6 Between image and imagination: Tippett's creative process

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Tippett's creative cycle

The music of Michael Tippett has often been described as visionary, an attribution acquired in part from the role imagery played in his creative cycle. Tippett's 'vigour' as a creative artist can be measured by his ability to apprehend 'images of abounding, generous, exuberant beauty' while his progress as an artist is determined by the radiance with which these images are projected in the music.[1] There exist pervasive and archetypal images that appear throughout Tippett's oeuvre or that link two or more compositions. His operas contain a multitude of visual manifestations but of particular interest are the metaphorical (and sometimes programmatic) images that permeate his music for the concert stage, and provide a determining influence on both his creative cycle and the musical development of the specific composition. To appreciate how these guiding images originate and how they are manifest in his compositions first requires examining the general condition predating their appearance, then tracing them through the creative cycle, and finally to their projection in performance.

The struggle all creative artists must endure is selecting the appropriate content for the desired conception. All too often certain *cultural* conditions can predetermine the selection. Tippett subverts these conditions by maintaining that his process of discovery was involuntary, and thus substitutes particular choices with universal alternatives. With his preternatural reach, he mined the Yeatsian 'Great Memory' for images of collective and universal value. As his creative vision gained momentum in the accretion of peripheral metaphors which aim to transcend the singularity of the image that served as catalyst, his creative cycle approached inevitability. If the preconditions of his creative cycle occasionally left traces on the work-as-artefact, his strongest compositions succeed by erasing the subjective tracks of the individual. Tippett's progress as an artist narrates his struggle to achieve a position of depersonalization where access to the mytho-poetic content is a fluid exchange between composer and image, until the composer is completely subsumed by the creative cycle.

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Table 6.1 *The five phases and conditions of Tippett's creative cycle*

Phase	Condition
Precondition-Preconception	absence
Einfall-Experience	acquisition
Image-Accretion (creative process)	accumulation
Transformation-Notation (compositional process)	transmutation
Performance-Reception	projection

The absence, acquisition, accumulation, transmutation and projection of images were conditions in his creative cycle and had a determining influence on the conception, realization and reception of his compositions. Each condition had a significant role to play in his broader creative cycle which included five phases: Precondition-Preconception, *Einfall*-Experience, Image-Accretion (creative process), Transformation-Notation (compositional process) and Performance-Reception. Table 6.1 summarizes how the conditions determine the phases of his creative cycle.

To assess properly how the cycle gets activated, and the influence an image exerted on specific compositions, it becomes necessary to return to a point in Tippett's creative development when the apprehension of the image was nascent but not yet available to the composer's consciousness, and contains – *in potentia* – the details of the composition. Commenting on the works of Wallace Stevens, Harold Bloom writes: 'A poem begins because there is an absence. An image must be given, for a beginning, and so that absence ironically is called a presence.'[2] This applies equally as well to Tippett, whose compositions, with rare exceptions, resonate from a similar and distinctly contemporary ironical absence.

Tippett's appreciation for this concept dates back to his earliest student days, when he was studying Greek and classics at Fettes College in Edinburgh. The curriculum certainly included cosmogonies where he must have encountered the term χάος (chaos), which is related to the verb χαίνω (to yawn, or to gape). In a cosmogonical context χαίνω creates a space where χάος – an absence of order – exists. Tippett believed his role as a creative artist, the demiurge, was to fashion order from this condition: 'I must create order out of chaos.'[3] The absence (of order) necessitated a procreative response, and his metaphorical image-driven music was designed to reverberate in that condition.

The most vivid manifestation of this absence was revealed in *The Mask of Time* (1980–2) in which the first section, entitled 'Presence', is filled metaphorically and literally with 'Sound' and then followed by 'an extended instrumental "sound picture" of dispersal (consequent upon

some supposed explosion "in the beginning") to one of stability (as of the galactic universe, the stars, and the sun). Here, the tradition of Purcell and Haydn seemed relevant: music can create order in the cosmos.'[4]

Two other natural phenomena that exert imagistic influence were 'the frightening but exhilarating sound of the ice breaking on the great northern rivers in the spring' and the experience of actually seeing Halley's comet.[5] But Tippett cautioned against describing 'art as *derived* from nature', where we risk losing 'sight of the one absolute idiosyncrasy of art, that works of art are images of *inner* experience, however apparently representational the mode of expression may be'.[6] These representations, however 'natural' they might be in origin, do not exclude depictions of historical or mythical events that exploit nature as a source for representation in the manner demanded by the concept of the artwork. Such an example exists in *The Vision of Saint Augustine* (1963–5). Tippett explains that:

> In the *Confessions* [St Augustine's autobiographical work], Augustine describes the vision of eternity as completely silent and wordless. A composer sympathetic to Augustine's preoccupation with the nature of time, wishing to describe this silent wordless experience through the sound of singing and instrumental playing, might use some of the techniques [already] discussed [*glossolalia, una voce*, and *jubilus*] – as indeed I did during the period composing the piece.[7]

