhood experiences. His father, William Henry Elgar to name just one example, came to Worcester in 1841 not 1845. Elgar’s youngest brother was Francis Thomas born in 1863, not Frederick Joseph from 1861. Young maintains in his introduction that “so far as biography is concerned, I have considered only those aspects, which relate to the history and development of the work.”¹⁴ This caveat not only fails to forgive his numerous errors but also opens the author for further critique. As Grogan points out, Young is reluctant to build on the material of his opening chapters to establish Elgar’s lineage and credentials as a Catholic composer. Instead, he resorts to the few works that the composer produced while in charge of the music at St. George’s. The evidence provided by these compositions seems less expressive about the composer’s attitude towards the Catholic Church than his almost complete silence regarding liturgical music once he surrendered the post.

By the early 1890s, Elgar was concentrating more than ever on building a successful reputation through the Three Choirs Festival. Young provides no evidence in

¹²Grogan, 629.

¹³Young, 42.

his survey of Elgar's progress in this traditionally Anglican environment that he was interested in either making a strong statement of Catholic theology or that his progress was in any way hindered by his religious background. While Elgar's personal faith seems central to any discussion of *The Dream of Gerontius*, no one has adequately chronicled Elgar's formative experiences as a Catholic. There exist a series of exchanges between A.J. Jaeger and Elgar in which Elgar discusses his understanding of the poem's theology, but these are well known and related by Young.

Scholars such as Basil Maine, Diana McVeagh, Michael Kennedy, and Percy Young maintain that the choice of Newman's poem was a statement of Elgar's Catholic world view.¹⁵ Given the social, historical and theological background to *The Dream of Gerontius*, McVeagh even maintains that its Roman Catholic nature constitutes a defiant stand in an otherwise Protestant dominated tradition. According to Michael Wheeler and Christopher Grogan, however, *The Dream of Gerontius* claims an audience that transcended the Catholic community. According to Wheeler, *The Dream of Gerontius*, after Tennyson's *In memoriam*, was the most popular literary work on the subject of death and judgement published during the Victorian age—a point echoed by Norma Rowen and Lister Sinclair in their 1984 radio essay for the CBC's provocative show, *Ideas*.¹⁶ Rather than alienating Protestants, its emphasis on the drama of the personal relationship between the individual and God enabled, as Wheeler says, "many Protestants troubled about eschatology to consider the possibility of Purgatory." Grogan strengthens this position by adding that Elgar's decision to set *The Dream* to music may testify more

¹⁴Young, i.

¹⁵Maine, 225; Diana McVeagh, *Elgar: An Appreciation*, (Worcester: sn, 1955), 32; Kennedy, 75-80, Young, i-iii.

¹⁶Norma Rowen, "Victorians and the Idea of God," *Ideas* on CBC Radio, 1984.

to his instincts as a dramatic composer in the wake of *Parsifal* than to the desire to champion Roman Catholicism in a potentially hostile Anglican milieu.¹⁷

In the end, the choice of Newman's poem may not have been the defiantly Catholic stand that it is often been held to represent. However, its Roman Catholic nature cannot be dismissed. But Elgar did not have to write a work so overt in its Catholic theology. As shall be shown, the harmonic language, orchestral fabric, and the use of reminiscence motives align *The Dream of Gerontius* more closely with Wagner's *Parsifal* than with any English oratorio of the nineteenth-century. Indeed, the relationship between a Wagnerian music-drama and a Catholic oratorio is closely enmeshed. The drama of both works lies in an inward, psychological journey of Christian themes and symbols. It is for this reason that Elgar's oratorio is often linked with the *Enigma Variations* as one of his greatest works. At best, the synthesis of Catholic and Wagnerian aspects in *The Dream of Gerontius* suggest that in 1900 Elgar may have in fact written two Enigmas.

¹⁷Grogan, 679.

Chapter 4

The Evolution of the English Oratorio: Design and Structure

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, English oratorios were influenced significantly by Handel's works in this genre. Typically, they were dramatic, their texts were based on the Old Testament, divided into three acts or parts, and as Howard Smither notes, they included several choruses in each act.¹ Works such as Barbandt's *David and Jonathan* (London, 1761), Arne's *Judith* (London 1761), and Stanley's *The Fall of Egypt* (1774) all share common musical characteristics directly inherited from Handel: a simple, tuneful vocal line with balanced phrases, lightly scored.²

The Handelian influence is especially evident in choruses. They become the most important part of the English oratorio in part because of their freedom from operatic conventions, and in part because of the close relationship between oratorio performances and festival choirs in nineteenth-century England. The stylistic influences are most evident in the density of choral writing: imitative, fugal, "open work," and chordal textures are often juxtaposed.³

In structure and design, Handel's influence on the English oratorio is most noticeable in the role and weight of the chorus—up to and including the oratorios of Elgar. In oratorios by Handel, Haydn, and Mendelssohn, the chorus often serves a multiplicity of functions. For instance, in *Judas Maccabaeus* the chorus participates in the action. In *Solomon*, the chorus is an element in incidental scenes. Or, as in works

¹Howard Smither, *A History of the Oratorio*, vol. 3, *The Oratorio in the Classical Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 238.

²The basso continuo is marked by a more conservative linear motion that tends to generate a faster harmonic rhythm than perhaps those found in Handel's late oratorios. For a discussion of this, and other characteristics of Classical English oratorios, see Smither, 238-55.

³Smither, *Oratorio*, 2:353.

such as *Israel in Egypt*, the chorus may narrate in passages such as the choral recitative “He sent a thick darkness.”

While Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* clearly includes a significant amount of challenging music for the chorus, the role of solo singing is an important, new development. In its subject matter, *The Dream* is primarily an inward, psychological drama of a spiritual journey, and can thus be aligned more with Wagner’s *Parsifal* than traditional Old Testament subject matters of English oratorios. Consequently, a greater role is given to solo writing to reflect the subject matter with its emphasis on the individual and the unconscious.

This evolution cannot be heard in all the works of the English oratorio tradition. The chorus continues to be primary in most works. *The Dream of Gerontius*, with its clearly obligatory choral sections, is unusual for the degree to which it increases the importance of solo writing. The scope of this thesis does not allow for a thorough discussion of works such as Spohr’s *The Last Judgement* (1826), Liszt’s *Christus* (1856), Franck’s *Beatitudes* (1879) or Gounod’s *Redemption* (1882) which, among other works such as William Sterndale Bennet’s *The Woman of Samaria* (1867), and John Stainer’s *Crucifixion* (1878), would show the continual primacy of choral writing in the English tradition.

Nevertheless, I shall discuss four examples to show the evolving role and weight of choral versus solo writing, and to highlight the somewhat unique position *The Dream of Gerontius* holds at the end of the nineteenth century. The discussion begins, necessarily, with Handel’s *Messiah* and Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* as these are works that significantly influenced English tastes—including those of Elgar’s. Antecedents by two

contemporary English composers, Sir Arthur Sullivan's *The Golden Legend* (1886) and Charles Hubert Parry's *Job* (1892), represent the second half of the century. In the former's emphasis on solo writing and the latter's transition away from biblical narratives, these works foreshadow *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Handel's *Messiah*

Handel's influence on the English oratorio tradition reached well into the Victorian era. Advertisements in *The Musical Times* from approximately 1850 to 1900 show that *Messiah* was continually performed, not only in London, but throughout the provincial choral festivals as well.⁴ Festivals at York, Norfolk, Norwich, Derby, Manchester, Birmingham and Hull almost always included *Messiah*, and the Three Choirs Festival, held annually at Gloucester, Worcester or Hereford on a rotating basis, performed it annually from 1757-1900.⁵ *Messiah* was not only a standard part of their repertoire, but by far the most frequently performed work. It was so popular it even became a symbol of England's imperial power, a point highlighted in 1877 by Joseph Bennett in the *Musical Times*:

We, as an imperial race, should appreciate the master's imperial effects. Handel is the Napoleon of his order, without a Moscow. The French Caesar used to win victories by launching masses at this enemy's centre. Handel too fights in masses and overwhelms by straightforward blows. You cannot give him too large a force. Expand the Sydenham transept till twice four thousand executants find room on its orchestra, and his power is doubled without encumbrance. Such a musician deserves to be the musician of an empire. Rome would have decreed him divine honours, and sent

⁴Edward Clinkscale, *The Musical Times, 1844-1900* (University of Maryland: Center for Studies in Nineteenth-Century Music, 1994).

⁵Howard Smither, "Messiah and Progress in Victorian England," *Early Music* 13/3 (August 1985): 339-48.

her legions to battle with his music at their head.⁶

The “drama” of *Messiah* is not narrated by a single voice; soloists and chorus carry the story. But while there is a more or less equitable distribution between aria, recitative and choral sections, with the exception of three choruses, the choral movements receive greater weight, and *Messiah* must be considered primarily a choral work.⁷ The choral movements crown a recitative-aria sequence that reflects the theological motifs structured by the librettist, Charles Jennens. The “Hallelujah” chorus, for example, is preceded by the tenor recitative “He that dwelleth in Heaven shall laugh them to scorn,” and the aria “Thou shalt break them with a Rod of Iron.” Together, this grouping provides a commentary on Christ’s Second Coming, which closes Part 2, Section VII. Each section focuses on a theological cluster.

. The character of Handel’s style in this oratorio is especially appropriate, as the emphasis is not on individual expression but communal declaration. Handel often used choruses in oratorio where in opera an aria would appear. Consequently, the collective effect of the choral emphasis tends to give such works a certain impersonality, a quality not unlike the choruses of Greek tragedy. Like Greek choruses, the “Hallelujah” Chorus is a commentary. It is a response to God’s ultimate victory over death and sin.

The chorus divides into seven sections. Triumphant chords in the winds and a driving rhythm in the strings introduces and accompanies the opening words with the “Hallelujah” motif. This is followed quickly by the slightly longer phrase built around the text, “for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.” The first section is a homorhythmic passage with all four voices moving in block chords. The contrasting section begins at

⁶Joseph Bennett, “Handel’s *Messiah*,” *Musical Times* (18 September, 1877): 322.

⁷Donald Burrows, *Handel: Messiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 73. They are

m. 22 in which Handel juxtaposes the text and their respective themes (See Example 1).

To generate variety, Handel alternates sections of static, homorhythmic passages (mm. 34-40, and 77-92) with points of imitation (mm. 42-51 and 66-70). Text phrases become associated with textural contrasts, alternating between homophonic texture (“Hallelujah”), imitative polyphony (“and he shall reign for ever and ever”), and even monophony (“For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth”). A rising sequence contrasts the sopranos solemnly intoning the words “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords”—answered by “forever, Hallelujah!” in the other voices—in a rising sequence accompanied by the trumpets. The final section closes as the movement began, with the music moving homorhythmically in a drive to the final cadence.

Example 1, Handel’s *Messiah*, “Hallelujah” Chorus, mm. 22-23

English oratorios living in the shadow of Handel continued to be primarily choral works. The chief stylistic characteristic of the choral sections was their ability to

“How beautiful are the feet,” “O thou that tellest,” and “But thanks be to God.”

establish and combine various textural fabrics. In the case of *Messiah*, it becomes the role of the chorus to conclude and summarize each section within the three-part structure of the work. Compared to operatic traditions in the second quarter of eighteenth-century England this is a significant increase in the role and weight of the chorus.

Mendelssohn's *Elijah*

Next to Handel's *Messiah*, perhaps the most popular nineteenth-century oratorio in England was Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. W.H. Reed documents that Elgar once told him that he admired the deft scoring in the fugal overture and the quartet "Cast thy burdens upon the Lord," in Part 1.⁸ Elgar also attributed Mendelssohn's use of reminiscence motives as the basis for his similar use of themes in the opening Prelude to *The Dream of Gerontius*.⁹

Elijah is not typical of a biblical narrative, and like Handel's *Messiah* it lacks a narrator. Mendelssohn did not think the story of Elijah was completely satisfying as a dramatic story.¹⁰ Moreover, he wanted a highly contemplative figure, a point which allows for some similarity between Mendelssohn and Elgar. The Blind Man from *The Light of Life*, and Gerontius from *The Dream of Gerontius*, are both contemplative protagonists. Their chief characteristic is not as heroes who overcome external conflict, but as humans who contemplate the meaning of life and the role they play in it.

⁸W.H. Reed, *Elgar* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1939): 85.

⁹In *Elijah*, musical episodes are occasionally built around a series of musical motives (*Reminiszenzmotiv*) that do not assume the status of a *leitmotiv* which tends to undergo more thematic transformation. A reminiscence motive returns more or less unaltered, purely as identification for the audience or to signify recollection of the past. In *Elijah*, for example, the theme from No. 5, "Yet doth the Lord see it not," recalls a motive heard in the introduction. It then returns in the final chorus, "And shall your light break forth," in the final fifteen measures by an extended climax built around the text "Amen." For a discussion of this and other numerous examples, see Donald Mintz, "Mendelssohn's *Elijah* Reconsidered," *Studies in Romanticism* 3/1 (1963): 5.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5.

Mendelssohn consciously mixed dramatic and religious elements, which, since Handel's oratorio, satisfied his audience's expectations. While not commissioned by a choral festival, *St. Paul* (1836) and *Elijah* were written with the Birmingham Festival in mind.¹¹ A third oratorio to complete the trilogy, *Christus*, was never finished. Mendelssohn wrote these works after he had participated in the revival of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and after a period of intense study of Handel's oratorios.¹² In addition to harmonised chorales in the style of J.S. Bach, Mendelssohn includes in these works all the types of music normally associated with Handel, namely *secco* and *accompagnato* recitatives, arias, and homophonic and fugal choruses.

The chorus is vital to *Elijah* and is featured at every significant point of dramatic interest. The weight of solo vs. choral writing is relatively equal. There are twenty-two choruses, of which eight are paired with recitatives, and twenty-two solo movements (fourteen recitatives and eight arias.). The dramatic musical climax of the first part of the oratorio is set on Mount Carmel; the firmness of purpose in Elijah's bass aria is set off against the despairing cries of the chorus, "Hear and answer, Baal." The leading part in the action, however, is played by the chorus, which embodies the people just as in Handel's oratorios. Here it provides the symbolism for the climax of this part of the work in "The fire descends." The second part, containing the indictment, escape, and ascension of the prophet, unfolds no less dramatically. In its first draft, Part II ended with a choral report of the prophet's ascent into heaven in a fiery chariot ("Then did the prophet break forth,"). Mendelssohn extended the work by the addition of another aria, recitative, and two more choruses because the librettist, Julius Schubring, thought the

¹¹Friedhelm Krummacher, "Composition as Accommodation? On Mendelssohn's Music in Relation to England," *Mendelssohn Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1992): 80-105.

work suffered from its Old Testament ending.¹³ For Schubring, *Elijah* needed modifying to give it New Testament hope. Throughout the work the chorus accounts for exactly one-half of the oratorio and assumes many roles. Its function shifts from that of participant to commentator, from Baalites to priests, and varies from fugal to homophonic styles. Of Mendelssohn's major works none is more closely associated with England than *Elijah*. Indeed, it succeeded earlier in England than it did in Germany.

Throughout the second half of the century, the chorus remains central to the English oratorio tradition. Works such as Gounod's *Redemption* (Birmingham, 1882) and Liszt's *St. Elisabeth* (London, 1886) introduce Roman Catholic themes into an otherwise very Protestant musical tradition, but also mark a subtle shift in subject matter. Their librettos maintain a unique position in the repertoire. The oratorios are sacred, but not biblical, pious, but more individualistic. The use of solo passages for inward, psychological reflection in Parry's *Job* (1892), and Elgar's *The Light of Life* (1896) show a similarity to Wagner's opera *Parsifal* in particular. An early antecedent to these works in the 1890s is Sir Arthur Sullivan's, *The Golden Legend* (1886).

Sullivan's *The Golden Legend*

Percy Young remarks that "in the general context of choral music of that era [this] work represents a departure from the overriding convention of religiosity," and he adds that Elgar was influenced by its "boldness of conception."¹⁴ Finding dramatic limitations in Biblical texts he had previously treated, such as *The Light of the World* (Birmingham Festival, 1873) and *The Prodigal Son* (Leeds Festival, 1869), Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842-

¹³Donald Mintz, "Mendelssohn's *Elijah* Reconsidered" *Studies in Romanticism* 3:1 (1963): 1-10.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁴Nicolas Temperly, ed., *Music in Britain* vol. 5, *The Romantic Age 1800-1914*, by Nigel Burton (London: Athlone Press, 1981), 229.

