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Nationalisms, Modernisms and Masculinities: Strategies of Displacement in Vaughan Williams's Reading of Walt Whitman

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At the time of his death in 1892, the paradigmatic American poet Walt Whitman was more widely celebrated in Britain than in his own country, having received the vocal support of the likes of Tennyson, William Michael Rossetti, John Addington Symonds, Swinburne (for a time) and Edward Carpenter. For these writers, Whitman's political egalitarianism – expressed through notions of 'manly love' and comradeship – presented a powerful alternative to prevailing Victorian forms of political and social relations. Whitman also provided significant inspiration for British composers at the turn of the twentieth century, with settings by Holst, Delius, Grainger, Scott, Gurney, Bridge, Stanford, Wood, Vaughan Williams and others. Yet while Whitman's transatlantic literary reception has come to be seen as a moment of crystallization in the formation of contemporary notions of homosexuality, his reception among British composers is viewed as having been highly circumscribed, focusing more on the democratic and mystical implications of Whitman's poetry.

This article suggests a different account of Vaughan Williams's reading of Whitman, and explores the implications of this reading for our broader understanding of the relationship between several notions of nationalism, masculinity and modernism. This examination aims to complicate, inter alia, the narrative of rupture associated with the transition to modernism, by demonstrating how the continuity of intellectual concerns across aesthetic, national, and sexual spheres has been obscured by strategies of displacement.

Oliver Neighbour once remarked that Ralph Vaughan Williams described the American poet Walt Whitman as being 'too fond of the smell of his own armpits'.[1] The comment – if indeed Vaughan Williams's wife Ursula reported it accurately to Neighbour – surely referred to the fecundity of Whitman's poetic imagery, which often plays upon bodily metaphors. Even so, it was no doubt a jocular observation, and perhaps somewhat misleading, given Vaughan Williams's life-long devotion to Whitman's poetry. The composer had first become enthralled with Whitman after being handed a copy of *Leaves of Grass* at Cambridge in 1892 by Bertrand Russell, who was at the time experiencing his own sexual awakening via Whitman's text.[2] Vaughan Williams went on to acquire

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[1] Oliver Neighbour, 'The Place of the Eighth among Vaughan Williams's Symphonies', in Alain Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 216, fn. 10.

[2] Indeed, Ray Monk has commented that 'the effect of lines [from Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*] upon Russell – who previously had nearly swooned when his teacher used the word

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Leaves of Grass in several editions and a range of sizes and formats, and it was described as 'his constant companion'.[3] He even took a pocket-sized copy of the text with him during his military service in World War I, jotting down reminders in the book jacket relating to his work running an ammunitions wagon.[4] Forty years (and 20 Whitman settings) later, in the last month of his life, when his biographer and friend Michael Kennedy asked him about Whitman, Vaughan Williams apparently answered that 'I've never got over him, I'm glad to say'.[5]

The notion that Vaughan Williams's enduring fascination with Whitman's poetry may have been tempered by an underlying unease with the poet's corporeal associations – namely, the 'smell of his own armpits' – has become emblematic of Whitman's musical reception in Britain in the early twentieth century more broadly. For example, Byron Adams has noted that the discomfort with

> Whitman's arrant and shameless homoerotic exhibitionism conditioned the response of English composers to his poetry. For Vaughan Williams and his English contemporaries, the poet's fragrant armpits were merely a metonym for other embarrassing parts of his extravagantly sexualized body that they chose to ignore.[6]

According to this type of account (which has also been forwarded by others, as we shall see), Whitman's musical reception in early-twentieth-century Britain was largely confined to the idea of Whitman as sage, or Whitman as democrat – the mystical or political Whitman, carefully separated from the corporeal or sensual Whitman.

This 'musical persona' stood in direct contrast to Whitman's 'literary persona' in the *fin de siècle* English literary sphere, where the reception of his work coincided with a moment of crystallization in popular conceptions of homosexuality. Given the nature and context of Whitman's English literary reception, the idea that Vaughan Williams and his contemporaries would seek to 'deodorize' Whitman might be construed as part of a conscious effort to distance themselves from the effeminate associations of Victorian Aestheticism.

Viewed as a narrative construct, this process of deodorization is complicit in the rhetoric of revolutionary rupture that typifies histories of artistic practice at the

"breast" – was electrifying and served to confirm him in his view of America as "a land of promise for lovers of freedom". Whitman – or "Walt", as Russell always called him, conferring upon him the intimacy of a close friend – became one of his idols. The first place he visited when he went to America three years later was the house in which Whitman had lived. It was a gesture of respect and gratitude for Whitman's having brought out into the open and declared healthy and normal, desires that, by the spring of 1893, had become so strong in Russell that he considered them a threat to his sanity' (Ray Monk, *Bertrand Russell: The Spirit of Solitude, 1872–1921*, vol. 1 (New York: The Free Press, 1996): 53).

[3] Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964): 65.

[4] This list of reminders included '1.) six gun teams/ 800 rounds of amm./Officers kit, wagon/ Water cart to be up here at 6pm; 2.) Lewis guns with am' (qtd. in Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, 128).

[5] Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964; new edition 1980): 100.

[6] Byron Adams, '"No Armpits, Please, We're British": Whitman and English Music, 1884–1936', in Lawrence Kramer, ed., *Walt Whitman and Modern Music* (New York: Garland, 2000): 25–42, here 26.

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turn of the twentieth century, emanating both from the claims of modernist artists themselves, as well as from subsequent efforts to historicize modernism.[7] Yet more recently, there has been an increasing level of self-awareness about the implications of evoking revolutionary rupture when describing the transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth, involving as it does a scholarly practice that partakes of the very same 'pleasures of aggression' pursued by modernists themselves against their immediate predecessors.[8] This new self-awareness has resulted in a renewed focus on tracing continuities across the *fin de siècle* and early modern periods, rather than ruptures, which in turn has placed significant pressure on conventional periodization.

In music, debates about the Romantic/modern divide have tended to pivot on the question of whether pre-war experimentation (during the period from the 1890s–1914) should be characterized as 'late romantic' or as a true break from the past – as 'early modern'.[9] And recent efforts to provide a geographical re-orientation for musical modernism have highlighted continuities as well as ruptures *within* the culture of modernism, uncovering a range of ways of responding to the past, which also effect questions of periodization.[10]

There have been similar reassessments of the periodization of this historical moment in literary studies, evidenced in concerns over what kinds of literature and

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[7] For a discussion of the institutionalization of narratives of rupture, or 'heroic modernism', in histories of modernism, and a presentation of alternative conceptions of modernism's 'badness', see Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Bad Modernisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). This collection is emblematic of 'New Modernist Studies' – an area which has sought to extend the geographical and temporal remit of modernism, as well as relativizing its 'badness' within a richer contextual history of competing agendas.

[8] This phrase was used by Elizabeth Prettejohn in 'From Aestheticism to Modernism, and Back Again', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 19/2 (2006): 1–16, here 2, referring to an observation about current scholarly practice made by David Perkins in *Is Literary History Possible?* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992): 32–3.

[9] For example, while Dahlhaus sought to construct a counter-narrative against a Stravinsky-centred conception of musical modernism, which he viewed as a 'polemical barb at the Schoenberg school, consigning its expressionist phase to the nineteenth century', Richard Taruskin posited that the true 'break' with the traditions of the nineteenth-century did not come until after World War I, with pre-war experimentation being merely an 'intensification' or 'maximalization' of its technical and expressive modes. See Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 334 (original German, 1980) and Richard Taruskin, 'Music in the Early Twentieth Century', *Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 5 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). More recently, scholars such as J.P.E. Harper-Scott have argued that Taruskin's narrative effectively erases modernism, as it focuses on the post-War neoclassical trends as the point of radical break, and is informed by a Cold-War view of musical modernism (J.P.E. Harper-Scott, *The Quilting Points of Musical Modernism: Revolution, Reaction, and William Walton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[10] See for example James Hepokoski, *Sibelius: Symphony No. 5* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); J.P.E. Harper-Scott, *Edward Elgar, Modernist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Daniel M. Grimley, *Carl Nielsen and the Idea of Modernism* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2011). For similar reorientations focused on the uses of certain terms in writings about music – such as 'modern' and 'absolute' – see Charles Edward McGuire, 'Edward Elgar: '"Modern" or "Modernist?" Construction of an Aesthetic Identity in the British Music Press, 1895–1934', *The Musical Quarterly* 91/1–2 (2008): 8–38 and also Mark Evan Bonds, *Absolute Music: the History of an Idea* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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cultural shifts might be occluded by the designation 'Victorian studies', and what the implications of the 'New Modernist Studies' might be for periodization, with plural modernisms encompassing a range of discourses that vary in their aspiration to constantly 'make it new'.[11] Much of the new work has expanded the field in a way that challenges the exceptionalism of its archetypal forms, highlighting continuities in practices and concepts, and revealing a more gradual unfolding of aspirations towards newness. A renewed emphasis on non-temporal categories such as 'decadence', 'cosmopolitanism', 'aestheticism' and 'metamodernism', reflects a similar discomfort with periodization. These concerns are of immediate relevance to the journal in which this article appears of course, to the extent that they are underpinned by the question 'how long was the Long Nineteenth Century?'