Certainly, many of Tippett's strongest projections occur in the works just prior to his conceptualization of Augustine's ecstatic vision. Many of these appear in the form of abstruse introductory texts to his compositions, while others were used in the creative cycle and either subsumed into the process or suppressed when it was completed. One of the earliest examples occurs in his String Quartet No. 1 (1934–5, rev. 1943). The creative cycle for the quartet coincided with Tippett's 'deepest, most shattering experience of falling in love' with Wilfred Franks, which he believed resulted in the discovery of his own musical voice.[8] Tippett reflected: 'all that love flowed out in the slow movement . . . an unbroken span of lyrical music in which all four instruments sing ardently from start to finish'.[9] By the time Tippett came to revise the work, in 1943, his relationship with Franks had ended, and this is perhaps the reason why he removed the poem 'Happiness' by Wilfred Owen, which appears as a preface to the manuscript in its earlier version.[10] This was followed by another strong allusion to an even stronger poetic influence: William Blake, whose fusion of image and word provided a perfect acoustic absence for him to fill. Tippett subsequently set *A Song of Liberty* (1937) from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, but the line 'Damn braces, bless relaxes' appears in the

manuscript to the finale of his String Quartet No. 1. The conceptual image can also be applied to his Piano Sonata No. 1 (1936–8, rev. 1942) and informs the creative and interpretive cycles to both compositions. The sonata, and the subsequent works that were composed in its wake, celebrate a 'marriage' of Blake's Urizen and Los, which Tippett identified as the archetype for the creative artist, whose ability to apprehend the image and measure it into a poetic vehicle for others to experience is their primary mandate: 'Let the Human Organs be kept in their perfect Integrity / At will Contracting into Worms, or Expanding into Gods.' Tippett affirmed that 'I cannot escape the special impact of any art which seems to be a product of a marriage' – a process which continued throughout his creative development.[11] Tippett's next work, the Concerto for Double String Orchestra (1938–9), has no such overt association, but its origin and manifestation are clear enough: Orpheus's lyre – an image that 'haunted' his mind, and which represents both the creative artist and the sounds of the modern string orchestra.[12] Then his most exuberant piece to date, and the one most universally appreciated, it is, paradoxically, the genesis of a deliberate conceptual ambivalence that pervaded his creative development. The concerto is a blend of abstraction and humanism, manifested in the two ensembles. These types of dualities were a 'problem of abiding fascination' for the composer, from which he could not escape and returned to again and again.[13] When he did recycle the image, it was in *The Mask of Time*, but the ambivalence had receded and been replaced with 'the triumph of Orpheus's song, its eternal potential'.[14]

Conceptual ambivalence returns in his next work, the *Fantasia on a Theme of Handel* (1939–41), which integrates critical scenes from Samuel Butler's dystopia *Erehwon* – the source of the Handelian quotation in its phantasmogorical transmutation. Except for the opening passage it was completely subsumed into the process and appears only as an interpretive association that gains integrity as it establishes deeper connections between the images of the Erewhonians and the treatment of the theme. All of his previous work culminates in *A Child of Our Time* (1939–41), a product of conscious technique and premonition that delivered a convincing synthesis of tradition and originality, an ideal marriage between abstraction and humanism, and provided him with primary and obsessive images of 'shadow and light' that would return again and again in his creative cycle and occupy him until more powerful and shattering ones replaced them.

The String Quartet No. 2 (1941–2) is the conceptual counterpart to the oratorio, thoroughly absolute and excelling in its ambition without being monumental. A series of incidental pieces and vocal works followed, where the source of the commission or the text determined the image

used throughout. *Boyhood's End* (1943) seems to rise above the rest, as its narrative chronicles a loss of innocence that Tippett was experiencing. A prison sentence must have been as harrowing then as it is now, but somehow Tippett was not too stripped of his dignity, as he managed one last nostalgic look to a more innocent past before he took the strange leap into the magical forest of *The Midsummer Marriage* (1946–52). The strength of those images resonates throughout his oeuvre and is present even in a work as 'late' as the Triple Concerto for Violin, Viola, Cello and Orchestra (1978–9), which uses a quotation of the dawn music found in the opera. The Symphony No. 1 (1944–5) has no avowed programme, but Kemp identifies in it a subtextual commentary on the war.[15] Considering the context of the creative cycle in which it was conceived and composed this seems likely, even if unsubstantiated. Closer study of the divisions of textures and the use of programmatic allusions, most notably a fanfare, seems to confirm this. The works that followed in the wake of the opera, such as the Piano Concerto (1953–5), are so strongly indebted to its imagery and influence they scarcely escape the associations. Neither the composer nor the compositions suffer from this condition. In fact, Tippett was that rare creative artist who could make such strong associations function as another layer to the multiplicities that informed and defined his works in the decade after the war, and the Piano Concerto was the first of such works that appear as offshoots of the opera. Tippett's first attempts at extending the dramatic horizons of his operas began with the concerto. Here, his use of quotation and association establish a dependency that strengthens the shared imagery and anticipates his use of *envoi* in the song cycles *Songs for Achilles* (1961) and *Songs for Dov* (1969–70). As his 'midsummer' progressed into late, turning eventually into autumn, the metaphorical leaves began to fall from the trees in the magical forest. Tippett accepted this condition entirely and, echoing T. S. Eliot, reminds us how 'it is vain to gum back the autumn leaves on to the trees'.[16]