1900) was drawn to *The Golden Legend* for its extra-biblical subject matter.¹⁵ Like Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, this work employs a non-biblical text with a sacred subject matter. Written as a poem by Longfellow, however, *The Golden Legend* is more similar to a German folk-tale than the spiritual transfiguration of Parsifal or Gerontius.

After an allegorical prologue the story begins with Prince Henry lying sick in body and mind at his Castle of Vantaberg on the Rhine. He has consulted the famous doctors of Salerno and learned that he can be cured only by the blood of a maiden who, of her own free will, shall consent to die for his sake. A peasant girl, Elsie, moved by great compassion for his fate, resolves to sacrifice her life that he might be restored. Before she is able to complete this act, however, Prince Henry who is miraculously healed by her noble gesture, rescues Elsie.

With other works such as Parry's *Job*, and Elgar's *The Light of Life*, Sullivan's *The Golden Legend* typifies a period of oratorio history in which solo writing has begun to foreground the music. Solo passages that are either dramatic or reflective in nature clearly outweigh the choral sections in number and importance. The introduction of Elsie, her decision to sacrifice herself, her argument with her mother, and her plea to God for greater resolve constitute most of the scene and introduce the eventual resolution of the dramatic tension. When the chorus is used it almost always provides a brief commentary or introduces minor characters to the story.¹⁶ The most important of these are the Evening Hymn, "O Gladsome Light" and the closing Epilogue which are brief, reflective, and chorale-like.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶It is used a total of seven times in the whole work.

Scene II forms the dramatic fulcrum of the work, the point at which the future resolution to the dramatic crisis is introduced. This section thus provides a good example of Sullivan's treatment of choral versus solo writing. The scene opens with an instrumental introduction that will return at the close in a modified manner. Elsie's mother Ursula sings a short aria, "Slowly, up the wall steals the sunshine." A Chorus of Voices follows with an evening hymn, "O Gladsome Light," clearly written in the style of an unaccompanied Lutheran chorale while Ursula lights candles in the house (See Example 2). The close part-writing, homorhythmic surface rhythms, and diatonic harmonies, are clearly written for the amateur choir and reveal the acquired tradition from movements like Haydn's "The Heaven's are Telling" from *The Creation* and "If you seek me with all your heart" from Spohr's *The Last Judgement*. It is unclear, though, who is singing or why. In this way the chorus is similar to "Cross of Jesus Cross of Sorrow," in John Stainer's 1887 *The Crucifixion*, which functions as a spiritual commentary: neither a character nor a narrator sings it. The role of solo passages is primary to the dramatic structure of the work and shows a decreasing stylistic distinction between aria and recitative. In mm. 330-370, for example, Elsie offers her life in a long sustained melodic passage that blurs the distinction between aria and recitative (See Example 3).

Example 2, Sullivan, *The Golden Legend*, Sc. II, mm. 84-99¹⁷

The musical score consists of two systems of music. The top system, starting at measure 84, features four staves of vocal music in G clef, with lyrics in English. The lyrics are: "of the ce - les - tial Sa - cred and bless - ed Je - - - sus . . . dim.", repeated three times. The bottom system, starting at measure 95, also has four staves of vocal music in G clef, with lyrics: "... our Sa - viour!.. O glad - some Light Of the Fa - ther im . . .". Both systems include dynamic markings such as crescendo (cres.) and decrescendo (dim.). The score is written in common time.

¹⁷Arthur Sullivan, *The Golden Legend*. (Novello's Press Ltd., 1890).

Example 3, Sullivan's *The Golden Legend*, mm. 330-344

190 *L'istesso tempo.*

ELSA.

333

beard him call.

336

When Christ as -

339

- oend - ed Tri - umph - - aut - ly

342

front STAR . . . to STAR . . .

The dramatic and musical properties of solo versus choral writing in *The Golden Legend* are clearly weighted towards the solo sections. The choral passages are infrequent, introspective, and somewhat antiquated in their chorale-like nature. The role of solo passages, on the other hand, is primary to the dramatic structure not only of this scene but the work as a whole, and shows a decreasing stylistic distinction between aria and recitative.

Parry's Job

Charles Hubert Parry received a commission for an oratorio from the famous Three Choirs Festival (Gloucester) in 1892. Because of the story's preoccupation with matters of philosophy and ethics, Parry, an agnostic, was drawn to the Book of Job for his subject matter. The oratorio opens with the title character, a pious, "perfect and upright" man, blessed by God in all things: Satan enters the court of heaven. God points to the piety and faithfulness of Job. Satan scoffs submitting that Job is ultimately motivated by self-interest. Because God trusts Job's faithfulness, Satan is allowed to bring total ruin to Job's health, family, and estate. Job remains steadfast. Three of Job's friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come to grieve and comfort him. This opening prose Prologue is developed rapidly in the first two chapters of the book.

In selecting his libretto, Parry chose to distil Job's forty-two chapters into four scenes. The first two scenes are completely narrative introducing the contest between God and Satan and the affliction of Job, respectively. Scene III, sung largely by the narrator, opens with the visit of Job's friends and Job's cursing of the day he was born. This section prepares the listener for the long soliloquy of Job, which Parry titled, "The Lamentation of Job." Constructed from selected chapters (3, 8, 9, 10, 14, 29 and 30), Job

protests against his friends who break their silence and offer their advice to curse God. Scene IV is eclipsed by an extended symphonic chorus representing God in the third person.¹⁸ This ends resolutely with the words "Then shall God also confess that thine own right hand can save thee." (40:14). In the denouement, the Narrator provides a frame for Job's final repentance (42:1-6).

The second-half of the work, Sc. III and IV, are slower and weightier than the first half. Each scene is a long soliloquy by Job and God respectively. The first half of the oratorio introduces the characters and the moral dilemma. The largest part of the biblical account, the "comforting" of Job's friends, constitutes thirty-seven of the forty-three chapters. Parry omits this part completely. Thus, the dramatic weight of the work is in the third scene. Each scene is of approximately equal length, but scene III is the most dramatic, for it is here that Job declares his need for answers. There is an equal distribution of choral vs. solo writing in the oratorio, but the long extended solo by Job equals one-quarter of the whole work. The "Lamentation of Job" in Scene III is one of the longest extended arias in the history of the genre and strives for an intensity of pathos rarely matched in the nineteenth-century English oratorio tradition. In its length and affect one thinks of Gerontius singing, "Sanctus fortis," in *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900) or Judas' soliloquy in *The Apostles* (1903). In opera, the scene is comparable with Wotan's agonised soul-searching in *Die Walküre* and the "Wahnmonolog" of Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger*.¹⁹

The scene is constructed in six discrete parts beginning in A-minor with Job's bitterness of spirit and desire for death. The scene is developed most successfully in the

¹⁸In the biblical text God speaks here in the first person.

¹⁹Jeremy Dibble, *Job*, Liner Notes, CDA67025 (London: Hyperion, 1998): 12.

meditative passages rather than the dramatic moments.²⁰ The opening musical material is stark and austere, written in rigid, parallel thirds.²¹ The composer's attempt to sustain long musical paragraphs in this section is undermined by frequent cadences that punctuate the arioso passages like those found in "How should a man be just with God?" (Example 4). There are also long paragraphs that, in their use of lyricism, diminished sevenths chords, and sometimes graphic word images, are similar to Mendelssohn's *Elijah* or Stainer's *Crucifixion* in their Victorian religious sentimentality. The passage, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me," is one such example (Example 5).

Example 4 Parry *Iob* Sc. III mm. 58-69

How should a man be just with God?

If he will con - tend with Him, he can-not answer Him one of a thousand.

He is wise in heart, and migh-ty in strength, who hath hardened himself against Him, and

²⁰See Jeremy Dibble, *C. Hubert Parry, His Life and Times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989): 300.

Example 5, Parry, *Job*, Sc. III, mm. 119-129

Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou con-tendest with me.
Is it
good un-to thee that thou shouldst op-press,
that thou shouldst do - spise .
... the works of thine hands, and shine up-on the coun - sel of the wicked!

If the musical weight of solo versus choral writing in *Job* is equally distributed, the dramatic weight is not. The closing choral section in Scene IV is significant for its sheer length and dramatic closure. However, it is the psychological turmoil in the Lamentation of Job that is the dramatic climax. The chorus, while present with its obligatory imitative, fugal, and homorhythmic sections, is clearly being displaced by solo passages of increasing length and importance.

²¹This theme is a transformation of Job's theme heard at the opening of the oratorio in the cello part.

Conclusion

From Handel onwards, oratorio has figured prominently in the English tradition. As in opera, the chorus usually serves as a variety of voices, including that of the narrator, the moralizer, the crowds, and the commentator. Unlike opera, however, the English oratorio is traditionally a choral genre. This is due, in part, to the popularity of works such as *Messiah* and *Elijah* that became models for English composers. By the 1890s the role of the chorus is still primary in most English oratorios, but it is not always as prominent. *The Golden Legend* and *Job* show that music for soloists is increasing in length and importance. In such examples, the effect is to place greater emphasis on the role of the individual as the subject and to direct the tension more into an inward, psychological drama of a single person than an Old Testament story of God's providence to His people.

This shift is not surprising given the emphasis on the individual, the unconscious, and the supernatural during Elgar's lifetime. While the nineteenth century witnessed a rapid expansion in scientific knowledge and methodology, its music simultaneously moved into the dream (the individual unconscious), as in Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, or even from the myth (the collective unconscious), as in Wagner's music dramas. The effort to find a musical language capable of expressing the *numenis* finds a perfect home in Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with its mystical subject matter, a greater emphasis on solo writing, and an expanded harmonic and melodic language. These characteristics can be heard not only in Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* but foreshadowed on a smaller, more domesticated scale, in an earlier work of Elgar's, *The Light of Life*.

Chapter 5

Wagner's Influence on *The Dream of Gerontius*

Elgar believed *The Dream of Gerontius* to be different from traditional English practice with its emphasis on Old Testament stories and choral writing. *The Dream* was less as an oratorio and more a music drama in the tradition of Wagner.¹ The music graphically illustrates the story's dramatic psychological content, employing a quasi-operatic style that nevertheless incorporates a considerable role for both the chorus and the orchestra. Other Wagnerian features of the oratorio are a vocal style based on *unendelichmelodie*, chromatically saturated harmonies, and dynamic arch forms. These characteristics have been discussed recently by Andreas Friesenhagen and Charles McGuire in their dissertations.² This study seeks to explore the internal psychological dramas of Wagner and Elgar and the degree to which they treat death, judgment, and salvation in a Christian framework, since these themes are central in *The Dream of Gerontius*. It also seeks to demonstrate Elgar's conscious awareness of Wagner as an important force in this compositional process.

Peter Dennison's thorough study of all the concert programmes kept at the Elgar Birthplace at Broadheath, Worcester, shows that over a period of thirty-five years Elgar both heard and performed a wide range of music by Wagner, much of it before *The Dream of Gerontius* was composed.³ This influence was synthesized into *The Dream*, but not to the degree that most scholars have assumed. The inclusion of *leitmotivs* was not a systematic or even conscious development on the part of Elgar. Rather, the strongest, and

¹Edward Elgar, *Elgar and His Publishers: Letters of a Creative Life*, J.N. Moore, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 226.

²Andreas Friesenhagen, "The Dream of Gerontius" von Edward Elgar: Das englische Oratorium an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert" (Köln-Rheinkassel: Dohr, 1994); Charles E. McGuire, *Elgar, Wagner, and*

most interesting comparison is that *Parsifal* and *The Dream of Gerontius* are both internalized psychological dramas focussed on Christian themes and symbols. Within a Roman Catholic framework, however, the works diverge in their understanding of dogma, ritual, judgment and salvation.

Elgar's involvement with the music of Wagner began as early as 23 October 1876 when Elgar arranged the music of the overture to *The Flying Dutchman* for the Worcester Glee Club. Hubert Leicester recalls that Elgar played the overture to *Tannhäuser* on the organ at about the same time.⁴ Elgar's first significant exposure to Wagner was on 6 September 1881 at the Worcester Three Choirs Festival when he played the first violin part to the March and Chorus of "Hail bright abode," from Act II of *Tannhäuser*. Elgar's programmes reveal that two years later he saw productions of *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and the Prelude to Act I of *Parsifal* while on holiday in Leipzig.⁵

Following Richard Wagner's death in February, 1883, August Manns performed a concert of Wagner's music in London which Elgar attended on March 3. His programme notes are riddled with annotations and musical examples. *Tristan und Isolde* made a particularly powerful impression upon him. On the blank page facing the Prelude to his vocal score, acquired on June 1 of that same year, Elgar wrote,

This Book contains the Height--the Depth,--
the Breadth,--the Sweetness,--the Sorrow,--
the Best and the whole of the Best of
This world and the Next.
Edward Elgar

Narrative Musical Structures, Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1998.

⁴Peter Dennison. "Elgar and Wagner," *Music & Letters* 66 (April 1985): 93-109.

⁵Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: a Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 65.

⁵Dennison, 73.

In the 1880s Hans Richter, the man who conducted the first complete Ring at Bayreuth in 1876, frequently performed works by Wagner at St. James' Hall at which Elgar was often in attendance. These works included not only orchestral extracts but sometimes entire operatic scenes. In 1889 the Elgars moved to London, and in July he saw *Die Meistersinger* at Covent Garden on at least three occasions. On an earlier programme from May 23 1887 Elgar put three emphatic checkmarks from such a concert beside the Ride of the Valkyries and the love scene from Act I of *Die Walküre*. Beside the text of the love duet he pencilled a strong vertical line beside the fourteen lines of text where Siegmund draws the sword from the tree.⁶

Alice Elgar's diary reveals that her husband's knowledge of Wagner increased substantially between 1892-1902. Elgar travelled to Germany six times and was ardent about seeing productions of operas by Wagner each time. In July of 1892 the Elgars were taken to Bayreuth where they heard *Parsifal* twice in addition to *Die Meistersinger* and *Tristan*. In preparation for these concerts, Elgar acquired vocal scores of the three operas that he was to see, and made a detailed analysis of the motifs.⁷ With the exception of 1896, the Elgars travelled to Munich each September between 1893 and 1897, where they heard operas by Wagner on every trip. The headmistress of the local school in Malvern, Rosa Burley, accompanied them on their first Munich visit and later wrote an account of their journey.⁸

⁶Ibid., 94.

⁷Moore, *Elgar*, p. 164.

⁸Rosa Burley and Frank Carruthers, *Edward Elgar: The Record of a Friendship* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), 67-70.

The three of them saw *Die Meistersinger* on August 17 and Rosa Burley recalls how Elgar was particularly attracted to the part-writing of the quintet.⁹ She also writes about Elgar's interest in the technical means by which Wagner achieved such dramatic effects. Throughout the remainder of the week the party heard *The Ring* cycle which Elgar enjoyed enthusiastically.¹⁰ According to the diary, the effect of *Tristan und Isolde* on August 6 was "shattering." Elgar later discussed his interest in Wagner's operas with Rosa Burley. He,

plunged... into an exciting lecture on the theories behind the new music-drama, its divergence from the older Italian opera, its use of leading-themes--which he illustrated on the piano with the 'gaze' motive from *Tristan*--and the welding which was attempted of musical plastic, and dramatic elements into one art-form.¹¹

Most discussions of *Gerontius*' indebtedness to Wagner have limited themselves to only three features of the composition. First, as shall be shown, many studies have concentrated on the composition's use of leitmotifs. Second, discussions on the use of internal quotations which refer to works by either Wagner or Elgar continue to be debated.¹² The third and most recent development examines the stylistic similarities between Wagner and Elgar, especially the use of *unendlichemelodie*, dynamic arch forms, and tonal frameworks that become stretched to extremes.¹³

There is another similarity, however. In its subject matter, *The Dream* is primarily an inward, psychological drama of a spiritual journey. The work is aligned more with Wagner's *Parsifal* than traditional Old Testament subject matters of English oratorio; and, a greater role is thus given to solo writing to reflect the subject matter with

⁹ Presumably, she meant the Quintet in Act III/iv, "Selig wie die Sonne meines Glucks lacht."

¹⁰ Rosa Burley did not share this attitude and apparently felt overwhelmed by its length. Nothing is known of Alice's perception.

¹¹ Burley, 56.

its emphasis on the individual and the *numen*. Examples of this can be heard in more domesticated forms in such works as Sullivan's *The Golden Legend*, Parry's *Job*, and Elgar's *The Light of Life*, but none develop it on such a large scale as *The Dream of Gerontius*.

The role of choruses is not diminished by the increased importance of solo parts. Yet as Charles McGuire points out, while several scholars have observed Elgar's success in setting Newman's text, a careful comparison of the original poem and the finished libretto reveals that Elgar radically altered the philosophical thrust of the poem, shifting the focus of the oratorio away from Newman's vision of the afterlife towards Gerontius as a suffering human figure.¹⁴ The weight of solo versus choral writing in *The Dream of Gerontius* reflects both this theological shift on Elgar's part, as well as the role it plays in giving a structure to the inward psychological journey.