Not only are narratives of rupture complicit in modernism's own 'pleasures of aggression', some have argued that they are also complicit in the gendered characterization of the Victorian/modern divide. For example, Elizabeth Prettejohn has suggested that the gendered historiographical implications of Victorianism and modernism encompassed aspects of an artist's self-presentation, sexuality, and level of commitment to (or withdrawal from) political action, in addition to elements of artistic technique and style.[12] Vaughan Williams was clearly acutely aware of these associations, and in holding to a de-eroticized reading of Whitman in the decades after the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895, he was effectively aligning himself with a masculine characterization that carried connotations of permanency and value to contrast against the deliberate posture of artifice that was characteristic of Victorian Aestheticism. The extent to which Vaughan Williams's post-1895 masculine public persona may have involved a conscious re-orientation on his part is open to debate, though there are several sources that give credence to this impression. For example, Kennedy noted that although Vaughan Williams was 'often described as "a jovial farmer" or a country dweller of pronouncedly bucolic character' in the press,

> Such an impression was grossly superficial and was, indeed, almost the exact opposite of the truth. True, he was a big man, heavy of gait and prone to wearing tweed suits of uncertain fit. (Sydney Grew described meeting him in London in 1912 'dressed as for stalking the folk song to its home'). But many an artist is careless about clothes and his untidiness was notable, apparently, even in early childhood. At the end of his life he rejoiced in new suits and ties and was rather amused to be called a dandy by his friends.

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[11] For a sketch of the voluminous literature in this area see Kristin Mahoney, 'The "Transition to Modernism": Recent Research on the Victorian/Modern Divide' *Literature Compass* 10/9 (2013): 716–24. Mahoney points out that these reassessments do not imply that the terms 'Victorian' and 'modernist' are redundant, only that they must be invigorated in different ways to reflect to a greater extent the 'cultural density' of the turn of the century (p. 722). See also Regenia Gagnier, 'Victorian Self-Projection and Critique: Response' *Victorian Studies* 53/3 (2011): 479–84; and Mao and Walkowitz, *Bad Modernisms*.

[12] Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'From Aestheticism to Modernism', 5–6. Prettejohn noted how the artistic techniques associated with Aestheticism have been devalued in explicitly gendered terms: 'The apparent sacrifice of manly originality in favour of passive imitation of historical artistic styles; the frequent preference for smooth or reticent brushwork over the vigorous handling that characterizes much French avant-garde painting; or the fascination with decorative elaboration rather than bold simplification of design. … In the historiography of modern art, Victorian Aestheticism has consistently been configured as the feminized "other" of manly modernism, something that is clearly reflected in its lower status within twentieth-century art-historical canons' (p. 6).

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> Nobody with any power of observation could fail to notice the long, thin, delicate fingers of his smooth hands – the hands of an artist – the finely-cut nose and the beautiful grey eyes, so expressive and alert at some times, so withdrawn and visionary at others.[13]

Kennedy noted how Vaughan Williams was 'a devotee of *Vogue*';[14] Neighbour related from Ursula Vaughan Williams that the composer 'adored silk stockings and high heels' and was 'excellent at feminine shopping';[15] and indeed this image of the man was buttressed by his own letters from the late-1890s, when, for example, he wrote to the two nieces of his then fiancée Adeline Fisher giving a detailed description of the design of his wedding suit.[16]

The question about the level of consciousness with which Vaughan Williams assumed a rough-cut masculine persona has a bearing on our understanding of his reading of Whitman, because it suggests that his efforts to de-eroticize Whitman were part of a *dialogue* with Whitman's Victorian reception, rather than being a *repudiation* of the corporeal elements of Whitman's verse, or even an ignorance thereof, as some have suggested. In turn, it is important to re-visit claims that Whitman was 'deodorized' in the musical sphere against a backdrop of heightened anxiety over homosexuality, given what we now know about the gendered character of early-twentieth century narratives of rupture and their historicization, and the role that this tendency has played in shaping periodization.

It is my contention that the persistence of Whitman's appeal across the late-Victorian literary sphere and the early-twentieth-century musical sphere suggests an underlying continuity of concerns that has been obscured by narratives of rupture and de-eroticization. I will argue that the basis of this underlying continuity can be described in terms of a desire to balance sameness and difference – an aspiration that found expression across a range of intellectual spheres. It was expressed through debates about male–male bonds in the late-nineteenth century literary sphere and about the relationship between nationalism and internationalism in the early-twentieth-century musical sphere; it was also expressed through persistent concerns with the extent to which an artist should remain autonomous from social and political commitment, as we shall see.

In examining this internal continuity, I would like to suggest that in these two reception contexts Whitman functioned as an exemplification of 'displacement' – a critical strategy described by Lydia Goehr as a way of forging a middle way between sameness and difference.[17] I will argue that this kind of displacement relied upon a network of interdependent critical concepts related to the aesthetic, national, ecological and bodily spheres within the discourse of modernism, such

[13] Kennedy, *Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 379–80.

[14] Kennedy, *Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 381.

[15] Oliver Neighbour, 'Ralph, Adeline, and Ursula Vaughan Williams: Some Facts and Speculation (with a Note about Tippett)' *Music & Letters* 89/3 (2008): 337–45, here 341.

[16] 'Dear Gaga and Vuff … Adeline and I think you might like to see some designs for my trousseau. The first pattern represents my wedding suit, the general colour is puce the spots being of a sandy colour the boots to be light blue with red heels. Pattern 2 represents a good working suit for everyday wear being made of good strong material with plaid stockings. (Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Fredegond and Ermengard Maitland, Sept. 1897, qtd. in Vaughan Williams, *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1895–1958*, ed. Hugh Cobbe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 17).

[17] Lydia Goehr, *Elective Affinities: Musical Essays on the History of Aesthetic Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). Strategies of displacement are further discussed below.

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that whereas in the Victorian literary context Whitman generated an alternative model of male–male bonds, in the early-twentieth-century English musical context his work generated an alternative model of national affiliation – essentially a form of 'rooted' cosmopolitanism that was politically committed and attracted masculine connotations. Both models developed from Whitman's essential re-imagining of the relationship between self and other, discussed below. In the context of modernism, this relationship can be seen as synonymous with the question of how art should relate to its context – a question that is commonly understood, when speaking of modernism, as the debate between artistic autonomy and 'commitment'. Other ways of describing this debate have referred to the relationship between the part and the whole – where autonomy refers to something that lies apart, remains aloof, and is *different* (such as art remaining aloof from everyday concerns), and commitment refers to the whole, or *sameness* (such as art that participates actively in its historical context).

It will become apparent that displacement, as embodied by Whitman and taken up by composers such as Vaughan Williams, was not designed to be a strategy of mystification – it was not, I believe, an act of repression or defence against the salacious implications of a cosmopolitan modernism, or a dandified Victorian Aestheticism. Rather, I would like to suggest that Whitman acted as a bridge between what are normally considered as oppositional positions of autonomy and commitment. So just as he was associated with the galvanization of apolitical and politically engaged notions of manly love for Victorian literary figures, as we shall see, so too did he facilitate the development of a nuanced relationship between the part (the individual, or national) and the whole (the communal, or global) for musical figures in the early twentieth century.

After making a closer examination of how Whitman's essential reimagining of sameness and difference was manifest in the literary and musical spheres respectively, I will then outline how strategies of displacement have been seen to operate in relation to music and modernity, and to Whitman. Finally, I will investigate the manifestation of these strategies in the context of Whitman's musical reception, and provide a closer reading of Vaughan Williams's interaction with Whitman's poetry and thinking.

PART I: Literary and Musical Whitmans

Outlining the Problem

In construing the attempted de-eroticization of Whitman by English composers, it is important to note that it was not necessarily the corporeal aspects of Whitman's verse – nor even its acquired association with homosexuality – against which they were reacting. Rather, they sought distance from effeminacy, or a mode of self-stylization that had become associated with decadence, cosmopolitanism, and an absence of political commitment, and only latterly with a particular model of homosexuality.

Eve Sedgwick has described Whitman as an 'English (far more than as an American) prophet of sexual politics for the nineteenth century',[18] arguing that debates over the merits of Whitman's poetry acted as forums for debates about

[18] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985): 204.

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male–male relationships in England at the time. She highlighted, for example, how '*Leaves of Grass* operated most characteristically as a conduit from one man to another of feelings that had in many cases, been private or inchoate',[19] and even how 'photographs of Whitman, gifts of Whitman's books, specimens of his handwriting, news of Whitman, [and] admiring references to "Whitman" … seemed to have functioned as badges of homosexual recognition', acting as a 'currency of a new community that saw itself as created in Whitman's image'.[20] In a similar vein, Richard Dellamora described how Victorian aesthetes were accused of using Whitman as 'a code word for illicit desire', and how his received persona in England functioned as 'signifier of male-male desire in a new form of sexual-aesthetic discourse'.[21]

According to Sedgwick, the transnational differential was the key to the special role that Whitman's poetry assumed across the Atlantic, because expressions of homosexual culture in England were constructed along class lines.[22] On the one hand, there was an aristocratic, feminized, cosmopolitan, apolitical model that drew inspiration from 'Catholic Europe'. And on the other, male bonds among the 'educated middle classes' eschewed associations with femininity, casting the absence of women as a virilizing force, and one that promoted manly brotherhood as an exemplar of democratic egalitarianism, drawing inspiration from classical Sparta and Athens.[23] It is important to note, for our purposes, that this latter version of manly bonds was explicitly about political participation, in contrast to the apolitical, feminized model.

