Representations and Intersections of Queerness and Disability in the Stage Works of Benjamin Britten

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PhD 2022

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Manchester Metropolitan University
and
The Royal Northern College of Music
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Research
The Royal Northern College of Music

2022

Contents

Abstract

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My work throughout this thesis aligns itself with an emerging interdisciplinary subfield: music and disability studies. Championing disability as a category of cultural analysis (alongside those more routinely instanced of race, gender, and class), this thesis highlights how critical disability theory can usefully be incorporated into a musicological setting.

I explore the portrayal and deployment of disability and queerness throughout the stage works of Benjamin Britten. I am particularly interested in the ways in which disability is a present but often unspoken and unacknowledged aspect of the discourse surrounding Benjamin Britten and his stage works. Moreover, with reference to crip theory, I argue that disability and queerness are interconnected in especially rich ways throughout Britten's stage works.

Although I attend to ways in which disability is a pervasive feature in many of Britten's stage works, the centrepiece of my work is my analysis of Britten's opera *Peter Grimes*. I explore how (cognitive) disability functions both as an element of plot and characterisation but also as a formal, structuring aspect of Britten's work, ultimately confounding the distinction between form and content.

Acknowledgements

I feel strongly that the word “acknowledgement” does not capture the enormous gratitude I feel towards everyone who has helped me throughout my PhD journey. I would firstly like to thank the research staff at the Royal Northern College of Music for welcoming me into the research community – it has been a real privilege to be part of such an excitingly diverse research environment. I must also give my deepest thanks to the North West Consortium Doctoral Training Partnership (NWCDTP-AHRC) for showing interest in my project and for funding much of my doctoral study.

My supervisory team have been a huge intellectual and personal inspiration to me throughout this journey. My supervisors Dr Cheryll Duncan, Dr John Habron, and Dr Lucy Burke, my former supervisor Dr Lois Fitch, my Director of Studies Dr Kirsty Fairclough and my former Directors of Studies Dr Angela Kang and Dr José Dias have all been extraordinarily supportive throughout my years working with them. I will never forget the generosity and compassion they have all shown me.

I simply would not have been able to get to this stage if it were not for my friends and family. Friends, both here in Manchester and further away, have kept me smiling throughout what has often been an incredibly challenging process. To my dad and to my brother Robert, I simply owe everything. The past years have been difficult for us as a family, but together we can get through anything! I cannot thank Robert enough for his advice and patient support throughout these past years – I am just in awe of his compassionate intelligence.

My late mother, Professor Annette Cashmore, and I were incredibly close, and life has not been the same without her here. Mum passed away whilst I was in the process of applying for a place on the PhD programme at RNCM. I would have loved to have been able to share my work with her as it developed, and I know that she would have been my fiercest advocate. Mum’s humour, generosity, keen intelligence, and passion for people are my biggest inspiration in life. I dedicate my work to her.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

At its broadest, this thesis is about some of the ways in which disability, queerness and music intersect. Throughout this project, I give specific attention to the stage works of Benjamin Britten (1913-1976). We might take a general perspective that music reflects the cultural and socioeconomic contexts in which it is composed. We might also suggest that the study of music can add to our understanding of such broader contexts. Thus, we might even infer that musical analysis can tell us something about prevailing cultural and societal attitudes towards, say, disability and queerness, in particular. This is certainly a compelling argument and one which I hold, at least in a basic sense, to be true. However, it is my contention that music's connection to its cultural context is rather messier and more complex than the above propositions would have us believe. I find it useful, therefore, to think about music not necessarily reflecting but rather refracting the context in which it is written. Through analysis then, I would argue that we can know something of the wider perspectives towards disability and queerness, at the times and in the places in which given musical works were composed, but only in the broadest and most abstract of senses. Indeed, it is perhaps also true that musical compositions and other cultural works shape broader attitudes towards queerness and disability as much as they reflect (or, as I have suggested, refract) them. There is evidently an intricate web of connections at play between society, the music it produces, and attitudes towards queerness and disability - let us get caught up in it.

Objectives

The core objectives of this thesis are as follows:

- To explore the ways in which disability has persistently been an unspoken and unacknowledged aspect of the literature surrounding Benjamin Britten and his stage works.
- To place this in the context of wider shifting and sometimes contradictory attitudes towards disability throughout twentieth-century Britain; to explore how such attitudes towards disability are reflected (or rather refracted) in Britten's stage works, and to ascertain whether, and if so, how Britten's output, in turn, contributes to those wider perspectives.

- To offer a reading of Britten's stage works, with a particular focus on *Peter Grimes*, in relation to disability, demonstrating the ways in which disability can expand our understanding of several of Britten's stage work protagonists and plots.
- To explore the ways in which disability is seemingly represented in the repertoire, through various musical means: forms, rhythms, melodic gestures, motivic development, harmonic devices, post-tonal schemes, instrumentation, and so on.
- To indicate how disability is deployed as a formal, structuring aspect of Britten's stage works.[1]
- To outline how disability readings of Britten's works, and *Peter Grimes* in particular, intersect with the well-established queer readings of the repertoire.
- To apply the insights gained from my novel readings of Britten's stage works to advance the frontiers of disability theory, critical disability studies and the subdiscipline of music and disability studies.
- To suggest implications of my work for future stage productions of Britten's oeuvre and the operatic industry more generally in relation to and in the pursuit of disability justice.

Before contextualising my research further and outlining my methods, a degree of terminological unpacking seems appropriate and necessary. The title of this thesis (*Representations and intersections of queerness and disability in the stage works of Benjamin Britten*) and its main objectives, which I have outlined above, throw up a number of concepts in need of clarification. This is to say that 'disability', 'queerness', 'representation', 'intersection' and perhaps even 'stage works' all require some level of definition.

Disability

In his seminal text in the field of music and disability studies, Joseph Straus (2011) suggests that "[d]isability is a pervasive and permanent aspect of the human condition: most of us have been, are now, or (as we age) will be people with disabilities" (p. 3). Disability is clearly important, it matters, and there is a need to address the ways in which it is routinely omitted

[1] This particular objective is admittedly rather abstract in its present formulation. However, throughout this thesis (and in chapters 6 and 7 especially) I will clarify my intentions in greater detail.

from our understanding of the world and our place in it. However, definitions of disability are notoriously slippery. Disability has, throughout human history, provoked responses ranging from horror, disgust, and pity but for many has also been a source of pride and has given a sense of cultural identity and belonging. Perhaps, for the present purposes though, a useful starting point is noting how disability is defined by law. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) of 1995 rendered it illegal to discriminate against disabled people "in connection with employment of goods, facilities and services or the disposal or management of premises". The DDA defined a disabled person as someone who "has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities".[2] In 2010, the DDA was repealed and replaced by the more overarching Equality Act, under which:

> A person (P) has a disability if-
>
> a) P, has a physical or mental impairment, and
>
> b) the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on P's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (2010, Equality Act).[3]

This legal protection of disabled people from discrimination was hard-won by the sustained efforts over several decades of disability rights organisations and activists. The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), for instance, which was co-founded in 1972 by Paul Hunt and Vic Finkelstein, campaigned for disability rights and urged for the full participation of disabled people in society. Amongst its central principles was the drawing of a conceptual distinction between disability and impairment. A pamphlet published by the UPIAS in 1976 contained the following statement:

[2] Prior to the DDA, disability was first defined in UK law in the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944: "In this Act the expression 'disabled person' means a person who, on account of injury, disease or congenital deformity, is substantially handicapped in obtaining or keeping employment, or in undertaking work on his own account, of a kind which, apart from that injury, disease or deformity would be suited to his age, experience and qualifications…".

[3] Alongside disability, the Equality Act (2010) protects individuals against discrimination on the basis of age, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

> In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the physical impairment and the social situation, called 'disability', of people with such impairment. Thus we define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organism or mechanism of the body: and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them in the mainstream of social activities. Physical disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression. (UPIAS, 1976, pp. 3-4)

Current UK legislation admittedly incorporates the language of both disability and impairment. Thus, it might appear, at first glance, that its approach to disability mirrors that of the UPIAS and other disability activist groups. Moreover, the Equality Act definition of disability has a bipartite structure: firstly, it acknowledges impairment, and it subsequently qualifies its definition of disability in relation to the social context in which impairment exists. However, upon closer inspection, the Equality Act definition does not distinguish between the two terms in the same way that the UPIAS definition does. It is notable that the UPIAS definition distinguishes between disability and impairment so as to locate the 'problem' of disability in the society that excludes people on the basis of physical, sensory or mental difference (impairment) rather than locating that 'problem', within the individual. However, The Equality Act draws its distinction between impairment, which it defines in terms of bodily or mental characteristics, and disability, which it describes in reference to how those characteristics inherently prevent an individual from leading a 'normal' life. In other words, the Equality Act distinguishes impairment, understood as difference in, or problem with an individual's form, from disability, understood as difference in, or problem with that individual's function. The Equality Act was clearly a significant milestone for the securing of disabled people's rights and their legal protection against discrimination. However, it can be argued that our current legislation, for all its merits, nevertheless maintains that the 'problem' of disability is ultimately assumed to be located in the individual rather than in society (Geffen, 2013).

Disability studies is an academic field of enquiry that, at its core, challenges this idea that the 'problem' of disability is found within the disabled individual. Rather, as Goodley (2017) puts it, disability studies "proposes that disability should be studied but for good reason. Disability is about the social world in which we live" (p. 1). Disability studies maintains that disability can only be fully understood in relation to society and societal oppression. Early iterations of disability studies in Britain developed from the grass-roots activism of the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1990s, Disability Studies was emerging in British university taught programmes as a fully-fledged academic discipline.

The social model of disability

Mike Oliver (1983), building upon the UPIAS' conceptual distinction between impairment and disability, coined the notion of the social model of disability. For Oliver, the social model marks a paradigm shift from what he terms the dominant individual model of disability, sometimes termed the medical model of disability. "The individual model sees the problems that disabled people experience as being a direct consequence of their disability. The major task of the [social work] professional is therefore to adjust the individual to the particular disabling condition" (p. 15). Such adjustment, Oliver continues, refers both to "[physical] rehabilitation programmes designed to return the individual to as near a normal state as possible" but also to the way in which the individual model requires disabled people to "come to terms with the physical limitations" psychologically (p. 15). Crucially, in both instances, the onus for change is placed upon the individual.[4] Whilst individual and medical models of disability refer to notions of cure, rehabilitation and adjustment, the social model attends to social exclusion and marginalisation, societal and institutional oppression, and physical, economic and attitudinal barriers to full participation in society.

[4] For many analytical intents and purposes, the notion of the medical model is largely interchangeable with that of the individual model. However, I do want to be precise with my deployment of the terms. The medical model refers specifically to the idea that disability is predominantly, if not entirely, to be understood as a medical issue. The notion of the individual model, however, refers much more generally to the idea that disability is an individual's personal issue (as opposed to an issue of social and environmental barriers). The medical model, then, is but one form of the individual model of disability.

Minority models of disability

In North American contexts, early disability scholarship also emerged from the efforts of disability activist movements towards the end of the 20th century. In the United States, taking inspiration from the Black civil rights movement, the gay liberation movement, and movements opposed to American involvement in the Vietnam war, disabled people's organisations such as the American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities (ACCD) gave rise to an understanding of disability as a positive minority identity (McRuer, 2002, pp. 223-224; Goodley, 2017, p. 13). Indeed, such an understanding of disability, a minority model of disability, came to characterise much of the early disability studies scholarship in both the US and in Canada. Accordingly, the focus tended to be on aspects of shared disability identity and collective marginalised experience.

With an emphasis on minority socio-cultural identity, coalitions between disability and racial politics rose to the fore within early North American disability studies. Moreover, perhaps influenced by the minority model, some British disability scholars adapted and expanded the social model. Swain and French (2000) coined the notion of 'the affirmation model of disability', one that, in addition to the insights offered by traditional notions of the social model, emphasises an explicitly positive group-identity understanding of disability. In some senses, this marks a convergence of the British and North American approaches.

Goodley (2017) writes of the way in which both British and North American early disability studies fields were intimately connected to their respective disabled people's movements: "[s]ocial and minority approaches were direct responses to oppression and they helped to fuel the activism of the disabled people's movement. Through the rise of these perspectives disability studies was born." (p. 13). It appears that activism begets theory begets activism.