Newman's poem is originally in seven sections, each with a central, thematic idea, which are sometimes called paragraphs or *tableaux*. Elgar telescopes paragraphs 2-7 into four scenes which takes place in Heaven between the Angel and the Soul, each of which ends in a chorus or duet. In Part I, there are ten scenes of which six are long, substantial solos by either Gerontius or the Priest. Part II, consists of twenty-three scenes of which fourteen are solos or duets for the Angel and the Soul. Of the remaining nine, five are varied but recurring settings of the hymn, "Praise to the Holiest." Elgar reduces the six paragraphs in the second half of the oratorio to three *tableaux entendus*, or "heard pictures" which depict differing perspectives on the Soul's experience of the afterlife.

¹²Dennison, p. 93-109.

¹³Frisenhagen, p. 110-116.

¹⁴Charles E. McGuire, "One Story, Two Visions: Textual Differences Between Elgar and Newman's *The Dream of Gerontius*," in *The Best of Me—A Gerontius Centenary Companion* (Rickmansworth: Elgar

Elgar gave the *tableaux entendus* a sense of movement through time and space in Heaven by rearranging several entrances of the Angelicals' choruses.¹⁵ In Newman's fifth paragraph, the Angel introduces the Angelicals with the words "Hark to those sounds/They come of tender beings angelical,/Least and most childlike of the sons of God." The Angelicals do not speak in Newman's setting until after the Angel has completed this introduction.

In contrast, Elgar juxtaposes the entrances of the Angel and the Choir, a construction that underlines the movement of the Angel and Soul through Heaven, as seen in Example 6.¹⁶ The Angel's narrative statement is split into two sections in Elgar's setting. The Angelicals state the first two lines of their hymn in a four-part texture, which decreases to two parts in the fifth bar of the example to a pair of sustained thirds. The result is that the Angel's one-bar description is easily heard. When the Angelicals sing their second couplet Elgar set their return in a six-voice texture for five bars. Again, he ends this passage (not shown) with only two parts on a sustained pitch, this time an A in mm. 471-72. When the Angel's final narration ends (Fig. 63), the Angelicals sing the remaining verses of their chorus uninterrupted. The main effect of this structure is a sonic picture of some subtlety: The Angel and the Soul approach the Choir of Angelicals as if from a distance, react to it, and finally hear it in full as they pass by. Such implied motion through Elgar's shifting of text is present throughout the entire

Editions, 1999): 84-101.

¹⁵ McGuire, 89. The following analysis is largely from this chapter by Charles McGuire whose central aim is to argue that a careful comparison of the original poem and the finished libretto reveals that Elgar dramatically altered the philosophical thrust of the poem, shifting the focus of the oratorio away from Newman's vision of the afterlife towards Gerontius as a suffering human figure. Presumably unknown to McGuire, this analysis also conveniently serves as an excellent example that shows the role and weight of choral versus solo writing in *The Dream of Gerontius*.

¹⁶ McGuire, 97.

Example 6, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Part II, Fig. 61

Angel

SA semi-chorus

Praise to the Ho-li-est in the height, and...

SA chorus

praise praise to the

Hark to those sounds! ...
in the depth be praise: In all His words most...
Ho-li-est, praise...

tableau. In addition, it highlights the greater emphasis that Elgar gives to the solo parts of the Angel and the Soul as their lines overlap with entrances by the Angelicals. This emphasis on solo writing as an expression of the inward, psychological journey is further reinforced when one considers that Elgar cut 470 lines from the poem, mostly Angelic

descriptions of Heaven—passages which in Newman's poem are given to the Angelicals and in Elgar's setting would clearly have been set as choruses.

The discussion around Elgar's use of leitmotivs as the chief similarity to Wagner, meanwhile, has gone more or less unchallenged in the musicological literature for nearly a century. In August, 1900 a close friend and publishing manager from Novello's Publishing Inc., August Jaeger, wrote a set of descriptive and analytical notes detailing what he saw as Elgar's extensive use of Wagnerian leitmotivs in the work.¹⁷ Surprisingly, virtually no attention has been given to evaluating the claims of Jaeger's analysis.¹⁸ Perhaps two reasons for this rests not only on the general view of Jaeger's analytical insight but also on the unquestioned assumption that he authoritatively represents Elgar's own thoughts. For example, Ernest Newman writes, "I adopt for the leading-motives the titles given them in Mr. Jaeger's analysis, which may be taken to have the composer's sanction."¹⁹

This assumed authority underpins the writing of Diana McVeagh in both her article in the *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, and her influential book *Elgar: An Appreciation*, published in 1955.²⁰ It was one of the earliest studies of Elgar, in conjunction with Basil Maine's *Elgar: His Life and Work* (1933), and both make references to Elgar's use of the leitmotivic technique. A number of Master's theses not only concur with with Jaeger but plagiarise him shamelessly, such as Mary Dann's *Harmonic Technique of Edward Elgar Based on "The Dream of Gerontius"* and Joseph Doyle's *Analysis of the Function of the Chorus in Elgar's Oratorio, "The Dream of*

¹⁷August Jaeger, *The Dream of Gerontius: Analytical and Descriptive Notes* (London: Novello, 1900; reprint, Sevenoaks: Novello, 1974.)

¹⁸McVeagh, *Edward Elgar*, p. 135; Maine, p. 225; Dann, pp. 1-20; Doyle, pp. 1-11; Fischer, pp. 7-33; Friesenhagen, pp. 91-93.

Gerontius" as it Evolved from the Handelian Pattern in 1969. Herman Fischer's *A Comparative Study of Edward Elgar's "The Dream of Gerontius" and Horatio Parker's "Hora novissima"* draws heavily from Jaeger. None of these writers list Jaeger's analysis as a source. While Andreas Friesenhagen's 1994 publication, based on his dissertation, "*The Dream of Gerontius*" von Edward Elgar: Das englische Oratorium an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert," does not identify or directly borrow Jaeger's material, his discussion of the oratorio is nonetheless indebted to Jaeger's analysis of leitmotivs.²¹

Correspondence between Elgar and Jaeger during the summer of 1900 weakens this presumed authority, however. An analysis of nine themes identified in just the Prelude alone reveal that a finer distinction must be made between the leitmotif and the reminiscence motive. The former is a technique clearly Wagnerian in origin. Jaeger's approach to analysis was concerned primarily with the identification of themes with various characters, objects, and ideas in the work.²² He then traces these as they recur through the musical fabric in order to illustrate how the music elucidates the text. In the introductory paragraph to his analysis he writes:

As the Dream is, so far, Edward Elgar's most important contribution to his art, so the orchestral prelude is his longest and most remarkable movement of the kind. It is modelled on the Weber-Wagner operatic prelude, in that it deals with material to be found in the body of the work, and in such a way that, once the significance of the various themes is understood, the intelligent listener can easily attach a connected programme to the music without having to draw very largely upon his own imagination.²³

¹⁹ Ernest Newman, *Elgar* (London: s.n., 1906), 85.

²⁰ Diana McVeagh, *Elgar: An Appreciation* (Worcester: Privately printed, 1955), 206.

²¹ Friesenhagen, pp. 89-94.

²² Jaeger's analysis is symptomatic of the "thematic transformation" fad in music theory at this time. See Joseph Kerman's *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985): 169 and his discussion of Rudolf Réti in particular.

²³ Jaeger, i.

One of the most prolific and influential writers on early leitmotivic techniques was Hans von Wolzogen. He published his first thematic guide to *The Ring* in 1876, and went on to write two more such pamphlets for *Tristan* and *Parsifal* which Jaeger likely read. The proliferation of English translations and German reprints indicate Wolzogen's influence and popularity was widespread.²⁴ There is a certain boldness, however, which comes on Jaeger's part with filtering Elgar's work so strongly through a Wagnerian lens. A letter written to Elgar on 26 August 1900 shows Jaeger's priorities in the analytical process:

Before I go on much farther, you ought to approve of, or correct my motive-names ('Fear', 'Death', 'Miserere', 'Despair', etc.) I want to give the themes a one word name wherever possible... Another suggestion. Would it not help listeners and students much if we adopted a German idea and referred to the Leitmotive at the side of the poem, by quoting the Title or number or both of the leitmotive used at a particular line... I think it will save much quizzing of my notes and turning back. I have seen the system adopted in some 'Ring' analyses. What think you?²⁵

The composer's reply on 28 August 1900 shows a satisfaction with Jaeger's analysis as he had completed it thus far, but a delicate correction:

I am delighted with your analysis so far as it goes...[however] my wife fears you may be inclined to lay too great a stress on the leitmotiven plan because I really do it without thought--intuitively, I mean.²⁶

Whether Jaeger made changes or not is not known. Most likely he did not, for he failed to retract his introductory notes or withdraw the one-word names he was seeking. Elgar's recently published letters, from which the above quotation comes, provide the only known criticism of the analysis by the composer. His public projection has suggested

²⁴Hans von Wolzogen, *Thematischer Leitfaden durch die Musik zu Richard Wagners Festspiel 'Der Ring des Nibelungen'* (Leipzig: E. Schloemp, 1876).

²⁵Moore, 226.

²⁶Ibid., 227-28.

implicit endorsement. Elgar asked Jaeger for two more similar analyses in 1903 and 1906 for *The Kingdom* and *The Apostles*, respectively.

The 174-measure orchestral prelude to *The Dream* is the longest of any by Elgar and introduces material that is found throughout the rest of the work. While Elgar's respect for Wagner is clear, his treatment of the thematic material in the prelude does not link music and drama like that of *Tristan* or *The Ring*. Elgar argued against Novello classifying *The Dream* as an oratorio, since he believed it was an altogether new genre. Regardless of how the work is classified, it is not a staged drama. Thus, relationships between any leitmotivs and supernatural forces, or states of mind, are attenuated.

Nonetheless, Jaeger identifies over fifty leitmotivs some of which only occur twice in the whole work. Few of these function like Wagner's leitmotivs: most are reminiscence motives. Nine of these themes which are heard in the opening prelude serve as a convenient example that highlight Elgar's treatment of the material. Seven out of the nine function as reminiscence motives. The remaining two which are heard at the end of the prelude are the only examples which are transformed in their recurrence, thus aligning themselves more with the Wagnerian leitmotivic tradition.

Of some importance is a short motif based on an ascending arpeggiated augmented triad used sequentially in a crescendo (Example 7). It can be found in the Prelude at m. 168, and is named "Energy" by Jaeger because when it occurs after the Prayer theme (mm. 189, 197, 218) it is as if Gerontius has gained energy and received refreshment from his supplications. The motif usually occurs at a louder dynamic level and quicker tempo than the surrounding music, and there is an internal rising pattern that provides a natural crescendo as well.

Example 7, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Energy Motif



In one instance of its use (Pt. I two bars before cue 33), in a slightly varied form, the score is marked *molto crescendo* as the motif provides a short link between the *ppp* ending of the Kyrie sung by an unaccompanied semi-chorus, and the faster *forte* section in which Gerontius sings resolutely "Rouse thee, my fainting soul." The motif also influences the recitative at this point for at the words "Of life and thoughts..." there is formed an ascending augmented triad by the notes Ab, C and Fb (See Example 8). A subtle use of the same motif occurs during another recitative section .

Example 8, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Part I, Cue 33

And... thro' such wan - ing span Of life and thought as

The motif is otherwise infrequently used by the composer for shortly after its last occurrence Gerontius dies and has no further use for earthly energy. It occurs for the last time in the accompaniment approaching the climax of this section, three measures after

Pt. I, Cue 62. It is in this section, however, that the first hint of the Demons occur, and Elgar transforms the Energy motif into one representing demonic forces. This is psychologically appropriate for they are presented as energetic beings in the way they "flap their hideous wings" and make a "fierce hubbub" in their "hungry and wild" state.²⁷ Elgar simply fills out the two major thirds of the augmented triad with chromatic sixteenth notes and, as the example shows, the upper part of the "Demon" theme is virtually complete.

Example 9a, Energy Theme Transformed into Demon Theme, Pt. 1, Cue 59



The antithesis of the Energy motif is Death. It occurs immediately after Energy, five measures after Pt. I, Cue 21 and is characterised by the melodic interval of a falling tritone. When it first occurs outside of the prelude the music subsides in readiness for Gerontius to state that he is near to death.

²⁷As described by The Angel at various points in the oratorio.

Example 10, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Part I, Cue 21



Here the interval is used on the first and second beats of the measure with an intervening eighth note, but the interval has been used on its own to a similar purpose earlier in the Prelude. It occurs four measures after Cue 16 where it resolves onto the dominant, A, to the accompaniment of an ominous-sounding triplet eighth on the timpani. This dissolves into a stroke on the gong, suggesting doom.

A passage which makes similar use of the tritone occurs again after the Energy motif five measures after Pt. I Cue 27, and again after a climax at Pt. I Cue 60 where the tritone Ab-D falls through three octaves within two bars. This descends four octaves in the bar before Cue 61 where the Despair theme commences (Example 11). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Elgar calls upon the expressive power of the tritone, both melodically and harmonically in the representation of the last moments of Gerontius' earthly life, eight measures after Pt. I Cue 67 (Example 12).

Example 11, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Part I, Cue 60



Example 12, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Part I, Cue 67

Lord, in - to Thy hands

Thus, the only examples from the Prelude that might be considered leitmotivic are the Fear and Energy motifs, for they synthesize the functions of reminiscence themes and transformational processes. The material associated with Death does not really function

as a reminiscence motive though its falling tritone interval does provide the basis for some thematic transformation. Due to the infrequency of their recurrence and in light of Elgar's own criticism, it is safe to say that the remaining seven themes in the prelude identified by Jaeger are aptly described as reminiscence motives. They have a more immediate but less complex function.

Jaeger's analysis, then, seems blind to the composer's intention. From the perspective of 100 years later it is brazen. But one modern defender of Jaeger is Peter Dennison who calls Jaeger Elgar's "most astute critic."²⁸ According to Dennison, "Elgar clearly considered the leitmotif central to Wagner's art and of immense value to his own."²⁹ To support this position Dennison points to Elgar's notes on Humperdinck's cantata *Die Wallfahrt nach Kevelaer*:

In Hänsel and Gretel... Humperdinck employed the 'representative theme' in quite an elaborate way as Wagner, illustrating character and idea in as marked a manner. In the present work, the same intricacy is displayed; not, be it noted, the intricacy of the mere contrapuntist, but elaboration abounding in poetic and suggestive touches.³⁰

This quotation satisfies Dennison's first position--Elgar clearly understood the leitmotif as central to Wagner's art. For Dennison the structural and referential significance of leitmotifs in Wagner's music was parallel in Elgar's dramatic works. He likens Elgar's treatment then to that of Brahms and Mahler. Diana McVeagh agrees and goes so far as to state that this is one of the chief defining characteristics of Elgar's style.³¹ The question of compositional process, however, is ultimately one of degree. Dennison's argument on this particular point feels too thinly stretched. To vary or develop a motive

²⁸Dennison, 105.

²⁹Ibid, 96.

³⁰As quoted in Dennison, p. 96.

³¹McVeagh, 206.

may well recall the original reference, but it fails to convey any new meaning to the listener of an unstaged oratorio.

That is not to deny Elgar's synthesis of Wagner's style into *The Dream of Gerontius*, and Jaeger's insights should by no means be dismissed as inconsequential. During the first two weeks of April 1900 Jaeger studied the proofs to a vocal score for Part I of the *The Dream*, and on April 13 wrote to Elgar that,

Since Parsifal nothing of this mystic, religious kind of music has appeared to my knowledge that displays the same power and beauty as yours.³²

Many writers support Jaeger in drawing this connection to *Parsifal*. Dennison identifies at least four ways in which the two works are similar. He argues that like *Parsifal*, *The Dream* "begins with the first phrase of a decisive leitmotif," which announces an unaccompanied melody on low clarinets and bassoons with muted strings.³³ As has been shown above to call this motive a leitmotiv seems forceful.

However, Elgar inscribed the opening six notes of *Parsifal* into his wife's diary on 28 July 1892, the first time he ever heard the opera in Bayreuth. In the closing section of Part I to *The Dream* at Fig. 68 Elgar introduces the Priest as the agent of the supernatural whose role it is to aid the Soul of Gerontius to the next world. Recalling the accompaniments of Wotan and the solemn proclamations of Gurnemanz, the Priest is introduced by a succession of chords on three trombones and tuba.³⁴

In *Parsifal* Gurnemanz makes a passionate speech as he leads Parsifal on a journey to see the Knights of the Grail in their hall (mm. 1073-1105). He is accompanied by the plodding patterns of repeated quarter notes on the strings, the low brass joining in

³²Percy Young, *Letters to Nimrod: Edward Elgar to August Jaeger 1897-1908* (London: D. Dobson, 1965), 83.