From the exuberance of his first period he moved into a more ironic second where he rejected the strong affirmations of the past as naïve conventions unavailable to him in his present 'barren age'. Instead, he indulged in an ironical ambiguity that allowed him to create music with undeniable transcendental aspirations while simultaneously challenging the general condition that made his compositions necessary expressions of the age. This ambiguity was indicative of a decentralized age which he believed defined the cultural condition. Within this he struggled to 'create a world of sound wherein some, at least, of my generation can find refreshment for the inner life', and 'to try to transfigure the everyday by a touch of the everlasting, born as that always has been, and will be again,

from our desire'.[17] Although he never admitted to reading Adorno, Tippett located this decentralized age within Adorno's *der letzten Stufe der Dialektik von Kultur* as described in his essay 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft'.[18] It was Friedrich Hölderlin who gave both a poetic voice to Tippett's observations and the courage to keep searching for the image to accompany the age:

> When I have pondered on the actuality of Hölderlin's 'und wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit', I am struck ever anew by the tremendous vitality and drive of the image-making faculty in man, which has since Hölderlin sustained, or rather forced, so many poets, painters, composers, to create in *immer dürftigerer Zeit*! – 'in an ever more barren time'. Naturally enough, indeed, I wonder at it, for I suffer this drive, within my limits, myself.[19]

Tippett not only suffered the creative drive to fill the absence with an acoustic presence, he was also acutely aware of the conditions that made image-driven music so urgent for the 'age' in which he created it. The division between his desire and the cultural moment formed a defining part of the Precondition-Preconception:

> I believe we are in an age of paradox, absolutely and entirely. These paradoxes have lived me, without my being able to analyse them or even tell what they are. Still, I've suffered them. Now, it's out of the violence of this division that I have to search for a metaphor, though not of union, I think. You accept it, be this as it is. It's an acceptance of this *and* of that as a reality . . . In any case, it is also, autobiographically, an absolute necessity. I cannot produce the conceptual fertility without suffering constantly every paradoxical division I can make.[20]

Thus, Tippett both perceives and projects the paradoxical, a necessary ingredient to his ironical ambiguity.

From *Einfall*-Experience to Performance-Reception

Tippett remained 'curiously objective about composition', stating: 'I am the person to whom the inspiration comes, but I know I am not its originator.'[21] Of course the multiplicities that resonate throughout Tippett's music dismiss any single source as its originator, but the *materia prima* for a particular composition can often be traced back to an *Einfall*-Experience that provided him with a guiding image. This experience was spontaneous and unwilled, presented as 'a conceptual spark, and a spark of self-fertilization'.[22] The origins of these images are as diverse as his oeuvre and their manifestation takes on many different forms. Some are used quite literally while others have a decidedly conceptual influence. Tippett

acquired these images in many different ways, but they were most commonly assimilated through listening to music. Three such experiences rise above all others: hearing a broadcast of a concerto by Vivaldi (conducted by Amaducci) in which the 'pounding cello and bass C's' are transformed into Tippett's 'own world' in his Symphony No. 2 (1956–7);[23] attending a performance of *Pli selon pli* by Boulez at the 1965 Edinburgh Festival which stimulated the beginning of Symphony No. 3 (1970–2); and listening to Solti rehearse Tippett's own *Byzantium* (1989–90) which activated the creative cycle for *The Rose Lake* (1991–3). The last is certainly the most peculiar but it accompanies a period of self-quotation and uses a wide range of inter-opus references that dominate and direct his creative cycle. He was confident in his ability to transcend the initial *Einfall* and therefore remained remarkably forthcoming about which composers or pieces elicited the experience. An *agon* between the source and the music he composed in the wake of the *Einfall*-Experience might still exist, but certainly not as an anxiety. Rather, it is an assurance of influence that is often exhibited in the very title of the compositions, most notably the *Fantasia on a Theme of Handel*, *Fantasia Concertante on a Theme of Corelli* (1953) and the *Divertimento on 'Sellinger's Round'* (1953–4).