Person-first versus identity-first language

One significant point of divergence between the North American and British early disability studies approaches, however, was over terminological preferences. British scholars tended to use the phrase, 'disabled people', whereas North American theorists tended to speak about 'people with disabilities'. For advocates of the North American so-called 'person-first' language, it is held as important to stress that people with disabilities are, above all, people

first. The phrase reflects an emphasis on the humanity of a marginalised and often de-humanised minority population. Contrastingly, for British social model theorists, it is felt that person-first language seems to reduce disability to the status of a property, something that someone has. In this sense, advocates of the identity-first formulation, 'disabled people', feel that person-first language implies that disability is located within an individual and ignores the role that society plays in marginalising and excluding disabled people from full participation in social life.

More recently, a new preference is emerging amongst North American disability studies scholars in consensus with those from British traditions, for identity-first language (Brueggeman, 2013; Davis, 1995; Longmore, 2003; Shapiro, 1993). For the present purposes of this thesis then, when making my own contributions to the discussion, I use the term 'disabled people'. Whilst I do acknowledge points raised by advocates of person-first language, and I certainly see the importance of rejecting dehumanisation, I nonetheless opt to follow the field's current, identity-first, convention. Moreover, it is simply a feature of the English language that adjectives tend to precede the nouns they qualify. In my view then, the phrase, 'disabled people' is just as much about 'people' as is the phrase 'people with disabilities'. Word order does not necessarily indicate importance, grammatical or otherwise. Ultimately though, as Titchkosky (2001) writes:

> Alternative phraseology is not the main issue here, although I would suggest that an openness to a diversity of terms and expressions of disability would be beneficial to all… the point is not saying 'saying it this way…' The point is, instead to examine what our current articulations of disability are saying in the here and now. (p. 138)

Generally, both social model and minority model approaches to disability, despite differences in phraseology, maintain the distinction between disability and impairment. I take this distinction rather seriously. Accordingly, throughout this thesis I use the terms "impairment" and "people with impairments" when referring specifically to physical, sensory, or cognitive characteristics. I use the term "disability", however, when referring to the various ways in which people with impairments are routinely marginalised, minoritized, stigmatised, oppressed and excluded from society on the basis of their impairment(s). Moreover,

throughout this thesis, I will come to use the term disability in preference to impairment. Social model and minority model theorists tend to, as Goodley (2017) puts it, "recognise the presence of impairment but attend to disability" (p. 9); generally, I shall do the same.

At times in this thesis, it will be necessary for me to speak about specific forms, or types, of disability. Though disability is, from a disability studies perspective, always "social" and not a characteristic of an individual per se, I nonetheless hold that it is possible (and useful) to use and distinguish between, say, the terms "physical disability", "sensory disability" and "cognitive disability". For my purposes, the phrase "physical disability", strictly speaking, attends to the socially situated experience shared by people with physical impairments. Similarly, "sensory disability" describes the social context surrounding people with sensory impairments. Accordingly, then, "cognitive disability" denotes the social situation of people with cognitive impairments. Furthermore, distinguishing between these types of disability acknowledges that the social oppression faced by different groups of disabled people can differ markedly.

However, language is less malleable when using this terminology in relation to particular people (or in the case of this thesis, in relation to literary and operatic characters). Using identity-first language, the formulations, "physically disabled people", and "cognitively disabled people" seem appropriate and clear enough. However, the equivalent phrase in relation to sensory disability, i.e. "sensorially disabled people", feels somewhat clunky and contrived; in this case, the person-first term "a person with a sensory disability" seems to work far better. It is possible to use an identity-first equivalent to "a person with a sensory disability", however, by referring to the particular form(s) of sensory impairment in question. "A blind person" or "blind people", "a D/deaf person" or "D/deaf people", and "a DeafBlind person" or "DeafBlind people" are all commonly used and widely acceptable terms.

In this thesis, I will use the term "non-disabled people" to denote people who are not disabled, and I will use "able-bodiedness" as an antonym for disability. In addition, I will use the terms "disablism" and "ableism" both to denote disability discrimination—though the two terms each give a subtly different emphasis. By "disablism", I mean "a form of social oppression involving the social imposition of restrictions of activity on people with

impairments and the socially engendered undermining of their psycho-emotional well-being" (Thomas, 2007, p. 73). The term "ableism" is used to designate a bias towards able-bodiedness. As Fiona Kumari Campbell (2001) puts it, ableism is:

> a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability, then, is cast as a diminished state of being human. (p. 44)

Reconsidering the disability/impairment distinction

Since the earliest iterations of disability studies, several scholars have begun to problematise the disability/impairment distinction. Disabled feminists have pointed out that even if it were possible to eradicate all social, cultural and environmental barriers that produce disability, impairment would nevertheless lead some to continue to experience exclusion from full participation in society (Crow, 1992; French, 1993; Thomas, 1999). In particular, it is felt that pain, chronic illness, and functional limitation are aspects that the disability/impairment binary (with its recognition of impairment but emphasis given to disability) glosses over.

In addition, Tremain (2001) challenges the view that impairment is "an objective, transhistorical and transcultural entity of which modern bio-medicine has acquired knowledge and understanding and which it can accurately represent" (p. 617). Rather, she suggests that impairment is historically situated, and is mediated by the "language with which we represent [it]" (p. 618). In this sense, the notion of impairment as physical, sensory, or cognitive characteristic begs a number of questions. Importantly, for instance, we might ask: by what process have we come to determine which physical, sensory, or cognitive characteristics count as impairment? Such a line of questioning points to the idea that impairment is just as socially constructed as is the notion of disability. In a similar vein, Areheart (2011), names the distinction between disability and impairment the "disability binary", alluding to Judith Butler's critique of the gender/sex binary (Butler, 1990). Areheart writes:

> The gender/sex binary states that sex is physiological, while gender is socially constructed. One of Butler's concerns was that the gender/sex binary, by effectively designating sex as non-social, left room for biological determinism. I am similarly concerned that the disability binary, by designating impairment as non-social, has left room for biological essentialism. Accordingly, I seek to make disability trouble by suggesting that (1) the meaning of disability is not fixed and has a way of transcending the disablement/impairment binary; and (2) disability is more social and less biologically laden than previously theorized. (p. 355)

It is notable that, in the above, Areheart uses the wording "the disablement/impairment binary" as opposed to "the disability/impairment binary". She uses the word "disablement" here instead of "disability", in order to reserve the term "disability" to signify the whole of the binary opposition formulation, rather than merely the first half of it. I acknowledge that, for the sake of analytic clarity and disambiguation, Areheart's is a useful strategy. Many other disability theorists, however, use the word disability both to refer specifically to the socially constructed element of the binary pair, but also in the "non-dichotomous, holistic", general sense (p. 355). Thus, throughout this thesis, where necessary, I shall endeavour to make it clear in which of the two senses the word disability is being used, in any given instance. I give further exploration of the disability binary, and an attendant critique of it, in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Having spent some time considering disability-related terminology, I must stress that the above is not intended to be a definitive guide. Rather, my aim is merely to demonstrate how I shall be using these terms throughout this thesis and placing my efforts within the context of disability studies. Many people who are included under the legal definitions of disability, and many of those who might be viewed by disability studies scholars (and wider society) as disabled, may choose not to identify with, or to use, the label. It is, of course, entirely an individual's prerogative how they understand and refer to themself. It is my intention, therefore, to pursue this project with a sense of humility and acceptance that the terms I use, and models I refer to, will inevitably be fraught and insufficient to describe the whole gamut of human experience. However, I see this in a positive light: the slipperiness of concepts

related to disability signifies the high contemporary relevance, and thus both the urgency and value, of the present discussion.

Historical perspectives

Disability studies has emerged out of and has contributed significantly to sociological fields. However, historical perspectives are also necessary in order to grasp the foundations of our contemporary understanding of disability (Oliver and Barnes, 2012). Lennard Davis (1995) suggests that disability's origins can be located alongside the rise of the notions of 'normal', 'normalcy', 'normality, 'norm', 'average', and 'abnormal' in the mid-nineteenth century (p. 24). Prior to this, it was the concept of the 'ideal' that had held sway since at least the seventeenth century:

> in a culture with an ideal form of the body, all members of the population are below the ideal… By definition, one can never have an ideal body. There is in such societies no demand that populations have bodies that conform to the ideal. (p. 25)

A shift occurred, according to Davis, around the mid-nineteenth century, with the rise of statistics, through which the human body could be measured and described in relation to the notions of "the average man" via the development of the statistical concept of "normal distribution". A normal distribution is a mathematical model (a bell-shaped curve) that organises data (in this case measured human characteristics) around a statistical norm. In this way, deviant measurements, or extremes, are defined and bracketed off from a conforming majority. "With such thinking, the average then becomes paradoxically a kind of ideal, a position devoutly to be wished" (p. 27). Davis continues: "The concept of the norm, unlike that of an ideal, implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm" (p. 29). It was the very possibility of being defined as outside of the norm gave rise to the concept of disability. Furthermore, Davis shows how the rise of statistics at this period in history is linked to the foundation and wide acceptance of eugenic theory and practices throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Douglas Baynton (2001) also locates the origin of disability in the mid-nineteenth century, and similarly links it with the development of statistics and the conception of the norm.

However, Baynton describes that the concept of the norm was preceded, not by the concept of the ideal, as such, but rather by that of 'the natural'. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, for instance, "[t]he metaphor of the natural versus the monstrous was a fundamental way of constructing reality…" (p. 35). Baynton contextualises his notion of the natural by suggesting that:

> the natural had been a static concept for what was seen as an essentially unchanging world, dominant at a time when 'the book of nature' was represented as the guidebook of God. The natural was good and right because it conformed to the intent or design of Nature or the Creator of nature. (p. 35)

Davis' conception of the ideal, and Baynton's of the natural, both imply the presence of some ultimately unattainable standard. Therefore, both scholars seem to argue that disability and disability oppression, in its contemporary sense at least, are products of the mid-nineteenth century. Davis' notion of the ideal is inherently totally exclusive, to the extent that there would be "no demand that populations have bodies that conform to the ideal" (1995, p. 25), and thus, presumably, no repercussions for not conforming. By contrast, Baynton's conception of the natural, however, was indeed a standard that could be achieved. From such a perspective, it is God's divinity that is held to be the unattainable standard. However, the natural, that which conforms with God's intentions for the world, most certainly was a standard by which individuals could be held to account. Thus, against the natural, the monstrous or the unnatural could be articulated – these notions being something of a precursor to disability in the modern sense of the term.

Thus whilst, strictly speaking, disability is only a relatively recent invention, something like it has been in currency since a much earlier period. Indeed, attitudes towards disability (or at least something akin to the concept of disability) have, since classical antiquity and the Biblical era (and perhaps even earlier), been varied and often contradictory. Disability has, at times, been understood to be a form of divine punishment and a consequence of personal or familial moral failing. At other times, disability has been interpreted as a mark of divine blessing, signifying closeness with God, or with gods (Winzer, 1997).

Throughout modern history, though, it is largely true to say that disabled people in Britain (and indeed more widely, across the Western world) have experienced prejudice, exclusion, and marginalisation. Whilst Baynton and Davis have located the modern origins of disability in the early to mid-nineteenth century, other disability historians, in reference to industrialisation, the economy, and patterns of labour, date the origins of the concept of disability (in its modern sense) somewhat earlier, alongside the rise of industry, in the eighteenth century.

Prior to the industrial revolution, many disabled people were able to forge a living within their communities, and those who were not were often supported by members of their family or by the church. Anne Borsay (2002) suggests that, at this time, "disabled people were part of an undifferentiated mass poor, and hence clustered at the lower reaches of society, but not excluded from it" (p. 103). However, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as industry boomed, and work became predominantly factory-based, disabled people were increasingly excluded from the labour market. With scant opportunity to participate in the new ways of living and working, disabled people thus had to turn to institutional living in workhouses (also referred to as poorhouses), voluntary hospitals and asylums. Living conditions in these institutions were often undignified but there was most frequently no alternative for disabled people who "broke the norms of economic productivity" (Borsay, 2005, p. 42).

As Stiker (1999) remarks, the return of soldiers after the First World War increased the public visibility of disability significantly. Wounded soldiers were felt to have sacrificed their bodies (and minds) for their country and wider societal attitudes towards disability began to shift accordingly. It should be noted, however, that treatment of disabled war veterans was significantly better than that of the disabled population at large. Stiker suggests the conception of disability that subsequently developed at this time was one largely related to the concept of damage. "The war has taken away, we must replace" (p. 123): this became the logic of the era. If the attitudes towards disability of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries can broadly be described in terms of institutionalisation and confinement, the early twentieth century saw a shift in focus towards rehabilitation and the development of

prosthesis (p. 123). Eventually, the logic of rehabilitation came to be extended and applied to all disabled people, not just those who became disabled in war.