³³Dennison, p. 105.

occasionally in a solemn dialogue. The whole episode suggests a dramatic and musical resemblance to the Priest in *Gerontius* as he dismisses either Gerontius or his attending friends from their recent supplications. One is never clear exactly about who is being dismissed. It is accompanied by a magisterial march, its heavy solemnity dissolving eventually into the chorus "Go in the name of Angels and Archangels," one of Elgar's most memorable passages of large ensemble writing.

Example 13, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Part I, Cue 68

Moderato.

f. accelerata p

Pro - fi - ci - ce-re, sa - i - ma Chris - ti - a - na, de hoc

f. accelerata p

mu - do! . . . Go forth up - ou thy jour - ney, Chris - tian soul!

Dennison's final argument is in comparing two passages from *Tristan* and *Gerontius* which are built upon a B-A-C-H pattern in their bass parts. Dennison fails to

³⁴Dennison, p. 26.

address the fact that his example from Wagner misspells the B-A-C-H pattern by displacing the b-natural as the penultimate note. Immediately before the Soul of Gerontius confronts God Elgar prepares the listener musically and dramatically with a crescendo that moves from solemn contemplation to a momentary flash (Figs. 118-20). Over a pedal A, the bass line forms two overlapping phrases of the pattern B-A-C-H. The same pattern is mirrored in the upper parts in the second 4-measure phrase (Example 14a). In *Tristan und Isolde* Act I/5 the lovers are stunned by the love potion and the musical texture shifts suddenly to express their impetuous bliss. Leading to a transposed BACH motive a third higher, Wagner's bass line moves in the same overlapping pattern of B-A-C-H (Example 14b).

Example 14a), Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Part II, Cue 119

14b) Wagner, *Parsifal*, mm. 1687-90

The musical score is divided into three staves, labeled (a), (b), and (c). Staff (a) features a bass line on a single staff with a sustained note (pedal A). Above it, two overlapping melodic phrases are shown, each consisting of four measures. The first measure of each phrase begins with a B note, followed by an A, a C, and a H (B natural). The second measure begins with an A, followed by a C, a D, and an E. The third measure begins with a C, followed by a D, an E, and a G. The fourth measure begins with a D, followed by an E, a G, and a B. Staff (b) shows the upper parts (voicing) corresponding to staff (a). Staff (c) shows the continuation of the bass line after the first four measures.

By the time Wagner was in his fifties his religious ideas were well defined. He believed that one could have an intuitive sense of a non-earthly, spiritual world. Second, "since this [physical earthly] world is the source of our unhappiness, that other world, of redemption from it."³⁵ The spiritual world redeemed man, and one could prepare for it through "voluntary suffering and renunciation."³⁶ As shall be discussed below, Elgar's religious ideas were to undergo a progressive change, not unlike Brahms, shifting from faith to agnosticism, but at the time of writing *The Dream* they were still firmly Christian.

In *Die Meistersinger*, Hans Sachs is the archetype of the self-contained man who reconciles the duality of his heart. He understands the mystical and transcendental relationship between Man and God. Yet, he sympathizes with and outwardly accepts the familiar dogmas of faith shared by the "Volk" of Nurnberg who find comfort in Lutheranism. Unlike the Dutchman, Tannhäuser, or Lohengrin, Sachs lives as part of society.³⁷ While he appears to be conformist, he does not find his identity or salvation from the Church, but, representing Wagner's personal views, in his inner spirituality.

Gerontius partially inverts this relationship. He himself is clearly Roman Catholic; he is administered last rites by a Catholic priest, his friends pray and sing for him in Latin Catholic rites; and in Part II he experiences purgatory. Whereas Sachs does not need a community of faith, Gerontius does. They provide him with support and rituals. However, his experience with his God is ultimately a solitary one in the form of a dream, either real or imagined. A dream, whether a spiritual conduit or delirious reverie,

³⁵Richard Wagner, *On State and Religion*, vol. 4, *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, trans., William Ashton (Boston: University Press of America, Inc., 1882), 24.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷David Aberbach, *The Ideas of Richard Wagner : An Examination and Analysis of his Major Aesthetic*,

is a reflection of an inner spirituality. The prayers, rites, and dogma of the Church can only point him towards his dream-experience.³⁸ And in a scene which Wagner would likely have approved, Gerontius is spared a degree of suffering in the afterlife because as the Angel explains it, "You are spared now because you have suffered then." It is not completely clear that Gerontius achieves this through self-sacrifice and renunciation, however. Elgar once wrote to Jaeger, for example, saying,

Look here: I imagined Gerontius to be a man like us, not a Priest or a Saint, but a sinner, a repentant one of course but still no end of a wordly man in his life, & now brought to book. Therefore I've not filled his part with Church tunes & rubbish but a good, healthy full-blooded romantic, remembered worldliness, so to speak. It is, I imagine, much more difficult to tear one's self away from a well to do world than from a cloister.³⁹

In referring to the spiritual world Wagner was not postulating an afterworld, an afterlife, or belief in bodily resurrection.⁴⁰ One of his major criticisms of Judaism was its persistent belief in such optimism. True religion for Wagner equalled a religious spirit,

within the deepest, holiest, inner chamber of the individual... for this is the essence of true religion... it shines in the night of man's inmost heart, with a light quite other than the world-sun's light, and visible nowhere save from out that depth.⁴¹

Yet, Wagner acknowledged few people have the ability to find spirituality exclusively from within. Most "folk" have to depend on the Church's traditions and dogma for psychological and emotional support. Wagner believed most people needed religion to enhance our spirituality. Nothing could be further from the truth for Newman or Elgar at the time of writing *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Political, Economic, Social, and Religious Thoughts (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988), 239.

³⁸The nature of the dream as it relates to the title and meaning of the work is discussed above in "Gerontius Before Elgar."

³⁹Moore, 228.

⁴⁰Aberbach, 243.

⁴¹Wagner, p. 24.

For Wagner, since institutional Christianity could not get across the message of Jesus, which had been distorted by the Catholic Church, might Art succeed where religion failed? Wagner began to make use of familiar religious thoughts and phrases which reaches its most extensive and subtlest in *Parsifal*. Outwardly, the symbols and characters are Christian. Inwardly, they are Wagnerian. The important inner meaning of Parsifal's life is related to his spiritual growth outside of the Church.⁴² *Parsifal* would be set in an obviously Christian melieu complete with the sublime dogma of the Eucharist. Underpinning it would be Wagner's larger theme, that is, God's love for man. But Wagner's God is of a greater import than the narrowly restricted doctrines and dogmas of institutional Christianity.

In *Parsifal* the knights enact their rituals meaninglessly: they have neither energy nor purpose, and they are susceptible to sexual sin. Amfortas has already yielded. Even though he celebrates the Eucharist at the end of the 1st and 3rd acts Amfortas offers no moral leadership and has to be forced, against his will, to celebrate the Mass, but he does so in anger. For Wagner, a belief in Christianity and the practice of its dogmas and rituals is not necessarily enough to redeem a person. In *The Dream of Gerontius*, however, it is precisely a belief in Christianity and the practice of its rituals which, if not redeems Gerontius, grants him a vision of that redemption. The opening lines after the lengthy Prelude identify the importance of Christian, especially Catholic, doctrine in the process of death and redemption. Gerontius sings,

Jesu, Maria I am near to death... Jesu, have mercy! Mary, pray for me!... Lover of souls! Great God! I look to Thee... Pray for me my friends.

⁴²Aberbach, 243.

His friends then begin to pray immediately for him invoking the Kyrie eleison, the Holy Mother Mary, and the Choirs of the righteous, which include the Saints, Hermits, and the Martyrs of God. Catholic references are abundant. Through an indication in the score provided by Elgar, these friends are the priest's assistants, presumably showing Gerontius' trust and history with the Catholic tradition. After another interjection by Gerontius, and subsequent petitions by his friends, the priest begins the last rites and Part I comes to an end. In comparing Gerontius' friends with the Knights of *Parsifal*, the Assistants take their charge so seriously they continue to pray for him even after Gerontius has died in hopes of easing his transition to the afterlife. At the point just before his judgment, the Soul of Gerontius says, "I hear the voices that I left on earth." The Angel guiding him on his journey replies, "It is the voice of friends around thy bed, Who say the 'Subvenite' with the priest. Hither the echoes come;" As the Soul goes before his Judge the Voices on Earth can be heard singing "Be merciful, be gracious; spare him, Lord." In *Parsifal* the Knights highlight the emptiness of ritual and dogma. In *The Dream of Gerontius* Elgar retains Newman's emphasis on tradition, dogma, and community in the redemption process.

Wagner's relationship to the Church was different from that of Newman's and this is clearly reflected in *The Dream*. Reflecting on his early life Wagner wrote,

At the time of my confirmation, at Easter 1827, I had considerable doubt about this ceremony, and I already felt a serious falling off of my reverence for religious observances... How matters stood with me spiritually was revealed to me, almost to my horror, at the Communion service, when I walked in procession with my fellow-communicants to the altar to the sound of organ and choir. The shudder with which I received the Bread and Wine was so ineffaceably stamped on my memory, that I never again partook of the Communion, lest I should do so with levity. To avoid this was all the easier for me, seeing that among Protestants such participation is not compulsory.⁴³

⁴³Wagner, pp. 23-24.

Elgar, however, was not Newman. Theologically, he would appear to stand at the midpoint between Wagner and Newman. At the time of writing *The Dream of Gerontius* Elgar knew because of its Catholic references its reception in a strongly Protestant choral environment would be met with resistance. Like Wagner, however, the influence of the Church on Elgar was to affect a change on his world view. This shall be the basis of the next chapter which will also seek to understand how *The Dream of Gerontius* reflects a particularly Roman Catholic view of death, judgment, and salvation.

Chapter 6

Elgar, Catholicism, and *The Dream of Gerontius*

In referring to *The Dream of Gerontius* Charles Villiers Stanford once made the comment that it "Stinks of incense."¹ His comment, while both biting and vague, is a convenient metaphor. In comparing *The Dream of Gerontius* to incense he makes a qualitative statement about the theological and social framework underpinning it. The text of the oratorio reflects a particularly English Roman Catholic theology distinguished by its treatment of death, judgement, and salvation. The purgatory which the Soul experiences in Part II is not that of a continental Catholicism, but a strain of English Catholic theology that emphasizes purification over punishment. To invoke a likeness of something that "stinks of incense," not only summons images of rituals and mysticism, but suggests at best they are in poor excess and at worst without substance. As shall be shown the Roman Catholic nature of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* is not only brought to the foreground of the listener's attention, but the chief reason for most of its early criticism.

Edward Elgar was baptized and raised as a Roman Catholic, though both his parents were Protestants originally. His father was the organist at St. George's Roman Catholic Church at Worcester in the 1840s, and in 1852, four years after her marriage, Edward's mother converted to Catholicism. The significance of her conversion, and the atypical upbringing of Elgar's early life, is significant for understanding Elgar's attitude towards composing *The Dream of Gerontius* with its strong Roman Catholic theology. It will also be necessary to illuminate the role Catholicism played in English Victorian life in order to understand Stanford's comment, and the unfavourable reception of *The Dream of Gerontius* by a mostly Protestant choral society.

The dramatic tension in the opening of *The Dream of Gerontius* lies in the danger of Gerontius' eternal damnation. In order to achieve his salvation Gerontius must appeal

¹McVeagh, *Edward Elgar His Life and Music*, p. 92.

to the mercy of Christ and the ministration of his church. In the opening, Gerontius is already close to death. He sings, "Jesu, Maria--I am near to death,/ And Thou art calling me; I know it now." His personal statements alternate with formal petitions highlighting the contrast between his fallen humanity and the power of God as judge and saviour. Mary, mother of God, meanwhile, acts as mediator between God and man. As Michael Wheeler points out, these scenes would be well-known to anyone who was familiar with the Prayers for a Happy Death.² Similarly, the prayers of the Assistants and the Priest are drawn from the "Commendation of a Departing Soul"--liturgies with which many Catholics would have been familiar.³

Gerontius, after affirming his faith in the Sanctus and Creed, experiences a "sense of ruin which is worse than pain." As discussed earlier in Chapter 5, to this Elgar introduces the listener to the Demon Theme, though Gerontius does not meet the demons until Part II. Through this intimation with evil he is driven to despair. In anguish Gerontius cries out to Mary again for intercession. "O Jesu, help! pray for me, Mary, pray!" In response the Assistants sing in the vernacular "Libera, Domine," from lines 130-134 of the *Rituale Romanum*--a nineteenth-century anthology of Roman Catholic liturgical rites.⁴

In Roman Catholic theology angels have played a significant role in the process of salvation history, and *The Dream of Gerontius* places great stress on this.⁵ As Gerontius dies he repeats the Last Rite which includes Christ's final words on the cross, "Into Thy Hands,/ O Lord, into Thy hands." The Priest and Assistants follow the rubric again drawing from the *Rituale Romanum* as they sing the "Proficisci, anima

²*The Manual for Prayers, Authorised by the Hierarchy of England and Wales for Congregation Use* (London: s.n., 1886), 235-36.

³Wheeler, 91.

⁴Ponificis Maximi Pauli V., *Rituale Romanum* (Mechliniae, 1860), 112. This passage is based on Hebrews Chapter 11, which refers to God's rescue of his chosen people from bodily destruction or danger.

⁵Gerhard Kittel, "Angelos in the NT," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 83-87.

*Christiana, de hoc mundo.*⁶ As messengers, mediators and worshippers the ministry of angels in the spiritual world is emphasized in the Roman rite. Their role is seen to be analogous to that of the clergy in this world. It is appropriate, then, that the first section of *The Dream* ends with the Priest, and Part II begins on the other side of eternity with the ministrations of angels.

Like *Parsifal*, the central themes in *The Dream of Gerontius*, center on death, judgement, and salvation. Perhaps after *In Memoriam*, *The Dream of Gerontius* was the best known and most frequently discussed artistic work on the subject of death and future life to be published during the Victorian Age. Geoffrey Rowell has observed that the judgement and purgatory which the Soul of Gerontius faces in Part II constitutes a purificatory rather than a penal process. In contrast to the continental tradition of Ligourian theology, this emphasis on purification is characteristic of nineteenth-century English Catholic theology and originates with Cardinal John Henry Newman.

Newman's theology of purgatory originates as early as his sermons from the 1820s while he was still an Anglican. He later distinguished in his controversial Tract 90 (1841), perhaps with some purposeful ambiguity, between the "Romish doctrine concerning purgatory," described in Article 22 of the Church of England, and "Primitive doctrines." While Article 22 refers to this Catholic doctrine as a "fond thing," Newman condemns neither very strongly in his article. Still a leading force in the Oxford Movement he did not advocate any of these "primitive doctrines" but his theology was evolving in such a way that he would soon be ready to accept the Roman belief of purgatory upon his conversion in 1845.

When Newman finally did decide to convert, his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* was already going through the press. In it was a short essay on purgatory. He refers to Alexandria's teaching on purification of the soul after death as a

⁶Geoffrey Rowell, "The Dream of Gerontius," *Ampleforth Journal*, 73 (1968): 190-94.

"discriminating fire."⁷ This is contrasted with three other views of purgatory which Newman summarizes in the writings of St. Perpetua, St. Cyril, and Cardinal Fisher.⁸ Borrowing from his own work earlier in Tract 79, Newman also quotes St. Cyprian. He reflects on the words *missum in carcarem* (sent to prison) and *purgari die igne* (purged a long while by fire) which "seem to go beyond any mere ecclesiastical, though virtually divine censure."⁹

Newman describes purgatory as a prison.¹⁰ It is an inward and spiritual reality that is "an antechamber to heaven."¹¹ Similarly, in his sermons he constantly stressed the relationship between present holiness and future blessedness.¹² Rowell argues that "insofar as [*The Dream of Gerontius*] removed eschatology from mechanical interpretations into the realms of their personal relationship between man and God, it spoke powerfully to... many Protestants troubled about eschatology to consider the possibility of purgatory."¹³ In the letters exchanged between Elgar and Jaeger which will be discussed below, however, it would seem that Rowell's thesis may be true in some areas of nineteenth-century English culture but not so for either the Birmingham Festival Committee or Charles Stanford.

