
INTERPRETATIONS

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PANIC AT THE PROMS

(perhaps the explanation lies in his background)

Abstract: This paper has been written as both a celebration of the music of Harrison Birtwistle – “the most forceful and uncompromisingly original British composer of his generation” according to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* – and as a response, at once playful and polemic, to the critics and commentators who struggle to name, claim, frame and contain it within the familiar categories and tropes of contemporary music interpretation. My particular focus is *Panic* which is exemplary in this respect and what Birtwistle *cognoscendi* have a habit of referring to as ‘his background’ to ‘explain’ the idiosyncratic difficulty and difference of his work, as in the quotation cited as my subtitle.

Key words: Birtwistle, background, jingoism, panic, Proms

1. What is he doing the great god Pan

Down by the reeds by the river

Spreading ruin and scattering ban

Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
With the dragon-fly on the river.¹

In Greek mythology Pan appears as the god of pastures, forests, flocks and herds, and also the universal deity. Some sources derive the name from the same root as that of Latin *pascere*, 'to graze'. His parentage is variously given as born of Jupiter and Calisto, Hermes and Penelope, among others, and he is represented with the upper part of a man and the body and legs of a goat, and with little horns on his head. The medieval image of the devil. Because his mother deserted him at birth, he was raised by nymphs. His lustful nature was a characteristic and he was the symbol of fecundity.²

Yet half a beast is the great god Pan,
To laugh as he sits by the river,
Making a poet out of a man:
The true gods sigh for the cost and the pain –
For the reed which grows nevermore again
As a reed with the reeds of the river.³

Legend has it that at the time of the Crucifixion, just when the veil of the Temple was rent in twain, a cry swept across the ocean in the hearing of a pilot. "Great Pan is Dead", and at the same time the responses of the oracles ceased for ever.⁴

And that dismal cry rose slowly,
And sank slowly through the air;
Full of spirit's melancholy
And eternity's despair!
And they heard the words it said –
PAN IS DEAD – GREAT PAN IS DEAD –
PAN, PAN IS DEAD.⁵

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¹ Notes/references. *Quotations in my works are like robbers by the roadside who make an armed attack and relieve an idler of his convictions.* Walter Benjamin
Para-cited from Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861), "A Musical Instrument".

² Para-cited from the entry on "Pan" in *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, Seventeenth Edition, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005, 1027.

³ Para-cited from Barret Browning, op. cit.

⁴ Para-cited from *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, op. cit.

⁵ Para-cited from Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861), "The Dead Pan".

Early Christians believed that this marked the beginning of the end of the pagan era.⁶

2. About a hundred million people heard *Panic* over the radio and television when it was first performed [the word comes from the god Pan, because the sounds heard by night in the mountains and valleys, which gave rise to sudden and unwarranted fear, were attributed to him] and judging from the letters the BBC received and the ten thousand outraged listeners who jammed the BBC switchboards most people were outraged.⁷

It is probable that no other composer before Birtwistle has had so much abuse thrown at them by the popular press. “Unmitigated rubbish” (*Daily Express*), “last fight of the Proms” (*Today*), “an hors d’oeuvre of cold sick” (*The Spectator*).⁸

Faced with the prospect of writing for the flag-wavers, giddy revellers and large general television audience of the Last Night Birtwistle devised the most unremittingly ferocious eighteen minutes of music in his entire output – a sustained assault, with brazen alto saxophone and drum kit leading an equally strident stringless orchestra.⁹

*(note the lack of strings—the voice of civilized culture)*¹⁰

Brazen, made of brass [alloy of copper with tin, zinc, or other base metal], also from brass often serving as a type of strength or impenetrability, extremely strong; impenetrable; pertaining to brass, proceeding from brass (*a brazen sound*); impudent, having a front like brass. v. t. to behave with insolence or effrontery [shameless audacity]; to brazen out, to persevere in treating with effrontery.¹¹

The overriding impression on first hearing was of the soloist and his side-kick drummer riding rough-shod over everything.¹²

⁶ Para-cited from Brewer’s..., op. cit.

⁷ Para-cited from Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle in Recent Years*, London, Robson Books, 1998, 130.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Para-cited from Robert Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, 191.

¹⁰ Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle. Man, Mind, Music*, London, Faber and Faber, 2000, 112.

¹¹ Para-cited from the entry on “brazen” in *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, London, Oxford University Press, 1966.

¹² Para-cited from Robert Adlington, “Harrison Birtwistle’s Recent Music”, *Tempo*, 196, April 1996, 2.

[*Rough-shod*, (of horse) having shoes with the nail-heads projecting (*ride rough-shod*, domineer over)]¹³

An obsessed-looking saxophonist wandered around bellowing like a bull in a field of cattle.¹⁴

This is music which is seemingly instinctive – repeating figures which amount to little more than primordial grunts and bangs – it is raw and immediate.¹⁵

Images of brutal death and destruction are accompanied by a music of similar character.¹⁶

This was a quarter-hour of fast, male violence, both as sound and as musical feeling – the ultimate up-yours piece.¹⁷

[*Up yours!* A crude exclamation of contemptuous rejection, in spoken form often accompanied by a v-sign. The implied full phrase is “Up your arse!” In May 1986 *The Sun* famously flaunted a front-page heading “UP YOURS DELORS” for the benefit of Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission.]¹⁸

‘Twas the hour when One in Sion
Hung for love’s sake on a cross –
When his brow was chill with dying,
And his soul was faint with loss;
When his priestly blood dropped downward,
And his kingly eyes looked throneward –
Then, Pan was dead.
And the rowers from the benches
Fell – each shuddering on his face –
While departing influences
Struck a cold back through the place:
And the shadow of the ship
Reeled along the passive deep –
Pan, Pan is dead.¹⁹

¹³ Para-cited from the entry on “rough-shod” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, op. cit.

¹⁴ Para-cited from Robert Maycock, “Last Night of the Proms. Birtwistle’s Premiere”, *The Independent*, September 18, 1995, 10.

¹⁵ Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 111–112.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Para-cited from Robert Maycock, “Last Night”, op. cit.

¹⁸ Para-cited from the entry on “Up yours!” in *Brewer’s Dictionary* op. cit., 1435.

¹⁹ Para-cited from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “The Dead Pan”.

3. The work's title [meaning a sudden fright, particularly without real cause; terror inspired by a trifling cause; from Greek *panikos*, of or belonging to Pan, the god who was believed to inspire sudden fear, fear arising among people without visible cause] suggests that the piece, far from disregarding the nature of the event for which it was written was devised as an act of deliberate provocation.²⁰

Was Birtwistle cocking a snook at a somewhat pompous middle-class tradition?²¹

[*Cock a snook* is to do something intentionally to show you have no respect for someone or something; to make a rude gesture by putting one thumb to the nose with the fingers of the hand outstretched; to show contempt by being insulting or offensive. If you *cock a snook* at someone in authority or at an organization, you do something that they cannot punish you for, but which insults them or expresses contempt. [Mainly British journalism] *Tories cocked a snook at their prime minister over this legislation.*]²²

I wouldn't know how to do that. I wouldn't be interested in doing it. It's not what I'm in the business of writing music for.

I don't write music in order to irritate anyone.²³

[The truth is we have no idea at all where this phrase comes from. The gesture of derision it encapsulates is that of putting one's thumb to one's nose and extending the fingers. Wagging them is optional but greatly improves the effectiveness of the insult. The gesture is widespread but names for it vary: *cocking a snook* is mainly the British name for what Americans, I think, sometimes describe as a *five-fingered salute*.

Cock here is a verb with the sense of sticking something out stiffly in an attitude of defiance, as the cockerel's neck, crest and tail is erect when he crows. But *snook* is not so easily explainable, since the word turns up only in this phrase. there's an example known from 1791, but the phrase doesn't become widely recorded until the last years of the nineteenth century. There is some suggestion that it is a variant form of *snout*, which would make sense.]²⁴

I wouldn't know how to do that. I wouldn't be interested in doing it. It's not what I'm in the business of writing music for.

²⁰ Para-cited from Robert Adlington, "Harrison Birtwistle's Recent Music", op. cit., 191.

²¹ Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 14.

²² Para-cited from the entry on "cock a snook" in *Collins Online English Dictionary*.

²³ "I wouldn't know ... irritate anyone". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, interview with John Tulsa, BBC Radio 3, July 1, 2001.

²⁴ "The truth is ... make sense". Para-cited from the entry on "cock a snook", *Collins Online Dictionary*.

I don't write music in order to irritate anyone.

Panic was composed in response to John Drummond's request for a work to be performed at the 1995 Last Night of the Proms and my own desire to write a work as a showcase for the saxophonist John Harle.

I have called the work a *dithyramb*, in classical Greece, a choric song in honour of Dionysius, whose wild exuberance here runs riot. The soloist, as chorus leader, is identified with the mythic god Pan, literally 'spreading ruin and scattering ban' as in the quotation from Elizabeth Barrett Browning with which I preface this score. The title *Panic* refers to the feeling of ecstasy and terror experienced by animals in the night at the sound of Pan's music.²⁵

The chaos wreaked by Pan is exemplified by the conflict between the orchestra and the alto saxophone soloist together with the drum kit. At times the two odd-men-out rebel and branch out, adopting tempos independent of the orchestra.