As previously stated, Tippett often found inspiration in nature, such as when he witnessed Le Lac Rose in Senegal while on vacation (which, combined with hearing *Byzantium* in rehearsal with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, gave him the necessary *Einfall*-Experience to envision *The Rose Lake*),[24] and sounds such as the 'peculiar, liquid tone' of a nightingale,

> which makes us respond deep down inside. It may only be for a moment, when some quality in the night and the sound of the bird-song combine to make an especially intense image. At such time we respond. It is as though another world had spoken by some trick of correspondence between the outside and the inside. For the 'thing' inside only works if the proper image is offered from the outside.[25]

Literary stimuli (which often provide a visual image) worked in very much the same manner, and could imprint upon his imagination an image of such overwhelming power; the only way in which to release it was by creative transformation. The characters found in his operas were frequently derived from such sources: Sosostris from Eliot's *The Waste Land* in *The Midsummer Marriage*; King Priam and cast from Homer's *The Iliad* in the eponymous opera; and Mangus, as the modern incarnation of Prospero from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in *The Knot Garden* (1966–9), are three easily identifiable examples. But these were designed to represent archetypes with only loose associations to their literary

originals. Theatrical works can more easily accommodate such projections, but Tippett did not limit this kind of representation to vocal works. Despite the images that pervade his music, and the associations they maintain, they rarely operate as programmes. Part of the 'trick of correspondence' resided in his ability to transform these images into metaphorically charged instrumental music that maintained traces of the original imagery. Two of the most compelling images derived from literature but transformed into 'pure' music are found in *The Vision of Saint Augustine* and *The Blue Guitar* (1982–3). In *The Vision* Tippett needed to depict the instrumental music the angels played, but 'the harps, trumpets, tubas, and cymbals . . . are not those of any modern orchestra'.[26] And thus the timbres he created to represent this music – 'an imperfect echo of the angelic music (in eternity)'[27] were metaphorical: 'much of the extended instrumental coda to the second part of the work was suggested by the persistence of the athletic metaphor in Augustine – running to get away from time, running away from things as they were, running towards things as they will be'.[28] The *Einfall* image for *The Blue Guitar*, a sonata for solo classical guitar, was derived from the words of a poem by Wallace Stevens ('The Man with the Blue Guitar') which Tippett cites in his preface to the score and which invokes images of 'the lion in the lute' and the 'lion locked in the stone'.[29] The lines serve as an introductory text for the first movement, which is aptly titled *Transforming*, and describe the process of turning the poetry into abstract music. Tippett identified with, anticipated even, Stevens's own 'reality-imagination complex'.[30] Both Tippett and Stevens agree that 'For each individual the imagination comes first and the world afterwards. The baby, with its powerful but underdeveloped and imprecise senses and without any experience or understanding of the world, dwells in a fantasy realm. That is transformed only gradually into reality. This mutually enriching interplay between the imagination and reality is the process that creates the self and art.'[31]

In each of the operas, and the works that resonate in association, Tippett creates a messenger character that represents the creative artist: Sosostris in *The Midsummer Marriage*, Hermes in *King Priam* (1958–61), Dov in *The Knot Garden*, Astron in *The Ice Break* (1973–6) and Pelegrin in *New Year* (1986–8). As Tippett explained in an interview: 'I guess all my operas have the one messenger who comes from the gods or whatever it may be, but perhaps comes from another world.'[32] In his essay 'Art and Man' he wrote: 'Hermes . . . speaks for me when he sings: *O divine music, O stream of sound, In which the states of soul, Flow, surfacing and drowning*.'[33] Hermes appears in various guises throughout Tippett's output, but perhaps nowhere more dominantly than as an archetype and originating

resonance for the Concerto for Orchestra (1962–3), which begins with a strong allusion to his 'divine music'.

Although he understood that society's mandate for an artist was to entertain, Tippett's allegiance was to his creative impulse which originated from a world that was primary and obsessive.[34] Despite living in a 'barren age' Tippett wrote:

> I know that my true function within a society which embraces all of us, is to continue an age-old tradition, fundamental to our civilization, which goes back into pre-history and will go forward into the unknown future. This tradition is to create images from the depths of the imagination and to give them form whether visual, intellectual or musical. For it is only through images that the inner world communicates at all. Images of the past, shapes of the future. Images of vigour for a decadent period, images of calm for one too violent. Images of reconciliation for worlds torn by division. And in an age of mediocrity and shattered dreams, images of abounding, generous, exuberant beauty.[35]

Vivid manifestations of this desire often appear veiled in a programme or guiding concept, such as the birth-to-death cycle found in Symphony No. 4 (1976–7) and the String Quartet No. 4 (1977–8), or the epochal cycles found in the Triple Concerto and *The Rose Lake*. But they differ slightly in that they are not strict narratives that dictate the progression of events in the individual compositions, rather they suggest metaphors – 'power', 'radiance' and 'lyric grace' – that associate a universal archetype with a particular resonance or timbre. These timbres typically originate in the operas but the imagery is perpetuated and often amplified in the instrumental works. For example, the 'otherworldly' horns heard at the conclusion of the second movement of Symphony No. 2 achieve a heightened exoticism gained from their appearance as signifiers of the magical forest in *The Midsummer Marriage*.