The traditional analogy of death as sleep which opens Part II also anticipates the last words of the Angel at the end of the poem. That the Soul will eventually enter heaven is guaranteed--the Angel's opening hymn is, "Alleluia/And saved is he." There is no post-mortem probation in Roman Catholic theology. Gerontius asks the Angel why he

⁷ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 388-89.

⁸ St. Perpetua prays for her brother Dinocrates who died at the age of seven and has a vision where she sees him delivered from purgatory. St. Cyril believed in the efficacy of prayers in the eucharistic service for those who had died as faithful Christians. Cardinal Fisher traces the development of purgatory as a concept highlighting points of faith in early Church history.

⁹ Wheeler, 90.

¹⁰ Prison was a commonplace description of purgatory to nineteenth-century Roman Catholics. As Wheeler points out, Fr. Henry James Coleridge, who first published *The Dream of Gerontius* in *The Month*, himself wrote *The Prisoners of the King: Thoughts on the Catholic Doctrine of Purgatory* (1878).

¹¹ Newman, *Verses on Various Occasions*, p. 358.

¹² For example, in a sermon on Hebrews 12:14 Newman concludes, "...to obtain the gift of holiness is the work of a life. No man will ever be perfect here, so sinful is our nature." See Newman, *Sermons*, p. 84.

¹³ Rowel, p. 192.

now has no fear at meeting the Judge. In life he did. The Angel says: "It is because/
Then thou didst fear, that now thou dost not fear,/ Thou has forestall'd the agony, and so
for thee the bitterness of death is passed."

Michael Wheeler has suggested that in focussing upon this phase in the spiritual journey of an individual soul, *The Dream of Gerontius* unfolds the Soul's salvation in a horizontal plane within the vertical "eternity" of personal judgment as Newman conceived of it. In emphasizing the relativity of the inward and spiritual judgment of individual souls in the spiritual world, where everyone is the "standard of his own chronology," *The Dream* also frees the doctrine of purgatory from its earthly, chronological associations.

Elgar uses the polyphonic resources of choral singing to express this paradox by having different lines sung synchronically by soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voices. Michael Wheeler and Denis McCaldin have astutely noted that in performance "All holy Disciples," (soprano), "All Evangelists (alto), "All holy Martyrs" (tenor) and "All holy Hermits" (bass) are thus arranged in a vertical rather than horizontal order.¹⁴ These voices of intercession from the friends of Gerontius, and Assistants to the Priest, implicitly return in Part II when the Soul sings, "I hear the voices that I left on earth." "It is the voice of friends around thy bed," answers the Angel, "who say the Subvenite with the priest." (Example 15) Thus, even though Gerontius has died, linear time appears to be unfolding in a vertical eternity which the music represents in both Parts I & II.

¹⁴Wheeler, p. 97.

Example 15, Elgar, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Part I, Fig. 103

Angel ad lib.

Thy judg-ment now is near, for we are come in-to the veil - ed

Lento. $d = 48.$

pp

p

103 *Moderato.*

pro- cures of our God.

Soul. pp

I hear the

103 *Moderato. d = 68.*

ppp

Example 15, Cont'd.

pp cresc.

It is the voice of friends a round thy bed, Who

vol·em that I left on earth.

dim.

Sms say the "Sub · ve · si · te" with the priest. Hither the eth - em

cresc. Pnf.

This paradox of the the "now" with the "eternal" also occurs within the structure and meaning of the passage itself. The anaphoric listing of saints, Old Testament patriarchs, and orders of angels has the effect of telescoping long historical sequences into a single and present reality.

Wheeler maintains that just prior to Gerontius' death Elgar provides a dramatic contrast to the semi-chorus' polyphonic harmonies by setting the lines which are abridged from Hebrews 11, in a vertical rather than horizontal order.¹⁵ The melody is borrowed from the chant *De Profundis* (Pt. I, Cue 64), which was another Catholic reference perhaps antagonizing Charles Stanford and the Protestant festival participants.¹⁶

¹⁵ Wheeler, p. 97.

¹⁶ The use of Gergorian chant was not the exclusive domain of Roman Catholics in nineteenth-century

Example 16, *The Dream of Gerontius*, Pt. I, Cue 64

Noe from the waters in a sav-ing home ; Job from all his multi-form and full distress ;
 Moses from the land of bondage and despair ; David from Golia and the wrath of Saul ;

a tempo.

Noe from the waters in a sav-ing home ; Job from all his multi-form and full distress ;
 Moses from the land of bondage and despair ; David from Golia and the wrath of Saul ;

a tempo.

Noe from the waters in a sav-ing home ; Job from all his multi-form and full distress ;
 Moses from the land of bondage and despair ; David from Golia and the wrath of Saul ;

a tempo.

Noe from the waters in a sav-ing home ; Job from all his multi-form and full distress ;
 Moses from the land of bondage and despair ; David from Golia and the wrath of Saul ;

The relations between Catholics and Protestants in nineteenth-century England are extremely complex mostly because it was not only the clergy and hierarchies who were drawn in, but ordinary church members as well. Although Catholic emancipation had been declared in 1829, Catholics were still largely second-class citizens, held in deep distrust by the majority of people for several reasons. A degree of this distrust is rooted in English nationalism.¹⁷ Catholics were perceived to have a double allegiance between the Pope and Crown. Might they not be potential subversives of the Protestant

English church music. Numerous examples of it parodied or paraphrased into the Anglican hymnal, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, can be found, for example. Even these, however, incurred criticisms of "popery," especially by the Rev'd. James Ormiston. See Susan Drain, *The Anglican Church in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989): 382-412.

¹⁷Drain, p. 17.

constitution? It is enough just to recall the shock and uncertainty created by Newman's conversion. Newman was an Anglican priest and a key figure in the Oxford Movement. In 1848, by his own intellectual conviction, he converted to Catholicism. When someone of his stature disavows what he has long been perceived to protect and defend, the consequences are not at all confined to his own life. After Newman's conversion others followed. Susan Drain, a nineteenth-century English historian, maintains that *The Tracts for the Times* was perceived by some to benefit Rome, and not to stir up Anglicanism.¹⁸

More likely in the context of Elgar's oratorio, however, Protestants objected to the superstitions of the Roman church, especially the veneration of the Virgin Mary, the invocation of saints, and the references to purgatory. In 1851, Cardinal Newman in a lecture entitled "The Present Position of Catholics in England" wrote,

Catholicism is the victim of a prejudice which perpetuates itself and gives birth to what it feeds on...English Protestants think our creed is so irrational that it will fall to pieces of itself, when the sun of reason is directed upon the places which at present it is enveloping.¹⁹

The force of anti-Catholicism to which Newman addressed himself could also be found in the working class. After the large scale immigration of unskilled Irish labourers in the early 1840s working men in England frequently gave rise to small-scale rioting. In 1852 riots in Stockport resulted in the vandalism and desecration of two Catholic chapels. Antagonism towards Catholics from the working class was often stirred up by itinerant preachers. In June of 1867, just days before Elgar's tenth birthday, a riot erupted not far away in Birmingham at a meeting addressed by an itinerant evangelical, William Murphy. The rioting reached its highest tension when the police began using sabres on the crowds. Murphy's route can be followed across the country through newspaper reports that disturbances occurred wherever he travelled. Therefore, Anne Elgar's

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Hodgkins, *Providence and Art*, p. 10.

decision to become a Roman Catholic likely emerged from a strong conviction in the truth of the church's teaching.

Edward and his sister Helen ('Dot') were instructed at home in the Catholic faith. This was supplemented by the parish priests at St. George's, Frs. Waterworth and Meagher. Helen became a nun in 1903 when Edward was writing *The Apostles* and eventually became head of her Order in England. Comparatively little is known of Elgar's younger years, but two of his three brothers died by the time he was nine. Perhaps this focussed his thoughts on the meaning and purpose of life, and of what lay beyond. In Elgar's music, death and judgment are certainly recurring themes.

Francis Reeve, the schoolmaster at the Littleton House which Elgar attended, once said, "The apostles were poor men, young men, at the time of their calling; perhaps before the descent of the Holy Ghost not cleverer than some of you here."²⁰ One can easily speculate how easy it was for young Elgar, brought up in a strict Roman Catholic upbringing, in a lower-middle class environment, to apply these words to himself. The saints were titans of the church, figures to be respected and revered. Yet, his church taught that both saint and sinner were essentially the same. Only the power of the Holy Spirit could effect a difference. The Apostles had been chosen, picked out by Christ for the special task of winning the world for Christianity. Elgar believed he, also young and poor, had been chosen to become a composer. "He staunchly believed that if he gave his utmost strength to the task, he too, like the Apostles, would receive spiritual help and inspiration."²¹

The Elgars worshipped at numerous churches while living in London from 1889 to 1891, including St. Mary's, Chelsea, the pro-Cathedral in Kensington, the Carmelite church, Brook Green, Farm Street, and St. Dominic's in Haverstock Hill. Otherwise, Edward was a regular worshipper at St. George's in Worcester. Often he would go on his

²⁰Ibid, p. 8.

²¹Reed, *Elgar*, p. 8.

own to an early mass and then again with Alice to a Benediction in the late afternoon. Geoffrey Hodgkins maintains Edward attended church fifty times during the year 1890--a remarkably high number considering Elgar's diary accounts for many days when bad weather and illness kept him from going.²²

As has been discussed in Chapter 5, the Elgars visited southern Germany on several occasions. In August 1892 he wrote a letter to his nieces and nephews. It reveals his respect for the workmen who carry their rosaries during the day, the abundance of churches, and the many crucifixes scattered throughout the towns and countryside where one can sit, and rest and pray.²³ Later in life, especially after his wife died, Elgar's attitude towards God, especially any blessing he may have received in the compositional process, shifted significantly. Elgar believed God was not only content in delaying his public recognition as a great composer, but perversely conspiring to prevent it from happening at all.

His ambitions and hopes were continually being balked. So much so that he began to believe that the hand of Fate was against him. The belief became so strong that it persisted in a greater or less degree even through the years when full and definite success were coming to him.²⁴

Geoffrey Hodgins maintains that Basil Maine probably changed the quotation so that Elgar was thought to have used the word "Fate" instead of "God."²⁵

What is certain is that Elgar believed his career had been penalized for being a Roman Catholic. In the early 1890s Elgar returned from London to Worcestershire after an unsuccessful attempt to make himself known as a composer. Shortly thereafter he confided in Rosa Burley that he had been handicapped because of his Catholicism.

²²Hodgkins, *Providence and Art*, p. 9.

²³Unpublished letter from the Elgar Birthplace at Broadheath.

²⁴Maine, p. 64.

²⁵Hodgkins, p. 3.

He said that I little knew how seriously his career had been hampered by his Catholicism. He told me of post after post which would have been open to him but for the prejudice against his religion, of golden opportunities snatched from his grasp by inferior men of more accepted views. It was a subject on which he evidently felt very bitter for he embroidered it at great length.²⁶

Two choral works written in 1896, both of which were partially responsible for winning the recognition that Elgar sought, contain this theme of isolation resulting from religious belief. In *King Olaf*, the king, a Christian convert, returns to a pagan country. He is faced with the challenge of converting his people to Christ. In *The Light of Life* later the blind man is healed, but he is rejected by the Jewish authorities because of his faith in Jesus.

For Elgar to set this poem to music, therefore, was a courageous act. As Diana McVeagh has hypothesized it may have been an act of defiance.²⁷ Jaeger, for example, warned him that *The Dream of Gerontius* would not be well received on the grounds its Catholic theology would be offensive to some, namely the Festival committee who commissioned it. Jaeger's vision mostly likely expanded beyond that, however. In a letter to Elgar on 14 June 1900 he wrote,

There is a lot of Joseph and Mary about the work: very proper for a Roman Catholic lying at death's door to sing about, but likely to frighten some d--d fools of Protestants. I had a long talk to the secretary of one of the big Glasgow societies yesterday and showed him proofs and so generally enthused over the work that I hope he will strongly recommend Gerontius to his Society. But he at once, on reading the words, spoke of the Roman Catholic element being so prominent. Tommy rot you say: ditto says I, who am rather an Agnostic than anything else. But alas one must deal with people as one finds them, and if, without bowdlerising a superb poem one can remove Mary and Jospeh to a more distant background, it may not be a bad thing.²⁸

Elgar replied the next day,

²⁶Burley, p. 26.

²⁷McVeagh, *The Dream of Gerontius*, p. i.

²⁸Moore, *Elgar and His Publishers*, p. 189.

As to the Catholic side, of course it will frighten the low Church party but the poem must on no account be touched! Sacrilege and not to be thought of: them as don't like it can be damned in their own way--not ours. It's awfully curious the attitude (towards sacred things) of the narrow English mind: it puts me in memory of the man who said, when he saw another crossing himself "Oh, this devilish crossing." There's a nice confused idea for you.²⁹

Dedicating it "A.M.D.G." (Ad Majoram Dei Gloriam, or "To the greater glory of God,") Elgar included a quotation from Ruskin at the end of the score which is most often quoted in literature when discussing *The Dream of Gerontius*: it "is the best of me; for the rest, I ate, and drank, and slept, loved and hated, like another; my life was as the vapour and is not; but this I saw and knew; this, if anything of mine, is worthy of your memory."

The first performance of *The Dream* on 3 October 1900 in Birmingham was a well-documented disaster. Several factors for this included the difficulty of the choral writing, the chaotic arrangements for the final rehearsals, and the sudden death of the chorus-master, Dr. Swinnerton Heap. Elgar's feelings towards God just weeks earlier were like someone suffering for the sake of Art. Now they had turned bitter and resentful. He wrote to Jager on 9 October 1900,

... As far as I'm concerned music in England is dead--I shall always write what I have in me of course. I have worked hard for forty years & at the very last, Providence denies me a decent hearing of my work: so I submit--I alway said God was against art and I still believe it. Anything obscene or trivial is blessed in this world and has a reward--I ask for no reward--only to live & hear my work... but I have allowed my heart to open once--it is now shut against every religious feeling and every soft, gentle impulse for ever.³⁰

Much has been written over this letter but, although it cannot be ignored, Elgar's propensity for dramatic over-emphasis should not be ignored.

The most clear identification that Elgar ever made with the Catholic church was his decision to set Cardinal Newman's poem to music. In 1898 Elgar was asked to write a "scriptural thing" for the Birmingham Festival of 1900 about which such scholars as

²⁹Ibid., p. 190.

³⁰Ibid., p. 244.

Diana McVeagh, Michael Kennedy, Geoffrey Hodgkins, and Percy Young all agree "was *The Apostles*. This would be deferred for three years, however. Another consideration was a work on St. Augustine. Elgar told Joseph Bennett, the music critic with the *Daily Telegraph*, that he believed the work to be too controversial. Hodgkins has speculated the controversy may have been over Augustine's private life, described in his *Confessions*.³¹

If Elgar was looking to avoid controversy, however, he was unsuccessful. Newman's poem, as demonstrated above, is firmly Catholic in its theology. Indeed, many late-Victorian Catholics of a liberal disposition considered it rather backward-looking and reactionary.³² As has been demonstrated above, there was a propensity at the Three Choirs Festival, and elsewhere, to write oratorios based on Old Testament stories with dramatic heroes and heroines. There is very little scripture to placate the Protestants in *The Dream of Gerontius* and the poem contains references to virtually all the doctrines which they found repellent. This has been seen in the references to marianism, Latin rites, guardian angels, and purgatory. *The Dream of Gerontius* would become one of the pieces to draw serious attention to the composer, first by German contemporaries, such as Strauss, and later by his fellow English admirers. However, its early reception was critical in part because of the theological tensions in the social fabric between Protestants and Catholics in nineteenth-century England.

³¹Hodgkin, p. 5. Augustine lived for over ten years with a common-law wife, and then carried on another relationship before leaving her to engage another.

³²Ibid.

Chapter 7
The Gates of Horn:
Revelation and Reason in *The Dream of Gerontius*

The *Dream of Gerontius* depicts the final hours of a dying man and is set in two parts, the first dealing with the death of Gerontius, the second with his Soul's progression through purgatory to meet with God. Whether this journey is a feverish state of mind of a dying man, or a dream-like state to the after life, however, is unclear. The Gates of Horn in the title of this chapter refers to the classical belief that true dreams exit the Land of Sleep from the Gates of Horn, while false dreams exit through the Gates of Ivory. As these images suggest, there has long existed an ambivalent attitude towards dreams, either as meaningless natural phenomena or as portentous supernatural revelations. This chapter examines the ambiguity of the dream in Elgar's oratorio, and the work as a personal statement of the composer's Roman Catholic views on death at the time of writing.