The composer wishes to capture the spirit of an improvising jazz drummer rather than the absolute precision of the classical percussionist. This is not to imply any lack of rigour: the essential rhythmic framework is shown throughout in large notes.²⁶

The important thing was to find a way of doing it that retains the energy of the drum kit that comes from it not being notated. And it's also important that it doesn't have the *cliché* of a drum kit. That's proving very difficult. But we'll see where we go. (*Pause*). It's a very different sort of energy in music when it's not notated. So it's an attempt to keep that energy without it being a *cliché*.²⁷

[But being a cliché seems to be precisely what the commentators insisted upon]

In many ways the piece is Drummond's own arrogant farewell gesture, the expression of compositional certainty and confidence.²⁸

[And what's the matter with that, I wonder]

Sir Harry has never been one for taking much notice of his audience. "I can't consider anything to do with who listens [to my music]", he told Sue Law-

²⁵ "*Panic* was composed ... Pan's music". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, "Composer's Note", *Panic. A Dithyramb for alto Saxophone, Drum Kit, Wind, Brass and Percussion*. Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers Limited n.d.

²⁶ "The chaos ... large notes". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, "Note On the Solo Drum Kit Part", *Panic. A Dithyramb*, op. cit.

²⁷ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in interview with Dan Warburton, July 8, 1995 at www.paristransatlantic/artic.com/magazine/interviews/birtwistle.

²⁸ Para-cited from Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 192.

ley on *Desert Island Discs*. So we can't say we weren't warned. As the establishment's anti-establishment figure, he'd already served notice of what he might do with a Proms commission in his gruff, *cock-a-snook* fanfare for the opening of the rebuilt Glyndbourne.²⁹

I wouldn't know how to do that. I wouldn't be interested in doing it. It's not what I'm in the business of writing music for

I don't write music in order to irritate anyone.

4. The last night of the Proms is an occasion when everyone can let their hair down in the Albert Hall. But before the concluding high jinks the audience finds comfort in a cocoon of jingoism symbolized by the singing of "Jerusalem" and "Rule Britannia".³⁰

[*Cocoon*. 1.n. Silky case spun by insect larva to protect it as a chrysalis, esp. that of silkworm; similar structure made by other animals, protective covering. 2.vb. form, wrap (as) in cocoon; spray with protective coating]³¹

[*Jingoism*. The policy and practices of *jingoes*. *Jingo*. A nickname for those who supported the policy of Lord Beaconsfield in sending a British fleet into Turkish waters to resist the advance of Russia in 1878; hence a blatant "patriot", a Chauvinist. Originally a piece of conjurer's *gibberish*; unintelligible speech; inarticulate chatter, jargon]³²

In a sequence that traditionally includes Edward Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance March No.1" to part of which "Land of Hope and Glory" is sung, Henry Wood's "Fantasia on British Songs", and the British national anthem in recent years in an arrangement by Benjamin Britten.³³

Land of Hope and Glory, Mother of the Free
How shall we extol thee, who are born of thee?
God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet,
God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet.

"Land of Hope and Glory" has traditionally been sung as the first song amidst the flag-waving at the climax of the Last Night of the Proms. The words were fitted to the melody of the trio theme of the "Pomp and Circumstance March" on the suggestion of King Edward VII who told Elgar he thought the

²⁹ Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, "Thoughts on First Hearing Sir Harrison Birtwistle's *Panic*", *Tempo*, 195, January 1996, 33.

³⁰ Para-cited from Hall, *Recent Years*, op. cit., 129.

³¹ Para-cited from the entry on "cocoon" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, op. cit.

³² Para-cited from the entry on "jingoism" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, op. cit.

³³ Para-cited from *Wikipedia* entry on "Last Night of the Proms".

melody would make a great song. When Elgar was requested to write a work for the king's coronation, he worked the suggestion into his Coronation Ode, for which he asked the poet and essayist A. C. Benson to write the words. The last section of the Ode uses the march's melody. Due to the king's illness, the coronation was postponed. Elgar created a separate song, which was first performed by Madame Clara Butt in June 1902.³⁴

Dear Land of Hope, thy hope is crowned,
God made thee mightier yet!
On Sov'ran brows, beloved, renowned,
Once more thy crown is set.
Thy equal laws, by freedom gained,
Have ruled thee well and long;
By Freedom Gained, by Truth maintained,
Thine Empire shall be strong.

The writing of the song is contemporaneous with the publication of Cecil Rhodes' will in which he bequeathed his considerable wealth for the specific purpose of promoting "the extension of British Rule throughout the world", and added a long list of territories which he wanted brought under British rule and colonized by British people. The reference to the extension of the British Empire's boundaries may reflect the Boer War, recently won at the time of writing, in which the United Kingdom gained further territory, endowed with considerable wealth.³⁵

Thy fame is ancient as the days,
As Ocean large and wide:
A pride that dares, and heeds not praise,
A stern and silent pride;
Not that false joy that dreams content
With what our sires have won;
The blood a hero sire hath spent
Still nerves a hero son.

A 2006 survey conducted by the BBC suggested that 55% of the English public would rather have "Land of Hope and Glory" than "God Save the Queen" as their national anthem.³⁶

³⁴ Para-cited from *Wikipedia* entry on "Land of Hope and Glory".

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

5. *Jerusalem*, the boldly idealistic song known by this name, which from the 1920s assumed almost the position of a secondary British National Anthem, is a setting by Hubert Parry of words by the poet-painter William Blake (1757–1827).³⁷

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green:
And was the holy Lamb of God,
On England's pleasant pastures seen!
And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

The setting dates from 1915 or 1916 and was made on the suggestion of Robert Bridges, the then Poet Laureate, who wanted it for a meeting of the “Fight for Right”³⁸ movement in the Queen's Hall, London and it later made a great impression when sung at a meeting in the Royal Albert Hall, in March 1918, to celebrate the attaining of the final stage in the “Votes for Women” campaign on which occasion the composer was in charge of the music.³⁹

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hands:
Till we have build Jerusalem,
In England's green and pleasant Land.

The words (which, without direct mention, recall to our minds the days of infant factory labour, child chimney-climbing sweeps, farm labourers at ten shil-

³⁷ Para-cited from the entry on “Jerusalem” in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, Oxford University Press, 1974, 537.

³⁸ The *Fight for Right Movement* was founded in August 1915 by Francis Younghusband. Its aim was to increase support for the First World War in Great Britain and to boost morale in the armed forces. Membership cost five shillings and members were pledged to “fight for right till right be won”, a call against disaffection in the progress and conduct of the war.

³⁹ Para-cited from *Wikipedia* entry on “Right to Life”.

lings a week, and men transported for life for poaching a hare) are not to be confused with Blake's larger poem "Jerusalem".⁴⁰

Blake wanted to stir people from their intellectual slumbers, and the daily grind of their toil, to see that they were captivated in the grip of a culture which kept them thinking in ways which served the interests of the powerful.⁴¹

Blake was an outspoken supporter of the French Revolution and in 1803 was charged at Chichester with high treason for having "uttered seditious and treasonable expressions", but was acquitted. The poem expressed his desire for radical change without overt sedition.

The poem, which was little known during the century which followed its writing, was included in the patriotic anthology of verse *The Spirit of Man*, edited by the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom, Robert Bridges, and published in 1916, at a time when morale had begun to decline because of the high number of casualties in World War I and the perception that there was no end in sight. Under these circumstances, Bridges, finding the poem an appropriate hymn text to "brace the spirit of the nation [to] accept with cheerfulness all the sacrifices necessary", asked Sir Hubert Parry to put it to music for a *Fight to Right* campaign meeting in London's Queen's Hall.

But Parry began to have misgivings about *Fight to Right* and eventually wrote to Sir Francis Younghusband, withdrawing his support entirely in May 1917. There was even concern that the composer might withdraw the song, but the situation was saved by Milicent Fawcett of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The song had been taken up by the suffragettes in 1917 and Fawcett asked Parry if it might be used at the Suffrage Demonstration Concert on 13 March 1918. Parry was delighted and orchestrated the piece for the concert (it had originally been for voices and organ). After the concert Fawcett asked the composer if it might become the Women Voters' Hymn. Parry wrote back:

"I wish indeed it might become the Women Voters' Hymn, as you suggest. People seem to enjoy singing it. And having the vote ought to diffuse a good deal of joy. So they should combine happily."

Accordingly, he assigned the copyright to the NUWSS. When that organization was wound up in 1928, Parry's executives reassigned the copyright to the Women's Institutes, where it remained until it entered the public domain in 1968.⁴²

⁴⁰ Para-cited from the entry on "Jerusalem" in *The Oxford Companion*, op. cit.

⁴¹ Para-cited from Christopher Rowland, cited in *Wikipedia* entry on "Jerusalem".