In Sedgwick's account, the development of middle-class manly bonds was substantially facilitated by the reception of Whitman by English writers such as John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter. Through these writers, this model of interaction was extended well beyond homosexual relations towards broader notions of egalitarianism, democracy and human brotherhood that underpinned Whitman's eroticized political philosophy. Carpenter wrote for example that 'Eros is the great leveler [that] unites in the closest affection the most estranged ranks of society',[24] reflecting the indivisibility of the political and sexual ideologies at play here. This middle-class conception of male bonds – expressed through masculine virility, strong political agency and democratic ideals – was ultimately subverted by the moral panic surrounding the trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895. At this critical moment, the many nuanced renderings of a Whitman-inspired male comradeship forged in the service of democracy, were flattened out into the more singular, apolitical, aristocratic model, for which Wilde became an icon, and which would become an enduring homosexual stereotype.

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19 Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 205–6.

20 Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 206.

21 Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990): 87.

22 Richard Cavell and Peter Dickinson have further extended Sedgwick's notion of 'homosociality' beyond class, along geographical parameters, describing Whitman's reception in England as 'a classic instance of 'trans-Atlantic homosociality', and arguing that the histories of sexuality and nationalism are interconnected. See Richard Cavell and Peter Dickinson, 'Bucke, Whitman, and the Cross-Border Homosocial', *American Review of Canadian Studies* 26/3 (1996): 425–48, here 426.

23 Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 206–7.

24 Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex* (London: S. Sonnenschein, 1909): 114, qtd. in Cavell and Dickinson, 'Bucke, Whitman, and the Cross-Border Homosocial', 426–7.

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> The middle-class-oriented but ideologically 'democratic', virilizing, classicizing, idealistic, self-styled political version of male homosexuality, which [Symonds and Carpenter] in their tendentiously different ways embodied and sought to publicize and legitimate, seems with the protracted public enactment of the trials to have lost its consensus and its moment. For the first time in England, homosexual style – and homophobic style – instead of being stratified and specified and kept secret along lines of class, became … a household word – the word 'Oscar Wilde'.[25]

In this light, the purported attempts by English composers in the early twentieth century to simply ignore the homoerotic implications of Whitman's poetry appear as a defensive measure against accusations of effeminacy, which were already heightened by virtue of their association with the musical profession. And indeed the success of their attempts in this direction are reflected in the critical response of the time. In the 1870s, for example, music critics were calling Whitman the 'wild word-monger of the West, who … preaches the supremacy of carnality: the flesh he deifies above the spirit, the life, above him who lives it'.[26] Yet by the turn of the century (which was the highpoint of Whitman settings by English composers), the associations were quite different. The critical response to Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony*, in which he set fragments of Whitman's poetry, gives an indication of the extent of this change, one critic noting that

> When we think of music in association with Walt Whitman we imagine something of the sustained spirituality, of the fleshless grandeur, of Palestrina – an exaltation of senses pouring out in music of a grand, yet simple, continuity. Whitman is the purest spirit among poets.[27]

It seems almost unfathomable that after acting as such a powerful symbol of male–male relations in the Victorian literary sphere, and being thereby implicated in the moral controversies of the 1890s, Whitman's poetry could come out of the other side of the Wilde trials somehow purified for English composers, so that they were able to simply ignore this key feature of Whitman's politics. That Whitman could go from being described as the 'supremacy of carnality' to being considered the apotheosis of 'fleshless grandeur' in the musical sphere reflects a truly astounding shift that certainly deserves the scholarly attention it has already received.

Perhaps even more significant (though less surprising), has been the manifest willingness of scholars to reinforce the sense of historical rupture between Victorian culture and modernism that this shift seems so ably to demonstrate. In relation to musical culture, this tendency can be seen in the perception that after 1895, English composers responded to the popular link between homosexuality and effeminacy, political withdrawal, cosmopolitanism and aristocratic sensibilities by consciously cultivating masculine personae, nationalist sympathies, a democratic interest in amateur music-making, and a preference for fresh air and physical exercise:

> [Wilde's] fate signaled the end of the aestheticism of the pre-Raphaelites and the delectable shame celebrated by the English Decadents. Banished virtually overnight

25 Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 216–17.

26 Anonymous, 'The Advent of the Uncouth' *The Orchestra* 18 (1872): 378–9, here 378. The musical impact of Whitman's 'decadence', according to this critic, manifest in opera composition as the rejection of melody and the democratic pre-eminence of chorus singers above soloists, both of which s/he associated with Wagner.

27 'Dr. R. Vaughan Williams' *The Musical Herald* 781 (1913): 99–103, here 99.

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> were witty paradoxes, elegant waistcoats, green carnations, voluptuous twilights, scented brocades, reference to Baudelaire, muted homoeroticism, and the perfervid celebration of Wagnerian erotic excesses. In their place, as signifiers of the modern, came pastoral landscapes flooded with daylight, rough tweeds, tramps over steep downs and through wet fields, ruddy manliness, folksongs, and Elizabethan madrigals.[28]

Positioning the reading of Whitman directly within this narrative, Adams wrote that 'for fifty years, English composers found in Whitman a bracing aesthetic alternative to the decadence and introspection of much late Victorian poetry'.[29] What Adams is describing with this narrative is a type of modernism that eschewed the aesthetic and ethical *topoi* of the continental musical avant-garde, which subsequently (and not without irony) has been given canonic status as a part of the post-war institutionalization of modernism. By this account, the Wilde trials served as a flashpoint in the emergence of a new, hearty British musical modernism constructed in opposition to its continentally inspired literary predecessor. I have argued elsewhere that this kind of historiographical narrative marginalizes certain British musical figures who were involved in lifestyle experimentation that did not conform to a modernist paradigm that was 'flooded with daylight', but who nevertheless remained politically engaged.[30] Still, the demarcation of 'British musical modernism' as different from, but equally authentic as, continental modernisms, represents a worthy desire to pluralize our understanding of musical modernism at the turn of the century more generally.

Whitman's musical reception however, presents us with a paradox. In one sense, accounts that claim that English composers were able to celebrate Whitman while ignoring the erotic basis of his politics because of a fundamental rupture in artistic culture, seem to be emblematic of this broader historiographical agenda. And despite sensitive scholarly acknowledgements of the complexities and nuances involved, this narrative of rupture still tends to rely upon binary distinctions between the effeminate and the masculine, the national and the cosmopolitan, between high and low brow, and between the politically engaged and disengaged. Yet the fact that Whitman survived this radical shift at all – acting as a powerful cultural signifier across Victorian and 'modernist' contexts alike – hints at an underlying continuity that seems to throw into question the narrative of rupture upon which our understanding of musical modernism (and Whitman's reception) is predicated, as mentioned above.

Specifically, one might ask how the turn towards 'ruddy manliness' can be viewed as a violent repudiation of Victorian Aestheticism, when it was exactly Whitman's bracing masculinity that socialist-aesthetes such as Carpenter celebrated. And indeed the same could be said of other features of modernism ascribed to the British musical sphere, including the turn towards nature and landscape, physical robustness, the interest in amateur and folk cultures, expressive directness, and democratic nationalism – these were all features that recommended Whitman to late-nineteenth-century literary figures for the same reasons that his poetry was taken up so fervently by English composers in the early twentieth century. Whitman was always the very antithesis of the feminine, apolitical, aristocratic, cosmopolitan model of

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[28] Byron Adams, 'Foreword' *Music Quarterly*, Special Issue on 'British Modernism' 91.1–2 (2008): 1–7, here 4.

[29] Adams, '"No Armpits, Please"', 39.

[30] Sarah Collins, 'Practices of Aesthetic Self-Cultivation: British Composer-Critics of the "Doomed Generation"' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 138/1 (2013): 85–128.

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homosexuality emblemized by Wilde.[31] Yet Whitman's de-eroticized reading among English composers has been viewed as emblematic of the broader repudiation of Aestheticism. The tendency to equate Whitman's open erotic expression with decadence (paving the way to view Whitman's de-eroticized reading as 'fresh air' modernist alternative) can be seen in a further comment from the review quoted above, which associates Whitman with the

> missionary of the new ideas [who] set before you a coffin, a bunch of blackberries, a boiled lobster, and a rigid sunset, and pointing out to you that the hue of the coffin matches the colour of the blackberries, and that the redness of the sunset is balanced by the redness of the lobster, [and] notifies that art is satisfied, and demands your admiration.[32]

The ambiguous conflation of sensuality, eroticism, homoeroticism and decadence, embodied in this quote, and also in some accounts of Vaughan Williams's reading of Whitman, reflects a persistent unwillingness to acknowledge the multifarious models of masculinity that Whitman's poetry helped to propagate, and this kind of reductionism has also seeped into the analysis of the role of nationalism in British modernism.