Ostensibly, there is a rational frame to explain the cause of the dream whether by mental associations induced from the Roman Catholic Last Rites, a guilty conscience, or a feverish state. In juxtaposition to this Newman and Elgar set the dream as a revelation of the Soul's eschatological condition. Whether Gerontius only dreams he is in heaven or the Soul is actually there is secondary. Newman and Elgar sought to portray something of the nature of the eschatological reality we can all expect. In other words, the Dream comes from the Gate of Horn rather than the Gate of Ivory.

A discussion of musical dreams ought to acknowledge the real dreams that they

simulate. One might first attempt to define "dream" which has been problematic for most philosophers and scientists. What is more useful for present purposes is to compare several definitions prevalent during the period under consideration in order to suggest those assumptions about dreams which the author and composer might also have shared. The English scientist William Newnham asserts, in his *Essay on Superstition* (1830), that "Dreams may be defined to be trains of ideas and images confusedly heaped together during sleep, and resulting from irritation of the brain."¹ Dr. John Abercrombie in *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers* (1832) notes the following occurrences which create the peculiar condition of the mind in dreaming:

1. The impressions which arise in the mind are believed to have a real and present existence; and this belief is not corrected, as in the waking state, by comparing the conception with the things of the external world.
2. The ideas or images in the mind follow one another according to associations over which we have no control; we cannot, as in the waking state, vary the series, or stop it at our will.

The elements common to these definitions are the following: dreams occur in the mind during a state of sleep; the dreamer has a dual role as both a passive observer and actual source of the images of the dream, those images have an apparent reality which the mind is conscious of and believes in the mental perceptions and an actual unreality in so much that the perceptions are merely illusions or hallucinations. This rational, physiological definition of dreams was dominant in the nineteenth century, at least among English scientists and philosophers. Whether or not Newman and Elgar were consciously aware of them or not is not known, but their treatment of *Gerontius* certainly meets all

¹William Newnham, *Essay on Superstition* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1830): 162.

the conditions described above.

Another definition of dreams existed, however. This popular, somewhat mystical view allowed for the existence of true, even prophetic dreams, along with the meaningless ones. Emanuel Swedenborg points to Biblical prophetic dreams as a precedent for his faith in the revelatory nature of dreams.² He identifies three spiritual sources for "significative" dreams: God, angelic spirits, and the spirits who are near when a man is sleeping. He adds, "But fantastic dreams are from another source."³ That source is diabolic.⁴ James Hogg, in an article on dreams for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* of May, 1827, scoffs at the certainty of the scientists who say that dreams are meaningless, saying that the "expert" cannot even provide an understandable definition of sleep, so "how can he define that eternal part of it [i.e. dreams], wherein the soul holds intercourse with the external world?"⁵ This belief in the possibility of meaningful, significative dreams persisted throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England. This popular faith in the possibility of prophetic dreams coexists with the scientific, rational theories through the period the libretto and oratorio were written.

A recurrent image in classical discussions of dreams provides a suggestive point of reference for this discussion. Both Homer and Virgil mention the twin gates of ivory and horn through which dreams pass on their way to the dreamer. Dryden's 1697 translation of the *Aeneid* phrases the image in this way:

²Swedenborg even kept a daily journal in order to interpret their significance.

³Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heavenly Arcana* trans., John C. Ager (New York: Citadel Press, 1965): 387.

⁴Swedenborg, p. 549.

⁵*Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 106 (May, 1827): 19.

Two gates the silent house of Sleep adorn:
 Of polished ivory this, that of transparent horn.
 True visions through transparent horn arise;
 Through polished ivory pass deluding lies.⁶

The recognition of both true and deluding dreams is important for this discussion. In nineteenth-century England, rational scientific studies of dreams had relegated them all to the gate of ivory and asserted that they were meaningless phantasms of the imagination. Yet the dream in *Gerontius* is almost without exception from the gate of horn: it purports to reveal truths about either the condition of the Soul, or at the very least something true about the dreamer, Gerontius.

Having mentioned the two coexisting currents of thought about dreams, there are also three alternative possibilities to the nature of the dream in *Gerontius*. These include reveries, the hypnagogic state, and somnambulism. The nature of somnambulism, or sleep-walking as it is commonly known, was still a mystery in the middle and late nineteenth century, though its symptoms made for popular dramatic effects. Lady Macbeth is, arguably, the most famous sleep walker in English literature. There is no evidence in either the poem or the oratorio that the nature of the dream is somnambulism.

The reverie, or waking dream, however, is a type of mental fantasy in which the dreamer retains some control over his or her impressions. In a reverie the dreamer is usually aware that he is awake, and he can exercise his will in perhaps shaping the direction of his imagination, or in judging what he perceives. In a real dream, the dreamer cannot say "I dream." As one scholar notes, "The night dreamer cannot articulate a

⁶Virgil, *Aenid*, ed. John Dryden, vol. 6 (1697): 1235-88.

cogito. The night dream is a dream without a dreamer. On the contrary, the dreamer of a reverie remains conscious enough to say: it is I who dreams this reverie.⁷

Another dream-like experience is the hypnagogic state of consciousness. This state occurs on the borders of sleeping and waking, either as the subject is falling asleep or waking up. There is a nineteenth-century explanation of a hypnagogic state in Robert Macnish's *The Philosophy of Sleep* (1834), a medical study of the mental states associated with sleep and dreams. As the body nears sleep, the various mental organs drop, one by one, into disuse:

This gradual sort of intellectual obliteration is a sort of confused dream_a mild delirium which always precedes sleep. The ideas have no resting place, but float about in the confused tabernacle of the mind, giving rise to images of the most perplexing description. In this state they continue for some time, until, as sleep becomes more profound, the brain is left to thorough repose and they disappear altogether.⁸

This hypnagogic state occurs in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, for example, when Oliver seems to observe Fagin and Monks staring in at him through an open window. Dickens speaks here of this state as "a kind of sleep that steals upon us sometimes, which, while it holds the body prisoner, does not free the mind from a sense of things about it, and enables it to ramble at its pleasure."⁹ He goes on to describe the hypnagogic state in great detail.

This condition could certainly be true in *The Dream of Gerontius*. In Part I of the oratorio Gerontius is tired and weak. "I fain would sleep, The pain has wearied me," he sings in "Novissima hora est." Whether from disease or old age, he lies on his deathbed

⁷Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetic of Reverie* (New York: Garland Press, 1969): 22.

⁸Robert Mcnish, *The Philosophy of Sleep* (Washington: University Publications of America, 1977): 24.

⁹Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Dent, 1963): 216.

with friends and priestly assistants around to attend him. Perhaps he suffers from a fever. He appears to be suffering at least from a guilty conscience. In one of the most memorable arias from the oratorio, "Sanctus fortis," Gerontius sings "...each thought and deed unruly Do to Death..." Elgar himself said to Jaeger that he believed Gerontius to be a worldly man, though we the listener never have privileged knowledge of those sins. This is why, according to the composer, he did not fill the work with church tunes. Thus, fever and guilt imprison the body but leave the mind to ramble. That his mind would wander in this hypnagogic dream-state to thoughts of his imminent life after death is not hard to imagine.

The opening to *The Dream of Gerontius* is a key passage to understanding the nature of the dream. At this point Gerontius has declared his faith in God, and the priest has performed the last rites. Writers employ literary dreams in order to utilize their inherent dramatic power. A literary dream cannot be effective, however, unless it seems sufficiently dream-like. In this case, the composer must convince the listener that the episode resembles an actual dream. The score shifts from Gerontius to the Soul of Gerontius suggesting he has either died or entered a dream-like state where he believes he is dead. The text which is in bold Elgar keeps in the oratorio.

**I went to sleep; and now I am refreshed.
A strange refreshment: for I feel in me
An inexpressive lightness, and a sense
Of freedom, as I were at length myself,
And ne'er had been before. How still it is!
I hear no more the busy beat of time,
No, nor my fluttering breath, nor struggling pulse;
Nor does one moment differ from the next.**

I had a dream; yes:--some one softly said
 "He's gone"; and then a sigh went round the room.
 And then I surely heard a priestly voice
 Cry "Subvenite"; and they knelt in prayer.
 I seem to hear him still; but thin and low,
 And fainter and more faint the accents come,
 As at an ever-widening interval.
 Ah! whence is this? What is this severance?

In the poem, the Soul is aware of his current condition and seems to emphasize his waking state during the dream. He is in reverie. This would mean he is not dead, he is not hypnagogic, and what is about to follow is not a revelation, but his current reality. However, in the poem the speaker refers to his dream in the past tense. In Elgar's oratorio Gerontius states "[I] went to sleep." The argument that the dream is a reverie would only be true if the current condition was the dream. This passage, paradoxically, suggests that his life was the dream. Elgar chose to cut the text referring explicitly to that dream, thus generating further ambiguity.

Even Gerontius' statement that he went to sleep remains unclear. His sleeping state could refer to the events of his life and the final moments we hear in Part I of the oratorio. This view of the afterlife in which heaven is somehow more "real" than what we thought was reality is preceded in Christian philosophy, ranging from Origen's *De Profundis* to C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*. Alternatively, his sleeping state could refer to the transition which took place between that moment of life here on earth, and his new existence in the afterlife.

The ambiguity around whether the dream of Gerontius is hypnagogic or reverie

has thus far been contained to the realm of dreams which are explained by science and rationalism; that is, what can be explained through reason. *The Dream of Gerontius*, however, can equally be explained by a process of revelation. The Bible is a necessary starting point for this exploration. Both Newman and Elgar were intimately familiar with the Bible both as a basis of their faith, and as a literary source. This work is also important because it contains so many accounts of significant dreams and "night-visions." Most appear in the Old Testament, although there are several in the New Testament, particularly in the Gospel of Matthew. Interestingly, the Bible also contains the same dual view of dreams, as either meaningful revelations or delusory nonsense.

The Old Testament contains numerous instances in which God communicates directly through dreams. Perhaps the most famous example is Jacob's dream at Bethel. This dream recalls the common ancient practice of dream incubation by which a subject would sleep in a holy place or temple in hopes of receiving a divine revelation. There is no evidence to suggest *The Dream of Gerontius* is revelation by incubation. Another kind of dream common in the Old Testament, however, does not have an explicitly divine origin. Nevertheless, these dreams are prophetic, in the sense that they correctly reveal what later comes to pass. The stories of Joseph, Gideon, and Daniel provide good illustrations of dreams with symbolic messages.

These prophetic dreams grant insight. They truthfully reveal what is to come. This would appear to be the category to which *The Dream of Gerontius* belongs--a hypnagogic state which reveals what the delirious, professing Gerontius sincerely believes

will happen to his soul after death. This is the most reasonable interpretation thus far.

There are two problems with this understanding, however. The text from the opening of Part II reads, "I went to sleep and now am refreshed." Possibly one can be dreaming that one is dreaming only to waken up from the dream in the dream state, but this is convoluted, indeed. Second, as Robert Karl Gnuse states in his book *The Dream Theophany*, these kinds of dreams "come not in clear words, but words veiled in mystery, gestures and actions pointing to a hidden meaning."¹⁰ The symbolic message dream differs from the auditory dream type, because its meaning is less straightforward; in order to be understood, it must first be interpreted. Sometimes the dreamer can interpret it alone, but at other times the interpretation must come from some expert or holy man. This does not appear to be the case in *The Dream of Gerontius*.

In the "Sanctus fortis" aria sung by Gerontius, the emphasis is on stating his doctrinal beliefs as an affirmation of faith. Like Gerontius in the "Sanctus fortis," *The Dream of Gerontius* is Elgar's statement of faith. He maintains the ambiguity of the dream aspect in the oratorio, but in so doing places greater emphasis on the message and meaning of the dream rather than its source. The intercession of Mary, Latin rites, guardian angels, and the purifying fires of purgatory are realities one can expect in the after life according to *The Dream of Gerontius*. Whether the Soul of Gerontius actually experiences these, or he only dreams of them, is of secondary importance.

There is compelling evidence that the dream is both a reverie and a hypnagogic dream state. There is also evidence that it can be explained away by rationalism and

reason as well as divine revelation. As has been shown, each of these four interpretations have critical shortcomings. Consequently, which half of *The Dream of Gerontius* is actually "the dream" remains unclear. This, however, is not the result of the librettist or the composer, and it is no comment on the nature of the dream as truth or lie. Ambiguity in the function and nature of dreams, real or literary, appears, in fact, to be a chief defining characteristic resulting in an emphasis on the meaning of the dream over its originating source.

The "Dream" in *The Dream of Gerontius* is a revelation from the Gate of Horn about the deep mystery of death, and perhaps revelations of any kind. In an age where Elgar's religion was living in the shadow of Darwinism and the hegemonic relationship of science over religion, *The Dream of Gerontius* represents an informed, modern, Catholic, artistic response to a "modern" society. Elgar uses the dream as a symbol of the impalpable; it is an artist's portrait of heaven, or at least someone on the road to the City on the Hill. It is above all a strong theological statement about death and judgment from a particularly Roman Catholic perspective. Elgar and Newman would have their audience enter the House of Sleep, dream, and know that *The Dream of Gerontius* flows from the Gates of Horn.

¹⁰Karl Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1977): 19.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

The Dream of Gerontius, together with the Enigma Variations (op. 36) in 1899, helped launch Elgar's career in England. Elgar and Jaeger both believed that the work was different from traditional English oratorios in the nineteenth century chiefly in its similarity to Wagner's music. The composer believed that the work was more of a music drama than an oratorio, and Jaeger believed that Elgar's use of leitmotivs was the primary means by which he accomplished this. Jaeger's influence on our understanding of *The Dream of Gerontius* has influenced generations of writers, and continues to this day. Jaeger's analysis, however, is incorrect. Recently published letters by Elgar to Jaeger, and an examination of the function of the themes in the work, show that of the more than fifty themes Jaeger identified in the opening Prelude most function as reminiscence motives, not leitmotivs.

If Wagner's influence is present it can be found in the similar subject matters and the shifting role of choral versus solo writing. This is not to deny that such characteristics as dynamic arch forms, chromatic saturation, and *unendlichemelodie* are not present in the music dramas of both composers, but other writers have discussed these parallels. It is in the treatment of an inward, psychological drama, which addresses such issues as death, judgement, and salvation, that *The Dream of Gerontius* not only aligns itself with such works as *Parsifal*, but mediates along three different poles: between its Catholic subject matter, and its reception by a mostly Protestant audience, between the poem and the music, and between the "reality" and mystery of life after death.

The Dream of Gerontius is not so much a didactic sermon set to music, but more of an epic journey presented in juxtaposition to the theological anxiety generated in the

Victorian era by the conflict between faith and science. Science's investigation of the physical universe, from the geological discoveries of Lyall in the 1820s to Darwin's work on evolution a generation later, gravely undermined the earlier view of nature as the expression of a divine and benevolent order. With nature revealed as possibly no more than a self-generating amoral machine, and the Bible reduced to myth, one's sense of the existence of God, especially of a personal, loving God, was gradually effaced, until by the end of the century Nietzsche was able to declare God dead. And so English Victorians found themselves alone in the universe with no firm grounds of being, and no purpose beyond what they could create for themselves. This vast metaphysical shift, with its enormous implications for humanity's status and destiny, had sooner or later to be faced by all thinking Victorians. Some found the new views liberating. Some fled from them back to the embrace of older ways of thought. Some experienced an anguish of loss, but managed in the end to come to some form of adjustment. Others abandoned themselves to despair.

Elgar's setting of Newman's *The Dream of Gerontius*, then, is something of its own enigma—a mystery wrapped within a riddle. The mystery is knowing which part of the poem is "the dream," and which part is reality. It has been suggested here that both the composer and the librettist never clearly address that question in order that they may foreground their response to the anxieties of Victorians in England, Protestant and Catholic alike. The riddle is to better understand the social and theological fabric that enabled Charles Villier Stanford to supposedly say of the work that, "it stinks of incense."

It could be that Stanford was simply jealous of Elgar's increasing success. Elgar represented everything Stanford did not. He was lower class and uneducated by any formal institution. However, while this may have been part of the reason that prompted Stanford's response, it is unlikely that is the only explanation as letters exchanged between Elgar, Jaeger, and the Three Choirs Festival committee which commissioned the work, show that the Catholic nature of *The Dream of Gerontius* was forefront in all of their minds. To invoke a likeness of something that "stinks of incense," not only summons images of rituals and mysticism, but also suggests they are in poor excess. Stanford could also have meant that the work was without substance. Few would argue the latter point today, and based on its reception, Stanford notwithstanding, few would appear to have thought so then. Assessing Stanford's pejorative criticism remains difficult.