The image of the creative artist is one of the strongest images projected in his oeuvre and is present in the *dramatis personae* in each of the operas, but it is also present as a conceptual construction, in the form of a dialectic on the origin of the artwork, in each of his instrumental compositions. Tippett confessed that 'the people who've always been the closest to me [are] the professional healers, in a world that needs it. That may be the initial concept. Then you have to structure, and the structure would be the scenario. That's a very long process indeed, because you have to try to put the jigsaw into position with your own imagination.'[36] Tippett's strongest projection of the image of the creative artist was appropriated from Yeats's poem 'High Talk' in which 'the whiffler stalking about on stilts in front of the circus parade is a perfect analogy for the human being trying to remain unswamped by the melee of experience, trying to assert an

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identity; it struck me also as the marvellous image of the artist, trying to put his message across.'[37]

Although the *Einfall* that initiated the creative process was often a singular and memorable experience, the creative cycle gains momentum through an accumulation of images that contribute to a multiplicity of images found at the core of Tippett's compositions. He explained:

> For me plurality is inescapable, simply because, since the First World War, we have been living in an ironic world of fragmentation and self-doubt. Composers, like other creative artists – like all other human beings, for that matter – enter unavoidably into this ironic inheritance. To find those metaphors which are tough enough to set the eternal against that inheritance, to be re-sounded in London or New York or Tokyo, to seep under the Iron Curtain and be secretly taped by young dissidents – that is our task and our challenge.[38]

The spinning coin of originality and tradition constitutes a fundamental polarity in Tippett's music and his reliance on image, forged into a 'poetic vehicle' such as an opera or symphony, mediates these exclusive positions. Tippett used his ironical ambiguity to avoid slipping into an entrenched ideological system of thought that might threaten to overdetermine his creative development, and while the diversity of his output remains problematic for some critics it is a testament to his ability to create ever anew and evidence of his creative confidence and visionary qualities which cut a path directly through the central art of his age.

While the original image of the *Einfall*-Experience occupies a special place in Tippett's creative cycle, it might eventually get subsumed into the broader process and dissolved into an archetype meant to represent a universal condition which the composition symbolizes through particular resonances. The third phase, or Image-Accretion (creative process), naturally followed the second: 'Once the [conceptual] spark exists and the fertilisation is in process, then the accretion of images begins. Now, this accretion can come from dipping into the great memory, if you like. It comes in all sorts of ways. It comes quite subjectively. But that accretive process is fundamental.'[39] It was also prolonged, and although he remained disciplined about it, he allowed it to progress involuntarily:

> I would never say, go into this as a deliberate act in order to discover. My acceptance of, or way down into, the collective unconscious – did I use it, did I know I was doing it, as a sort of calculated technique for producing revelation . . . no . . . [I]t's not possible to say that you go to search for revelation. But if you allow the accretional process to continue to its finality, and follow it, then, with the act of forging and measuring, there's a

> possibility that out of all that comes a work of art which has within it – I would hesitate to use the word revelation – *apprehensions* beyond other kinds of works of art in which we have a feeling that our apprehensions are concerned almost purely with aesthetics.[40]

These apprehensions are often recorded in his sketchbooks, and appear as metaphors that were retrieved by 'dipping your hand into the great memory; not only your own memory, but the archetypal memory, and producing from this a set of metaphors which you hammer into' music.[41] They play a particularly influential role in the formation of the conceptual designs of his large-scale compositions. Tippett explained: 'I have, in a sense, been drawn from time to time to these larger scale works which are multilayered, part of whose process must go on in an accretory process from inside what we call the collective unconscious.'[42] What the creative artist retrieves 'are not yet art. It takes a lifetime's work to mould them into works of art. For this the artist can have no reward but the joy of doing it.'[43] Behind this statement was a deeper awareness of the 'disrelation' between the creative artist and the public.[44] Although Tippett desired to create music that had a profound and lasting impact, 'wherein some, at least, of my generation can find refreshment for the inner life',[45] it must be through the 'activation of the Great Memory: that immense reservoir of the human psyche where images age-old and new boil together in some demoniac cauldron'.[46] Describing the prolonged Image-Accretion phase for Symphony No. 3, he explained that:

> The work took seven years of intermittent consideration and eventual creation. From such tiny noting of a future possibility I had to put down a kind of mnemonic shorthand, so that I could remember what I thought the structure of the whole work might be when I'd only experienced the initial moment of conception . . . a great many disjointed, unstructured notions have been noted in my own kind of verbal shorthand . . . the original spontaneous conception of 'immobile' polarized against 'speedy' (so ridiculously simple, but clearly having the power to initiate the creative process now apparently ready to being) was always the structuring factor.[47]

'Immobile' and 'speedy' were eventually transformed into the strong images 'Arrest' and 'Movement' which replaced the former 'shadow' and 'light'.