In seeking to challenge the understanding of modernism as rupture, and to complicate the false binaries that often attend this understanding, it behoves me to first highlight that it is not my intention to create a reductionist straw man out of some very excellent recent scholarship. To wit, it is certainly true that Whitman's role in the musical culture of early-twentieth-century England was enabled by a shift in thematic emphasis attributed to his work, as suggested by Adams and others discussed below. The striking absence of erotic connotation in Whitman settings is clearly apparent to anyone familiar with the writings in the major music periodicals of the time. Equally, the significant impact of the Wilde trials is undoubtedly crucial to our understanding of the shift in English musical culture at the turn of the twentieth century towards a more nationalist, hetero-normative ethos. In addition, many of the scholars involved in the renewed interpretation of Vaughan Williams's works over the last two decades have been instrumental in mitigating the tendency to view this shift in overly monolithic terms. Vaughan Williams may still represent to many the paradigmatic 'English' composer, due to his musical pastoralism, folk-song collecting, writings on the importance of national musical traditions, his view of music as a voice of the people and his institutional affiliations.[33] However recent scholarship has successfully problematized this reductionist historical positioning by highlighting the many contradictions in Vaughan Williams's life and work – for example, he was a staunch nationalist, but yet supported European Federation; he was an atheist, but set to music many biblical texts; he advocated national institutions of musical education so that British composers could be trained on native soil, and for

[31] Indeed, his antithetical aesthetics was immediately apparent even from the outward appearance of the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*, which omitted Whitman's name from the title page, instead just including a photograph of him dressed in workers' clothing, set between a green cover jacket embossed with earthy leaves and vines.

[32] Anonymous, 'The Advent of the Uncouth', 379.

[33] Indeed, Alain Frogley, in his 1996 collection of essays on Vaughan Williams, recognizes immediately that 'mention the name Ralph Vaughan and to most people's mind come immediately three words English, pastoral, and folksong' ('Introduction', in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, 1).

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nationalism in music, but yet he himself was reasonably widely travelled and eclectic in his associations and musical sympathies.

Neither is it the case that Whitman's reception in English literary circles was anywhere near as consistently thematic as Sedgwick and Dellamora's focus suggests. Indeed, after a heroic 200-page examination of the English literary reception of Whitman, Harold Blodgett finds himself asking

> Considering the English story as a whole, can one find in this intricate crazy-quilt of repudiation, indifference, and affirmation, any significant pattern which gives character to the whole fabric? It is hard to do so. [Edmond] Gosse was right in observing that each man saw himself reflected in *Leaves of Grass*. As the British reader turned the pages, he was confronted, according to his temperament, by Whitman the magnetic lover and glorifier of life, Whitman the arch-type of the American democrat, Whitman the great prophet of the world's hope, Whitman the innovating artist, or Whitman the vulgar and ignorant charlatan.
>
> But in the main Whitman challenged English attention as a crusader, a rebel against the *status quo*, who furnished to a few ardent minds a means for both social and personal improvement. It was as a moralist and a prophet rather than as an artist that he threw the gauntlet to the English, and the English recruits marched to his banner because they found in *Leaves of Grass* disturbing intimations of a new social dispensation, a renovated humanity, deriving its vitality from the transcendent personal magnetism that the poet was said to exemplify in his own life.[34]

While Blodgett's characterization gives a sense of the complications at hand, I will suggest that there is substantially more that can be derived from Whitman's various receptions than a generalized sensibility towards rebellion, or a mirror to the reader's personal temperament.

Whitman's cultural function as a purveyor of the interdependence of sameness and difference held a particular resonance in turn-of-the-century Britain in a manner that provides a crucial key to our understanding of the artistic responses of the period. Indeed, there seems to be a latent recognition of the centrality of this principle that haunts writings in this area. For example, Alain Frogley has perceptively referred to the 'confused ideological landscape of Britain's long slide from international power' which manifest in a combination of 'a terror of insularity' and 'unchecked xenophobia',[35] and Adams similarly noted how Vaughan Williams, like Whitman, moved 'in a rhetorical space which is poised between the national and the universal'.[36] In a recent influential study, Jed Esty offered a detailed historical account of this aspect of British literary modernism, viewing it as an effect of the 'hollowing out' of national culture that comes with an imperialist agenda that was predicated on principles of humanist universalism:

> English culture does not engender a radical modernism because it is *already* universalist and metacultural. The Arnoldian absence of national essence makes

[34] Harold Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1934; reissued NY: Russell, 1973): 216–17.

[35] Alain Frogley, 'Constructing Englishness in Music: National Character and The Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams' in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, 1–22, here 22.

[36] Byron Adams, 'Scripture, Church, and Culture: Biblical Texts in the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams' in Frogley ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, 99–117, here 105.

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> the ground unripe for the kind of dramatic clash between the national and the international that marks high modernist aesthetics.[37]

In response to the special case of Britain, then, Esty suggests a conception of modernism as an 'equipoise between universalist and localist claims – an equipoise that corresponds to the simultaneously expanding and contracting quality of imperialism in the period from 1890 to 1930'.[38] The recognition of this defining feature of British modernism is yet to be fully tested in relation to musical culture, though what follows is intended to prepare the ground for a closer examination into the manifestation of this distinctive principle in the British musical sphere of the turn of the century. Rather than being considered solely as a 'code-word for illicit desire' in the Victorian literary sphere, and as an emblem of national or cosmic union in the musical sphere, then, Whitman should be considered in both instances as an advocate of the interdependence of difference and sameness – difference being associated with withdrawal and independence, and sameness indicating participation and communal identification. Both Carpenter and Symonds's 'middle-class homosocial' and Vaughan Williams's staunch commitment to nationalism within the idea of Europe can be understood in these terms, with Whitman providing the model for both versions of maintaining the double of sameness and difference.

The Indivisibility of Eroticized Politics

It is a well-known historical curiosity that at the time of his death in 1892, Whitman was more widely celebrated in Britain than in his own country. Whitman's transatlantic reputation enjoyed the ardent and vocal support of the likes of Swinburne, Tennyson, William Michael Rossetti, John Addington Symonds and Edward Carpenter. Blodgett ventured an assessment of this apparent 'grace of distance':

> The Americans, conscious of the common criticism of their literary crudity and bumptiousness, wished to be considered as having grown too civilized to be deluded by Whitman's barbarism. The English, tired of a second-rate American literature superficially polished by a patterning after Old World models, hailed Whitman's originality as the one refreshing aspect of the American output.[39]

Blodgett hints here at the critical context for Whitman's dissemination within the history of Anglo-American literary relations that lends the accounts of this dissemination a historical curiosity all their own – a claim that is also true of Whitman's musical reception, as we shall see. Blodgett describes how British writers (and to an extent, Whitman himself) capitalized upon perceptions of American philistinism in order to encourage a positive perception of radical stylistic innovation and lifestyle experimentation in an age increasingly preoccupied by notions of progress and a burgeoning modernism. While not discounting Whitman's standing in Britain in the late-nineteenth century, Blodgett notes, for example, that 'in general, the English reading public took to Whitman no

[37] Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press): 35. (original emphasis)

[38] Esty, *A Shrinking Island*, 35.

[39] Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, Preface.

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more warmly than did his own countrymen',[40] summing up the initial reception of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in Britain with Charles Kingsley's description of it as 'the production of a coarse, sensual mind'.[41]

A decade after its first release in America, William Michael Rossetti set about sanitizing Whitman's verse for a British readership, producing the first British edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1868. In light of this transatlantic expurgation, Blodgett and others have forwarded a counter-narrative to the progressive claims of the British literary avant-garde with regard to the success of Whitman's poetry in Britain, suggesting instead that in any case, 'many English men met Whitman only after he had been gone over by Rossetti, his shirt buttoned and his hat set at a decent angle'.[42] According to this counter-narrative then, the British acceptance of Whitman was less due to their enlightened progressiveness, and more to the careful management of Victorian moral sensibilities.

Since Blodgett's 1934 casting of Whitman's reception in England as 'a remarkable episode in Anglo-American literary history',[43] the story of how Whitman was read by nineteenth-century British literary figures has taken on a life of its own. In particular, this story has made some striking appearances in late-twentieth-century cultural criticism, in a way that should in turn inform our view of Whitman's reading among British musical figures. Crucially, Sedgwick observed that this story does not concern 'Whitman himself but the ideological uses made of his reticence'.[44]

Sedgwick claimed that Whitman's reception in late-nineteenth-century England informed the development of a masculine, middle-class model of homosexuality, as we have seen. She also discerned an internal division within this model, represented in the respective readings of Whitman by Symonds and Carpenter. For Sedgwick, Symonds's view of Whitmanian male comradeship as an ideal to promote democracy was undermined by the writer's inability to escape his upper-middle-class heritage and truly identify with those whom he described as inhabiting 'real life' as opposed to his own 'thought-world'.[45] Symonds's vision of egalitarianism failed to include women, and was far from genuinely radical, as Sedgwick noted: 'Symonds' imagined democracy, firmly based as it was on noblesse oblige and individual pastoralism and condescension, was not structurally threatening to the class system as he experienced it'.[46]

Despite being similarly adverse towards the feminine – both as embodied in women, and as practised by effeminate males – Edward Carpenter actively campaigned for feminist causes alongside his other egalitarian agendas. Also, Carpenter's lifestyle – which ultimately saw him reject his sources of privilege, including bonds to city, education and religion – genuinely reflected his political commitments. Although neither of these Whitman-inspired alternative models of homosexuality survived the cultural impact of the Wilde trials, due in part to the ill-timed publication of their key texts, we can see in them

[40] Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, 7.
[41] Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, 7.
[42] Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, 9.
[43] Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, Preface.
[44] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 202. This idea is also echoed by Cavell and Dickenson, where they refer to Whitman as an 'equally great artifact', as much as a poet ('Bucke, Whitman, and the Cross-Border Homosocial', 427).
[45] Qtd.in Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 210.
[46] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 210.