Alongside this new logic of rehabilitation and the longer-term persistence of regimes of institutionalisation, confinement and cure, the early twentieth century was an era in which eugenic ideas continued to hold a significant presence, as they had done since the development of the statistical norm in the middle of the nineteenth century. Straus (2018) summarises that, at the time, disabled people (and especially, he notes, cognitively disabled people) were believed to be a "menace to the health of the community and nation, and were incarcerated in institutions, sometimes sterilized, and often left to die of neglect in appalling conditions" (p. 8).[5] In 1913 (incidentally, the year of Benjamin Britten's birth), the Mental Deficiency Act, "[b]orn of eugenic panic" was passed, enabling local authorities to compulsorily sequester those it deemed to be 'mental defectives' (Borsay, 2005, p. 71).

With the outbreak of the Second World War, as many employed people enlisted, there was subsequently a significant depletion of the labour force in Britain. As a consequence, a national 'Interim Scheme' aimed at the recruitment of disabled people into employment was introduced (Borsay, pp. 133-135). The scheme somewhat succeeded in bringing many disabled people into employment and demonstrated the need to protect the rights of disabled people "to engage in the labour market and hence win the status of a full citizen" (p. 135). Thus, in 1944, the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act was passed. However, as Borsay notes, in the long term, the Act was not entirely sufficient in ensuring that disabled people were fully integrated into the workforce and, for many, "social citizenship was an empty promise" (p. 139).

It seems logical to suggest that the uncovering of the horrors of the Nazi regime, including the systematic killing of hundreds of thousands of disabled people under the *Aktion T4* project, should have fostered a heightened general sense of outrage towards the injustices of disability discrimination in Britain. However, as Bland and Hall (2010) point out, "the

[5] See Leonard (2016), Lombardo (2011), and Davis (2005) for further historical details of eugenics.

backlash against eugenics was considerably delayed" and the Eugenic Society did not feel the need (or social pressure) to "rebrand itself" or change its name until 1989 (pp. 222-223).

At this time, with the major expansion of the welfare state after the Second World War, provision for disabled people increased significantly. However, disabled people nonetheless continued to be excluded from full participation in society in the decades following the Second World War, particularly, as I have suggested, in relation to employment. Moreover, there is also a sense in which the progressive project of welfare was itself tied up with and undergirded by eugenic aims (Bland and Hall, 2010, p. 223).

The disability activism of the 1970s and 1980s garnered significant progress in the securing of the legal rights of disabled people, but the full emancipation of disabled people has not yet been fully achieved. Disability discrimination and hate crime are still rife. Journalist Katherine Quarmby (2012) writes passionate about the surprising contemporary prevalence of disability hate crime in Britain, and McRuer (2018) demonstrates that the contemporary global neoliberal political strategy of austerity affects disabled people to a devastating extent.

The life of Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) thus spans a period which, as I have shown, was one in which there was significant change in attitudes towards disability. The picture, though, is a complex one: throughout the twentieth century, the rights of disabled people were gradually being secured, but, at the same time, eugenic thought continued to persist, even incorporated as a component of welfare capitalism and the formation of the NHS and thus to what is usually viewed as progressive post-war politics. However, though Britten lived during this time of considerable change, it cannot be said that he was particularly deeply engaged with the concept of disability justice. Nor am I going to suggest that, in Britten's work, we find the perpetuation of eugenic ideas. My point is merely that the ambivalence surrounding attitudes towards disability provides the backdrop to Britten's artistic and dramatic output.

Music and disability studies

The profile of disability as a category of cultural analysis has been raised significantly in literary fields (Bolt, 2007). However, until 2004 there remained a relative silence with regards to the implications of disability in a musicological setting (Howe, Jensen-Moulton, Lerner, and

Straus, 2016, p. 3). Lerner and Straus (2006) edited the first major musicological contribution to the field of cultural disability studies, a collection of essays that explore the multiple ways that music and disability intersect and Straus (2011) wrote the first major monograph on the subject. However, Howe, Jensen-Moulton, Lerner and Straus (2016) together, edited the volume that has effectively established music and disability studies as an academic subdiscipline in its own right.

Music and disability studies is an emerging subdiscipline to which my work contributes. One of the field's key areas of interest is disability as an aspect of composer identity. Frequently, the stories that we tell, about disabled composers, and particularly about those who became disabled, often deploy stigmatising metaphors and narratives that reduce disability to the status of a problem to be overcome. For instance, there is a persistent strand of Beethoven scholarship that links the composer's deafness to changes in his musical style (Straus, 2011, p. 52). Drawing connections between Beethoven's biographical circumstances and his musical style in this way is not, it should be noted, necessarily stigmatising in itself. Rather, what is stigmatising is the fact the so-called 'heroic style' of his middle period is often articulated as Beethoven overcoming the 'problem' of his deafness (e.g., Solomon, 1998).

Discussions about Frederick Delius and his music similarly tend to draw on stigmatising tropes about disability. During his 30s, Delius (1862-1934) contracted syphilis which, in its later stages, caused the paralysis of his hands and blindness. He continued to compose throughout this later period of his life, with another musician, Eric Fenby, working as an amanuensis. Straus (2011) outlines how critical responses to Delius' music have been shaped significantly by knowledge of these aspects of his biography (pp. 23-26). Some scholars, Anthony Payne (1961), for instance, construct narratives of Delius' late works representing something of a triumph over disability. Contrastingly, others (Gray, 1976, p. 144; Jefferson, 1972, p. 107) are more critical of his later compositions, attributing apparent flaws in the music to Delius' impairments. The collaboration between Delius and Fenby has itself been the subject of scholarly intrigue, with some critics (Oyler 1972, p. 444, for instance) even questioning the authenticity and legitimacy of Delius' later works. In each of these ways, disability comes to be understood as something undesirable: either something tragic that is to be overcome,

something tragic that cannot be overcome, or ultimately even something that is a source of deception.

More generally though, we might question the appeal to composer biography in the analysis of musical works on the grounds of epistemic value. Peter Franklin (1997), though he is writing specifically about the life and works of Gustav Mahler, acknowledges a broader "decline in support for artistic biography. It has become a suspect means of engagement with works of art, precisely because it comes 'between' us and them" (p. 2). In a literary theory context, Roland Barthes (1977) famously pronounced the figurative 'death of the author', critical of how:

> [t]he explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the author 'confiding' in us. (p. 143)

Barthes suggests that the 'tyranny' of the author limits a text and undermines the legitimacy and agency of its readers. This idea can be, and has been, readily applied in a musical context too. In this sense, any view that the composer determines musical meaning is fraught and undermines the agency of the audience and the performer. Musical meaning, in this sense is not fixed and unitary, but rather multiple and fluid.

Incidentally, Britten scholars appear to be especially cautious, in this sense, about drawing too close a connection between aspects of Britten's life and his music. Discussing queer interpretations of Britten's operas in relation to queer aspects of the composer's life, Clifford Hindley (1995) carefully notes that "[i]t can be argued that the texts bear their meanings independently of their author's intention…" (p. 67). Nonetheless, his conclusions appear to throw that interpretive caution to the wind. Quite similarly, Brett (1983) writes: "There is, however, no reason to see all [Britten's] work as autobiographical. It is surely wrong, and perhaps crass, to identify Britten with any of his characters…" (pp. 191-192).

A further, and important, strand within the field of music and disability studies attends to the experiences and distinctive contributions of disabled performers (for instance, McKay 2013).

The strand of the subdiscipline to which this project attends however is the representation of disability within musical works, both the way in which disability is a narrative feature within texted musical works, but also the idea that disability can be represented by musical elements. Having explored the terminology surrounding disability, I now turn to that of the concept and history of queerness.

20th century British queer history

Benjamin Britten's life and creative output spans important moments in both British queer and disability histories. For most of the 20th century, homosexuality remained a criminal offence in Britain. The Buggery Act of 1533, which had been introduced by Thomas Cromwell during the reign of Henry VIII, first criminalised homosexuality in Britain, rendering sex between men a capital offence. In 1861 the penalty for "buggery" was reduced from the death sentence to up to ten years' imprisonment. The 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act further reduced the severity of punishment for men committing homosexual acts to "not more than two years' imprisonment, with or without hard labour". Whilst the Amendment led to the reduction of severity of punishment for sex between men, the range of sexual acts punishable by law expanded to include not only anal penetration but also acts of "gross indecency", a term so nebulously defined that the courts had significantly greater scope for successfully prosecuting gay men. Famously, it was under this legislation that Oscar Wilde was put on trial and was convicted in 1895. After the second world war, there was increasingly a political and legal climate of suspicion surrounding gay men, and a series of arrests and charges of gross indecency were made throughout the 1940s and 50s. Britten met Peter Pears in 1937 and the pair soon became romantically involved. Accordingly, their lives were significantly impacted by the legal situation for gay men at this time. In his biography about Britten, Kildea (2013) cites a letter written in 1954 by Percy Elland, editor at the *Evening Standard*, to politician and media tycoon Lord Beaverbrook: "Scotland Yard are definitely stepping up their activities against the homosexuals. Some weeks ago they interviewed Benjamin Britten. This week I am told they have interviewed Cecil Beaton. No action is to be taken against either" (p. 378). Perhaps one of the most high-profile arrests at the time was that of Alan Turing who was prosecuted 1952, subjected to chemical castration and subsequently is thought to have taken his own life in 1954. Turing's case, others like it, and the increasing use of illegal tactics by law enforcement to achieve prosecutions led to

greater public demand for the law to be reformed. Subsequently, Sir John Wolfenden was appointed to lead a committee to reconsider legal issues surrounding homosexuality and prostitution. In 1957, The Wolfenden Committee recommended the legalisation of homosexual acts in private between consenting men over the age of 21 but it was not until the passing of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, that the (partial) decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales was achieved. The majority of Britten's stage works were written prior to the passing of The Sexual Offences Act. However, in his later stage works, and *Death in Venice* in particular, themes of same-sex love could be approached significantly more directly.

Queerness is a term that I am using specifically for its critical insight. Other words, such as 'gayness', 'homosexuality' etc. are historically related to the word 'queer', but I opt for queerness for a number of reasons. It should be noted that, in circulation in the mid-twentieth century and indeed present in the Britten scholarship, alongside the use of the words 'queer/queerness' to refer to same-sex attraction, the terms 'gay/gayness' and 'homosexual/homosexuality' are also particularly prominent. Whilst these terms all have similar and overlapping meanings, some disambiguation is perhaps necessary in order to explore their subtle differences and to define how I intend to employ them throughout this thesis.

The term 'homosexual' is thought to have come into circulation in the mid-nineteenth century (Foucault, 1976). However, contemporary perspectives tend to advocate, rather, for the terms 'gay' or 'queer' to avoid the clinical and pathological implications that the word 'homosexual' often implies, e.g., the GLAAD media reference guide (2021). The use of the term 'gay' to refer to same-sex attraction came to prominence in the early twentieth century, with its alternative and original positive meanings of 'joyful', 'happy' and 'bright' being used affirmatively to replace the negative, pathological connotations of 'homosexual'. 'Queer', originally meaning 'strange', 'odd' or 'peculiar' came to be used pejoratively to denote same-sex attraction in the late nineteenth century; one famous, early and often cited occasion of such derogatory use is found in a letter sent in 1894 by John Sholto Douglas, 9th Marquess of Queensberry, who ultimately played a significant role in the homophobic imprisonment of Oscar Wilde. However, the late twentieth century saw a re-claiming of 'queer' as means of

speaking back in defiance to those who use the term for its negative associations, particularly in the midst of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Whilst it might not have been until the 1980s that 'queer' affirmative reclamation became widespread, there is evidence that the term was used somewhat neutrally even as early as the early 1900s, in the poetry of Gertrude Stein, for instance. In contemporary usage, the term 'queer' is often employed as an overarching, umbrella term to refer to non-heterosexual attraction and non-normative gender expression in an inclusive, expansive and community-building fashion. Further, in academic settings, 'queer' has gained additional theoretical traction as a critical term mobilized in opposition to binarisms and notions of normativity (Butler, 1990) and as a critical practice that disrupts and troubles dominant conceptual paradigms.

The three terms, 'gay', 'homosexual' and 'queer' (alongside their abstract counterparts, 'gayness', 'homosexuality' and 'queerness') do indeed all appear in the literature surrounding Britten's life and works (reflecting the shifting, ambivalent 'mixed economy' of attitudes towards nomenclature over the course of the twentieth century and beyond). Throughout this thesis, when citing correspondence and scholarship, I do adhere to the terms used by each author at hand in order to take heed of the subtly shifting differences of emphasis they give; to preserve a sense of what might be called the discourse's *genealogy*.