Tippett allied himself with other creative artists, especially poets, most notably Eliot and Yeats who used similar structuring factors. In an interview Tippett explained that:

> I'm in a tradition of writers and creators or whatever it is, in which the concepts come first, and then a lot of work and imaginative processes until eventually, when you're ready, *finally* ready you look for the actual notes.

> They are not entirely spontaneous, they then have to be found. The *Anfall* [*sic*] as the Germans would say, then has to happen. That is more difficult. Once there, by what ever means one uses, then as far as I'm concerned, I can proceed from the start to the end. I can even write it down in full score to go to be made into a vocal score and be printed act by act before anything further is done at all. I never have to go back.[48]

The concepts had to be clear and well defined before progressing onto the next phase (Transformation-Notation). He insisted that:

> For some artists – myself included – the concept underlying a piece and its formal proportions have to be settled before the detail of its notes and instrumentation can be finalised. I compose by first developing an overall sense of the length of the work, then of how it will divide itself into sections or movements, then of the kind of texture or instruments or voices that will be performing it. I prefer not to consider the actual notes of the composition until this process – elaborated in preparatory sketchbooks – has gone as far as possible. Finally the notes appear. During the preparatory stages, I find that the effort of articulating my imagination has allowed much of the precise detail to form itself subconsciously, so that I never have to struggle to find it.[49]

As images combine they lose their singularity but contribute to the overall force of the creative cycle. Regardless of their particular resolution, they are used obliquely and provide grist for the archetypes that are projected. These archetypes then suggest the particular metaphors which populate his scores. To complete the process the metaphors are then translated into music, notes and timbres, which retain their associations, and when applied to the compositional process exert a direct influence on the creation and development of the musical material. Once the accumulation of images and formation of concepts took on a critical shape, he entered into the Transformation-Notation (compositional process) stage, where the transmutation of images into music would begin. In a letter to Eric Walter White, written on 26 October 1965, he described a breaking point where 'I expect I shall have to let the music start soon. But . . . that is always v. slow in accumulating.'[50] Relating this to Symphony No. 3, he explained: 'While holding these ideas in my mind over a period of years, allowing them gradually to grow, I come next to a moment when I had nearly everything in my mind except the notes. The symphony so far had a structure and balance; it had ideas about orchestration. Thus I could begin what is usually thought of as the composition. I began at the piano a search for the right sounds. Now I don't find the precise sounds I want *on* the piano, but *through* the piano (this is after all a piece for an orchestra). But I can invent as *though* the orchestral score were in my head all the time.'[51]

Determining a direct correlation between the image and the music is difficult to establish: 'The process of transformation inside the psyche may be an easy one, or it may be exceptionally arduous. What is clear is that once that transformation has taken place, it is difficult to trace it back to its original stimulus.'[52] Even when he provides the image and a conceptual map to retrace the steps, the process of transmutation is anything but routine: 'Now when it gets transformed into music, that is something other. The image goes, disappears into the music.'[53] Thus the images that get projected in the music may not resemble the image of its origin. When the *Einfall*-Experience could be traced back to a particular piece of music the transmutation process was even more critical because 'if this process of transmutation did not occur, then you would not be aware of me as a composer at all . . . The blues in my Third Symphony would revert to being real Bessie Smith; the pounding C's at the start of my Second Symphony might even become Vivaldi again! What I write sometimes borders on quotation.'[54]

According to Tippett the role of the creative artist was to 'transmute the everyday for the sake of poetry'.[55] He reminds us: 'Our English word for poet comes from the old Greek word ποιειν [*poiein*], to make. The composer is in this sense a poet of tones. He makes structures of tones (and silences) which when performed appear as works of musical art substituting independently of composer and performer.'[56] In a letter to William Glock he stressed the importance of using precise imagery to allow for a smoother process of transmutation:

> I am pretty sure that tones are an actual sensual image of the aesthetic, emotional experience, for the use of the composer, just as words are for the poet. Relations between tones may be abstractable a la Mathematics, but even then the choice of the relationships is still that of fashioning a concrete image. Even the 'philosophy' in Dante is made poetry by the constant use of precise images. Aquinas may have written only in concepts, I wouldn't know: but Dante never. To depart very far from this sensuous precision is to end in confusion, both in criticism and in creation. What is needed is more precision in the image: it has been only too fatally easy in music to evade precision by every sort of nostalgic, sentimentality, 'sublimity', socialism, and whatever.[57]