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the kernel of a direct interconnection of egalitarian sexual relations and broader democratic notions.

In a similar manner, Richard Dellamora's claim that Whitman could be seen as a 'signifier of male-male desire in a new form of sexual-aesthetic discourse' in Victorian literary circles, was developed through an examination of the correspondence of Swinburne, Hopkins and Symonds.[47] Although Dellamora criticized Sedgwick's typology of Victorian homosexuality in terms of class stratification as well as her 'female-centered' approach to masculine desire, he latently supported and further developed her positioning of Whitman as a conspicuous vehicle for debates about male–male relationships in late-nineteenth-century Britain. He observed the anxious ambivalence with which Whitman was discussed by the three correspondents, noting how they vacillated between emancipatory self-recognition on the one hand, and defensive disavowal on the other.

Swinburne's turn against Whitman is of particular interest for our purposes here. Dellamora noted how Swinburne had read the first edition of *Leaves of Grass* only a year after it was initially published, in 1856, together with William Michael Rossetti. Swinburne was particularly entranced by Whitman's description of the sea, and referring to the poem 'A Voice from the Sea' (which appeared in the later 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*), wrote to a friend and fellow Whitmanian, Moncure Conway, that 'I knew that the man who had spoken as he has of the sea must be a fellow seabird with me; and I would give something to have a dip in the rough water with him'.[48] And in a later passage Swinburne makes an explicit conceptual link between this feeling for the sea in terms of homoerotic desire and communion (or synthesis), and an identification with other marginalized groups, namely workers: 'since I was thirteen I have always got on with sailors and fishermen and such like men, so from what you say I judge and hope I must have some points in common with Walt Whitman'.[49] In other forums, Swinburne further develops this point of commonality between sexual and political emancipation, as stridently emblemized by Whitman, but by 1871 the English poet began to distance himself from the corporeal aspects of Whitman's mandate. Significantly, Dellamora noted that in Swinburne's 'To Walt Whitman in America' he

> nearly ignores the awareness of sexual difference that had provoked Whitman to identify against the dominant culture and with members of such marginal groups as men who enjoyed sexual and emotional ties with other men, female prostitutes, women generally, manual workers, and blacks. Instead Swinburne conflates the 'democratic' poet … with an abstract 'Democracy'.[50]

Swinburne's retreat into a de-eroticized account of Whitman's democratic ideal of manly comradeship signalled the beginning of a more decisive disavowal, which Dellamora attributes to his panicked response to Robert Buchanan's essay, 'The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti', which included various slurs upon Swinburne.[51]

For the purposes of the ensuing discussion of the function of Whitman for English composers in the decades that followed, it is crucial to note here that the

[47] Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 87.
[48] Qtd. in Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 90.
[49] Qtd. in Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 90.
[50] Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 91.
[51] The essay first appeared in *The Contemporary Review* 18 (August–November, 1871).

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mechanism for Swinburne's disavowal was de-eroticization. In the face of moral panic, Swinburne sought to cast Whitman as a code-word for democracy, as it were, rather than of 'illicit desire', but in so doing he effectively repudiated the coalition of sexual and political/class freedom, as well as his avowed identification with other marginalized groups. Unfortunately for Swinburne, Whitman's aestheticization of democratic politics cannot be divorced from his simultaneous eroticization of aesthetic discourse. As Dellamora succinctly put it, 'to de-eroticize Whitman is also to depoliticize him, since the awareness of sexual difference is basic to his politics'.[52] This remains so, even when, after 1867 Whitman himself began to decrease explicit references to physicality in his verse, in the face of adverse critical reaction. It is not that Whitman's vision of democracy is built upon or contingent upon his views on sexuality, but rather that the two are entirely enmeshed, and their separation is logically impossible. Sedgwick also alluded to this point when she remarked that the concretization of the disengaged, aristocratic, feminized model of homosexuality in the wake of the Wilde trials was not only a death knell for the Uranian model that involved promoting feminist and other minority causes, but also 'went with a loss of interest in, or hope for political struggle in general'.[53]

The inseparability of Whitman's democratic and homoerotic vision is founded once again upon his understanding of the codependence of difference and sameness. For Whitman, democracy was defined by a community of individuals engaged in self-rule. Hierarchical structures of state and judiciary were to be replaced by brotherly bonds of 'adhesive love', that ensured individual freedoms were contingent upon the freedom of the masses. This quality of dependent independence, as it were, was notably captured in the opening lines of Whitman's 'Song of Myself',

> I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you […]
> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
> You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

In this way, male–male relationships were not only an analogy for a political ideal, but they functioned as the mechanism for the realization of that ideal.

Whitman's vision of a democracy in terms of 'adhesive love' has been extended by Christopher Newfield to show how contemporary homophobia may be grounded in a 'phobia about [political] equality'.[54] Newfield has argued that the regulation of homosexual identity historically was intertwined with bourgeois anxieties about the threats of free sociability and interdependence to neo-liberal ideals of individual competition. By highlighting the parallel emergence of ideas about the psychology of the crowd (including in Gustave Le Bon's *Psychologie des foules*, 1895) and the modern use of the term 'homosexual' towards the end of the nineteenth century, Newfield has shown how an equating of crowd consciousness with erotic compulsion and sexual inversion conditioned a middle-class fear of radical egalitarianism and male–male relationships alike – both being perceived as

[52] Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, 91.
[53] Sedgwick, *Between Men*, 217.
[54] Christopher Newfield, 'Democracy and Male Homoeroticism' *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 6/2 (1993): 29–62, here 30.

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threats to institutional structures of state and market. At is core, this fear was predicated upon an unacknowledged assumption about how individuals relate to each other without their autonomy being undermined. Newfield notes how

> Whitman's utopianism redefines the European male friendship tradition. His idea is *not* to establish a singular relation to the Other who, as Derrida argues, is then shown to correspond to 'the law' as established by 'a tribunal, a jury, some agency (instance) authorized to represent the Other legitimately, in the form of a moral, legal, or political community'. The other (in Whitman's ideal) has no being independently of the living force of reciprocal adhesion, and hence its law consists of nothing more than the particular adhesion itself. For Whitman, the psychology of the crowd is the psychology of adhesion. Mass democracy can reject pre-established, unequal, or supervisory law once it has lived through the mutually created bonds and freedoms typified by friendly adhesion.[55]

Whitman's democratic ideal, then, is constructed on a radical reconfiguration of the conventional binary relationship between self and other – a reimagining that finds expression in 'manly love', as well as his conception of national union. This new reconfiguration continued to hold resonance in the fashioning of a specifically British musical response to the conditions of modernism.

Although British writers had been reading Whitman since at least 1856 (only one year after the publication of the first edition of *The Leaves of Grass* in America), the highpoint of musical settings of Whitman's poetry by British composers did not occur until the turn of the century.[56] During this highpoint, Whitman's verse was set by composers such as Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Frederick Delius, Cyril Scott, Percy Grainger, Rutland Boughton, Frank Bridge, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Ivor Gurney, Charles Villiers Stanford, Charles Wood, Arthur Bliss, Hamilton Harty and W.H. Bell, among others.

In addressing the question of the delayed musical response to Whitman's poetry beyond America, Lawrence Kramer observed that art-song traditions in Europe were predominantly nationalist projects; and within America, he was not set because his poetry was too brazen and uncouth for an art-music scene seeking after gentility.[57] By the time musical settings did begin to appear, of course, not only had the political and sexual landscape shifted dramatically within a burgeoning modernism, but Whitman's verse itself had undergone a degree of sanitization. The process of obscuring the overt homoeroticism of the texts was initiated both by Whitman himself, in response to critical reception, and by devotees such as Rossetti, in the English editions of *Leaves of Grass*, as noted above. Still, the English editions of Whitman's work were expurgations from the outset, even as read by Victorian literary figures, yet while his transatlantic reception in literary circles has been cast as a crucial moment in the history of sexual politics, Whitman's musical reception in England has been made to appear curiously sex-less, as it were.

The circumscribed tenor of these accounts can be seen from early on. For example, in an article on 'Vaughan Williams's Choice of Words' in 1938, William Kimmel wrote that what drew Vaughan Williams to Whitman was

[55] Newfield, 'Democracy and Male Homoeroticism', 43, quoting from Derrida 'The Politics of Friendship', *The Journal of Philosophy* 85 (November 1988): 640.

[56] According to Adams, this highpoint dated from 1884 to 1936 (Adams, '"No Armpits, Please"' 25).

[57] Lawrence Kramer, *Walt Whitman and Modern Music* (New York: Garland, 2000): xvii.

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'their common affection for the simple pleasures of outdoor life'.[58] Here, as elsewhere, we can discern the gradual positioning of Vaughan Williams's public persona as far away as possible from the pre-Raphaelite preoccupations of his youth, culminating in a striking and well-documented nexus of folk, nature and nation. Thus for Kimmel, Whitman and Vaughan Williams shared a love of the 'common people; a desire for direct expression; for deriving rules from practice rather than from distanced reflection; and for conveying the voices of the street rather than those of the cloistered academy'. Kimmel emphasized the masculine, pioneering quality of both Whitman and Vaughan Williams in shaping national unity and egalitarianism, even attributing to the composer the 'emancipation of musical England from continental influence [… as he was] loyal to his ideals of individuality, originality and modernism in music'.[59] And this, even despite Vaughan Williams's well-known period of study with Ravel, and his willingness to send a promising student to study abroad.[60] Kimmel also wrote that those of Whitman's poems that Vaughan Williams chose to set were 'selected for their quality of mysticism', and that Whitman's celebration of the 'true idea of Nature'[61] resonated with Vaughan Williams's love of folk-song and the pastoral.