However, where possible in my own contributions to the discussion, I opt for the term 'queer' in order to remain, in the first instance, at a critical scholarly distance from the pathologizing connotations that tend to circulate around the term 'homosexuality'. Furthermore, while it is widely acknowledged that Britten did not tend to speak frequently nor openly about his sexuality, he is thought to have particularly disliked the term 'gay' and refrained from the use of it to describe himself. Additionally, as I shall argue, there is some scholarly evidence suggesting that Britten's sexual orientation might not necessarily have been exclusively characterised by same-sex attraction. This aspect has, I suggest, been significantly underplayed in the Britten studies literature and it is one of the aims of my thesis to explore the reasons why this might be the case within the context of bisexual erasure and biphobia (and the underlying ableism that I shall argue subtends them). For all of these reasons, the term 'queer' (signifying non-normative sexuality, though not necessarily exclusively same-sex attraction) is taken to be the preferred term throughout this thesis. Indeed, the critical

theoretical import of the term 'queer' is central to my conception of the relatedness of the scholarly discourse surrounding Britten's life to a critical disability theoretical perspective via the connectedness of notions of 'queer' with notions of 'crip'.

One of the main aims of this thesis is to explore the ways in which disability and queerness are represented throughout Britten's stage works. Moreover, this thesis will demonstrate that the representation of queerness and that of disability are thoroughly enmeshed in the repertoire. As a primary objective, then, my work attends to the way in which several of Britten's operatic protagonists can usefully be interpreted in relation to disability. In the case of certain of Britten's operas, the labelling, of characters as disabled appears to be somewhat uncontroversial (at least at first). The title character of *Billy Budd*, to take one example, stammers and indeed his disability is an important aspect of the unfolding of the narrative. This is to say that stammering is an aspect both of Billy's characterisation and features as an important plot driving force.

By "stage works", I refer to the fact that Britten wrote a number of dramatic pieces for the stage that cannot technically be called opera, thus I use the term stage works to include Britten's dramatic, non-operatic works. Thus as well as, *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *Albert Herring*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Rape of Lucretia*, *Death in Venice*, *Paul Bunyan*, *Gloriana*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I am also interested in the church parables (*Burning Fiery Furnace*, *Prodigal Son*, and *Curlew River*). Reference will also be made to some of Britten's other works (particularly other dramatic works written for voice (*Noyes Fludde* and the cantatas).

Outline of the following chapters

Chapter 2 of this thesis outlines my methodological approach. I identify that, of the recent scholarly approaches to the analysis of disability representation in the Western Classical music tradition, the work of Jensen-Moulton (2012) and Joseph Straus (2018) are particularly useful for my present purposes. I outline what it is about their respective work that will be important for my work as well as discussing which aspects are not appropriate for my study. Ultimately I develop something of a synthesis of Jensen-Moultonian and Strausian approaches. In particular I explain that I draw from an approach taken by Jensen-Moulton in

her analysis of 20th century American opera, but also from Joseph Straus' work on disability representation in modernist music. Ultimately though, I employ a synthesis of these approaches to explore the way in which libretto and music work together to represent disability.

In chapter 3, I develop a critical analysis of the literature surrounding the music and life of Benjamin Britten. I explore the prominent strands and topics of debate within the scholarship and outline the way in which disability emerges as a potential avenue for scholarly exploration. Indeed, I conclude that disability is already a significant aspect of the Britten scholarship, but one that has tended to be unacknowledged and unspoken.

In chapter 4, I then go on to explore various aspects of critical disability theory that will become relevant throughout the later chapters of this thesis. I draw out the ground that critical disability has made on traditional disability theory and some of the live topics of debate. One area of particular interest takes up the idea of the interconnectedness of queerness and disability. Crip theory (McRuer 2006) thus takes a central place in my theoretical outlook.

In Chapter 5, I further develop an account of the representation of disability in *Peter Grimes*. I argue that the character of Peter Grimes can be read in relation to disability and that disability has always already been a significant component in interpretations of *Peter Grimes* (and indeed the reception of the opera). I argue, in particular, that disability is represented in the Act 3, Scene 2 so-called mad-scene.

In chapter 6, I argue that Grimes is coded as disabled throughout the opera (and not just in the mad scene) and suggest that disability operates as a structuring formal aspect of musical representation.

Chapter 7 explores the musical deployment of disability and how this has ideological implications.

In the conclusion to this thesis in chapter 8, as well as summarising some of the key findings of my research, I return to the idea of representation being a linking point between aesthetics and politics. I want to ask what relevance disability representation in musical works has – and what implications my work has for further research and indeed for the opera industry. I conclude that if disability representation is a complex phenomenon, disability justice/access will be equally complex – in other words, box ticking is out.

Chapter 2 - Methodology

Music and disability studies

The introduction to this thesis outlined some of the significant developments in the interdisciplinary field of Music and Disability Studies. Though the field has great breadth and music and disability have been shown to intersect in multiple ways, I have identified that the analysis of opera, in relation to disability, is currently underexplored but has the potential to generate novel and particularly rich interpretive insights. Furthermore, the post-war period in Britain was a time of shifting yet contradictory attitudes towards disability (Barnes, 1991; Borsay, 2005); I suggest that Britten's music, his stage works in particular (the majority having been written between 1945 and 1972), can therefore be said to be of especial timely relevance to the cultural and historical study of disability and of queerness.[6] In this chapter, as I outline the methodological approach that I employ in order to carry out my analysis of Britten's stage-works, I suggest that the cultural work done by Britten's operas can be understood as a participation in the post-war renegotiation of conceptions of the self and citizenship in relation to attitudes towards disability.

The Music and Disability Interest Group (Society for Music Theory) and Study Group (American Musicological Society) maintain a database of musical representations of disability, with many entries referring to operas, operettas, ballets, songs, cantatas and musicals (i.e., texted, narrative musical works), though there are entries relating to non-narrative instrumental works as well (https://www.lsu.edu/faculty/bhowe/disability-representation.html). Britten's stage works feature particularly significantly. *Rejoice in the Lamb* is cited as representing "mental disorder (madness)", with the accompanying comment that "[t]he cantata sets the poetry of Christopher Smart, who wrote his *Jubilate Agno* while committed to an asylum in London". *Peter Grimes* is also highlighted as involving the

[6] I use the term stage works here to be inclusive of the whole variety of Britten's musical works that incorporate the staged presentation of narrative, not just those which neatly fit conventional definitions of opera. *Paul Bunyan*, for example, is usually described as an operetta rather than as an opera, given the incorporation of spoken dialogue between musical sections. Britten's church parables, to give another example, are strictly speaking a stage work genre of their own, devised by and unique to Britten. Throughout this thesis, I often refer to 'Britten's operas' as shorthand for his entire stage work output; where I wish to refer specifically and exclusively to those works which might more conventionally be understood as operas, I shall make this clear in the text.

representation of "mental disorder (madness)": "Exhibiting irrational behavior and delusions, the title character is depicted as a social outlier". *Billy Budd* is described as representing "mental disorder (madness)" (however, as the impairment category of "vocal disfluency" is used elsewhere in the database, it is likely that the identification of "madness" in *Billy Budd* here is a clerical error, given that Blake Howe, the contributor of this entry, comments that, in the opera "[t]he title character stutters"). Howe also notes that *Gloriana* features "visual impairment (blindness)", stating that "[a] blind ballad-singer performs in Act III". The representation of "mental disorder (madness)" additionally figures in *The Turn of the Screw*; the contributor comments that "[t]he opera, like James' novella, suggests that the Governess experiences delusions". *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in which "Thisby's 'mad scene' includes a parody of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*", thus is also cited as representing "mental disorder (madness)". *Curlew River* is also given an entry in the database: "mental disorder (madness)" with the comment that "[t]he parable tells the story of the Madwoman's rehabilitation". *Death in Venice* features twice: Blake Howe suggests that the opera involves the representation of "disfigurement" as "[d]isabilities associated with Aschenbach's age are contrasted with Tadzio's youth"; Joseph Straus adds that Britten's final opera represents disability through the depiction of "disease (cholera)" as "Venice is threatened by an outbreak of cholera". These entries form a useful starting point for my present study and the frequent identification of representations of "mental disorder (madness)" throughout Britten's operatic writing is particularly noteworthy; this is an observation which is given a great deal of consideration in the concluding part of my thesis.

This part of my thesis expands upon the ways in which such representations of disability operate musically: what is it about Britten and his librettists' music and text that make such representations of disability legible? Further, I identify and explore a number of representations of disability in Britten's operas which have yet to be included in the SMT-AMT database. I suggest that representations of madness are present in the depictions of the respective protagonists of *The Rape of Lucretia*, and of Britten's 1975 cantata, *Phaedra*, both of whom, it is worth noting, happen to be female. Additionally, the character of John Shears in *Paul Bunyan* is depicted as stuttering, perhaps prefiguring the representation of vocal disfluency in *Billy Budd*, although the representation of stuttering in *Paul Bunyan* is intended to be performed to comic effect, whereas Billy Budd's speech impairment, as we shall see,

becomes involved in altogether more philosophical concerns surrounding the nature of meaning and of the linguistic sign. Furthermore, I tentatively read the character of Albert Herring, from Britten's 1947 comic opera, in relation to intellectual disability and autism. I explore the contexts in which such representations have emerged, developing a sense of how, in some instances, they have been adopted and adapted from the literary sources upon which the operas are based.

I highlight where, in other cases, disability representations emerge in Britten's operas as additional narrative elements, ones not identifiably present in the original literary source materials on which the operas are based. Furthermore, I identify instances where disability representations *are* identifiable in the operas' source materials but where these have not been carried over into their respective operatic settings, and occasions where disability can be said to have been exhumed from the text in the adaptation from literary source to the operatic stage. Specifically, I consider the manner in which Crabbe's *The Borough* (on which *Peter Grimes* is based) describes the character of Ellen Orford as blind, and as having a cognitively disabled daughter. Moreover, I attend to Henry James' reference to Owen Wingrave's older brother who had been institutionalised owing to his cognitive disability. Additionally, I consider the opening of Herman Melville's novella, *Billy Budd, Sailor* in which he describes the phenomenon of the "Handsome Sailor" figure who won the attention and affection of his fellow sailors. Melville describes a real-life "Handsome Sailor" figure whom he had come across, specifically referring to the fact that this sailor was Black. Indeed, there is a rich scholarly tradition of exploring Melville's literary output in relation to race (Freeburg, 2015, for instance). The relationship between the real "Handsome Sailor" figure whom Melville had encountered at the Liverpool Docks, and the fictional character, Billy Budd, is unclear. However, aspects of race and imperialism that underscore Melville's novella serve to complicate Melville's (and therefore Britten's) representation of disability.

Jensen-Moulton's literary approach to the analysis of disability representation in opera

In this thesis, my interpretive and analytical strategy is influenced particularly by the work of Jensen-Moulton (2015) and Straus (2008, 2011, and 2018). Jensen-Moulton explores the ways in which representations of disability have been obscured, embellished, developed, altered, and coded musically in Carlisle Floyd's 1970 operatic adaptation of Steinbeck's 1937

novella *Of Mice and Men*. Jensen-Moulton notes plot differences between the novella and the opera. In particular, she draws out the fact that Floyd's work misses the opportunity to explore the intersections of race and disability as they play out in Steinbeck's novel in the context of the widespread consciousness of the growing civil rights movements in the United States by the latter part of the 20th century, when Floyd was writing.

Jensen-Moulton highlights that, in the character of Lennie Small, Steinbeck's novella instanced a "groundbreaking" portrayal of intellectual disability, for its time (p. 1). However, Jensen-Moulton is clear that such a depiction nonetheless relied upon harmful and reductive disability tropes, even if Lennie's position as a central character was, in itself, ground-breaking. Jensen-Moulton places Steinbeck's writing within the context of the prevailing eugenic ideology of the early 20th century in the United States (and beyond).

Steinbeck's novella has certainly held an important position in school English literature curricula in both the United States and in Britain for some time. The suitability of Steinbeck's work for use in educational settings has, however, frequently come under scrutiny. It is notable that, whilst such debates have tended to question the appropriateness of the novella's use of racist slurs and its depictions of derogatory attitudes towards Black people, questions surrounding the suitability of harmful disability tropes - especially the notion that intellectually disabled people are a danger to society - have been conspicuously absent in the discourse.

Literary disability theorist and historian Sonya Freeman Loftis explains that Steinbeck's fictional portrayal of Lennie has relevance to the wider realities of the cultural, social and legal status of intellectually disabled people in the United States in particular. Loftis describes how, in 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that individuals with intellectual disabilities could no longer be given a death penalty sentence. However, the state of Texas, rather than using guidelines established by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, used criteria directly based on Steinbeck's characterisation of Lennie.