The Transformation-Notation phase was a physical act – finding the notes on the piano and then placing them on the page – and was aided, in part, by the precision of his images and how developed the concepts were (including structure, instrumentation, genre and so on). If the *Einfall*-Experience was spontaneous, and Image-Accretion more cognitive to conceptualize the parameters to match the chosen metaphors, then the last phase, the transmutation and notation of material, was the most

consciously driven. 'As a creative musician, I can designate two general categories of activity which enable me to capture and express this inner flow of experience. One entails spontaneity and accident; the other, a more self-conscious process of testing and measuring.'[58] Spontaneity, distinct from choice, has the capacity to reveal authentic truths, while measurement is more consciously directed. Between the sketchbook and the manuscript the process was largely complete and little evidence of the transmutation was left on the pages. Tippett's manuscripts exhibit a multilayered process that included visions and revisions, but once committed to the page he was confident the image was captured and transmuted. Measurement and testing was almost entirely an internal process associated with and submitted to a physical trial to determine its aesthetic standard. Describing this process he said: 'The movements of the stomach or any other part of the nervous system, in response to the *imagined* music, is the somatic test of aesthetic validity within the combined psychosomatic act of creation – just as sets of gradually acquired intellectual judgments of formal patternings, of taste, of values, are the tests of the conscious mind.'[59]

This process continues in the next and final phase: Performance-Reception, where the images are projected in performance. Acknowledging this, he wrote: 'I have to polarise these two, the irrational psychic instructions and the rational formality, in some such way that it's set down finally as a collection of notes and instructions, but if they are heard in the concert hall, something of this strange transmutatory magical experience happens to you from the sounds you psychically hear.'[60] Tippett understood the importance of performance, and therefore always left something pending: 'the song if you like – that would depend always on performance, which is the real thing that happens in the place with the people . . . I'm trying to say that this is something special for myself. You can attempt to have a kind of non-living music, and various composers feel they can put it onto a perfect disc or something. I have no feeling like that at all. I like the performance, and each performer does it differently.'[61] Despite his engagements as a conductor and interpreter, his interest in the music was almost entirely with its creation: 'I have, in principle, nothing to do with the performance: my interest is simply with *invention*.'[62] Once the composition was complete, fully emancipated from the creative cycle of the individual composer, it held no interest for him: 'from my point of view of a composer, all is finished. When I conduct or even listen to my own works, it is as though the music has completely left me, the creator, and now has a life entirely of its own.'[63] And in an interview from 1996 he maintained his objectivity: 'It's difficult. I'm outside the music I've made, I have no interest in it.'[64]

Tippett's disinterest and objectification culminated in his last composition, *The Rose Lake*. Meirion Bowen described it as 'his most reticent piece, really, he's almost saying he doesn't exist. It reminds me of the Joyce *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* where the highest you aspire to as an artist is to be totally outside, independent of the art itself; you are simply there looking at it from all directions. You are detached from it completely. It's there, the work. You've disappeared. He simply said: "bye, bye, I'm not there, it's just the music".'[65] This was anticipated in *Byzantium*, which Tippett described as 'an artefact: an artistic object in which all the emotion of the artist has disappeared inside'.[66] But the creative artist was still 'ambivalently' present in the composition, most especially in the last lines – 'Those images that yet / Beget fresh images' – which 'fascinated' him, as he had yet to beget his last two compositions, pieces that would fully emancipate him from the creative cycle and thus arrive at the end of Eliot's process of depersonalization.[67] But *The Rose Lake* takes this concept one step further, not by concluding the progress of an artist but rather through a metaphorical depiction of an exit of the artist from the professional stage. In his play *Amadeus* Peter Schaffer depicted a fictional Mozart composing his own requiem, but Tippett might very well be the truest manifestation of this portrayal. Certainly the last images give pause: an onomatopoeic 'plop' into the lake followed by a bar of silence – a return to the metaphorical absence that was the origin of his creative cycle.

Notes

1 Michael Tippett, 'Poets in a Barren Age' in *Moving into Aquarius*, expanded edn (St Albans: Paladin Books, 1974), pp. 155–6.
2 Harold Bloom, *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of our Climate* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 375.
3 Tippett, 'Poets in a Barren Age' in *Moving into Aquarius*, p. 148.
4 Tippett, '*The Mask of Time*' in Meirion Bowen (ed.), *Tippett on Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 248–9.
5 From the Preface to *The Ice Break*, Schott ED 11253 (London: Schott & Co. Ltd., 1977).
6 Tippett, 'Towards the Condition of Music' in *Tippett on Music*, pp. 9–10 (original emphasis).
7 Tippett, 'St Augustine and His Visions' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 235.
8 Tippett, *Those Twentieth Century Blues: An Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1991), p. 58.
9 *Ibid*.
10 British Library, Add. Mss. 61748–9.
11 Tippett, 'Too Many Choices' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 296.
12 *Ibid*.
13 *Ibid*.
14 Tippett, '*The Mask of Time*' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 254.
15 Ian Kemp, *Tippett: The Composer and his Music* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 197.
16 Tippett, 'The Gulf in Our Music', *The Observer*, 14 May 1961, 21.
17 Tippett, 'A Composer's Point of View' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 6.
18 T.W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' ['Cultural Criticism and Society'] (1949) in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Neville Spearman, 1967; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).
19 Tippett, 'Aspects of Belief' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 240.
20 Tippett, *E. William Doty Lectures in Fine Arts*, 2nd series, 1976 (Austin: College of Fine Arts, University of Texas, 1979), pp. 12–13 (original emphasis).
21 *Songs of Experience: Michael Tippett at Eighty Five* [film], dir. Mischa Scorer