⁴² "Blake was an outspoken supporter ... 1968". Para-cited from *Wikipedia* entry on "Jerusalem".

[It is somewhat ironic therefore – or perhaps not – that it was more than one hundred years before the Last Night of the Proms actually featured a woman conductor for the first time, the American Marin Alsop in 2013. While the first non-British conductor to lead the proceedings was Charles Mackerras in 1980. Make of this what you will.]

“Jerusalem” is considered to be England’s most popular patriotic song; *The New York Times* said it was “fast becoming an alternative national anthem” and there have even been calls to give it official status. Many schools use the song, especially public [i.e. private] schools in Great Britain and several private schools in Australia, New Zealand, New England and Canada. “Jerusalem” was chosen as the opening hymn for the 2012 London Olympics. It is the official hymn of the English and Wales Cricket Board and since 2004 has been the anthem of the English cricket team, being played before each day of their home test matches. It is traditionally sung before rugby league’s Challenge Cup Final, along with “Abide With Me”, and before the Super League Grand Final, where it is introduced as “the rugby league anthem”. It was one of three “hymns” sung at the wedding of Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, and Catherine Middleton. At a concert at the Royal Albert Hall on 4 July 2009, Jeff Beck performed a version featuring his touring band at the time and guest appearance by David Gilmour. While, along with “The Red Flag”, it is sung each year at the closing of the annual Labour Party Conference.⁴³

There’s a moral in the fate of Jerusalem. The gentlemanly Parry thought he was being radical when he set Blake’s fiery tract. But he underplayed the crucial passage, the dark satanic mills, and now look what happens – people wave Union Jack flags while they sing it, for heaven’s sake. We change from firebrands to pillars of the Establishment before we know it.⁴⁴

So has he become Establishment?

Well, *I* might be, sort of, but my music isn’t.⁴⁵

6. Rule, Britannia!

Britannia rules the waves

Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.

Rule, Britannia!

Britannia rules the waves

Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Para-cited from Robert Maycock, “Last Night”, op. cit.

⁴⁵ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Ivan Hewett, “You Have to Have a Vision”, *arts. telegraph*, October 3, 2003.

⁴⁶ This is how the chorus is usually sung these days. But see below for the original and the history of its changes.

The music of “Rule, Britannia!” is by Thomas Arne and the words by James Thompson (1700–1748). It was first performed in the masque of *Alfred*, produced in the grounds of the Prince of Wales, Frederick (Cliefden House, Maidenhead) on 1 August 1740 to commemorate the accession of George II and the third birthday of the Princess Augusta. The words of the masque were published three weeks later. The song with its music was published a few months later still in an appendix to Arne’s music to Congreve’s *Judgment of Paris*.⁴⁷

When Britain first, at heaven’s command
Arose from out the azure main;
Thus was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sang this strain:

Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

The nations not so blessed as thee,
Must, in their turns, to tyrants fall;
While thou shalt flourish great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.

Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

Thompson was a Scottish poet and playwright who spent most of his adult life in England and hoped to make his fortune at court. He had an interest in helping foster a British identity, including and transcending the older English, Irish, Welsh and Scottish identities.⁴⁸

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
More dreadful, from each foreign stroke;
As the loud blast that tears the skies,
Serves but to root thy native oak.

Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

Wagner is reported to have said that the first eight notes of the tune expressed the whole character of the British nation, or words to that effect. The

⁴⁷ Para-cited from *Wikipedia* entry on “Rule, Britannia!”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

melody was the theme for a set of variations for piano by Beethoven and he also used it in “Wellington’s Victory”, Op. 91. Wagner himself wrote a concert overture in D major based on the theme in 1837, WWV 42, and Johann Strauss I quoted the song in full as the introduction to his 1838 waltz “*Huldigung der Konigin Victoria von Grossbritannien*” (Homage to Queen Victoria of Great Britain), Op. 103, where he quotes the British national anthem ‘God Save the Queen’ at the end of the piece.

According to David Armitage “Rule, Britannia!” was the most lasting expression of the conception of Britain and the British Empire that emerged in the 1730s, “predicated on a mixture of adulterated mercantilism, nationalistic anxiety and libertarian fervour”.⁴⁹

Thee haughty tyrants ne’er shall tame:
All their attempts to bend thee down,
Will but arouse thy generous flame;
But work their woe and thy renown.

Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

At the time of its appearance the song was *not* a celebration of an existing state of naval affairs, but an exhortation. Although the Dutch Republic, which in the 17th century presented a major challenge to English sea power, was obviously past its peak by 1745, Britain did not yet “rule the waves”. The time was still to come when the Royal Navy would be an unchallenged dominant force on the oceans.⁵⁰

To thee belongs the rural reign;
Thy cities shall with commerce shine:
All thine shall be the subject main,
And every shore it circles thine.

Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

“Rule, Britannia!” is often written as simple “Rule Britannia”, erroneously omitting both the comma and the exclamation mark, which changes the interpretation of the lyric by altering the grammar. Maurice Willson Disher notes that the change from “Britannia, rule the waves!” to “Britannia rules the waves” occurred in the Victorian era, at a time when the British did rule the waves and no

⁴⁹ “Wagner ... favour”. Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

longer needed to be exhorted to rule them. Disher also notes that the Victorians changed “will” to “shall” in the line “Britons never shall be slaves”.⁵¹

The Muses, still with freedom found,
Shall to thy happy coast repair;
Blest Isle! With matchless beauty crown'd
And manly hearts to guard thee fair.
Rule, Britannia! rule the waves:
Britons never will be slaves.

It is sad to have to admit that the chorus of “Rule Britannia!” is the only part of it the ordinary British man, woman or child can repeat when called upon, and that he, she, or it makes the confident but unauthorized statement, “Britannia rules the waves” instead of uttering the poet’s stern advice or nowadays wistful command, “Britannia, rule the waves!”⁵²

Sad indeed!

Quod erat demonstrandum.

High jinks and jingoism at the last night of the Proms – thrown into a panic by *Panic*.

7. In recent years the saxophone concerto has been a favoured vehicle for assorted musical confections and palliatives, so it seemed that the giddy high spirits of the Proms Last Night might be well served by this latest contribution to the genre. But *Panic* divested itself of its sheep’s clothing to reveal a wolf of such uncontainable ferocity that even those who sought to emphasize the celebratory, Dionysian qualities of Birtwistle’s modernism must have paused for thought.⁵³

There is much – too much – to contemplate in this summary but exemplary diagnosis of *Panic* as beyond the pale of musical propriety: of Christianity, Greek mythology, and even Birtwistle’s modernism itself.

Beyond the Pale. Outside the limits of what is acceptable, especially in terms of civilized behaviour. “Pale” in this context is a wooden fence surrounding and demarcating a piece of territory (from Latin *palum*, “stake”), with the implication that those who live outside it are barbarians.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Para-cited from entry on “Rule, Britannia!” in *Oxford Companion to Music*, op. cit., 897–898.

⁵³ Para-cited from Robert Adlington, “Harrison Birtwistle’s Recent Music”, op. cit., 136.

⁵⁴ Para-cited from entry on “Beyond the Pale” in *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, op. cit., 136.

Barbarians. The Greek and Romans called all foreigners “barbarians” since they were “babblers, speaking a language not understood by them. The word is thus imitative of speech that is unintelligible. The extension of meaning to imply “uncivilized” or “uncultured” is a natural consequence.⁵⁵

(note the lack of strings – the voice of civilized culture)

So, let us also pause for thought.

The dozing sages drop the drowsy strain,

*Then pause, and puff – and speak, and pause again –*⁵⁶

First, there is the question of the saxophone concerto posited here as “a favoured vehicle”, indeed “genre”, for “assorted musical confections and palliatives”. Really? The saxophone concerto?

Confection. Anything prepared or preserved with sugar, as fruit; a sweetmeat; a composition or mixture. Mixing compounding; thing compounded, esp. preserve, sweetmeat, ready-made article of (usu. female) dress, mantle, wrap, &c.⁵⁷

Palliative. Serving to cloak or conceal; serving to relieve (disease) superficially or temporarily, or to mitigate (pain, etc.). Tending to extenuate or excuse; an extenuating representation. *Extenuating*. That extenuates, chiefly in *extenuating circumstances*: circumstances that tend to diminish culpability.⁵⁸

Really? The saxophone concerto? associated with sweetmeat, preserved with sugar, ready-made, serving to cloak or conceal, extenuate or excuse, relieve disease, mitigate pain, diminish responsibility? Really?

The saxophone? An instrument whose very sound – which has been described as ‘carnal’ and “voluptuous”– caused it to be banned by Nazis and Communists; and religious leaders, including the Vatican, deemed “profane”?⁵⁹

Well, that’s the saxophone for you, controversial from the very start.

The biggest issue for Adolphe Sax right after he invented the horn in the 1840s was that his saxophone threatened to put out of business all sorts of other instrument makers. The saxophone is so flexible in its sound, it can sound like

⁵⁵ Para-cited from entry on “Barbarians” in *Brewer’s op. cit.*, 104.