> Some might argue that actual deaths have little to do with fictional depictions of people on the spectrum: the Texas legal system's appropriation and

> interpretation of Steinbeck's novella Of Mice and Men is a reminder of the powerful impact that fictional representations of disability can have on the actual perceptions of cognitively disabled subjectivity. (2015, p. 62)

"The literary character has become adapted into law, as the court rules that individuals judged to be less impaired than the fictional Lennie may be executed, while those judged to be more impaired than the literary character may not." (p. 62). Loftis highlights that this is a "startling reminder of the influence that fictional depictions can have on public opinions" (p. 63), with real life and death implications to boot. One of the outcomes of my analysis of Britten's operatic oeuvre is to draw out, in this way, the cultural and social implications of disability representation for wider public opinion, civil rights, and ultimately, disability justice.

Just as the state of Texas failed to recognise the fictionality of Steinbeck's representation of intellectual disability (and its reliance on reductive and harmful tropes), Floyd's 1970 adaptation of Steinbeck's novel "reflects the unfortunate contrast between the nascent disability rights movement in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s and the lingering negative stereotypes about people with intellectual disabilities during that era" (Jensen-Moulton, 2012, p. 152). Jensen-Moulton also notes Floyd's omission of the character of Crooks, a stable-hand who is the only Black worker on the ranch and who is physically disabled. In Steinbeck's novella, Crooks is subject to racism and prejudice; Jensen-Moulton suggests that Floyd's reasons for deciding to omit the character may have been due to a view that "race was a much too sensitive issue in 1970 to be brought onto the operatic stage for trial" (p. 153). However, the representation of intellectual disability in Floyd's characterisation of Lennie "shows no such judgement or sensitivity to the major societal shifts taking place in thinking about disability coeval with the composition of the opera" (p. 153). Indeed, Crooks' disappearance from Floyd's opera robs the work of potential to explore the intersections between disability and race, particularly in the light of timely interconnections and coalitions between the protests against the segregation of black people in the US and the burgeoning disability rights movement. Ultimately, then, Jensen-Moulton is critical in her assessment of Floyd's opera:

> While Floyd's choice of operatic subject matter for his opera afforded him the opportunity to correct an erroneous frame of understanding about intellectual disability, his compositional choices, character omissions, and seeming unawareness of the disability rights movement all reflect Floyd's apparent contentment with the operatic status quo. (p. 153)

The music accompanying Lewis Milestone's 1939 film adaptation of Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* was written by Aaron Copland; incidentally, Britten and Copland were friendly at that time and it was around then, during Britten and Pears' stay in the United States, 1939–1942, that Britten had also commenced work with W.H. Auden on his American operetta, *Paul Bunyan*. In October 1939, Britten wrote to his sister, Beth Welford:

> I see lots of Wystan [Auden]; it is nice to have him around. Also Aaron Copland – although he's gone off to Hollywood to do a film [Of Mice and Men]. Wystan & my opera is settled for Broadway <u>when</u> we have done it. (Welford, 1939, as cited in Mitchell and Reed, 1991b, p. 707)

Whilst it is certainly not possible to deduce the nature of the influence of Copland's contributions to the film adaptation of *Of Mice and Men* on Britten's compositional development, Britten and Copland were particularly closely in touch during this time (Copland and Perlis, 1984, pp. 302-304; Robinson, 1997). It is likely that the pair would have discussed issues surrounding their respective projects in some depth, and perhaps, though they almost certainly could not at the time have articulated it as such, issues surrounding the musical representation of (intellectual) disability.

It is in this spirit, then, that I consider Britten's stage works, as I attend to the following central questions: what sorts of disability representations are present in the source material upon which Britten's operas are based? Further, do Britten's adaptations demonstrate a critical engagement with such representations, or do they merely reproduce prevailing cultural norms, disability tropes, and, to use Jensen-Moulton's phraseology, the "operatic status quo"? Indeed, do representations of disability shift throughout Britten's operatic career, in the light of the emerging disability rights movements of the second half of the 20th century?

Joseph Straus, disability, and music analysis

Over the past decade or so, Joseph Straus has explored ways in which music can be said to represent disability (2006, 2008, 2011, 2018). In his work on so-called late-style (2008), Straus suggests that musical attributes typically associated with works written towards the end of a composer's life might more accurately be described as disability-related features, a "disability-style" of sorts. Noting that proximity to the end of a composer's life is often correlated with the experience of disability (for example, he notes Bach's blindness, Beethoven's deafness, Copland's dementia and Schumann's experience of mental illness – to which, we could surely add Britten's heart condition, which, as I noted earlier has been the subject of scholarly and biographical fascination), Straus suggests:

> Late-style music is understood as having certain distinctive attributes, often including bodily features (fractured, fissured, compact, or immobilized) and certain mental or emotional states (introverted, detached, serene, or irascible). It may be that in writing music describable in such terms, composers are inscribing their shared experience of disability, of bodies and minds that are not functioning in the normal way. In a related vein, it may be that listeners and critics, knowing of the composer's disabilities, read nonnormative physical and mental states into the music. (p. 6)

Acknowledgment of the part played by listeners and critics (and musicologists) in the 'meaning' of disability representation, that is to say, allusion to the way in which musical meaning is produced and constructed rather than necessarily inhering within the music itself, is crucial here, if one is to avoid a sense of essentialism or immanent meaning. More recently, Straus has explored the way in which musical *modernism* specifically can be interpreted in relation to the musical representation of disability (2018). He writes:

> Modernist music is centrally concerned with the representation of disabled bodies. Its most characteristic features—fractured forms, immobilized harmonies, conflicting textural layers, radical simplification of means in some cases, and radical complexity and hermeticism in others—can be understood as musical representations of disability conditions, including deformity/disfigurement, mobility impairment,

> madness, idiocy, and autism. Although modernist music embodies negative, eugenic-era attitudes toward disability, it also affirmatively claims disability as a resource, thus manifesting its disability aesthetics. (p. 1)

Here, Straus draws from Tobin Siebers' work on disability aesthetics in visual arts (2010) and applies it to his thinking about music. Disability, for Siebers, is one of modernism's (modernist visual art's) "defining characteristics" (2010, p. 3) and functions as an artistic resource. Straus makes a corollary claim about modern music. In other words, the cultural work done by modernist music, in a sense, destigmatises disability. Straus outlines particular features and qualities of modernist music, "forms made of discrete blocks, stratified textures, immobile harmonies, radical simplification of materials, juxtaposition of seemingly incommensurable elements, extremes of internal complexity and self-reference" (p. 3), and interprets these as representations of disability. Throughout his work, Straus identifies the ways in which modernist music comes to represent "deformity/disfigurement", "mobility impairment", "madness", "idiocy", and "autism", noting that "[t]hese representations sometimes perpetuate pernicious eugenic-era stereotypes and sometimes are more accepting, even celebratory, of extraordinary bodies." (p. 69) In my interpretive and analytical work that follows in chapters 5, 6 and 7 of this thesis, I apply Straus' illustrative examples of modernist musical representations of disability to the operas of Benjamin Britten. I compare the modernist musical works that Straus identifies as representing disability with Britten's modernist stage works, outlining features that they share.

> Modernist music does many things, of course, and for many different reasons, but it maintains a fundamental interest in disability. In moving disability representation from a stigmatized periphery to a valorized center of artistic expression, modernist music claims disability. (Straus, 2018, p. 3)

It is fascinating to consider Straus' claim here alongside his earlier assertion that compositional 'late-style' might be read as 'disability-style'. In both cases, crucially, disability is identified as an aesthetic category, one which is affirmed in its distinctiveness. For Straus, it is not merely the case that disability *can* be represented in musical works, but rather, that music abounds with disability representations, both in modernist music, and in 'late-style'

works written at various points throughout musical history. Perhaps, in a certain sense, there might indeed be interpretive connections to be drawn between the notion of late-style and modernism more generally.

Furthermore, perhaps it is possible to relate Straus' work on disability aesthetics and 20th century music to his earlier work on modernism (1990) in which he adapted ideas developed by the literary theorist and (poetry) critic, Harold Bloom. For Bloom, "the anxiety of influence" (1973) is an affective struggle experienced by authors in the (impossible) attempt to create meaningful and truly innovative works after those who have come before. Early twentieth-century composers, for Straus, felt something akin to an "anxiety of influence" particularly keenly. Perhaps we might read 'anxiety' here in relation to disability, to affective conditions more specifically. It was disability theorist and historian Douglas Baynton who wrote "disability is everywhere, once you begin looking for it…" (2001, p. 52).

However, given the porous, ambivalent, and unfixed, nature of musical meaning, is there perhaps a danger of reading disability too readily, too essentially, and too reductively from musical works and features? Straus takes caution to highlight, in his theorizing of musical disability representation, that this need not be the case: his work on the normalising tendencies of late 18th and early 19th century approaches to the analysis of Western Art Music (*Formenlehre*, and the tonal theories of Schonberg and Schenker) is particularly relevant here (2006). Taking his cue from recent (at the time of writing) work in disability studies (including, amongst others, Baynton, 2001), Straus attends to the historical emergence of the concepts of the 'normal' and 'abnormal' at the turn of the 19th century. Straus identifies that consideration and analysis of music have, for a long time, utilised metaphors of the body. Strands of musicology in the 1970s and 1980s developed theories of musical hearing as an embodied phenomenon, in line with theories of experientialism in broader linguistic and philosophical fields, that knowledge of the (musical) world is mediated by our intimate knowledge of our own bodies. Indeed, for Straus, the use of bodily metaphors appears even to have characterised music analytic approaches significantly prior to the 'embodied musicology' of the late 20th century. In describing music in relation to the body, the question emerges: *what kinds* of bodies, moreover, *whose* bodies are we talking about? Straus suggests that music analysis, at the turn of the 19th century in particular, engaged notions of

the 'normal' body in relation to "normative… arrangements of musical elements" in the prioritisation of form (2006, p. 127). Formal deviations and dissonance, in this way, came to be understood in relation to normative formal and harmonic standards, which Straus argues, relate to normative *bodily* standards. Straus connected the rise of the normative body (which as Baynton described was itself a product of the development of 19th century statistical methods and Quetelet's normal distribution curves) with normative music analysis. He writes:

> By the end of the nineteenth century, the study of musical form had taken a decisive empirical turn… It is assumed by Prout and Tovey, as it is more recently by Blume, Newman, and Hepokoski/Darcy, that the study of musical form involves the inspection of lots of pieces and their categorization based on shared attributes, implicitly a process of statistical norming in which most of the population is sheltered under the bell-shaped curve, with abnormal members relegated to the margins. (p. 134)

Within this context, then, identifications of representations of disability ought not to be understood as reductive or essentialist claims per se, but rather, can be understood within the context of a broader reductive, essentialist and the altogether erroneous truth-claim that bodies and music can most productively be understood in relation to statistical norms. In other words, music is always already understood in relation to bodies; the identification of representations of disability in music challenges normative assumptions about what those bodies should look and be like.

It is worth noting, though, that many of the examples of musical modernist disability representation given by Straus are taken from untexted, instrumental musical works (rather than from operas, that is). It is important to clarify and perhaps distinguish between what is meant by representation in the context of texted music and by representation in relation to absolute music. In one sense, representation (in general) denotes the telling or narrating of a story, whether that be literary or operatic, involving characters, events and climaxes. In another sense, though, representation need not be more than mere description or depiction; in this sense, representation does not require a plot. However, for the present purposes, I choose to follow Ronen (1997) in her literary theoretical assertion that the "almost canonical

description of description as non-narrative should be given up…" (p. 247). Ronen suggests that, in practice, the distinction between narration and (mere) description is an untenable dichotomy. Narratives are described and descriptions are, of course, narrated. In the context of musical representation, then, I understand the phenomena of characterisation, depiction, description, and narrative all to be caught up within a broader network of representation. Thus, whilst there are likely to be differences between the ways in which music represents in dramatic and non-dramatic contexts, they are ultimately inextricably linked.