In a manoeuvre that continued the tendency to distance Vaughan Williams from any continental sympathies (including via association with English aesthetes and cosmopolitans) the composer's second wife Ursula Vaughan Williams wrote that what attracted him to Whitman was that Whitman was 'as unlike as could be to the scented melancholy of many of Rossetti's *art-nouveau*-erotic sonnets and pictures'.[62] Vaughan Williams's biographer Michael Kennedy finds the question of Whitman's appeal to Vaughan Williams unproblematic, citing broadly similar tropes:

> The reason for Whitman's appeal to Vaughan Williams is fairly obvious, apart from the sheer technical challenge to his musical powers. In Vaughan Williams's nature there was a strong vein of mysticism veiled by a thoroughly down-to-earth commonsense approach to his art. He was a romantic; he was also an agnostic, a questioner; he believed in the strength of national roots and he looked to the past in order to venture into the future. It is possible that the Rossetti's' medievalism had some appeal for him before he discovered, in folk song, a truer traditionalism. Whitman presented a love of nature plus a combination of plain statement with mystical yearnings; he drew, like the folk singers, on vivid verbal material shorn of academicism.[63]

In his still-impressive 1985 study of the modern English song tradition, Stephen Banfield was among the first to make a point of discounting the possibility of a sensual reading of Whitman by English composers:

> [English] composers were not interested in [Whitman's] celebration of (homo)sexual liberation … they were more responsive to his intoxicated boldness in describing …

[58] William Kimmel, 'Vaughan Williams's Choice of Words' *Music & Letters* 19/2 (1938): 132–42, here 140.

[59] Kimmel, 'Vaughan Williams's Choice of Words', 140–41.

[60] See for example Vaughan Williams, letter to Edward J. Dent, 1 July 1927, GB-Ckc, King's/PP/EJD/4/456/3.

[61] Kimmel, 'Vaughan Williams's Choice of Words', 135.

[62] Ursula Vaughan Williams, 'Ralph Vaughan Williams and his Choice of Words for Music', *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 99 (1972–73): 81–9, here 82.

[63] Kennedy, *Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 83.

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> contemporary scenes, particularly those of the American civil war, which accorded well with the Englishman's pre-war romanticizing of military endeavour …
>
> Whitman tackled the themes of love and death in an affirmatory manner, with plenty of apostrophes to the 'Soul', a convenient new name for God that satisfied both Christian and agnostic. Whitman could be an Englishman's Nietzsche. Moreover his metrically free verse pattern, with their short, ejaculatory repetitions, were a gift to composers who wanted to make a rhetorical impact in their declamation.[64]

Banfield's parallel casting of Whitman and Nietzsche is perceptive, and is also indirectly echoed in Adams' analysis.[65] This parallel clearly had contemporary anecdotal currency, with composers such as Frederick Delius viewing Whitman and Nietzsche as twin forces in the battle against religious dogma and materialism.[66] Alain Frogley noted also how one of Whitman's French devotees, Henri Guilbeaux, made a similar parallel in an essay published in the same year as the premiere of Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony*.[67] Guilbeaux's formulation however, is a great deal more sensitive than Banfield or Adams allow in their own respective pairings of Whitman and Nietzsche. Crucially, Guilbeaux distinguishes Whitman from Nietzsche, terming the former a 'social-individualist', and the latter a 'self-absorbed German'.[68] This demarcation, which grounds Whitman's aesthetic politics on the interdependence of the communal and the individual, in contrast to Nietzsche's paradigmatic selfishness, hints at the precise cultural function that I want to ascribe him in the context of his musical reception.

Banfield dealt mainly with Charles Wood's settings of Whitman, but he noted that Delius's *Sea Drift* and Vaughan Williams's *A Sea Symphony* are the most 'durable' orchestral examples of Whitman settings.[69] Significantly, Banfield's criteria for determining the durability of various settings of Whitman's verse in song is cast in terms of masculine virility and a commitment to political nationalism. For example, he noted that

> of the composers who fell under [Whitman's] spell, most of them before the first world war took the edge off such idealism, Bridge, Coleridge-Taylor, Farrar,

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[64] Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20th Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 27.

[65] For example Adams wrote that 'during the crises of faith that beset the Victorian and Edwardian thinkers, composers searched for alternatives to biblical texts that yet would express both the spiritual restlessness and "evolutionary" optimism of their times … free from the taint of a Christianity that seemed outmoded and intellectually compromised. In Whitman they found a poet at once democratic, mystical, and evolutionary' (Adams, '"No Armpits, Please"' 29).

[66] During a visit to London in December 1898, Delius wrote to German painter Jelka Rosen, who would later become his wife: 'I cannot work here at all, quite impossible … What a useless rotten life I lead here! What a City! What people! No wonder Nietzsche went mad. As soon as I am certain of no success here I shall hurry back! So you may see me sooner than you expected … I have my Walt Whitman and Nietzsche here so that I am not quite alone' (Frederick Delius, letter to Jelka Rosen, 18 Dec. 1898, AUS-PVgm, 02.0107).

[67] Henri Guilbeaux, *Walt Whitman*, Portraits de'Hier, Deuxième Année, 37 (Paris: H. Fabre, 1910), cited in Alain Frogley, '"O Farther Sail": Vaughan Williams and Whitman' in *Let Beauty Awake: Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and Literature* (London: Elgar Editions, 2010): 77–95, here 79.

[68] Frogley, '"O Farther Sail"', 79.

[69] Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 27.

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> Gurney and Cyril Scott did not find the experience catalytic; Stanford and Wood, both of a considerably older generation, did.[70]

And further, with reference to Whitman settings of the inter-war period, Banfield casts composer-critics such as Rutland Boughton – who used an altered form of Whitman's words in his 'Proletarian Song' and 'The Love of Comrades', and who wrote for *The Workers Weekly* – as the deluded 'lunatic fringe',[71] in comparison to the healthy nationalist vision of Vaughan Williams and Holst who 'saw themselves as having a duty towards the revival of a national musical tradition'[72]:

> Even [Boughton's] seven settings of the great socialist Edward Carpenter (who was of the Bantock circle), potentially the sort of collaboration to yield an antidote to Edwardian complacency, are musical ciphers. The expression of a social conscience in English song had to wait for Alan Bush and Auden and Britten.[73]

For Banfield, then, a political reading of Whitman seemed to hold more sway in the context of song settings, and the fact that these types of readings rested on a de-eroticization of Whitman – with British composers being supposedly 'not interested' in the homoerotic implications of Whitman's democratic ideal – seems unproblematic in Banfield's account.

Wilfrid Mellers offered a similar analysis, though emphasizing the spiritual or metaphysical implications of Whitman's verse for 'Englishmen of Vaughan Williams's generation', who had evidently already been inured to recognizing the 'unknown powers within', and the 'novelty of familiar objects' by their own poets, particularly Wordsworth.[74] Similarly, Stephen Town noted that

> The English composer was particularly enchanted by the meditative and elegiac qualities of the mystical or religious sections found throughout *Leaves of Grass*, or by its poetic diction, frequent use of parallelism and lovely cadences.[75]

And finally, Alain Frogley itemized the 'key elements' of Vaughan Williams's attraction to Whitman as including the poet's:

> all-encompassing post-Christian sense of spiritual quest; his unifying embrace of both the mystical and the mundane; his visionary conception of democracy; his view of national identity within an inclusive global fraternity; and a startlingly fresh and fluid approach to poetic metre and diction, which includes a fascination with repetition, end-stopped lines, organic construction, and other features that for many invite analogies with music.[76]

According to these accounts, out of either self-preservation or sheer indifference, English composers (excepting Delius) drew from and were inspired by

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[70] Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 27.
[71] Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 102.
[72] Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 105.
[73] Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 104.
[74] Wilfrid Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (London: Pimlico, 1989): 17.
[75] Stephen Town, '"Full of Fresh Thoughts": Vaughan Williams, Whitman and the Genesis of *A Sea Symphony*', in *Vaughan Williams Essays*, ed. Byron Adams and Robin Wells (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003): 73–101, here 74.
[76] Frogley, '"O Farther Sail"', 80–81.

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everything *but* the erotic content of Whitman's verse. This conclusion, whose evidential validity is undeniable, seems to support the narrative of rupture attributed to the development of a style of musical modernism characterized by a hearty 'down-right-Britishness' in opposition to the continental influences of Victorian Aestheticism. However, this analysis presents a direct affront to perceptions of the indivisibility of Whitman's sexual-aesthetic-political mandate, and occludes Whitman's true cultural function in relation to the expression of musical modernism in Britain.