⁵⁶ Para-cited from William Cowper (1731–1800), “Conversation”.

⁵⁷ Para-cited from entry on “confection” in *Consolidated-Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1946.

⁵⁸ Para-cited from entry on “palliative” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*, op. cit.

⁵⁹ “An instrument . . . profane”. Para-cited from Kris Dahl’s review of Michael Segell, *The Devil’s Horn: The Story of the Saxophone, from Noisy Novelty to King of Cool*, in *Publisher’s Weekly*, October 2005.

an oboe, a bassoon, a French horn, a flute. You can do all sorts of things with it. And when he won his contract to have the saxophone placed in the French military ensembles he obviously was going to put out of business a lot of people. They formed this Association of United Instrument Makers and they twice tried to kill him. They burned down his factory. And that legacy seems to have followed the saxophone right up until the present. It just gets people's goats.⁶⁰

To get someone's goat. To make someone annoyed or angry. "Gavin may seem unflappable but I know a way to get his goat". The origin of this expression is disputed. H. L. Mencken held it came from a tradition in horse-racing. Thought to have a calming effect on highstrung thorough-breds, a goat was placed in the horse's stall on the night before the race.⁶¹

Highstrung. Highly sensitive or nervous and tense, from the tuning of stringed instruments, strung to a high tension or pitch.⁶²

Unscrupulous opponents would then steal the goat in an effort to upset the horse and cause it to lose the race. However, there is no firm evidence for this origin c. 1900.⁶³

Is that why it's sort of had a seedy reputation for so long?⁶⁴

Seedy. Full of seed, going to seed; (of brandy) having flavour attributed to weeds among the vines; (colloq.) shabby-looking, in worn clothes, out of sorts, feeling ill; *seed-toe*, disease of horse's foot.⁶⁵

The seedy reputation probably began in 1903 when the Vatican declared that the saxophone gave reasonable concern for disgust and scandal. Now you have to wonder how the pope would have figured this out, you know, sitting in his apartment listening to some wax cylinders of saxophone music and saying, "Wow, that's profane. That's what profane music is".

And then in the teens, when there was the dance craze in America and everyone was boogalooing and doing a lot of dirty dancing in the seedier night clubs, which is naturally where the saxophone gravitated to, the *Ladies' Home Journal* wrote that the saxophone rendered listeners incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong and evil and good.

⁶⁰ "Well, that's the saxophone ... gets people's goats". Para-cited from Michael Segell, interview with Liane Hansen, NPR, November 6, 2005.

⁶¹ Para-cited from entry on "to get someone's goat" in *Dictionary.com*.

⁶² Para-cited from entry on "highstrung" in *The Oxford English Dictionary* and *Collins Online Dictionary*.

⁶³ Para-cited from entry on "to get someone's goat" in *Dictionary.com*.

⁶⁴ Para-cited from Liane Hansen, interview with Michael Segell, NPR, op. cit.

⁶⁵ Para-cited from entry on "seedy" in *Oxford English Dictionary*.

And I think the apotheosis of all this scapegoating of the saxophone occurred in 1954 when Elia Kazan made the movie version of “A Streetcar Named Desire”.⁶⁶

Scapegoat. Person or animal which takes on the sins of others, or is unfairly blamed for a problem. The concept originally came from Leviticus, in which a goat is designated to be cast into the desert with the sins of the community. *And Aaron shall cast lots upon two goats: one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for Azazel*. Other ancient societies had similar practices. In psychology and sociology, the practice of selecting someone as a scapegoat has led to the concept of scapegoating.⁶⁷

And there’s a scene in the movie in which Stella and Stanley have a fight and Stella is standing at the top of that wrought-iron staircase in her sultry New Orleans apartment, and they’re coming back together. And in the background is a sultry saxophone solo. The Legion of Decency screened the movie. They would either give their imprimatur to movies or they would say that we can’t possibly endorse this. And they said we can’t possibly endorse this not because of that scene, but because of the so-called carnal, voluptuous sound of the saxophone.

But interestingly, the saxophone ended up empowering three very disenfranchised groups in America and they would be African-Americans, women, and children. It wasn’t really until the soloists broke out of the dance bands – and they would be Coleman Hawkins and Chu Berry and Ben Webster and Mayor Lester Young – that the saxophone really found the voice that we think of today. Something very similar happened with women in the teens. It was considered impolite for women to play an instrument in public and yet in the teens around the time of the suffrage movement, women formed in America all-female, all-saxophone bands of four, eight, 12, 20 saxophones. And the short story with the children is that the profits from the enormous sales of saxophones in the teens and the ‘20s, when a million and a half saxophones were sold in America during what was known as the saxophone craze, basically subsidized music education in America thanks to the instrument makers, who were self-serving by giving their instruments away to fledgling bands in public school.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ “The seedy reputation ... *Desire*”. Para-cited from Michael Segell, interview with Liane Hansen, NPR, op. cit.

⁶⁷ Para-cited from *Wikipedia* entry on “scapegoat”.

* Cf. The 1918 dedication of *Jerusalem* as The Women Voters’ Hymn as discussed in # 5 above

⁶⁸ “And there’s a scene ... public school”. Para-cited from Michael Segell NPR interview op. cit.

Strange then to associate the saxophone, the eponymous *Devil's Horn* – controversial from the start – with *palliatives*: things that serve to palliate, to alleviate (disease) without curing, to extenuate, to excuse; and *confections*: sweetmeats, shaped morsels of confectionary usually consisting chiefly of sugar or chocolate, fruit preserved in sugar, bonbon, sugarplum, good.

And thus and therefore *Panic* with a wolf divested of its sheep's clothing.

A wolf of such uncontainable ferocity that even those who sought to emphasize the celebratory Dionysian qualities of Birtwistle's modernism must have paused for thought.⁶⁹

[*Wolf*. Erect-eared, straight-tailed harsh-furred tawney-grey, wild gregarious carnivorous quadruped allied to dog, preyer on sheep etc. or combining in packs to hunt larger animals; rapacious or greedy person.]⁷⁰

[*Sheep*. Kinds of wild or domesticated timid gregarious woolly sometimes horned ruminant mammal of which the male is named *ram*, the female *ewe*, and the young *lamb* (*sheep and goats*, the good and the bad, see Matt. xxv. 33: "And he shall set the sheep on his right side, but the goats on the left").]⁷¹

Beware the false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

What could he have been thinking of? *A Streetcar Named Desire*?

The dozing sages drop the drowsy strain,

Then pause, and puff – and speak, and pause again –

8. Once again, Birtwistle has utilized a mythical character to help unleash the powerful forces of the unconscious.⁷²

What comes first? Is it an idea, or a shape, an architecture?

No. I'm not an architectural composer. What comes first is an idea while I'm writing the last piece. I can see there's a way forward in doing something which might exploit something that I couldn't exploit in the last piece. This piece I'm working on now – I can see a lot directions it could go.

This is "Panic", your commission for the last night of the Proms? But I thought the rehearsals were this weekend.

They are. They'll do some of it. There are lots of ideas. You find a way to end the piece and a lot of them are not there.

So you don't know how long it's going to take?

⁶⁹ Robert Adlington, "Harrison Birtwistle's Recent Music", op. cit., 2.

⁷⁰ Para-cited from entry on "wolf" in *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁷¹ Para-cited from entry on "sheep" in *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁷² Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 111.

I never do.

How do you feel about having this piece on the same bill as “Pomp and Circumstance March Number 5”?

Nothing to do with it.

You once compared composing to dry stone walling. What did you mean?

I’m a dry stone waller. (Pause) I was brought up – so were you, in the North – we know what dry stone walls are.⁷³

Dry stone walls are made of stone without any cement or mortar. This traditional technique originated before cement was invented. It does not need the cost of cement, and more important, such walls will last longer than cement walls if the ground is soft and the foundations move. If the wall has been well made, the stones will move but still stay together.

Dry stone walls were all made for a particular function. Usually they were an aid to farming by forming a long-standing field barrier, using readily available materials. They keep livestock and wild animals from crops, define the property boundary and also provide a use for the stone removed from the field so that grass and crops can grow better.

But dry stone walls are an important and attractive part of the present landscape. They follow the form of the land and lead the eye. They are close to the earth and rarely higher than shoulder. You can always look over them.

Dry stone walls are a direct link to local history. Not only were many built and repaired, with great effort, by the ancestors of local families but they are also of interest because of the variations in the local styles of construction and the features found. The styles are directly related to the shape and hardness of the stone available locally.⁷⁴

But you know what’s interesting about dry stone walls? It started in the eighteenth century, I think. The people who built them had to provide their own stones, and they were paid per hundred yards, something like threepence. What I remember about this old guy who did it was, when he picked up a stone, he never tried it. He always had a place for it.⁷⁵

What I do is a bit like that. My material has been created by some chance operation. I pick up the first thing that comes to hand and find the most suitable

⁷³ “What comes first ... stone walls are.” Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, interview with Dan Warburton, July 8, 1995 at www.paristransatlantic/artic.com/magazine/interviews/birtwistle.