However, representation in music is clearly heavily shaped by the presence of an associated or accompanying text, whether that be an opera's libretto, poetry in the case of art song or Lieder, or, indeed, even the instance of a descriptive title or performance direction in purely instrumental music. There is perhaps, in the main, consensus that literary text can represent. However, the question of the possibility of representation (and, by extension, narrative) in music (or rather, in absolute music, devoid of text) has been the subject of musico-philosophical debate for decades (Reyland, 2016, p. 204). Indeed, as Kerman (1999) outlines, music criticism has long been invested in the idea that music *can* signify, that it *can* convey stories. Indeed, what is musical analytical interpretation if not the adaptation of music into the spoken or written (narrative) word? However, Nattiez (1990), and Abbate (1991), are altogether more sceptical of the possibility of musical narrative and representation: for Nattiez, 'it is not within the semiological possibilities of music to link a subject and a predicate' (1990, p. 244, quoted in Reyland, 2016, p. 206); moreover, for Abbate, musical narrative is impossible as music lacks temporality, or as Reyland summarises Abbate's position, "music cannot posit a past tense" (2016, p. 206). If language can represent (narrate), but music, in itself, cannot, then it might only be through associated text (libretto, poem, title, programme note etc.) that music can point to anything outside itself at all. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that the scholarship surrounding *operas* had already variously taken up issues of disability representation, or at least representations of madness specifically, prior to Straus' latest publications, whereas analytical scholarship concerning absolute music had not.

According to Pipes (1990), the representation of madness has held a central place in the field of opera studies, and the operatic intersections between madness and gender have been elaborated particularly well by Clément (1999). However, such accounts of the

representation of madness in opera have not, on the whole, located themselves within the broader social and political context of disability studies, nor have they considered the relation of madness to broader disability identity. Though she does not write within the context of disability studies, Susan McClary (1991) gives a very textured account of the representation of madness in opera in relation to social and gendered norms. Straus' is, however, the first *systematic* study of the musical representation of disability, and along with Jensen-Moulton, was one of the first to draw out wider socio-political implications of operas in relation to disability.

Rather than accepting that language is *more* capable than absolute music of representing (narrating), it might be suggested that language actually 'gets in the way' of knowing. In this sense, then, it is the famous non-representationality of music that, somewhat counterintuitively, makes representation possible. All this is to say that the distinction between the representationality of text and that of music is largely untenable. Thus, even in the analysis of *opera*, Straus' work on musical disability representation is highly relevant.

In the analysis of Britten's stage works that follows, I adopt a synthesis of Jensen-Moulton's broadly literary approach, and Straus' music theoretical/analytical methods. In doing so, I develop a sense of how textual and musical representations of disability operate together, identifying where libretto and musical setting mutually sustain particular representations of disability, and where, conversely, they operate antagonistically. Broadly, I find that disability can be said to be represented extensively and in complex ways throughout Britten's operas from *Paul Bunyan* to *Death in Venice*.

Chapter 3 - Britten scholarship

Aims of this chapter

Following on from my discussion of methodology, this chapter attends to some of the recurring themes and topics of discussion that have emerged in Britten scholarship since he and his music first came into the public eye. In particular, this chapter draws out the prominence, in the biographical accounts of Britten's life, and the analysis and interpretation of his music, of issues surrounding his queerness, anti-war pacifism, an involvement with politically left-leaning artistic circles (particularly in the 1930s), and a life-long stance against marginalisation and oppression. Further, this chapter explores the literature circulating around Britten's interest in music of eastern Asian origin (notably Indonesian Gamelan, and traditional Japanese Noh Theatre), his supposed preoccupation with the notion of the corruption of innocence, and a Christian spirituality that, some have argued, persisted throughout his life, having an accordingly great influence on his musical output. Moreover, this chapter notes that recent years have seen a scholarly interest in the relationship of Britten's music to modernism, its status with regards to the 'modernist canon' and the socio-cultural role played by Britten's music in the development of what might be conceived of as a mid-twentieth-century middle-brow culture.

In presenting the shape of the literature and the debates that it encompasses, I map out the ways in which disability, non-normative bodies and minds, their socio-cultural construction, and, moreover, their complex embodiment (Siebers, 2008), might be positioned as unacknowledged, unspoken elements of the discourse surrounding Britten's works. The sense in which disability emerges as an unacknowledged element within the scholarship resonates with the fact that, in society at large, disability, whilst ubiquitous, is often conspicuously absent from the stories we tell (Baynton, 2001). Furthermore, throughout this chapter, I demonstrate that the increasingly critical and self-reflexive scholarly approaches to Britten's works that have emerged since the turn of the twenty- first century, lend themselves particularly well to the development of what might tentatively be called 'crip musicology'. I suggest that, in particular, key musicological debates surrounding the relationship between composer biography and musical work, and between musical representation and identity

could be foundational in the development of a 'crip' / critical disability studies approach to musicology. Further, I argue that the scholarly unearthing of the highly collaborative process through which Britten's operas were written, and the multivalent interpretive approaches that have come to characterise the scholarship surrounding his music, could be foregrounded as a musicological contribution to intersectional and coalitional theories of identity politics, marginalisation and oppression. In sum, I seek to demonstrate that Britten scholarship provides both the content and the context for the drawing out of a critical disability perspective in a musicological setting.

Milestones in Britten Scholarship

This chapter outlines the shape of the scholarship concerning the life and works of Benjamin Britten. In considering the themes and debates that the literature encompasses, I draw out some of the ways in which disability perspectives might enrich the field. I will suggest that disability is already a very much present, though most often unacknowledged, aspect of the discussions surrounding Britten and his music. However, I also contend that by incorporating disability as a category of analysis into Britten studies, connections and complications between aspects of the field begin to emerge in novel and exciting ways.

Throughout his musical career, Britten enjoyed an established reputation not only as a first-rate composer, but also as a conductor and pianist (particularly in his work as an accompanist for his partner, tenor, Peter Pears). Britten's instrumental and vocal music continue to be given regular international concert performance and his operas can frequently be seen on stages across the world. *Operabase*, an online platform that documents professional operatic activity worldwide, has statistics demonstrating that Britten has been consistently amongst the 20 most played composers of opera every year since at least the 2004–2005 season (when *Operabase* records start), with around 50 productions and often well over 200 performances of his operas taking place across the globe annually (https://www.operabase.com). Correspondingly, Britten's life and his musical works have been the subject of significant scholarly attention for well over half a century, both during the composer's lifetime and following his death in 1976.

Evans (1979), in the preface to his major overview of the music of Britten, remarks that Britten's output was the subject of musical analysis from a surprisingly early stage of the composer's career (p. 1). Highlighting that it was published a year before Britten's fortieth birthday, Evans grandly describes the volume edited by Donald Mitchell and Hans Keller (1952) as a 'comprehensive symposium' about Britten's life and musical works; Dean (1953) gave the work the witty moniker "Encyclopaedia Brittenica". However, Palisca (1954) insinuates that the Mitchell-Keller collection was an unabashed and somewhat biased attempt at propelling Britten's career rather than a serious scholarly study. Indeed, Tranchell (1953) was also highly sceptical of the appropriateness of the publication of such a comprehensive biography and study of a living composer, concluding:

> It remains for me to offer to the subject of this hero-worship my condolences that the book should not have been better written and that [Britten] should have been the victim of so inopportune an outburst of noble intentions. (p. 132)

Nonetheless, the extensive nature of the Mitchell-Keller symposium demonstrates the interest that was beginning to circulate around Britten and his works, even at such an early stage of his career. In addition to the Mitchell-Keller collection, another significant (albeit rather more modest) early study of Britten's music appeared at around a similar time, written by Eric Walter White (1949). White updated his work a number of times with the latest version being published in 1983, five years after Britten's death. Alongside these early analytical studies of Britten's music was that of Patricia Howard (1969) who gives an interpretive overview of Britten's operas, from *Peter Grimes* to *The Burning Fiery Furnace*. Howard develops a sense that a recurring theme throughout the repertoire is the portrayal of "good and evil in conflict" (p. 235) and the notion of the unfortunate necessity of sacrifice in the resolution of such moral predicaments. Other early notable contributions to the field are Eric Crozier's descriptive studies of *Peter Grimes* (Crozier, 1945) and of *The Rape of Lucretia* (1948), and a number of essays by Keller dating from the 1940s to the 1970s, published together at a later date (Keller, 1994, 2013).

Regardless of whether such studies of Britten's life and his music were appropriate so early in Britten's career, their existence set the scene for the subsequent wealth of Britten

scholarship that was to emerge throughout Britten's later life and indeed beyond it. Moreover, this early analytical literature surrounding Britten's music has an additional direct relevance for the present purposes. Throughout this thesis, I consistently argue that disability is an unspoken and unacknowledged aspect of Britten scholarship; I am particularly interested in exploring the development of this element throughout the literature in relation to the wider shifting attitudes towards disability over the course of the twentieth century. In this sense, allusions to disability within the Britten scholarship of this period can be placed in relation to the still-prominent eugenic thought of the post World War 2 regeneration era in Britain (Hanson, 2013)[7] and the rise of psychoanalysis (Shapira, 2013). To give an example, many of Keller's studies draw from his practice as a psychoanalyst, developing psychological readings of Britten's music: Keller's psychoanalytic studies of *Peter Grimes* (1995), for instance, interpret the character of Grimes in Freudian, psychopathological terms. Further, Howard's foregrounding of the theme of sacrifice in Britten's operas can be related to some of the precepts of British mid-twentieth century eugenics. I suggest in this chapter, and throughout the remainder of this thesis, that the prominent ideas of early Britten scholarship have effectively set the terms of the scholarly debates that were to follow. Though there have of course been significant turns throughout the history of the field, a "dogged desire to find a hopeful message in Britten's operas is a persistent feature of Britten scholarship" (Harper-Scott, 2018, p. 58). In this sense, I make the ambitious claim that exploration of the ways in which themes in Britten scholarship have developed serves to trace the outlines of the shifting discourses of disability over a significant period of British disability history.

It is commonly acknowledged that Britten had chosen Donald Mitchell to write his official biography. However, at a time when Mitchell had become heavily involved in a project of editing Britten's letters and diaries with Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke, the fruits of which were to be published in six volumes (Mitchell and Reed (Eds.), 1991a, 1991b; Mitchell, Reed and Cooke (Eds.), 2004, 2008; Reed and Cooke (Eds.), 2010, 2012), Humphrey Carpenter was granted permission to embark upon a volume of his own (1992) which has almost gained

[7] Whilst it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest a connection between eugenic thought and British progressive post-war politics, Hanson suggests that the link "becomes more intelligible if we locate it in the context of the longer term history of eugenics" (p. 2) and the eugenicist Francis Galton's misappropriation of his cousin Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. For Hanson, for example, eugenic thought is evident in the 'meritocratic' education policies that characterised the post-war period in Britain.

status as *the* definitive Britten biography. Prior to the publication of Carpenter's account, Kennedy (1981) had detailed Britten's life and career in the first half of his comprehensive Britten study in what was an important contribution to the field, owing to its depth of insight and incorporation of a great deal of correspondence source material that had yet to appear in print. Another biographical contribution was Headington's (1981) that, whilst perhaps not as comprehensive as Kennedy's, is nonetheless highly detailed and informative. Both biographies were important sources for the subsequent development of Britten scholarship and are thus highly relevant to the present study as I chart the development of certain themes throughout the literature in relation to disability. Carpenter's book, however, was a marked contrast to those of Kennedy and Headington; reviews by Shaw (1993), Puffet (1994) and Sutcliffe (1992) all note how Carpenter's biography gives an account of some of the more controversial aspects of Britten's character. For instance, Sutcliffe (1992) suggests that in Carpenter's account, "Britten does seem a pretty cold fish, making up with Pears a fairly unattractive and manipulative couple" (p. 569). Shaw (1993) writes that Carpenter's biography presents previously unexplored territory in the Britten scholarship, in particular that "the disclosure that Britten's obsession with boys was pursued far more actively and persistently than anyone outside his immediate circle could have guessed", and that Britten mistreated and frequently dismissed friends and colleagues who were no longer of use to him (p. 31). If Mitchell and Keller's symposium can be accused of painting too idyllic a portrait of Britten, Carpenter's writing certainly cannot.

Since the publication of Carpenter's biography, a number of other accounts of Britten's life have been published over the years. Of particular note are Oliver (1996), who offers a clearly knowledgeable, unspeculative, if concise account of Britten's life and, later, Powell (2013) and Matthews (2013), a composer who had himself worked with Britten as a copyist. Kildea (2013) writes comprehensively, with a level of detail that perhaps rivals Carpenter's account. One of the more striking claims made by Kildea is the suggestion that Britten's death was in part brought about by his having tertiary syphilis (p. 532). Kildea points out that, in the late twentieth century, undiagnosed syphilis was especially common among homosexual men and that there was correspondingly a great stigma surrounding the disease, the explanation he gives for Britten's diagnosis not having been more widely known. I give further comment on this point later in this chapter as I draw out some of ways in which disability and queerness

have emerged in interconnected ways in the Britten scholarship. Suffice it to say, though, that Kildea's assertion was met with a distinct scholarly defensiveness and there was a notable attempt to discredit his claim by Petch (2014 and 2015).