PART II: Maintaining Sameness and Difference

Displacement at the Seashore

In Lydia Goehr's *Elective Affinities*, she opens a chapter on the use of music and sound in film with this quotation from Max Picard, a Swiss philosopher and theologian, from his 1929 text *Das Menschengesicht* (*The Human Face*):

> That they were all different from each other was a sign of the inexhaustibility of god's abundance. At the same time, they were all similar insofar as one knew that the diversity stemmed from a single creative source.[77]

Here we see Picard describing God's gift to humanity as the interdependence of sameness and difference. As Goehr notes, the passage appeared five years later in an essay on the deleterious impact of technology on cultural meaning by the Galician-born Jewish journalist, Joseph Roth (1894–1939). For Roth, the interdependence of sameness and difference described art's capacity to represent life while also remaining separate from it. Roth believed that this all-important doubling had been flattened out in modern times due to technological advance, which allowed mediums such as film unprecedented capacities for the imitation of life. This flattening of the double meant a loss of the divine co-existence of sameness and difference. Film could now replace reality with artifice in the guise of reality – to replicate it too accurately – and thereby undermine the process of doubling whereby art could create and sustain aesthetic meaning. The 'reality' represented on the screen consisted of mere shadows and ghosts of a meaningful existence, but their apparent realness was reflected back onto reality which in turn emulated the representation of itself. The loss of the double is then like two mirrors facing each other, each reflecting the other, with no actual content between them. According to Roth, this loss of the double signalled a decline initiated by the homogenizing thrust of modernity.

Goehr in turn explored three strategies for doubling – duplication, dissonance and displacement. In a simplified form 'duplication' described a realistic rendering of sound in film; 'dissonance' was associated with modernist strategies of interruption and estrangement – describing the intentional rejection of representation; and 'displacement' essentially oscillates between the two – now imitative, now expressive – with this oscillation serving to reveal the very existence of these strategies of doubling. Out of these strategies, Goehr favoured displacement, so that the doubling can be made visible – neither being flattened out nor dissolved entirely. According to Goehr, this kind of displacement is achieved by creating film that calls into question the nature of film through the use of sound that sometimes mimics the filmic action, lending it a closeness to reality, and then at other times disturbs the appearance of

[77] Qtd, in Goehr, *Elective Affinities*, 205.

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wholeness, promoting detachment and distance. Via these means, this strategy was intended by Goehr to serve a critical purpose akin to cultural criticism, seeking to demystify film for the sake of demystifying life, with the use of music and sound being the agent in this process of demystification.

Goehr acknowledged that strategies of displacement have the potential to unduly aestheticize politics, such as when art that commemorates the victims of terrorism appeals to universalist humanistic themes that negate individual experience in precisely the same way as the spiritual rationalization that motivated the terrorist act in the first place.[78] The problem of how to retain the sense of individual experience in commemorative art is a question of balancing the 'double' of difference and sameness, described in Picard's quote.

Lawrence Kramer has highlighted how Vaughan Williams chose to approach this exact question in his setting of Whitman's cycle *Drum-Taps* within his 1936 cantata *Dona Nobis Pacem* – one of the few settings, it must be said, in which Vaughan Williams chose not to omit an explicit reference to male–male tenderness. Kramer notes for example that the setting of the poem 'Reconciliation' recreates a moment of fraternal intimacy between a living soldier and his dead comrade, which enacts what he calls the 'commemorative paradox'. The paradox is that soldiers who die in war both hold a unique identity in death and also become a part of the 'nameless multitude of bodies on the field', and any commemoration of the individual becomes a permanent memorial to all the dead. This trope has its musical expression in Vaughan Williams's setting as a solo baritone voice singing the words 'I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin – I draw near/Bend down and lightly touch with my lips the white face in the coffin' – a passage whose extraordinarily spare texture, and individualized, isolated lyricism gradually breaks down and is replaced by a soprano-led chorus passage, with the baritone never returning.[79]

Despite displacement's negative potential in this regard, Goehr argued for its capacity to serve a critical function in ensuring art's distinction from life while also retaining for it some kind of relationship with reality – in other words, retaining its closeness and distance, or retaining the double of sameness and difference: 'art that is properly responsive to its times is not one that produces images and messages about the times but one that remains true to art in its present condition'.[80] Goehr also described this 'displacement' as a 'way of being' that allows one to be both outside and inside.[81]

Betsy Erkkila described Walt Whitman's political and aesthetic agenda in strikingly similar terms:

> Although Whitman was cognizant of the ways that past literature participated in and justified the domination, power, and interests of an aristocratic class system, he never fully acknowledge the extent of his own ideological complicity as the celebrator of American democracy. The fervent Tom Paine democrat of *Leaves of Grass* is (mis) represented as a nonpartisan citizen of the world, a figure who stands simultaneously inside and outside social time and above the squalor of political context.[82]

[78] See for example her chapter 'The Musicality of Violence' in *Elective Affinities*.

[79] 'Like Falling Leaves: The Erotics of Mourning in Four *Drum-Taps* Settings', in *Walt Whitman and Modern Music*, ed. Lawrence Kramer (New York: Garland, 2000): 151–165, here 158.

[80] Goehr (referring to Adorno), *Elective Affinities*, 201.

[81] Goehr, *Elective Affinities*, 238.

[82] Betsy Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): 92.

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Erkkila notes that this conflict has its 'political analogue [in] the paradox of an American republic poised between self-interest and public virtue'.[83] This historically rooted reading places at the heart of Whitman's work the problematic of the double described in the above quote by Picard – namely difference within sameness – applied to the relationship between self-sovereignty and union in personal terms, as well as in respect of the nation's relationship with a global polity.

To the extent that Erkkila's language here is evaluative, the presentation of this 'doubling' in Whitman is deemed problematic – Whitman 'never fully acknowledged' his ideological complicity, and Tom Paine is '(mis)represented' as a nonpartisan. In other words, Erkkila's reading is about unveiling the situatedness of the position described here, as if to say 'neither Whitman nor his characters are neutral, though they may be deluded enough to think that they are'. The critical operation here is about purportedly 'correcting' the parallax error by showing that Whitman did not realize the political irony at play both within his poetry and his life. Following from Goehr's notion, Erkkila's treatment of Whitman might be deemed 'dissonant' in nature, where an error of perspective is revealed by presenting a disruptive perspective that is deemed to have greater validity or greater authenticity.

But what would an understanding of Whitman's doubling – his simultaneous outsider and insider status – look like from the perspective of displacement, rather than dissonance, so that rather than correcting an error or pointing out a conflict, we are proposing an understanding of the object as containing within it and being defined by, these mutually opposing forces? In fact, it may be that this critical stance was cultivated for the express purpose of allowing its bearer to be 'objective' (though not neutral); to be a spectator and a participant; to be at once outside and inside, as Goehr suggested in the context of music and film.

Whitman's life-long preoccupation with the seashore is significant with respect to this point, and significant also for the dissemination of his strategy of displacement to English composers such as Vaughan Williams. In an autobiographical reminiscence, Whitman wrote

> Even as a boy, I had the fancy, the wish, to write a piece, perhaps a poem, about the sea-shore – that suggesting, dividing line, contact, junction, the solid marrying the liquid – that curious, lurking something, (as doubtless every objective form finally becomes the subjective spirit,) which means far more than its mere first sight, grand as that is – blending the real and ideal, and each made portion of the other[…] I remember well, I felt that I must one day write a book expressing this liquid, mystic theme. Afterward, I recollect, how it came to me that instead of any special lyrical or epical or literary attempt, the sea-shore should be an invisible *influence*, a pervading gauge and tally for me, in my composition.[84]

In this passage from Whitman's *Specimen Days* the shore-line acts variously as both a border – namely, a 'dividing line, contact, [or] junction'; a point of reconciliation – a 'blending' or 'marrying'; a point of transformation – 'from objective form' to 'subjective spirit'; and a point of mutual interpenetration – 'each made portion of the other'. It is in the latter sense that the seashore functions in

[83] Erkkila, *Whitman the Political Poet*, 94.

[84] Quoted in Paul Fussell, Jr. 'Whitman's Curious Warble: Reminiscence and Reconciliation', in *The Presence of Walt Whitman: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. R.W.B. Lewis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962): 28–51, where it is said to be from 'How I Still Get Around at Sixty and Take Notes' (1881). But elsewhere this is quoted as being from 'Sea-Shore Fancies' in *Specimen Days* (1882).

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Whitman's poetry as a point of incongruous contemporaneity – of minimal difference – whereby the sense of the whole is shown to be underpinned by multiplicity. It presents a point of crystallization that is characteristic of how he conceptualized the cosmic within the material – to see God in a blade of grass, as it were – or the universal within the local.

This function of the seashore in Whitman's poetry is especially clear in the first two poems of the 11-poem *Sea-Drift* cluster, prepared for the 1881 edition of *Leaves of Grass*, parts of which were set to music by both Delius (in *Sea Drift*, 1903–04) and Vaughan Williams (in *A Sea Symphony*, 1903–09). Here, the sea embodies a sense of pre-subject union from which individual subjectivities emerge, and back into which they eventually recede with the ebb and flow of the tide. Issuing from the 'fierce old mother' of the sea, Whitman imagines the individual as 'chaff, straw, splinters of wood, weeds, and the sea-gluten/Scum, scales from shining rocks, leaves of salt-lettuce, left by the Tide', whose separateness or distance is strikingly precarious:

> As the ocean so mysterious rolls toward me closer and closer,
> I too but signify at the utmost a little wash'd-up drift,
> A few sands and dead leaves to gather,
> Gather, and merge myself as part of the sands and drift […][85]
> Ebb, ocean of life, (the flow will return),
> Cease not your moaning you fierce old mother,
> Endlessly cry for your castaways, but fear not, deny not me,
> Rustle not up so hoarse and angry against my feet as I touch you
> or gather from you.[86]

The sea here signifies death, but also the eternal recurrence of life, or the immortality of the soul. The sea embodies wholeness in contrast to the 'wash'd-up drift' of humanity, yet its function involves both synthesis (namely in subsuming the individual upon death) and atomization (by being the organ of birth or individuation). In this sense, the unit is 'always already' present in the whole, and should logically undermine its unity. For Whitman though, it is only through this realization that the narrator is able to become truly himself, truly individual, indeed truly human ('Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake').[87] Significantly, it is the seashore – 'The rim, the sediment that stands for all the water and all the land of the globe'[88] – that provides the site for and instigator of this revelatory incongruity.