⁷⁴ “Dry stone walls ... locally”. Para-cited from “Walls Need Friends”, Dry Stone Walling Association of Great Britain at www.dswa.org.uk/Publications/Leaflets/walls.

⁷⁵ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, interview with Dan Warburton, op. cit.

place for it. Having created a context I then generate more material and so the piece gets bigger.⁷⁶

9. That *Panic* seemed to touch deep fears is evinced by the ferocious public response to the work, echoed in the tabloid newspapers.⁷⁷

Ferocious. Fierce, savage, cruel [L. *ferus*, fierce, wild]⁷⁸

*O Swallow, Swallow flying flying South,
Fly to her, and fall upon her gilded eaves,
And tell her, tell her, what I tell to thee.*

*O tell her, Swallow, though that knowest each,
That bright and fierce and fickle is the South,
And dark and true and tender is the North.*⁷⁹

Fierce. Violent in hostility, angrily combative; raging, vehement [L. *ferus*, savage]⁸⁰

*Black it stood as night
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
And shook a dreadful dart.*⁸¹

Or did the outrage generated by *Panic* reveal a deeper horror at being confronted by the terror of the shadow of the repressed unconscious?⁸²

Only a dilettante will even try to reduce everything about art to the unconscious, reiterating one hackneyed psychoanalytic cliché after another.⁸³

My attitude to writing is, it's like when you do wallpapering, you know, you remember where all the little bits are that don't meet, you think: "Oh my God that's horrible". And then your friends come and say: "Who did this wallpapering? It's terrific!" (*Laughs*) After a while you live with it and you forget about that.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 149.

⁷⁷ Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 114.

⁷⁸ Para-cited from the entry on "ferocious", *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁷⁹ Para-cited from Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809 – 1914), "Song".

⁸⁰ Para-cited from the entry on "fierce", *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁸¹ Para-cited from John Milton (1608–1675), "Paradise Lost", l. 666.

⁸² Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 114.

⁸³ Para-cited from Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by C. Leinhardt. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984, 13.

⁸⁴ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, interview with Dan Warburton, op. cit.

It's like shells on a shore: I compose each shell but they're all slightly different, and they're thrown by circumstance on the shore, by what the sea does to them.⁸⁵

But you don't in fact allow the bits to be put together in different ways.

No, I decide what the order is through my ears, through my intuition, through whatever composition is.

Do you allow the possibility that it could be otherwise?

No. It's a funny double standard, but once it's there it becomes a fact. You take a photograph of the seashore, to continue the analogy: when I click the camera, that's my photograph.⁸⁶

To change the analogy, I also feel like one of those medieval carvers Nicholas Pevsner discusses in those books he wrote for King Penguin's: I carve the stone or the piece of wood to make the object I want, but there are elements in the material beyond my control. So the essential nature of the stone or the wood remains inviolate. It has a life of its own.⁸⁷

10. For me, it is undoubtedly a music with primordial expressivity. Its power, its excitement, even its danger comes from its predominantly Dionysian directness, from the pleasure it takes in the immediate (sonic, rhythmic), from its celebration of the rough bodily physicality of its soloists seemingly uninfluenced by the rational Apollo.⁸⁸

It's a nineteenth century, romantic idea that creative artists are people who are preoccupied with self-expression. What really pre-occupies artists is simply how the hell you do it.⁸⁹

I'm very interested in formality, used as a frame for unpredictable events. To make forms that are in a sense unique.⁹⁰

All that matters is that the composer has a responsibility to his materials. But that's obvious.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Paul Griffiths, *New Sounds, new Perspectives: British Composers of the 1980s*, Faber Music Ltd., 1985, 191.

⁸⁶ "But you don't ... photograph". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, interview with Dan Warburton, op. cit.

⁸⁷ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 149–150.

⁸⁸ Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 114.

⁸⁹ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 147–148.

⁹⁰ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in discussion with Ross Lorraine in "Territorial Rites 2", *The Musical Times*, November 1997, 16.

⁹¹ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 149.

I know what material is. I don't think I always did, but I do now. I'm not trying to carve out of stone when I have a piece of wood.⁹²

The roughness of the sound can come over as violence?

In my work? No, I don't think it's violent. It's to do with the nature of the material.⁹³

I've never tried to fight it; I've tried to understand it. To understand the nature of your material is the most important thing for creativity.⁹⁴

The music I write needs a physical presence. Something like Xenakis's music can only exist because it's loud. It speaks through four ffffs. With my material it might come over superficially as violent, but I don't feel I'm expressing anything. [Pause] I could contradict that. Maybe it is violent, I don't know.⁹⁵

It's a question of what's the bread, and what's the filling. I like to think that in my music there's an ambiguity about what the bread is and what the filling is.⁹⁶

It's like a journey. Like the Klee idea of taking a line for a walk. An active line on a walk, moving freely, without a goal. A walk for a walk's sake. I don't have a map of the journey, just a direction.⁹⁷

Music is an incremental art. It has a life of its own. The decisions about where to go derive from the context of where you are at any moment.⁹⁸

You need a method of working which enables you to manipulate the material. I've certainly created a vocabulary for doing things but some items get thrown out, some forgotten. I've become acutely aware of the sanctity of the context.⁹⁹

Writing music is a very hard grind. Spontaneity takes time. Ten seconds of music takes two days to build. Sticking together very small notes. Finding the right stone for the right place. Pebble by pebble by pebble.

⁹² Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Griffiths, *New Sounds*, op. cit., 192.

⁹³ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Norman Lebrecht, "Music that Makes a Stand: Norman Lebrecht talks to Harrison Birtwistle", *ENO & Friends*, 10, Summer 1986, 10.

⁹⁴ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Griffiths, *New Sounds*, op. cit., 192.

⁹⁵ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Norman Lebrecht, "Music that Makes a Stand", op. cit., 10.

⁹⁶ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in discussion with Ross Lorraine in "Territorial Rites 1", *The Musical Times*, October 1997, 8.

⁹⁷ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in discussion with Ross Lorraine in "Territorial Rites 2", op. cit., 16; and Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Praeger, [c1953].

⁹⁸ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, "Commentary" at "Making Music. Harrison Birtwistle", Zankel Hall at Carnegie, January 31, 2005; and Harrison Birtwistle in Ross Lorraine "Territorial Rites 2", op. cit., 16.

⁹⁹ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 149.

I worry a great deal. It keeps me awake at night. I can only believe in what I'm doing at the moment.

It's the most terrifying thing to do. You have to go in with your wellies – and do it.¹⁰⁰

11. He is a blinkered, single-minded composer; he only hears what he wants to hear, in the way he wants to hear it.¹⁰¹

Blinker. 1.n.(usu. in pl.) Leather screen(s) on bridle preventing horse from seeing sideways. 2. v.t. (esp. fig.) Obscure with blinkers.¹⁰²

There are no songs, sonatas, quartets, concertos or symphonies. None of the abstract forms which have dominated music since the eighteenth century. Nor are there any of the equally abstract 'process' titles other contemporary composers adopt. When not referring to a text he is setting, the titles of his pieces suggest an older, less sophisticated tradition. *Monody for Corpus Christi, Entr'actes, Chorales, Tragoedia, Verses, Eight Lessons for Keyboards*.¹⁰³

*Perhaps the explanation lies in his background?*¹⁰⁴

[*Background*. Part of scene, picture, or description, that serves as setting to chief figures or objects and foreground. (*fig*) Obscurity or retirement; person's cultural knowledge, education, experience, etc., information needed to understand problem etc.]¹⁰⁵

*Mrs. Rode's background and education did not naturally prepare her for our ways. It was a question of enlightenment, not criticism. Do I make myself clear? She would never really have fitted in. Her background was against her. The fault was not hers – it was her background which, as I say was unfortunate.*¹⁰⁶

As state-funded grammar-school boys their backgrounds were very different from the privileged upbringing of previous generations of London based composers. They breathed a different air; they were less constrained by convention.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ "Writing music ... do it". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, "Commentary", at "Making Music", Zankel Hall, op. cit.; and Harrison Birtwistle, interview with John Tulsa, BBC, Radio 3, July 1, 2001.

¹⁰¹ Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 9.

¹⁰² Para-cited from the entry on "blinker" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁰³ Para-cited from Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁵ Para-cited from the entry on "background" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁰⁶ Para-cited from John Le Carré, *A Murder of Quality*, Penguin Books, 1964, 54.

¹⁰⁷ Para-cited from Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 11.