In a review article, Manton (2013) highlights that the final decade of the twentieth and the start of the twenty-first centuries saw a flurry of scholarly research relating to Britten and his creative output. A particularly exciting year for Britten scholarship was 2013 itself, marking 100 years since the composer's birth; it is noteworthy that the Powell, Matthews and Kildea biographies were all published in that year. Manton's article also spotlights work by Claire Seymour (2004), whose studies have provided further depth to the musical analysis of Britten's operas, as do those of Rupprecht (2001). Seymour concludes that, in his operas, "Britten creates literal and symbolic voices, communicating his 'meaning' in sound and in silence. Ultimately, the song which these voices sing expresses and embodies the essential reticence of Music itself, reticence which Britten might have called its innocence" (p. 339). The identification of reticence as an essential force operating within Britten's stage works can effectively be understood, I suggest, as connected to Keller's earlier Freudian psychopathological interpretations of the music. Rupprecht's work (2001) introduced Austin's speech act theory (1962) to the analysis of Britten's operas; of particular relevance to my thesis is his chapter on *Peter* Grimes in which he states:

> One might… claim that Peter's operatic identity is less a matter of "sadistic" or "poetic" qualities revealed in solo arioso, than of a linguistically construed subject position. Grimes – more precisely, "Grimes!" – is the referent of a series of operatic acts of hailing. (Rupprecht, 2001, p. 56-57)

By moving from a discussion of Grimes' character towards a more expansive notion of the constitution of Grimes as a subject by politicised acts of naming, Rupprecht, unlike Seymour, appears to break with the Kellerian tradition (if I may call it that) of psychopathologizing Grimes. From the materialist critical disability perspective that I develop throughout this thesis, Rupprecht's analysis, then, is particularly pertinent.

The complexities surrounding musical representation and meaning have been brought to the fore in Whittall's (2000) analysis of Britten's *Owen Wingrave*. Whittall begins his discussion by considering musical representations of lament and the way in which "they seem to embody and yet transcend the raw, immediate feelings of grief and pain" (p. 145). Not wishing to make the claim that musical meaning is in any way a simple one-for-one substitution of sign for referent, though, Whitall proceeds with caution. Whittall acknowledges that, when we talk about music representing lament, what we usually mean to say is that certain musical figures, for example, descending chromatic bass lines and melodic figures that resemble sighing, have been so frequently and persistently used in the context of lamenting, that those figures effectively take on representational power. However, Whittall also warns that making over-easy associations such as this can lead to essentialising and reductive analysis. In Britten's case:

> the reductive assumption that [his] music is, in essence, one long lament on the part of a disaffected, guilt-ridden, perpetual adolescent, whose public success simply intensified his self-doubt and preference for repression and concealment, can all too easily come to underpin even the most determinedly technical discussions of musical detail. (p.145)

Thus Whittall proceeds with his analysis of *Owen Wingrave* with the intention of steering clear of "counter-productive over-simplification" (p. 145). For the present purposes of this thesis, then, as I investigate the representation of queerness and disability in Britten's stage works (and in *Peter Grimes* in particular), Whittall's approach will prove to be an important model. A brief example will be illustrative here: loose manuscript pages found in one of Britten's sketchbooks contain some preliminary musical ideas that Britten developed as he worked on *Owen Wingrave* (p. 148). One of these ideas is a two-part contrary-motion, tonally ambiguous progression that moves from a single shared note towards two different tonal regions. In his sketches, Britten worked through different versions of the idea. Whittall traces the way in which this "wedge-shaped" motive is used throughout the opera but also suggests that "it could have arrived in *Owen Wingrave* by way of *The Prodigal Son* [Britten's church parable only a few years earlier]" (p. 150). Whittall considers connections between the narratives of these two stage works and suggests that, "in these terms, the role of the wedge-shaped

motive in the later opera – given the way in which Britten uses it – becomes a little more complex than is usually recognised" (p. 152). In this way, Whittall allows the different contexts in which certain musical ideas are employed to add texture to our understanding of what those ideas represent, rather than reducing each particular instance of them to a unitary essential narrative. Analysis, in this sense, can complicate representation rather than simplifying it.

Whilst insights into the composer's 'life and works' are clearly of scholarly interest in and of themselves and Britten scholarship has additional significant import in that it has been the site of debates surrounding the production of musical meaning it has also played a seminal role in the development of new musicological (sub)fields and perspectives. In particular, the analysis of Britten's music has played a formative role in the development of what might termed 'queer musicology' (formerly, 'lesbian and gay musicology'); the contributions of Brett (1997, 1983, 1994 and 2006) are especially significant in this regard. More broadly, Britten scholarship has been the stage upon which advancements to 'new musicology' and 'critical musicology' have been made. It is the contention of this chapter that, if such a discipline as 'critical disability musicology' or 'crip musicology' is ready to emerge, the scholarly discourse surrounding Britten's life and his music might prove to be similarly formative and productive as it has been in the development of queer musicology and new musicology.

Queerness

Of the themes to emerge in the scholarship surrounding Britten and his music, that of queerness (that is, non-heteronormative sexuality) is perhaps the most prominent. It is now somewhat uncontroversial to assert that Britten's works, and his stage works in particular, are inflected and shaped by his queerness (and indeed that of many of his creative collaborators). In this section, I outline some of the ways in which queerness has been explored in relation to Britten and his music (his stage works in particular), demonstrating, furthermore, how disability and queerness emerge in various interconnected ways. Queerness and disability share a pathologized (and moreover a psychopathologized) past (McRuer, 2006; Foucault, 1976), the legacy of which, I contend, has a particular relevance in relation to Britten scholarship. However, I will also claim that the queer non-normativity that

some scholars have argued permeates Britten's works, might be suitably employed in relation to the affirmation of disability and non-normative bodies and minds.

Queer analysis

Philip Brett was among the first to give a sustained exploration of Britten's operas in relation to queerness. Brett (1977) argued that *Peter Grimes* could productively be interpreted as a queer story in which the social exclusion experienced by the protagonist can be understood as an expression of the marginalisation faced by queer people during Britten's lifetime. Early scholarly analyses and interpretations of *Peter Grimes* had already identified some of the ways in which Britten's musical adaptation of Crabbe's poetry emphasised that the character of Grimes was somehow marked out as different from the rest of the Borough (e.g., Crozier, 1945; Evans, 1979, p. 104-123 and Howard, 1969). In addition, White (1970, p. 119) had drawn connections between the characterisation of Peter Grimes as being at odds with the Borough and the bitonality that subtends much of the opera's orchestral writing. However, Brett was the first to identify Grimes' at-odds-ness specifically in queer terms, famously stating:

> *Peter Grimes* is about a man who is persecuted because he is different. We may recall Peter Pears's explanation that Grimes "is very much of an ordinary weak person who… offends against the conventional code, is classed by society as a criminal and destroyed as such". To which he adds as a final line, "There are plenty of Grimeses around still, I think!" There is every reason to believe that the unspoken matter is what in 1945 was still the crime that hardly dare speak its name, and that it is to the homosexual condition that *Peter Grimes* is addressed. (Brett, 1983, p. 187)

In a sense, Brett offers his queer interpretation of *Peter Grimes* as a matter of allegory, supported by and alluding to the biographical circumstances of Britten and Pears' own queerness. This is to say that Brett reads the character of Grimes and his narrative situation as a metaphor for the experience (Britten's experience) of being queer in a hostile and unaccepting, anti-queer social environment. Whether or not Grimes' queerness was the product of a conscious (or even subconscious) decision on Britten's part, Brett refrains from speculating. However, as Brett's writing develops further, a corollary and rather more direct

suggestion about the role that queerness plays in Britten's operas seems to emerge alongside the broader interpretation of the works as metaphor for queerness. For Brett, queerness is an unspoken, inexplicit, but also a nonetheless 'essential' aspect of Peter Grimes' character, albeit one that had to be censored, codified and made secret in order for Britten to preserve his societal respectability. Supporting his claim, Brett suggests that a reading of Grimes's character as queer helps to make sense of the opera dramatically: "[T]he viciousness of the Borough's persecution becomes more explicable, and Peter's own tragedy, that of guilt and self-hatred, all the more poignant and relevant to people today" (2006, p. 20).

Queerness, for Brett, then, is not merely alluded to metaphorically, but is also, in some senses, the key that explains (or perhaps even explains away) Grimes' unanswered and ambiguous difference that was raised by White (1970), Evans (1979), Howard (1969), Kennedy (1981) and others since. What is particularly striking, in his analyses of *Peter Grimes*, and, later, Britten's other operas, is the way in which Brett moves between the identification of queerness operating (intentionally or otherwise) on a metaphorical level, and the more literal interpretation of queerness as a hidden element of plot. The matter, for Brett, however, is neither settled one way nor the other, and his writing is characterised by an altogether more ambiguous position. Indeed, reflecting upon his earlier 1977 article in a postscript, Brett (1983) comments:

> The furthest we might go is to see Grimes as symbolic of something the composer recognized in himself. For if, as I suggested at the end of "Britten and Grimes," [1977] he came to terms with his worst fears about the darker side of society in his opera, he may also have explored there the darker and more violent sides of his own nature. (p. 192)

Brett's later writing explores queerness as it plays out throughout Britten's operatic output. However, given that *Peter Grimes* holds an important position in Brett's thought, I shall stay with it a little longer. A significant contribution to the field of Britten studies was Brett's detailed examination of the creation of the libretto for *Peter Grimes*. Broadly, Brett (1983, 1996 and 2000) explores the fraught collaborative process through which the *Grimes* libretto was conceived and developed and, subsequently, underwent various significant revisions.

Brett stresses that, whilst Montagu Slater takes the official title of librettist, Britten himself played a significant role in the libretto's creation, alongside the influences of Pears, W. H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood and Eric Crozier. In this way, Brett problematises notions of authorial voice and authorial intention in his queer interpretation of *Peter Grimes*. If queerness is an important aspect in the opera, *whose* queerness is it: Grimes', Britten's, or that of his collaborators? (Or indeed, Brett's?).

Brett draws out the way in which the initial conceptions of the opera (crafted by Pears and Britten during their summer stay in Escondido, California) depicted the protagonist as significantly more overtly queer than the Peter Grimes of the finalised iteration of the opera's libretto. However, Brett highlights that some renegotiation over this point must have occurred relatively early in the compositional process: Pears had reduced the initially unambiguous queer references in the subsequent re-drafting of some of the more violent scenes of the opera, sketched during his and Britten's return voyage to England. Indeed, Brett cites Pears' response to Britten upon hearing an early version of part of the score:

> The more I hear of it, the more I feel that the queerness is unimportant & doesn't really exist in the music (or at any rate obtrude) so it mustn't do so in the words. P. G. is an introspective, an artist, a neurotic, his real problem is expression, self-expression. (Brett, 2006, p. 40)

Brett's assertion, in his earlier work on *Peter Grimes*, that queerness is an unspoken, unacknowledged aspect of Grimes' character is met here, in his later archival work, with some important corroborating evidence. What exists, in the characterisation of Grimes, are merely the *traces* of a queerness which, Brett suggests, for one reason or another has been censored and obscured. Moreover, Pear's statement is additionally relevant to the broader aims of my thesis: his specific description of Grimes as "an introspective… a neurotic" whose "real problem is expression, self-expression" is itself not wholly unrelated to the psychopathological disability reading of the operatic protagonist that, as I highlighted earlier was articulated and elaborated by Keller (1995).

Indeed, elsewhere, Brett describes the way in which certain labels such as “adolescent”, “immature” and “clever” are often levied against Britten in the negative reception of his work, suggesting that these operate euphemistically as “code word[s] referring to a particular view of homosexuality during the period as a [*pathological*] matter of arrested development leading to a failure to ‘adjust’” (2006, pp. 45-46). Through his work then, Brett outlines the way in which queerness operates simultaneously as: an unspoken aspect of plot, having been removed from the work during the compositional process; a trace element caught up in the discourses of insinuation and euphemism; and a function of the interpretation and analysis of Britten’s music.

Whilst it is clear that queerness is relevant to (and signified in some way by) *Peter Grimes*, Brett refrains from drawing conclusions about authorial intention in Britten’s work: “The point is not that *Peter Grimes* initiated or even participated in this debate [surrounding the position of queer people in society], but that it stands as a symptom of the conditions of that debate” (2006, p. 50). What is especially interesting is Brett’s notion that the contribution to queer musicology made by *Peter Grimes* is, to a significant extent therefore, unwitting. Furthermore, for the present project, Brett’s deployment of the word “symptom” is particularly intriguing itself as a disability-related term.