Elgar's setting of the "dream" of Gerontius recasts the traditional English oratorio narrative and makes more acceptable the fantastic and sometimes bizarre world of personifications and symbolic objects characteristic of religious allegory. The historical evidence suggests that whatever anxieties he, Jaeger, and the Three Choirs Festival committee had about the Catholic nature of the work, they were unfounded. There is no evidence that *The Dream of Gerontius* suffered in stature or popularity because of its Catholic nature. Indeed, rather than alienating Protestants, its emphasis on the drama of the personal relationship between the individual and God, and a uniquely English image of Purgatory that emphasized purification over punishment, may have made the Catholic nature of the oratorio more palatable. Given the literary and political role of Gerontius in English history *The Dream of Gerontius* becomes an allegorical framework for unity. It

mediates a middle road between Protestant and Catholic, it synthesizes characteristics of Wagner's music dramas within an English oratorio tradition, and it makes a deeply orthodox Christian statement about the meaning life during an age of skepticism and anxiety at the end of the nineteenth century.

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Appendix A
The Dream of Gerontius
 by Cardinal John Henry Newman

Lines in bold format show text used in Elgar's oratorio.

Gerontius

Jesu, Maria--I am near to death,
And Thou art calling me; I know it now--
Not by the token of this faltering breath,
This chill at heart, this dampness on my brow,

(**Jesu, have mercy! Mary, pray for me!**)--
 'Tis this new feeling, never felt before,
 (Be with me, Lord, in my extremity!)
 That I am going, that I am no more.
 'Tis this strange innermost abandonment,
 (Lover of souls! great God! I look to Thee,)
 This emptying out of each constituent
 And natural force, by which I come to be.
 Pray for me, O my friends; a visitant
 Is knocking his dire summons at my door,
 The like of whom, to scare me and to daunt,
 Has never, never come to me before;
 'Tis death--O loving friends, your prayers!--'tis he!...
 As though my very being had given way,
 As though I was no more a substance now,
 And could fall back on nought to be my stay,
 (Help, loving Lord! Thou my sole Refuge, Thou,)
 And turn no whither, but must needs decay
 And drop from out the universal frame
 Into that shapeless, scopeless, blank abyss,
 That utter nothingness, of which I came:
 This is it that has come to pass in me;
 O horror! this it is, my dearest, this;
So pray for me my friends, who have not strength to pray

ASSISTANTS

Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison, Kyrie eleison.
Holy Mary, pray for him.
All holy Angels, pray for him.
Holy Abraham, pray for him.

St. John the Baptist, St. Joseph, pray for him.
 St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Andrew, St. John,
 All Apostles, all Evangelists, pray for him.
 All holy Disciples of the Lord, pray for him.
 All holy Innocents, pray for him.
 All holy Martyrs, all holy Confessors,
 All holy Hermits, all holy Virgins,
 All ye Saints of God, pray for him.

GERONTIUS

Rouse thee, my fainting soul, and play the man;
 And through such waning span
 Of life and though as still has to be trod,
 Prepare to meet thy God.
 And while the storm of that bewilderment
 Is for a season spent,
 And, ere afresh the ruin on the fall,
 Use well the interval.

ASSISTANTS

Be merciful, be gracious; spare him Lord.
 Be merciful, be gracious; Lord deliver him.
 From the sins that are past;
 From thy frown and Thine ire;
 From the perils of dying;
 From any complying
 With sin, or denying
 His God, or relying
 On self, at the last;
 From the nethermost fire
 From all that is evil;
 From the power of the devil;
 Thy servant deliver,
 For once and for ever.

By Thy birth, and by Thy Cross,
 Rescue him from endless loss;
 By Thy death and burial,
 Save him from a final fall;
 By Thy rising from the tomb,

**By Thy mounting up above,
By the Spirit's gracious love,
Save him in the day of doom.**

GERONTIUS

**Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundus oro te,
Miserere, Judex meus,
Parce mihi, Domine.
Firmly, I believe and truly
God is Three, and God is one;
And next I acknowledge duly
Manhood taken by the Son.
And I trust and hope most fully
In that Manhood crucified;
And each thought and deed unruly
Do to death, as He has died.
Simply to His grace and wholly
Light and life and strength belong,
And I love, supremely, solely,
Him the holy, Him the strong.
Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundis oro te,
Misere, Judex meus,
Parce mihi, Domine.
And I hold in veneration,
For the love of Him alone
Holy Church, as His creation,
And her teachings, as His own.
And I take with joy whatever
Now besets me, pain or fear,
And with a strong will I sever
All the ties which bind me here.
Adoration aye be given
With and through the angelic host,
To the God of earth and heaven,
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Sanctus fortis, Sanctus Deus,
De profundis oro te,
Misere, Judex meus,
Mortis in discrimine.**

**I can no more; for now it comes again,
That sense of ruin, which is worse than pain,
That masterful negation and collapse
Of all that makes me man; as though I bent
Over the dizzy brink
Of some sheer infinite descent;
Or worse, as though
Down, down forever I was falling through
The solid framework of created things,
And needs must sink and sink
Into the vast abyss. And, crueller still,
A fierce and restless fright begins to fill
The mansion of my soul. And, worse and worse,
Some bodily form of ill
Floats on the wind, with many a loathsome curse
Tainting the hallowed air, and laughs, and flaps
Its hideous wings,
And makes me wild with horror and dismay.
O Jesu, help! pray for me Mary, pray!
Some angel, Jesu! such as came to Thee
In Thine own agony...
Mary, pray for me. Joseph pray for me,
Mary, pray for me.**

ASSISTANTS

**Rescue him, O Lord, in this his evil hour,
As of old so many by Thy gracious power:--(Amen.)
Enoch and Elias from the common doom; (Amen.)
Noe from the waters in a saving home; (Amen.)
Abraham from th' abounding guilt of Heathenesse;
(Amen.)
Job from all his multiform and fell distress; (Amen.)
Isaac, when his father's knife was raised to slay; (Amen.)
Lot from burning Sodom on its judgement-day; (Amen.)
Moses from the land of bondage and despair; (Amen.)
Daniel from the hungry lions in their lair;
(Amen.)
And the Children Three amid the furnace-flame;
(Amen.)
Chaste Susanna from the slander and the shame; (Amen.)
David from Golia and the wrath of Saul;
(Amen.)**

Tecla from her torments; (Amen.)

—so, to show Thy power,

Rescue this Thy servant in his evil hour.

GERONTIUS

**Novissima hora est; and I fain would sleep,
The pain has wearied me...Into Thy hands,
O Lord, into Thy hands...**

THE PRIEST

**Proficiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo!
Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul!
Go from this world! Go, in the name of God,
The omnipotent Father, who created thee!
Go in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord,
Son of the living God, who bled for thee!
Go, in the Name of the Holy Spirit, who
Hath been poured out on thee! Go, in the name
Of Angels and Archangels; in the name
Of Thrones and Dominations; in the name
Of Princedoms and of Powers; and in the name
Of Cherubim and Seraphim, go forth!
Go, in the name of Patriarchs and Prophets;
And of Apostles and Evangelists,
Of Martyrs and Confessors; in the name
Of holy Monks and Hermits; in the name
Of holy Virgins; and all Saints of God,
Both men and women, go! Go on thy course;
And may thy place to day be found in peace,
And may thy dwelling be the Holy Mount
of Sion:--in the Name of Christ, our Lord.**

Part 2**SOUL OF GERONTIUS**

I went to sleep; and now I am refreshed.
 A strange refreshment: for I feel in me
 An inexpressive lightness, and a sense
 Of freedom, as I were at length myself,
 And ne'er had been before. How still it is!
 I hear no more the busy beat of time,
 No, nor my fluttering breath, nor struggling pulse;
 Nor does one moment differ from the next.
 I had a dream; yes:--some one softly said
 "He's gone"; and then a sigh went round the room.
 And then I surely heard a priestly voice
 Cry "Subvenite"; and they knelt in prayer.
 I seem to hear him still; but thin and low,
 And fainter and more faint the accents come,
 As at an ever-widening interval.
 Ah! whence is this? What is this severance?
 This silence pours a solitariness
 Into the very essence of my soul;
 And the deep rest, so soothing and so sweet,
 Hath something too of stannous and of pain,
 For it drives back my thoughts upon their spring
 By a strange introversion, and perforce
 I now begin to feed upon myself,
 Because I have nought else to feed upon.

Am I alive or dead? I am not dead,
 But in the body still; for I possess
 A sort of confidence which clings to me,
 That each particular organ holds its place
 As heretofore, combining with the rest
 Into one symmetry, that wraps me round,
 And makes me man; and surely I could move,
 Did I but will it, every part of me.

And yet I cannot to my sense bring home,
 By very trial, that I have the power.
 'Tis strange; I cannot stir a hand or foot,
 I cannot make my fingers or my lips
 By mutual pressure witness each to each,

Nor by the eyelid's instantaneous stroke
 Assure myself I have a body still.
 Nor do I know my very attitude,
 Nor if I stand, or lie, or sit, or kneel.

So much I know, not knowing how I know,
 That the vast universe, where I have dwelt,
 It quitting me, or I am quitting it.
 Or I or it is rushing on the wings
 Of light or lightning on an onward course,
 And we e'en now are million miles apart.
 Yet...is this premtory severance
 Wrought out in lengthening measurements of space,
 Which grow and multiply by speed and me?
 Or am I traversing infinity
 By endless subdivision, hurrying back
 From finite towards infinitesimal,
 Thus dying out of the expanded world.

Another marvel: someone has me fast
Within his ample palm; 'tis not a grasp
 Such as they use on earth, but all around
 Over the surface of my subtle being,
 As though I were a sphere, and capable
 To be accosted thus, a uniform
 And gentle pressure tells me I am not
 Self-moving, but borne forward on my way.
 And hark! I hear singing; yet in sooth
 I cannot of that music rightly say
 Whether I hear or touch or taste the tones.
 Oh what a heart-subduing melody!

ANGEL

My work is done,
My task is o'er,
 And so I come,
 Taking it home,
For the crown is won,
 Alleluia.
 For evermore.
My Father gave
 In charge to me

This child of earth
E'en from its birth,
To serve and save,
Alleluia,
And saved is he.
This child of clay
To me was given,
To rear and train
By sorrow and pain
In the narrow way,
Alleluia,
From earth to heaven.

SOUL

It is a member of that family
Of wondrous beings, who, ere the worlds were made,
Millions of ages back, have stood around
The throne of God:--he never has known sin;
But through those cycles all but infinite,
Has had a strong and pure celestial life,
And born to save on th'unveiled face of God
And drank from the eternal Fount of truth,
And served Him with a keen ecstatic love.
Hark! he begins again.

ANGEL

O Lord, how wonderful in depth and height,
But most in man, how wonderful Thou art!
With what a love, what soft persuasive might
Victorious o'er the stubborn fleshy heart,
Thy tale complete of saints Thou dost provide,
To fill the thrones which angels lost through pride!

He lay a grovelling babe upon the ground,
Polluted in the blood of his first sire,
With his whole essence shattered and unsound,
And, coiled around his heart, a demon dire,
Which was not of his nature, but had skill
To bind and form his opening mind to ill.

Then was I sent from heaven to set right
The balance in his soul of truth and sin,

And I have waged a long relentless fight,
 Resolved that death-environed spirit to win,
 Which from its fallen state, when all was lost,
 Had been repurchased at so dread a cost.

Of what a shifting parti-coloured scene
 Of hope and fear, of triumph and dismay,
 Of recklessness and penitence, has been
 The history of that dreary, lifelong fray!
 And oh the grace to nerve him and to lead,
 How patient, prompt, and lavish at his need!

O man, strange composite of heaven and earth!
 Majesty dwarfed to baseness! fragrant flower
 Running to poisonous seed! and seeming worth
 Cloaking corruption! weakness mastering power!
 Who never art so near to crime and shame,
 As when thou hast achieved some deed of name;--

How should ethereal natures comprehend
 A thing made up of spirit and of clay,
 Were we not tasked to nurse it and to tend,
 Linked one to one throughout its mortal day
 More than the Seraph in his height of place,
 The Angel-guardian knows and loves the ransomed race.

SOUL

Now know I surely that I am at length
 Out of the body: had I part with earth,
 I never could have drunk those accents in,
 And not have worshipped as a god the voice
 That was so musical; but now I am
 So whole of heart, so calm, so self-possessed,
 With such a full content, and with a sense
 So apprehensive and discriminant,
 As no temptation can intoxicate.
 Nor have I even terror at the thought
 That I am clasped by such a saintliness.

ANGEL

All praise to Him, at whose sublime decree
 The last are first, the first become the last;

By whom the suppliant prisoner is set free,
 By whom proud first-borns from their thrones are cast,
 Who raises Mary to be Queen of heaven,
 While Lucifer is left, condemned and unforgiven.

3

SOUL

I will address him. Mighty one, my Lord,
 My Guardian Spirit, all hail!

ANGEL

All hail, my child!
 My child and brother, hail! what wouldest thou?

SOUL

I would have nothing but to speak with thee
 For speaking's sake. I wish to hold with thee
 Conscious communion; though I fain would know
 A maze of things, were it but meet to ask,
 And not a curiousness.

ANGEL

You cannot now
 Cherish a wish which ought not to be wished.

SOUL

Then I will speak. I ever had believed
 That on the moment when the struggling soul
 Quitted its mortal case, forthwith it fell
 Under the awful Presence of its God,
 There to be judged and set to its own place.
 What lets me now from going to my Lord?

ANGEL

Thou art not let; but with extremest speed
 Art hurrying to the Just and Holy Judge:
 For scarcely art thou disembodied yet.
 Divide a moment, as men measure time,
 Into its million-million-millionth part,
 Yet even less than that the interval
 Since thou didst leave the body; and the priest
 Cried "Subvenite," and they fell to prayer;

Nay, scarcely yet have they begun to pray.

For spirits and men by different standards mete
 The less and greater in the flow of time.
 By sun and moon, primeval ordinances--
 By stars which rise and set harmoniously--
 But the recurring seasons, and the swing,
 This way and that, of the suspended rod
 Precise and punctual, men divide the hours,
 Equal continuous, for their common use.
 Not so with us in the immaterial world;
 But intervals in their succession
 Are measured by the living thought alone,
 And grow or wane with its intensity.
 And time is not a common property;
 But what is long is short, and swift is slow,
 And near is distant, as received and trapsed
 By this mind and by that, and every one
 Is standard of his own chronology.
 And memory lacks its natural resting-points
 Of years, and centuries, and periods.
 It is thy very energy of thought
 Which keeps thee from thy God.

SOUL

Dear Angel, say,
Why have I now no fear at meeting Him?
Along my earthly life, the thought of death
And judgement was to me most terrible. I had it aye before me, and I saw
The Judge severe e'en in the crucifix.
Now that the hour is come, my fear is fled;
And at this balance of my destiny,
Now close upon me, I can forward look
With a serenest joy.

ANGEL

It is because
Then thou didst fear, that now thou dost not fear.
Thou has forestalled the agony, and so
For thee the bitterness of death is past.
Also, because already in thy soul
The judgement is begun. That day of doom,

One and the same for the collected world--
 That solemn consummation for all flesh,
 Is, in the case of each, anticipate
 Upon his death; and, as the last great day
 In the particular judgement is rehearsed,
 So now too, ere thou comest to the Throne,
A presage falls upon thee, as a ray
Straight from the Judge, expressive of thy lot.
 That calm and joy uprising in thy soul
 Is first-fruit to thee of thy recompense,
 And heaven begun.

4

SOUL

But hark! upon my sense
Comes a fierce hubbub, which would make me fear
Could I be frightened.

ANGEL

We are now arrived
Close on the judgement court; that sullen howl
Is from the demons who assemble there.
 It is the middle region, where of old
 Satan appeared among the sons of God,
 To cast his jibes and scoffs at holy Job.
 So now his legions throng the vestibule,
Hungry and wild, to claim their property,
And gather souls for hell. Hist to their cry.

SOUL

How sour and how uncouth a dissonance!

DEMONS

Low-born clods
Of brute earth,
They aspire
To become gods,
By a new birth,
And an extra grace,
And a score of merits.
As if by aught
Could stand in place

Of the high thought,
 And the glance of fire
 Of the great spirits,
 The powers blest,
 The lords by right,
 The primal owners,
 Of the proud dwelling
 And realm of light,--
 Dispossessed,
 Aside thrust,
 Chucked down,
 By the sheer might
 Of a despot's will,
 Of a tyrant's frown.
 Who after expelling
 Their hosts, gave,
 Triumphant still,
 And still unjust,
 Each forfeit crown
 To psalm-droners,
 And canting groaners,
 To every slave,
 And pious cheat,
 And crawling knave,
 Who licked the dust
 Under his feet.