*Take poor Rode, for instance. I certainly don't hold Rode's background against him in any way, poor fellow. The grammar schools do a splendid job, I am sure. Besides, he settled down very well. I told the Master so. With careful instruction, such people can, as I said to Master, learn our customs and even our manners; and the Master agreed.*¹⁰⁸

[*Grammar Schools.* The somewhat forbidding name has its origins in the medieval schools established by pious founders to provide free education for local children. The schools were largely dependent on the church, and as Latin was then the universal language of knowledge and communication, it figured largely in the timetable. Hence the grammar of the title. The schools gradually declined over the years mainly because of a diminution in endowments, and by the 19th century they were in a poor state. The Grammar School Act of 1840 then authorized governing bodies to introduce a wider range of subjects. Both boarding and day schools developed, and it was from the former that public schools emerged.]¹⁰⁹

*Thou hast traitorously corrupted the youth of the realm in erecting a grammar school: and whereas, before, our forefathers had no other books but the score and the tally, thou hast caused printing to be used; and, contrary to the king, his crown and dignity, thou hast built a paper-mill.*¹¹⁰

[*Public Schools.* The schools so designated are in fact private (fee-paying) and independent. They came to be so-called in the 18th century when the reputation of grammar schools spread beyond their immediate neighbourhood and they began taking resident students from elsewhere. They were thus open to all, and not completely local.]¹¹¹

Grammar schoolboy music is tough and gritty.¹¹²

I like the idea that there's a bit of dirt in it. I would have been a terrible jeweler. Boulez is a musical jeweler. But I don't think of myself as a lesser artist because of that. Experience makes other problems. By which I mean you remember the wounds and they heal, but there are boils and sores and other wounds that appear.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Para-cited from John Le Carré, *A Murder of Quality*, op. cit., 56.

¹⁰⁹ Para-cited from the entry on "Grammar School" in *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, op. cit., 604–605.

¹¹⁰ Para-cited from William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part 2*, IV, viii, 35.

¹¹¹ Para-cited from the entry on "Public School" in *Brewer's*, op. cit., 118.

¹¹² Para-cited from Dai Griffiths, "Genre: Grammar Schoolboy Music", *Critical Musicology Newsletter*, 3, 1995, # 3.

¹¹³ Para-cited from Stuart Jeffries, "Up the Garden Path", *The Guardian*, November 28, 2003.

The classic exponents of grammar schoolboy music were the New Manchester School and its acolytes. Grammar schoolboy music is scored for orchestras, not studios. Grammar schoolboy music is uncompromising: it doesn't compromise with pop music in particular.¹¹⁴

He is however, an unexpected champion of the Police.

I thought they were pretty good. He can't act for toffee, though.

What about Sting's solo music? Birtwistle stares silently out of the window.

He is belatedly getting into Roy Orbison. Why?

He's very cool. He has a proper expressive voice, like a good *lieder* singer. My premise is if it's interesting, it's worth a detour.¹¹⁵

The refusal by works of art to consent to compromise implies also a critical stance towards the notion of internal consistency, which is the quality of uncompromising elaboration and integration.¹¹⁶

The home of grammar schoolboy music is the university music department. No-one else wants it. Grammar schoolboy music is the practice, music analysis the theory. Music analysis is also full of grammar schoolboys, except that they didn't have quite the narcissism, self-pity, ambition, or talent to produce grammar schoolboy music.

Without music analysis grammar schoolboy music's in trouble – deep. No-one wants to hear it; what they want to hear is the bits when grammar schoolboy music stops being grammar schoolboy music.¹¹⁷

We have a generation of young composers in this country who are amoebas, who come into the world fully formed. I make no more claims for them. For me, I have a music in my head but I don't feel I had the technical equipment or the tools to make it come out.

He declines to name these amoebas.

I very much identify with painters and sculptors. I suppose it's called the struggle. I don't know. But I feel closer to people like Klee and Cézanne. Think of those views of *Mont Saint Victoire*. The subject matter falls out as irrelevant, the different views on the same thing are what it's about. That's much more me.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Para-cited from Dai Griffiths, "Genre", op. cit., #3.

¹¹⁵ "He is however detour". Para-cited from Stuart Jeffries, "Up the Garden Path", op.cit.

¹¹⁶ Para-cited from Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., 67.

¹¹⁷ "The home of ... schoolboy music". Para-cited from Dai Griffiths, "Genre", op. cit., #9.

¹¹⁸ "We have a generation ... much more me". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Jeffries, "Garden Path", op. cit.

The most forceful and uncompromisingly original British composer of his generation.¹¹⁹

*Perhaps the explanation lies in his background?*¹²⁰

12. He was born on 15 July 1934 in the Lancashire mill-town of Accrington, which is situated between the larger towns of Blackburn and Burnley, some 20 miles north of Manchester.¹²¹

Famous throughout the country for the manufacture of red brick.¹²²

It too is uncompromising. No foliage softens the stark hills which enclose it; nothing disguises the fact that its function is purely industrial.¹²³

*We lived in a town stolen from the valleys, a huddled place full of chimneys and little shops and back-to-back houses with no gardens. The hills surrounded us, and our own swept out into the Pennines, broken now and again with a farm or a relic from the war. There used to be a lot of old tanks but the council took them away. The town was a fat blot and the streets spread back from it into the green, steadily upwards.*¹²⁴

There is only row upon row of workers' cottages, and above them, dominating them, the tall chimneys of the mills and the high arches of the railway viaduct (an image Birtwistle uses in his second act of the *Mask of Orpheus* when Orpheus descends to Hades!).¹²⁵

This may seem a relatively insignificant fact of biography, but it throws interesting light on much of his later work. Anyone who hears Birtwistle talk even today will recognize immediately that he has lost little of his soft but gruff Lancastrian accent. Despite his many international successes, despite his prolonged

¹¹⁹ Para-cited from Anthony Holden's citation of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* in his review of *Birtwistle, Theseus Game, Earth Dances*. Ensemble Modern/Brabbins/Valade/Boulez (DG 477 0702) in *The Guardian*, August 1, 2004. www.theguardian.com/music/2004/01/classicalmusicandopera.

¹²⁰ Para-cited from Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 4.

¹²¹ Ibid. [Full disclosure: I too was born and brought up in Accrington, as was the novelist Jeanette Winterson cited below and the artist John Virtue.]

¹²² Para-cited from Dan Warburton, op.cit. [Accrington is famous also for Accrington Stanley, the local football team; and the Accrington Pals, the 11th Battalion (Accrington), East Lancashire Regiment: a pals battalion of Kitchener's Army raised in and around the town of Accrington during the First World War, of which approximately 700 went into action on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916, and were effectively wiped out within half an hour.]

¹²³ Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 4.

¹²⁴ Para-cited from Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit*, Pandora Press, 1985, 6.

¹²⁵ Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 4.

periods of residence in the south of England, the United States, Scotland and France, despite even his espousal of a certain cosmopolitanism (he owns a modishly furnished flat in London's Docklands with commanding views of the River Thames), he seems to retain some of the manners and attitude of a working-class northerner. It is as if his roots are still firmly planted in his native region's soil, from which he continues to draw nourishment.¹²⁶

We are the only working-class composers.¹²⁷

Each morning, Harrison Birtwistle walks across the garden to his studio. He goes past the potted quince and maple trees, past the bamboo and roses.¹²⁸

It's a working-class thing, I suppose, that need to get out of the house to go to work.¹²⁹

His father was a farmer and his childhood home was a smallholding on the edge of Accrington, at the point where the black industrial town met the moorland.¹³⁰

[*Smallholding*. A small plot of agricultural land bigger than an allotment, but not big enough to be called a farm. The term received legal significance under the Small Holdings Act of 1892, which permitted county councils to provide them for letting. The Small Holdings and Allotments Act of 1926 defined them as of not less than an acre and not more than 50 acres, and of not more than £100 in annual value.]¹³¹

Looking back, Birtwistle describes it as 'paradise', a kind of Arcadia; it still lives with him.¹³²

[*Arcadia*. A district of the Peloponnesus named after Arcas, son of Jupiter, chiefly inhabited by shepherds. It is also the abode of Pan. According to Virgil it was the home of pastoral simplicity and happiness. The name was used by Sir Philip Sidney for the title of his prose romance (1590) and it soon became a by-word for rustic bliss.]¹³³

We first hear of the Birtwistle family with Ralph de Bridtwisell, born about 1160, and living in the now-vanished hamlet of that name, next to Hapton, near Accrington in Lancashire. In 1316, his great-great grandson, William de

¹²⁶ Para-cited from Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 3.

¹²⁷ Para-cited from Peter Maxwell Davies in Alexander Chancellor, "How Wonderful to See You", *The Guardian*, July 21, 2004.

¹²⁸ Para-cited from Stuart Jeffries, "Up the Garden Path", op. cit.

¹²⁹ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Jeffries, op. cit.

¹³⁰ Para-cited from Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 7.

¹³¹ Para-cited from the entry on "smallholding" in *Brewer's Dictionary*, op. cit., 1287.

¹³² Para-cited from Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 7.

¹³³ Para-cited from the entry on "Arcadia" in *Brewer's*, op. cit., 60.