Quite apart from Whitman the man, this conception of the point between land and ocean – the seashore – as a point of 'blending' rather than a border might also offer an understanding of the ideological function that his poetry came to play in various contexts, the least of which being Whitman's poetry's literal sea-crossing – namely, his transatlantic reception. Indeed, it is this core concern for retaining diversity within unity, embodied in the imagery of the sea and sea-shore, that underpins the text of Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony*.

[85] Walt Whitman, 'As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life', from 'Sea-Drift', in *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1881–82): 202.
[86] Whitman, 'As I Ebb'd', 203.
[87] Walt Whitman, 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking' from 'Sea-Drift' in *Leaves of Grass* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1881–82): 200.
[88] Whitman, 'As I Ebb'd', 202.

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This concern is most aptly demonstrated in the relationship between the first and second movements of the Symphony. The portions of text that Vaughan Williams chose to highlight in the first movement, titled 'Song for all Seas, all Ships', seem to forward an all-encompassing humanism, with the most direct reference to the unifying impulse of commemoration being introduced by the strident first appearance of the soprano voice: 'Flaunt out O sea your separate flags of nations!' This rallying cry is immediately echoed by the chorus, with an extraordinary *a cappella* choral unison on the phrase 'separate flags of nations!' The setting of this choral unison to a phrase that directly refers to separateness is noteworthy, given that Vaughan Williams's intention here was clearly to convey the sense of unity that underpins the text as a whole. Also, there were a range of explicit references to unity in the text that might seem more obviously to warrant such special treatment – such as 'one flag above all the rest' (which upon its first appearance receives a particularly ambivalent harmonic treatment); 'signal for all nations' (given a contrapuntal setting); and 'a pennant universal' (first exclaimed by solitary solo baritone). This choice to preserve unison choral treatment for textual references to diversity is again exemplified a short while later at 'various flags and ship-signals'.

The apotheosis of this movement undoubtedly occurs at the setting of the words 'one flag', though even then the sense of grandeur that attends this moment quickly disintegrates into the uncertain singularity of the solo soprano, descending quietly into her lower register at 'above all the rest'. She then gives a still and solemn repetition of the very line of text that received such a cataclysmic setting at the opening of the movement 'behold the sea itself, and on its limitless, heaving breast the ships'. The fragile fading pianissimo D major chord with which the movement ends seems again, in such contrast to the heroic opening, to undermine the notion that Vaughan Williams intended his setting of Whitman here to be an unbridled exaltation of 'oceanic unity' and brotherhood.

The juxtaposition provided by the second movement, 'On the Beach at Night, Alone', only deepens the sense of stillness and solitude left by the first movement, though again it is not simple divisibility with which Vaughan Williams seems concerned. Rather, the solitude of the second movement is a solitude of revelation in the notion of the indivisibility of time and space, with the solo baritone line maintaining an awe-struck monotone, with only narrow deviations:

> On the beach at night alone,
> As the old mother sways her to and fro singing her husky song,
> As I watch the bright stars shining, I think a thought of the clef of the universes and of the future.

Gradually, the celestial voices of the soft chorus join the solo quester, as if echoing from a great distance:

> A vast similitude interlocks all,
> All distances of space however wide,
> All distances of time,
> All souls, all living bodies though they be ever so different […]

Again in monotone, though becoming more strident: 'all nationals, all identities'; leading to 'all lives and deaths, all of the past, present, future'; finally

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being reinforced by the unified *a cappella* chorus, beginning in monotone: 'This vast similitude spans them, and always has spann'd / And shall forever span them and compactly hold and enclose them'. The heroic brass fanfare that follows is violently cut off, as the movement recedes back into the solitariness of the opening solo monotone 'on the beach at night alone'.

'Political Internationalism and Personal Individualism'

A further area of Vaughan Williams's work and thinking that reflects the impact of Whitman's concern for maintaining the double of sameness and difference via displacement, is his view on cultural nationalism. In his essay 'Nationalism and Internationalism' (1942) Vaughan Williams asked 'Is it possible to be a nationalist, and at the same time an internationalist?' In response, he notes that 'I believe that political internationalism and personal individualism are necessary complements: one cannot exist without the other'.[89] This view is rationalized via a concrete historical hypothesis:

> When the United States of Europe becomes a fact, each nation must have something to bring to the common stock of good. What we have to offer must derive essentially from our own life. It must not be a bad imitation of what other nations already do better. We should then be bad members of a world polity.[90]

Not only did being a 'good nationalist' (Vaughan Williams's counter to the 'Good European') enhance one's character as a citizen of the world, but these identities were mutually interdependent, so that on the other hand, 'this loyalty to one's country can only come to a full flowering when it is merged in a wider loyalty to the whole human race'.[91] For Vaughan Williams, being a 'good nationalist' within a 'world polity' involved shaping a distinctive culture, and he described the notion of 'cultural internationalism', as an 'emasculated standardization of life'. For this reason he heartily rejected the idea of music acting as some kind of 'universal language' to be put to work improving cross-cultural relations.

Vaughan Williams's view of national separateness as being necessary to effective international cooperation was mirrored in his view of the function of the composer in society. Drawing from Whitman's 'Song of the Exposition' (from 1876), in which the poet tells us to stop wandering among the classics, and instead 'know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide untried domain', Vaughan Williams argued in his article 'Who Wants the English Composer?' (1912), that the composer should be a servant of the people, that the amateur masses should be judge of aesthetic value, and that art music should be informed by the popular realm – including music hall ballads, barrel organs and street calls – in order for it to be music of and for the people. He points to an analogue for his argument about the political and social responsibility of the composer in the process of common law development (in other words, 'judge-made law'), which he viewed as an organic process of deriving of rules from practice, rather than the abstracted codification that attends the

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[89] Reprinted in Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963): 154–9, here 154.

[90] Vaughan Williams, 'Nationalism and Internationalism', 155.

[91] Vaughan Williams, 'Nationalism and Internationalism', 155.

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civil law system. This notion of an organically growing tradition, with all the root and branch implications of authenticity and authoritativeness that comes with using the common law as an analogue, holds clear implications for Vaughan Williams's interest in folk song. Folksong was a tradition in constant flux; it was a body of musical material forged in communal social practice rather than in a composer's private contemplation; it was owned by the collective rather than being the product of a single, autonomous creative agent; and it was transmitted aurally rather than by notation, or codification. Within this system, notation acted as a stultifying force for music as did codification in the civil law system – both required abstracted contemplation, which he associated with reflective knowledge as opposed to experiential knowledge, and it is clear that this abstraction or codification mirrored the 'emasculating' effects of cultural internationalism.

Once again in this context Vaughan Williams drew from Whitman, writing in his essay 'The Evolution of Folksong' that

> When about twenty-five years ago Cecil Sharp collected and published his new discoveries in English folk-song he had in his mind the ordinary man, the 'divine average' of Whitman. And it is the ordinary man for whose musical salvation the folk-song will be responsible.[92]

And further extending this notion to contemporary art music practice, he noted that

> It is the essence of modern music as of all modern thought to drive straight to the root of the matter in hand without artifice or subterfuge – to let the matter rule the form, not the form the matter-to obtain our rules from practice, not our practice from rules.[93]

Yet for Vaughan Williams, this construct also relied upon what he termed 'personal individualism', so that in fact he understood abstraction and critical withdrawal to be a constituent part of participation, rather than its ethical opposition. His understanding of the function of music in society and the responsibilities of the composer *did* incorporate an aspect of contemplative isolation prior to community expression. After all, the composer's role was not merely to voice the will of the people, but to activate the latent aspirations of the polis – to be 'their own voice speaking through his art those things which they can only dimly grope for'.[94] In this way, the realm of private experimentation was seen as enhancing rather than subverting the broader democratic system, in the same way that a strong national identity made one a more effective citizen of the world – thereby maintaining difference within sameness, and fending off the threat of 'emasculated standardization'.

This intermingling of cosmopolitanism and nationalism, isolation and engagement, self-determination and union in musical discussions not only suggests an alternative reading of Whitman's reception among English composers, but also provides a striking case study for showing alternative ways of being within the

[92] Vaughan Williams, 'The Evolution of Folk-Song', in *National Music and Other Essays*, 28–52, here 38.

[93] Vaughan Williams, 'Gustav Holst', *Music and Letters* 1/4 (1920): 305–17.

[94] Vaughan Williams, 'Who Wants the English Composer' *Royal College of Music Magazine* 9/1 (1912): 11–15.

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modernist context that eschew the binary opposition of autonomy and commitment. In particular, it illuminates ways of being that did not rely solely on difference, dissonance or dissolution on the one hand – an ethos customarily associated with continental modernism – nor solely on claims to an organic union on the other, but rather relied upon the dialectical interplay between these two positions within an aestheticized political mandate.

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