(Antelope West Productions and BBC/RM Arts, 1991).
22 Tippett, *Doty Lectures*, p. 10.
23 See Kemp, *Tippett*, p. 493 n. 21.
24 Tippett, 'Archetypes of Concert Music' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 107.
25 Tippett, 'A Composer's Point of View', *ibid*., p. 3.
26 Tippett, 'St Augustine and His Visions', *ibid*., p. 233.
27 British Library, Add. Ms. 72026.
28 Tippett, 'St Augustine and His Visions' in *Tippett on Music*, pp. 235–6.
29 Preface to *The Blue Guitar*, Schott ED 12218 (London: Schott & Co. Ltd., 1985).
30 Robert Rehder, *The Poetry of Wallace Stevens* (London: Macmillian Press Ltd., 1988), p. 150.
31 *Ibid*., p. 133.
32 Richard Dufallo, *Trackings*: *Composers Speak with Richard Dufallo* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 356.
33 Tippett, 'Art and Man' in Meirion Bowen (ed.), *Music of the Angels: Essays and Sketchbooks of Michael Tippett* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1980), p. 29.
34 See Tippett, 'The Artist's Mandate' in *Moving into Aquarius*, pp. 122–9, and *Doty Lectures*, p. 5.
35 Tippett, 'Poets in a Barren Age' in *Moving into Aquarius*, pp. 155–6.
36 Dufallo, *Trackings*, pp. 356–7.
37 Tippett, '*The Mask of Time*' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 248.
38 Tippett, 'The Composer's World' in Keith Spence and Giles Swayne (eds.), *How Music Works* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1981), p. 356.
39 Tippett, *Doty Lectures*, p. 10.
40 *Ibid*. (original emphasis).
41 *Ibid*., p. 4.
42 *Ibid*., p. 11.
43 Tippett, 'The Artist's Mandate' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 293.
44 See Tippett, 'A Composer and his Public' in *Moving into Aquarius*, p. 97.
45 Tippett, 'A Composer's Point of View' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 6.
46 Tippett, 'A Composer and his Public', *ibid*., p. 281.
47 Tippett, 'Feelings of Inner Experience' in Mick Csaky (ed.), *How does it Feel? Exploring the World of your Senses* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), p. 176.
48 Dufallo, *Trackings*, p. 355.
49 Tippett, 'The Composer's World' in Spence and Swayne (eds.), *How Music Works*, p. 348.
50 Tippett, letter to Eric Walter White (26 October 1965) in Thomas Schuttenhelm (ed.), *The Selected Letters of Michael Tippett* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 383.
51 Tippett, 'Feelings of Inner Experience' in Csaky (ed.), *How does it Feel?*, p. 176 (original emphasis).
52 Tippett, 'The Composer's World' in Spence and Swayne (eds.), *How Music Works*, p. 347.
53 '*Einfall*', radio broadcast talk, BBC Radio 3, 20 February 1995.
54 Tippett, 'The Composer's World' in Spence and Swayne (eds.), *How Music Works*, pp. 355–6.
55 Tippett, 'A Composer's Point of View' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 5.
56 Tippett, 'Music and Life' in Bowen (ed.), *Music of the Angels*, p. 30.
57 British Library, MS Mus. 957, fol. 145.
58 Tippett, 'The Composer's World' in Spence and Swayne (eds.), *How Music Works*, p. 347.
59 Tippett, 'Feelings of Inner Experience' in Csaky (ed.), *How does it Feel?*, p. 173.
60 *Ibid*., p. 175.
61 F. David Peat, *Interviews with Composers: Sir Michael Tippett* [online], 1996, www.fdavidpeat.com/interviews/tippett.htm.
62 Tippett, 'The Score' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 259 (original emphasis).
63 Tippett, in *Songs of Experience: Michael Tippett at Eighty Five* (see n. 21 above).
64 Peat, *Interviews with Composers* (see n. 61 above).
65 '*Einfall*' (see n. 53 above).
66 Tippett, 'Archetypes of Concert Music' in *Tippett on Music*, p. 106.
67 *Ibid*., p. 107.