Bridtwisell exchanged land with John de Huncote and moved into Huncote Hall (later known as Huncoat Hall), where the main branch of the family remained for the next 450 years, buying more land and marrying into many of the prominent families. Later, because of their devout Catholicism throughout the Reformation and beyond, and later their loyal adherence to the Royalist cause, this staunch recusant family were subjected to many trials and tribulations, including imprisonments, fines and sequestrations, so that their fortunes waxed and waned over the centuries. The hall was one of several Lancashire houses to have a Priest's Hole – a hiding place for visiting priests during the years of persecution, when they would travel the kingdom in disguise, from safe house to safe house, saying mass and giving the sacraments to local Catholics. The Birtwistles sent many sons to be educated abroad in France, Spain and Holland. Several returned as priests and became chaplains to various Catholic families. Their relative, the martyr St. John Southworth, of the Samesbury Hall family, was one of those who hid at Huncoat, and some records say he was captured there before his incarceration in Lancaster Castle.¹³⁴

13. Young Harry grew up with the co-existence of industry and countryside, of factory chimneys and sheep, of workers' terraces and farmhouses.

A concern for *rus in urbe* is, according to Pevsner, 'eminently English', and is entirely characteristic of Birtwistle. *Panic*, for instance, is a Dionysian celebration of the nature god Pan for the decidedly urban soloists of saxophone and drum kit plus orchestra of wind and percussion (*no strings*).¹³⁵

[*Celebration*. 1. v.t. Perform publicly and duly (religious ceremony etc.); officiate at (Eucharist); observe (festival), honour with rites, festivities, etc.; praise widely, extol; 2. v. i. Officiate at Eucharist; engage in festivities after success etc.]¹³⁶

These industrial sounds – of wind, brass and percussion (he has a self-confessed discomfort with writing for strings – the voice of civilized culture) – have dominated his sonic imagination ever since.¹³⁷

As uncompromising and craggy as the Northern landscape he grew up in.¹³⁸

The way he composes is typically English. He is governed not by theory, as his avant-garde colleagues on the continent tended to be in the fifties and sixties

¹³⁴ Para-cited from "A Tale of Downward Social Mobility. The Birtwistles and Huncoat Hall". Just another WordPress.com weblog.

¹³⁵ "The young Harry ... (no strings)". Para-cited from Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 4.

¹³⁶ Para-cited from the entry on "celebration" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹³⁷ Para-cited from Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 8.

¹³⁸ Para-cited from Warburton, op. cit.

when he was moulding his style, but by practical experiment. This relates him to the long tradition of English empiricism.¹³⁹

Now the one thing that I rejected in my life was English music (it has no cowshit in it – it’s never rough enough). I did it really from arrogance as a young man but it was a conscious thing.¹⁴⁰

As a point of departure, English music was what I wasn’t interested in. I was interested in the thing that came from Europe.¹⁴¹

You can’t really talk about an English tradition.

If I’ve arrived anywhere, I’ve arrived a different way from somebody like Vaughan Williams.

People say my music is English. I don’t know what it is. Maybe it’s not me writing English music, but that English music is becoming more like me.

So, I’ve never really thought of myself as an English composer.¹⁴²

14. Everything about Harrison Birtwistle bespeaks a son of the soil¹⁴³

Single-mindedly ploughing his own modernist furrow.¹⁴⁴

*Men of England, wherefore plough
For the lords who lay you low?*¹⁴⁵

A quiet, rather secretive person, he tends to keep himself to himself. Should you meet him, you would get the impression of someone utterly self-possessed. He seems invulnerable to the external environment, yet he has the air of a countryman about him.¹⁴⁶

The short compact frame, the round countryman’s face surrounded by a frizz of nearly white hair and beard.¹⁴⁷

His manner is stolid and unflappable, his Lancastrian voice soft-grained, his appearance a little unkempt.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁹ Para-cited from Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle in Recent Years*, op. cit., 99.

¹⁴⁰ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle, *ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴¹ Para-cited from “Harrison Birtwistle Quotes” at www.brainyquotes.com.

¹⁴² “You can’t really ... English composer”. Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle in Recent Years*, op. cit., 98.

¹⁴³ Para-cited from Meirion Bowen as cited by Hall in *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 12.

¹⁴⁴ Para-cited from Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 14.

¹⁴⁵ Para-cited from Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), “Song to the Men of England”.

¹⁴⁶ Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle in Recent Years*, op. cit., 4.

¹⁴⁷ Para-cited from Ivan Hewett, “Calling the Tune”, *Times Online*, September 25, 2004.

¹⁴⁸ Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle in Recent Years*, op. cit., 4.

[*Stolid*. Phlegmatic, unemotional, lacking or seeming to lack animation, not easily excited, hard to stir, obstinate, apparently stupid.]¹⁴⁹

[*Unkempt*. Uncombed, disheveled; untidy, of neglected appearance.]¹⁵⁰

Pay him a visit at his Twickenham home, and you are likely (at least in the summer) to find him curled up asleep like a hedgehog in a corner of the garden.¹⁵¹

Some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,

*When hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn.*¹⁵²

[*Hedgehog*. Small spiny nocturnal pig-snouted insectivorous mammal of genus *Erinaceus*, rolling itself up into a ball for defence; porcupine, sea-urchin, or other animal similarly armed with spines; (mil.) small self-contained defensive position bristling with fortifications on all sides; prickly seed-vessel of some plants, e.g. corn crowfoot; person hard to get on with [f. ME *hedge* (from its habitat) + *hog* (from its snout)].¹⁵³

Interviewing Birtwistle is like trying to mate pandas. The creature is friendly but on the surface ponderous, though capable of sudden grace, exactness and surprise.¹⁵⁴

He digresses easily from his music and other professional matters to talk of trees, birds and insects which absorb him just as much.¹⁵⁵

He has a way, this soft-pawed composer with his bear-softened face and gentle Accrington accent of flintily returning questions to sender. He holds up a copy of a recent interview headlined: ‘You have to have a vision’.

No you don’t.

He snaps.

And I certainly haven’t.¹⁵⁶

In fact, Birtwistle seems to be getting more prickly these days, as if to ward off any suggestion of mellowing.

It becomes more and more difficult to talk to other composers. There’s nothing to say, after a while. With his round face surrounded by a frizz of graying hair, Birtwistle looks like a countryman, and he seems happiest talking about orchids, or the difficulties of breeding turtles. But eventually the conversation

¹⁴⁹ Para-cited from the entry on “stolid” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁵⁰ Para-cited from the entry on “unkempt” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁵¹ Para-cited from Meirion Bowen, “Articles and Publications: Variation Forms” at www.meirion-bowen.com/mbartbirt.

¹⁵² Para-cited from Thomas Hardy (1840–1928), “Afterwords”.

¹⁵³ Para-cited from the entry on “hedgehog” in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁵⁴ Para-cited from Paul Griffiths, *New Sounds*, op. cit., 191.

¹⁵⁵ Para-cited from Meirion Bowen in Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 12.

¹⁵⁶ “He has a way ... haven’t”. Para-cited from Jeffries, op. cit.

turns back to music, and the current craze for John Tavener's 'religious minimalism'.

I cannot stand John Tavener's music. It's what I call sentimental extremism.¹⁵⁷

But he could, in fact, be described as a hedgehog in another, entirely different sense – that popularized by Sir Isaiah Berlin in his famous essay on Tolstoy, which takes its starting point from a fragment of Archilochus: The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.¹⁵⁸

In his book *Wittgenstein's Place in Twentieth Century Analytic Philosophy*, Oxford philosopher Peter Hacker uses this metaphor to contrast Berlin's Tolstoy, "a fox by nature, but a hedgehog by conviction" with the Austrian-born philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who was "by nature a hedgehog, but after 1929 transformed himself, by great intellectual and imaginative endeavour, into a paradigmatic fox."¹⁵⁹

In *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, Sir Isaiah Berlin characterizes hedgehogs as those "who relate everything to a single, central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate, in terms of which they understand, think and feel – a single, universal, organizing principle in terms of which alone all that they are and say has significance."¹⁶⁰

Start with an absolutely regular and uniform pattern of the simplest, most predictable kind then superimpose upon it a pattern which is its extreme opposite – something capricious and unpredictable.¹⁶¹

[*Capricious*. Guided by whim, inconstant, irregular, uncalculable. F. Ital. *capro*, he-goat.]¹⁶²

The capricious, accidental and unpredictable patterns he employs come from a number of sources.¹⁶³

It's important for me that it's not preformed. I get very uninterested in just sticking to process – the creative juices are in obedience! When the piece takes over, and I have to go with it, that's when I feel good about it.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁷ "In fact ... extremism". Para-cited from Birtwistle and Hewett in Hewett, "Calling the Tune", op. cit.

¹⁵⁸ Para-cited from Meirion Bowen in Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 12.

¹⁵⁹ Para-cited from *Wikipedia* entry on "The Hedgehog and the Fox".

¹⁶⁰ Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 12.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶² Para-cited from the entry on "capricious" in *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

¹⁶³ Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 13.

¹⁶⁴ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Lorraine, "Territorial Rites 2", op. cit., 16.