ANGEL

It is the restless panting of their being;
 Like beasts of prey, who, caged, within their bars,
 In a deep hideous purring have their life,
 And an incessant pacing to and fro.

DEMONS

The mind bold
 And independent,
 The purpose free,
 So we are told,
 Must not think
 To have the ascendant.
 What's a saint?
 One whose breath

**Doth the air taint
Before his death;
A bundle of bones,
Which fools adore,
Ha! ha!**
**When life is o'er,
Which rattle and stink,
E'en in the flesh.
We cry his pardon!
No flesh hath he;
Ha! ha!**
**For it hath died,
'Tis crucified
Day by day,
Afresh, afresh,
Ha! ha!**

SOUL

**This gains guerdon,
So priestlings prate,
Ha! ha!**
**Before the Judge,
And pleads and atones**
**For spite and grudge,
And bigot mood,
And envy and hate,
And greed of blood.**

SOUL

**How impotent they are! and yet on earth
They have repute for wondrous power and skill;
And books describe, how that thee very face
Of the Evil One, if seen, woud have a force
Even to freeze the blood, and choke the life
Of him who saw it.**

ANGEL

**In thy trial-state
Thou hadst a traitor nestling close at home,
Conatural, who with the powers of hell
Was leagued, and of thy senses kept the keys,
And to that deadliest foe unlocked thy heart.**

And therefore is it, in respect to man,
 Those fallen ones show so majestical.
 But, when some child of grace, angel or saint,
 Pure and upright in his integrity
 Of nature, meets the demons on their raid,
 They scud away as cowards from the fight.
 Nay, oft hath holy hermit in his cell,
 Not yet disburdened of mortality,
 Mocked at their threats and warlike overtures;
 Or, dying, when they swarmed, like flies, around,
 Defied them, and departed to his Judge.

DEMONS

Virtue and vice,
A knaves pretence.
'Tis all the same;
Ha! ha!
Dread of hell-fire,
Of the venomous flame,
A coward's plea.
Give him his price,
Saint though he be,
Ha! ha!
From shrewd good sense
He'll slave for hire;
Ha! ha!
And does but aspire
To the heaven above
With sordid aim,
And not from love.
Ha! ha!

SOUL

I see not those false spirits; shall I see
 My dearest master, when I reach His Throne;
 Or hear, at least, His awful judgment-word
 With personal intonation, as I now
 Hear thee, not see thee, Angel? Hitherto
 All has been darkness since I left the earth;
 Shall I remain thus sight bereft all through
 My penance time? If so, how comes it then
 That I have hearing still, and taste, and touch,

Yet not a glimmer of that princely sense
Which binds ideas in one, and makes them live?

ANGEL

Nor touch, nor taste, nor hearing hast thou now;
Thou livest in a world of sign and types,
The presentations of most holy truths,
Living and strong, which now encompass thee.
A disembodied soul, thou has by right
No converse with aught else beside thyself;
But, lest so stern a solitude should load
And break thy being, in mercy are vouchsafed
Some lower measures of perception,
Which seem to thee, as though through channels brought,
Through ear, or nerves, or palate, which are gone.
And thou art wrapped and swathed around in dreams,
Dreams that are true, yet enigmatical;
For the belongings of thy present state,
Save through such symbols, come not home to thee.
And thus thou tell'st of space, and time, and size,
Of fragrant, solid, bitter, musical,
Of fire, and of refreshment after fire;
As (let me use similitude of earth,
To aid thee in the knowledge thou dost ask)--
As ice which blisters may be said to burn.
Nor hast thou now extension, with its parts
Correlative,--long habit cozens thee,--
Nor power to move thyself, nor limbs to move.
Hast though not heard of those, who, after loss
Of hand or foot, still cried that they had pains
In hand or foot, as though they had it still?
So is it now with thee, who hast not lost
They hand or foot, but all which made up man;
So will it be, until the joyous day
Of resurrection, when thou wilt regain
All thou has lost, new-made and glorified.
How, even now, the consummated Saints
See God in heaven, I may not explicate.
Meanwhile let it suffice thee to possess
Such means of converse as are granted thee,
Though, till that Beatific Vision thou art blind;
For e'en thy purgatory, which comes like fire,

Is fire without its light.

SOUL

His will be done!

I am not worthy e'er to see again
 The face of day; far less His countenance
 Who is the very sun. Nonetheless, in life,
 When I looked forward to my purgatory,
 It ever was my solace to believe,
 That, ere I plunged amid th'avenging flame,
 I had one sight of Him to strengthen me.

ANGEL

Nor rash nor vain is that presentiment;
Yes,—for one moment thou shalt see thy Lord.
 Thus will it be: what time thou art arraigned
 Before the dread tribunal, and thy lot
 Is cast for ever, should it be to sit
 On His right hand among His pure elect,
 Then slight, or that which to the soul is sight,
 As by a lightning-flash, will come to thee,
 And thou shalt see, amid the dark profound,
 Whom thy soul loveth, and would fain approach,—
One moment; but thou knowest not, my child,
What thou dost ask: the sight of the Most Fair
Will gladden thee, but it will pierce thee too.

SOUL

Thou speakest darkly, Angel! and an awe
Falls on me, and a fear lest I be rash.

ANGEL

There was a mortal, who is now above
In the mid glory: he, when near to die,
Was given communion with the Crucified,—
Such, that the Master's very wounds were stamped
Upon his flesh; and, from the agony
Which thrilled through body and soul in that embrace
Learn that the flame of the Everlasting Love
Doth blur ere it transform...

...Hark to those sounds. They come of tender beings angelical,
Least and most childlike of the sons of God.

FIRST CHOIR OF ANGELS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise;
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways!

To us His elder race He gave
To battle and to win,
Without the chastisement of pain,
Without the soil of sin.

The younger son he willed to be
A marvel in his birth:
Spirit and flesh his parents were;
His home was heaven and earth.

The Eternal blessed His child, and armed,
And sent him hence afar,
To serve as champion in the field
Of elemental war.

To be his Viceroy in the world
Of matter, and of sense;
Upon the frontier, towards the foe,
A resolute defence.

ANGEL

We now have passed the gate, and are within
The House of Judgement; and whereas on earth Temples and palaces are formed of parts
Costly and rare, but all material,
So in the world of spirits nought is found,
To mould withal and form into a whole,
But what is immaterial; and thus
The smallest portions of this edifice,
Cornice, or frieze, or balustrade, or stair,
The very pavement is made up of life--
Of holy, blessed, and immortal beings,
Who hymn their Maker's praise continually.

SECOND CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
 And in the depth be praise:
 In all His words most wonderful;
 Most sure in all His ways!

Woe to thee, man! for he was found
 A recreant in the fight;
 And lost his heritage of heaven
 And fellowship with light.

Above him now the angry sky,
 Around the tempest's din;
 Who once had angels for his friends,
 Had but the brutes for kin.

O man! a savage kindred they;
 To flee that monster brood
 He scaled the seaside cave, and clomb
 The giants of the wood.

With now a fear, and now a hope,
 With aids which chance supplied,
 From youth to eld, from sire to son,
 He lived, and toiled and died.

He dread his penance age by age;
 And step by step began
 Slowly to doff his savage garb,
 And be again a man.

And quickened by the Almighty's breath,
 And chastened by His rod,
 And taught by Angel-visiting,
 At length he sought his God:

And learned to call upon His name,
 And in His faith create
 A household and a fatherland,
 A city and a state.

Glory to Him who from the mire,

In patient length of days,
Elaborated into life
A people to His praise!

SOUL

The sound is like the rushing of the wind--
The summer wind among the loft pines;
Swelling and dying, echoing round about,
Now here, now distant, wild and beautiful;
While, scattered from the branches it has stirred,
Descend ecstatic odours.

THIRD CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depth be praise:
In all His words most wonderful;
Most sure in all His ways!

The Angels, as beseemingly
To spirit-kind was given,
At once were tried and perfected,
And took their seats in heaven.

For them no twilight or eclipse;
No growth and no decay:
'Twas hopeless, all-ingulfing night,
Or beatific day.

But to the younger race there rose
A hope upon its fall;
And slowly, surely, gracefully,
The morning dawned on all.

And ages, opening out, divide
The precious and the base,
And from the hard and sullen mass,
Mature the heirs of grace.

O man! albeit the quickening ray,
Lit from his second birth,
Makes him at length what once he was,
And heaven grows out of earth;

Yet still between that earth and heaven--
 His journey and his goal--
 A double agony awaits
 His body and his soul.

A double debt he has to pay--
 The forfeit of his sins,
 The chill of death is past, and now
 The penance-fire begins.

**Glory to Him, who evermore
 By truth and justice reigns;
 Who tears the soul from out its case,
 And burns away its stains!**

ANGEL

They sing of thy approaching agony,
 Which thou so eagerly didst question of:
 It is the face of the Incarnate God
 Shall smite thee with that keen and subtle pain;
 And yet the memory which it leaves will be
 A sovereign febrifuge to heal the wound;
 And yet withal it will the wound provoke,
 And aggravate and widen it the more.

SOUL

Thou speakest mysteriest; still methinks I know
 To disengage the tangle of thy words:
 Yet rather would I hear thy angel voice,
 Than for myself by thy interpreter.

ANGEL

When then--if such thy lot--thou seest thy Judge,
 The sight of Him will kindle in thy heart,
 All tender, gracious, reverential thoughts.
 Thou wilt be sick with love, and yearn for Him,
 And feel as though thou couldst but pity Him,
 That one so sweet should e'er have placed Himself
 At disadvantage such, as to be used
 So vilely by a being so vile as thee.
 There is a pleading in His pensive eyes

Will pierce thee to the quick, and trouble thee.
 And thou wilt hate and loathe theyself; for, though
 Now sinless, thou wilt feel that thou has sinned,
 As never thou didst feel; and wilt desire
 To slink away, and hide thee from His sight
 And yet wilt have a longing aye to dwell
 Within the beauty of his countenance.
 And these two pains, so counter and so keen,--
 The longing for Him, when thou seest Him not;
 The shame of self at thought of seeing Him.--
 Will be thy veriest, sharpest purgatory.

SOUL

My soul is in my hand: I have no fear,--
 In his dear might prepared for weal or woe.
But hark! a grand mysterious harmony:
It floods me, like the deep and solemn sound
Of many waters.

ANGEL

We have gained the stairs
 Which rise towards the Presence-chamber; there
 A band of mighty Angels keep the way
 On either side, and hymn the Incarnate God.

ANGELS OF THE SACRED STAR

Father, whose goodness none can know, but they
 Who see Thee face to face,
 By man hath come the infinite display
 Of Thy victorious grace;
 But fallen man--the creature of a day--
 Skills not that love to trace.

It needs, to tell the triumph Thou has wrought,
 An Angel's deathless fire, and Angel's reach of thought.

It needs that very Angel, who with awe,
 Amid the garden shade,
 The great Creator in His sickness saw,
 Soothed by a creature's aid,
 And agonised, as victim of the Law
 Which He Himself had made;

For who can praise Him in His depth and height,
But he who saw Him reel amid that solitary fight?

SOUL

Hark! for the lintels of the presence-gate
Are vibrating and echoing back the strain.

FOURTH CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,

 And in the depth be praise:

In all His words most wonderful;

 Most sure in all his ways!

The foe blasphemed the Holy Lord,

 As if he reckoned ill,

In that he placed His puppet man

 The frontier place to fill.

For even in his best estate,

 With amplest gifts endued,

A sorry sentinel was he,

 A being of flesh and blood.

As though a thing, who for his help

 Must needs possess a wife,

Could cope with those proud rebel hosts,

 Who had angelic life.

And when, by blandishment of Eve,

 That earth-born Adam fell,

He shrieked in triumph, and he cried,

 "A sorry sentinel;

The Maker by His word is bound,

 Escape or cure is none;

He must abandon to his doom,

 And slay His darling son."

ANGEL

And now the threshold, as we traverse it,

Utters aloud its glad responsive chant.

FIFTH CHOIR OF ANGELICALS

Praise to the Holiest in the height,
 And in the depth be praise:
 In all His words most wonderful;
 Most sure in all His ways!

O loving wisdom of our God!
 When all was sin and shame,
 A second Adam to the fight
 And to the rescue came.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood
 Which did in Adam fail,
 Should strive afresh against the foe,
 Should strive and should prevail;

And that a higher gift than grace
 Should flesh and blood refine,
 God's Presence and His very self,
 And Essence all divine.

O generous love! that He who smote
 In man for man the foe,
 The double agony in man
 For man should undergo;

And in the garden secretly,
 And on the cross on high,
 Should teach his brethren and inspire
 To suffer and to die.

6

ANGEL

Thy judgment now is near, for we are come
 Into the veiled presence of our God.

SOUL

I hear the voices that I left on earth.
 It is the voice of friends around thy bed,
 Who say the "Subvenite" with the priest.
 Hither the echoes come; before the Throne
 Stands the great Angel of the Agony,

**The same who strengthened Him, what time He knelt
Lone in the garden shade, bedewed with blood.
That Angel best can plead with Him for all
Tormented souls, the dying and the dead.**

ANGEL OF THE AGONY

**Jesu! by that shuddering dread which fell on Thee;
Jesu! by that cold dismay which sickened Thee;
Jesu! by that pang of heart which thrilled in Thee;
Jesu! by that mount of sins which crippled Thee;
Jesu! by that sense of guilt which stifled Thee;
Jesu! by that innocence which girdled Thee;
Jesu! by that sanctity which reigned in Thee;
Jesu! by that Godhead which was one with Thee;
Jesu! spare these souls which are so dear to Thee,
Who in prison, calm and patient, wait for Thee,
Hasten, Lord, their hour, and bid them come to Thee,
To that glorious Home, where they shall ever gaze on Thee.**

SOUL

I go before my Judge. Ah!...

ANGEL

...Praise to His Name!

**The eager spirit has darted from my hold,
And, with the intemperate energy of love,
Flies to the dear feet of Emmanuel;
But, ere it reach them, the keen sanctity,
Which with its effluence, like a glory, clothes
And circles round the Crucified, has seized,
And scorched, and shrivelled it; and now it lies
Passive and still before the awful Throne.
O happy, suffering soul! for it is safe,
Consumed, yet quickened, by the glance of God.**

SOUL

**Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep,
Told out for me.
There, motionless and happy in my pain,
Lone, not forlorn,--**

**There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.**

**There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,
Which ne'er can cease**

**To throb, and pine, and languish, till possest
Of its Sole Peace.**

There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:--

**Take me away,
That sooner I may rise, and go above,
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.**

7

ANGEL

Now let the golden prison open its gates,
Making sweet music, as each fold revolves
Upon its ready hinge. And ye great powers,
Angels of Purgatory, receive from me
My charge, a precious soul, until the day,
When, from all bond and forfeiture released,
I shall reclaim it for the courts of light.

SOULS IN PURGATORY

- 1. Lord, Thou has been our refuge: in every generation;**
- 2. Before the hills were born, and the world was:**
from age to age Thou art God.
- 3. Bring us not, Lord, very low: for Thou has said,**
Come back again, ye sons of Adam.
- 4. A thousand years before Thine eyes are but as yesterday: and as a watch of the night which is come and gone.**
- 5. The grass springs up in the morning: at evening-tide it shrivels up and dies.**
- 6. So we fail in Thine anger: and in Thy wrath we are troubled.**
- 7. Thou has set our sins in Thy sight: and our round of days in the light of Thy countenance.**
- 8. Come back, O Lord! how long: and be entreated for Thy servants.**
- 9. In Thy morning we shall be filled with Thy mercy:**
we shall rejoice and be in pleasure all our days.
- 10. We shall be glad according to the days of our humiliation: and the years in which we have seen evil.**
- 11. Look, O Lord, upon Thy servants and on Thy work: and direct their children.**
- 12. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and the work of our hands, establish Thou it.**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be:
 world without end. Amen.

ANGEL

**Softly and gently, dearly-ransomed soul,
 In my most loving arms I now enfold thee,
And, o'er the penal waters, as they roll,
 I poise thee, and I lower thee, and hold thee.**

**And carefully I dip thee in the lake,
 And thou, without a sob or a resistance,
Dost through the flood thy rapid passage take,
 Sinking deep, deeper into the dim distance.**

**Angels, to whom the willing task is given,
 Shall tend, and nurse, and lull thee, as thou liest;
And Masses on earth, and prayers in heaven,
 Shall aid thee at the Throne of the Most Highest.**

**Farewell, but not for ever! brother dear,
 Be brave and patient on thy bed of sorrow;
Swiftly shall pass thy night of trial here,
 And I will come and wake thee on the morrow.**