Since *Refrains and Choruses* was composed off the top of his head the disruptions which throw things into disorder derive from his fantasy, his own capriciousness.¹⁶⁵

I wrote it completely off the top of my head. I can't justify a single note.¹⁶⁶

Since the central organizing principle requires that something uniform and regular be set off by something capricious, the capriciousness is the role the horn must play.¹⁶⁷

It's as if I compose all the elements first, and move through them, and can return to them – which introduces the element of repetition.¹⁶⁸

The horn is therefore the protagonist and the drama, the conflict between capricious individuality and the solidarity of groups.

Gradually the horn's capriciousness becomes more assertive until, in the sixth section, it becomes almost unbearably headstrong.

No protagonist has ever been so wilful or capricious as Mr. Punch.¹⁶⁹

Birtwistle believes his own primary task as a composer of opera is to explain how it is that characters need to sing, instead of merely speaking or whatever.

His ultimate reference point is the original source of the music itself: hence his habit of beginning from a single note or phrase, or placing a single line melody in the foreground. Constantly he asks the question, why sing or play?¹⁷⁰

He can theorise about his music until the end of time. But ...

It's just a story you tell afterwards about what you've done.¹⁷¹

I can't get into all that stuff about communication. That's what so many younger composers are doing now and to me it seems retrogressive. It's all rhetoric and no form. For me music is all about making a real form, otherwise all you're doing is making a substitute, adding another piece into a world that is already filled with pieces very like it. You have to have vision.¹⁷²

You have to go in with your wellies—and do it.

¹⁶⁵ Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 13.

¹⁶⁶ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Jeffries, op. cit.

¹⁶⁷ Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 14.

¹⁶⁸ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Lorraine, "Territorial Rites 2", op. cit., 5.

¹⁶⁹ "The horn ... Mr. Punch". Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 15.

¹⁷⁰ "Birtwistle believes . . . play?" Para-cited from Meirion Bowen, "Articles and Publications: Variation Forms" at www.meirion-bowen.com/mbartbirt

¹⁷¹ Para-cited from Jeffries, op. cit.

¹⁷² Para-cited from Hewett, "Calling the Tune", op. cit.

15. The dramas he enacts are internal rather than external. They are dramas of the mind and do not require external referents. In effect, they are projections of internalized conflict which probably besets all children from a cohesive working-class community who consider themselves outsiders, the conflict between the necessity of self-assertion and the equally strong pull of the group.

In all his music Birtwistle requires a soloist to represent the ego and chorus, the collective unconscious.¹⁷³

It's not about the story. Francis Bacon talked about the "boredom of the story" and that's why I use myths. They've been told endlessly before; you don't have to do the boring work of creating them.

But I thought you reckoned that popular culture had messed up so much with our collective psyche that we don't know those mythic narratives any more.

That's a problem.¹⁷⁴

A better model for understanding expression is to think of it not in terms of subjective feeling, but in terms of ordinary things and situations in which historical processes and functions have been sedimented, endowing them with a potential to speak.

Social conflicts and class relations leave an imprint on the structure of works of art.

Art is expressive when a subjectively mediated objective quality raises its voice to speak: sadness, strength, yearning.

Art is imitation only to the extent to which it is objective expression, far removed from psychology.¹⁷⁵

Expression is a phenomenon of interference, a function both of method and mimesis. Mimesis in turn is called forth by the complexity of the technical procedure.¹⁷⁶

It's about making a context and then breaking it. It's how you break it that becomes interesting.¹⁷⁷

The context of the moment is unique and must exert an influence, a strong influence.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷³ "The dramas ... unconscious". Para-cited from Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 52–53.

¹⁷⁴ "It is not what ... problem". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Jeffries, op. cit.

¹⁷⁵ "A better model ... psychology". Para-cited from Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op. cit., 163.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷⁷ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Jeffries, op. cit.

¹⁷⁸ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Michael Hall, "The Sanctity of the Context: Birtwistle's Recent Music", *Musical Times* 129/1, January 1988, 14.

The role playing could move in a totally different plane from that of the ideas of foreground/middleground/background, a sort of independent stratum (this is more than just interesting) – *important* – do not precompose the idea of role playing. Let any logic in that direction come out of the composed context – it should make a sort of hidden drama on an independent level. Like a secret theatre.¹⁷⁹

Wasn't it Yeats who said start with anything – as soon as you have a context, anything. I would never formalize, never predict what the piece is going to be, because the one sacred thing is the context. As soon as I move, as soon as I make a gesture and move to another there's a situation with ramifications. Things I would never have thought of in the first place appear. To these I have a duty. They are highly potent. From then the formalism starts showing itself. There's certainly no pre-composition.¹⁸⁰

In a way a piece of music is like a journey.

The decisions about where to go derive from the context of where you are at any moment.¹⁸¹

The total object is never sounded.

You never actually hear the whole thing.¹⁸²

An analogy would be wandering through a town with squares, some more important than others, a town with roads on which you go round and round, in through one square and out through the other.¹⁸³

There's no logical end to it.¹⁸⁴

Have you ever been to Lucca? If you go into a walled town, like Lucca, you find what you do is retrace your steps and approach piazzas from different angles. The nature of the place is concealed – like a ball of string.¹⁸⁵

There are days when I've thought 'wouldn't it be wonderful if I didn't have to go through all this process of all these bloody notes and paper, and end up with something at the end of the day which I know more or less what it was like'.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁸¹ "In a way ... moment". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Lorraine, "Territorial Rites 2", *op. cit.*, 14–16.

¹⁸² "The total ... thing". Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Griffiths, *New Sounds*, *op. cit.*, 191.

¹⁸³ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, *op. cit.*, 144.

¹⁸⁴ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Lorraine, "Territorial Rites 2", *op. cit.*, 13.

¹⁸⁵ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Jeffries, *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁶ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Lorraine, "Territorial Rites 1", *op. cit.*, 6.

You never get the complete picture.¹⁸⁷

Yan Tan Tethera Methera Pim

Sethera Lethera Hovera Dovera Dik

Various parts get repeated. But the repeats are not like ritornellos, they're not the same thing seen from a new perspective, they take context into account.¹⁸⁸

I've become acutely aware of the sanctity of the context.¹⁸⁹

All that matters is that the composer has a responsibility to his materials.¹⁹⁰

I've never tried to fight it; I've tried to understand it. To understand the nature of your material is the most important thing for creativity.¹⁹¹

It's to do with what is background, what is foreground.¹⁹²

This sounds horribly pretentious but I like to think that if music hadn't existed I could have invented it.¹⁹³

You have to go in with your wellies – and do it.

The most forceful and uncompromisingly original British composer of his generation.¹⁹⁴

Perhaps the explanation lies in his background.

Perhaps.

And that dismal cry rose slowly

And sank slowly through the air

Full of spirit's melancholy

And eternity's despair

And they heard the words it said

Pan is Dead –Great Pan is Dead –

Pan, Pan is Dead

¹⁸⁷ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Lorraine, "Territorial Rites 2", op. cit., 14.

¹⁸⁸ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 144.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Para-cited from Harrison Birtwistle in Griffiths, *New Sounds*, op. cit., 192.

¹⁹² Para-cited from Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle*, op. cit., 144.

¹⁹³ Para-cited from Brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/h/Harrison birtwistle.

¹⁹⁴ Para-cited from the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as cited by Anthony Holden op.cit.

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Summary

This paper explores the critical response to Harrison Birtwistle and his music in general and *Panic* in particular through a constellation of para-citations taken from a wide range of sources, scholarly and otherwise, which in their juxtaposition provide the historical, cultural and political context—the ‘background’ if you would—of the Birtwistle effect. The paper opens with a brief discussion of the mythical Pan and its relevance to *Panic* and the response to its first performance at the Last Night of the Proms in September 1995, which prompted ten thousand outraged listeners to jam the BBC switchboards with their indignant complaints. This is followed by a consideration of the history of the Proms and of the tradition of the Last Night in particular as an occasion for an exuberant celebration of British (or more precisely English) identity, involving the waving of national flags and the communal singing of popular anthems, including “Land of Hope and Glory”, “Rule, Britannia!”, and “Jerusalem”, for example. This leads into a review of the history of the saxophone, ‘controversial from the start’, and its current position in the concert repertoire, and from there to a detailed presentation of some of the routine and/or critical comments

of the *cognoscendi* about Birtwistle the man and his music, and their particular preoccupation with what they refer to as his ‘background’. Birtwistle was born and brought up in the Lancashire mill-town of Accrington, thirty miles north of Manchester, England (so was I as it happens, and so was Jon Anderson of the progressive rock band “Yes” whose father used to drink with my father at the local Working Mens’ Club, for what that’s worth): “It too is uncompromising. No foliage softens the stark hills which enclose it; nothing disguises the fact that its function is purely industrial”. Looking back, Birtwistle describes it as “paradise”, a kind of Arcadia that still lives with him.

The voice of Birtwistle is privileged in this paper and his words are cited throughout the various discussions providing a counter-narrative, a dissonance if you would, to that of his interpreters as well as an alternative foreground to their background noise. As he says of his own composition, “It’s to do with what is background, what is foreground”. And that, of course, depends on where you stand and the focus and direction of your gaze.