Throughout his later writing, Brett applies the queer insights gained from *Peter Grimes* to Britten’s operatic output more broadly. For instance, writing about *Billy Budd*, Brett (1984) takes a closer musical analytical approach than he perhaps does in his work on *Peter Grimes*. Here, he explores the use of tonal schemes and harmonic devices in Britten’s adaptation of Melville’s novella to argue that in *Billy Budd* “in Platonic terms, the love of Ideal Beauty can lead to wisdom, knowledge and forgiveness; and that in Christian terms, goodness and love have the power to forgive” (Brett, P. McClary, S. and Doctor, J. 2006, p. 78). For Brett, the traces of queer love between Captain Vere and Billy are implicit in Britten’s musical presentation as much as they are in the opera’s libretto. In my analysis of Britten’s operas in relation to disability, following Brett, I shall be concerned both with aspects of the libretto and plot as well as with Britten’s musical setting itself.

Elsewhere, writing about *Albert Herring*, Brett (1986) asserts that Britten's 1947 chamber opera is a "parable of liberation" (Brett, P. McClary, S. and Doctor, J. 2006, p. 82). Rather than merely a light-touch piece, Brett emphasises the queer implications surrounding Britten and Crozier's portrayal of Albert and his mother's relationship: "To be unmarried, and worse still, to be living for Mum, these are taboos in English society, which has contained them (and justified its self-image of toleration) within the concept of 'eccentricity'" (p. 84). Thus, Brett, in reference to Porter (1978), concludes that "it is quite correct to think of Albert's self-liberation… in terms of 'coming out'" (Brett, 2006, p. 85). Through such a lens, Brett observes the message in *Albert Herring* (one not necessarily authorized by Britten, but nonetheless representationally evident) of queer affirmation as Albert finds his independence throughout the opera. Brett turns again, here, to the question of authorial intention, as he considers whether Britten's recordings of his own works (in this case, *Albert Herring*, but the idea applies more broadly too) can point to a definitive queer message inherent within the music. Brett cites Evans (1979), who writes: "Britten's purpose in writing Albert Herring could have been no more than a wish to entertain by apt caricature of the familiar" (Evans, 1979, p. 145). "On the surface the composer's own recorded performance seems to bear out that assertion" (Brett, 2006, p. 82). No queer affirmation as of yet. However, Brett's point here is that, to reach below the surface, to the queer reading, requires a level of intertextual comparison. Peter Hall's production of the opera at Glyndebourne in 1985, with John Graham-Hall playing Albert, and Bernard Haitink conducting, created a heightened sense of parody through having many of the characters, including Albert, sing with a Suffolk accent throughout. Brett suggests that the unfortunate effect of this attempt at realism was "vocally diminishing and therefore musically damaging to Britten's conception" (p. 83). However, earlier recordings of *Albert Herring* conducted by Britten, with the title role played by Pears (without the regional accent), present a less caricatured portrayal by comparison. In this sense, Brett suggests that a more subtle meaning can emerge in Britten's earlier recordings, a meaning that is, however, obscured in Hall's production. Moreover, the subtle (read, queer) meaning emerges, not merely in reference to Britten's recording by itself, but rather through its interaction, and by comparison, with the later Glyndebourne iteration. Therefore, Brett seems to entertain the idea that "[t]he ethos of faithfulness to the composer's recording" (in and of itself, that is) might be "useful in setting a general style, indicating the likely interpretation of ambiguous matters…" (p. 87). However, he suggests that such an approach might be inherently limited:

"Yet if it inhibits the search for meanings that are latent in the score, but understated in that particular performance (for whatever reason), then I think its seeming authority must be resisted, however gently" (p. 87). Musical meaning, with regards to queerness for Brett is ultimately not discernible save through a complex network involving the composer, but also singers and directors who come to perform the works in their own time. In this way, Brett engages with the broader musicological debate over the conflation of musical meaning with composer's intention. A significant body of musicological scholarship in the 1980s was dedicated to issues surrounding historically informed and 'authentic' performance of Early Music, and a turbulent debate ensued. For instance, Taruskin (1988) and Dreyfus (1983) are particularly sceptical of analytical positivism in which musical meaning is understood as verifiable, through the gathering of facts. Brett's queer interpretations of Britten's operas take up this issue in the context of problematising the relationship between composer biography and musical meaning. The question is not so much: 'what does Britten's sexuality indicate about the true meaning of his operas?', nor 'what do Britten's operas tell us about his nature and sexuality?'. Rather, Brett seems to advocate for the unravelling of the complex layers of queer meaning that constellate around the opera. In this way, Brett's scholarship is especially relevant throughout my thesis as I draw out the ways in which disability figures in the biographical accounts of Britten's life and also as a latent feature of operatic characterisation. As Brett highlights, the "real question, as always, is to know how and where to draw the line" (p. 87).

Further contributions to the exploration of queerness in Britten's operas were made by Clifford Hindley. Drawing in part from Brett's scholarship, Hindley writes extensively about the ways in which queerness figures in Britten's operas. However, where Brett emphasised the ambiguous and multiple layers of queer meaning produced by the operas at various levels of signification, Hindley's accounts are often more literal, identifying aspects of plot that might be given a more surface-level queer reading. For instance, writing of *Billy Budd*, Hindley (1989, 1994) highlights the prominence of queer elements that emerge in the narrative depiction of the relationships between Billy and Vere and between Billy and Claggart. Crucially, for Hindley it is the depth of the productive love between Billy and Vere that provides the ultimate queer affirmative message of the opera. Similarly, Hindley (1990b)

interprets the relationship between Miles and Quint, in *The Turn of the Screw*, as one of same-sex love.

> [F]undamental is the fact that their relationship is one of homosexual love. It is presented as an emotional and mutually responsive relationship, in which the physical element is barely hinted at. It is nevertheless a bond of the kind rejected by conventional society. (p. 15)

Thus, from Miles' death, Hindley draws what he considers to be the opera's conclusive meaning: that of the devastating self-denial and destruction that results when society rejects the validity of queer, non-normative sexualities.

Hindley (1990a) also cites Donald Mitchell who had already explored the notion that certain themes in *Death in Venice* had a personal significance for Britten, "embod[ying] unequivocally the powerful sexual drive that was Britten's towards the young (and sometimes very young) male" (Mitchell, 1987, p. 21). However, Hindley seeks to draw out some of what he considers to be queer-affirming elements that emerge in the text. In studying the adaptation of Thomas Mann's novella to the operatic stage, Hindley stresses Britten's conception of the affirmative potential of Platonic love of youthful beauty. For Hindley, the tragedy of Aschenbach's death, rather than signifying the corrupting and dangerous consequences of the love of youthful beauty, represents Aschenbach's failure to commit fully enough to and engage with the Platonic vision of Ideal beauty as represented by the young boy Tadzio. For Hindley, *Death in Venice* points to the tragic consequences of a world in which homosexuality is condemned. However, Hindley does express some caution over interpreting operas biographically, of reading too much too literally into the connections between composer and composition, "especially in interpreting the work of so private a person as Britten." He continues:

> But he did once lift the veil, and the ideal of rooting artistic achievements in the 'reality' of personal relationships which Aschenbach rejects is, it seems to me, remarkably close to the vision which colours a great deal of Britten's [perspective as revealed in his lecture given upon receiving the first] Aspen Award… (p. 523)

Where Brett, after having initially identified the connection between Britten's queerness and what he saw as unacknowledged queer elements in *Peter Grimes*, took pains to complicate the way in which queer meaning was produced surrounding the opera, Hindley does rather the opposite. For Hindley, there does appear to be conclusive queer meaning in Britten's operas, and indeed it is possible to gain insight into the composer through the analysis and interpretation of his compositions. Ultimately, whilst there may be aspects of ambiguity surrounding queerness in Britten's operas, they operate, Hindley suggests, as queer parable art. Indeed, Hindley (1995) suggests that it was W. H. Auden's portrayal of Johnny Inkslinger in the libretto of *Paul Bunyan* that was to serve as a model for presenting queerness in a coded fashion on an operatic stage. He concludes:

> Britten's youthful engagement with left-wing causes, in particular pacifism, demonstrated a developed social conscience. He was particularly inspired by W.H. Auden's vision of 'parable art' as the artist's way of functioning in society and a means of teaching men to 'unlearn hatred and learn love'. (1995, p. 85)

Nonetheless, Hindley suggests that the subtlety of an opera's apparent queer meaning does not necessarily suggest that it was unintentional. Hindley intimates that Britten would have put the onus on the audience to do the work to recover his operas' queer meaning, "expecting [them] to participate creatively in the interpretive experience" (p. 85).

Britten's operas, for Hindley, make a queer statement. It may be that the queer statement is at times conflicted and surrounded in ambiguity, but it is ultimately an affirmative statement nonetheless:

> [I]n a number of the operas [Britten] made a more positive statement on this issue than he has sometimes been given credit for. He was moved not only by his ambition as a consummate professional musician… but also by a resolve to challenge his audiences to grow in love and understanding, particular[ly] in their attitude to those who acknowledge love for their own sex. (p. 86)

Hindley and Brett, in their respective scholarly outputs, have therefore played out the tensions over queer meaning on two planes: both have explored the question of whether queer meaning can be definitive; both have explored the relationship between composer biography and musical meaning. Hindley tends to settle on the essentialist side of both of these questions, whereas Brett offers a more ambivalent response.

Interestingly, Hindley points to the Carpenter biography to allude to the fact that Britten's sexual orientation may not have been exclusively homosexual (Hindley, 1995, p.65). This is a point that is only given brief mention in Carpenter's biography (1992, p.178) and has certainly not been granted significant further scholarly attention. The fact that Hindley considers this point, though, is highly significant. Indeed, Hindley situates this assertion within the context of the characters of Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*, who, in addition to his attraction towards Tadzio, was a widower from a previous, heterosexual, marriage, and Peter Quint in *The Turn of the Screw* who had had an earlier affair with Miss Jessel, in addition to his interaction with the young Miles which comes to characterise his behaviour throughout the opera. It seems interesting to me that the issue of a 'non-exclusive homosexuality' is not articulated in relation to the term bisexuality. Bisexuality is historicised by MacDowall (2009) who highlights that the term had been used equivocally since the mid nineteenth century: an early usage of the word referred anatomically to "forms of life that are sexually undifferentiated or thought to exhibit characteristics of both sexes" – a historical equivalent of the modern usage of the term intersex. Later, by the start of the twentieth century, bisexuality had come to refer to a combination of masculine and feminine "psychical" traits – a usage for which we might now use the terms genderqueer or gender nonbinary, amongst others. Additionally, in the mid twentieth century, bisexuality had come to be used in its modern sense to refer to sexual attraction, as MacDowall puts it, "a combination of… heterosexual/homosexual" (p. 4). Thus, it is certainly not beyond the realm of possibility that Hindley could have specifically deployed the term bisexual in his 1995 article (even if Britten and his contemporaries, earlier in the century, could not), 1995 incidentally being "a moment when the project of the bisexual movement's attempts to establish bisexuality as a viable sexual identity had gained public and international momentum" (p. 6). The fact that Hindley, and Britten scholars on the whole, have omitted to acknowledge this aspect of Britten's sexuality is, I suggest, related to the phenomenon of bi-erasure, in which bisexuality and bisexual subjectivities continue to be

consistently underplayed throughout broader historical, biographical and philosophical literature. After briefly outlining hints of Britten's 'non-exclusive homosexuality', Hindley continues: "it is not my purpose here to enter the essentialist/constructivist debate. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has written of the need to recognise the legitimacy of both accounts of sexuality, at least as *bona fide* self-descriptions" (1995, p. 65-66). I would argue that the move Hindley makes here conflates bisexuality with a misappropriation of the constructivist conception of gayness – the notion that (gay) sexuality is a social construct – thus reproducing the 'common sense' ideas (as MacDowell puts it) that "everyone is bisexual" (2009, p. 5) which is really another way of saying "bisexuality does not *actually* exist". In the next chapter of this thesis I will explore in further detail some of the connections I see between the erasure of bisexuality and the way in which disabled experiences are frequently minimised. Arguments for the social constructedness of disability, for example, too often become, "well isn't everyone is a bit disabled?", or "the only disability is a bad attitude". Thus, I see a structural connection between bi-erasure and ableism, one that, throughout my analysis, I shall draw out in relation to the representation of disability in Britten's operas.

Problematising identity politics

Questions surrounding sexuality, as we have seen, are complex and often fraught. Harper-Scott (2013) is therefore, on the whole, wary of queer interpretations of Britten's operas; for instance, he characterises Brett's queer musicology as reductive (pp. 144-145)[8]. However, Harper-Scott seems merely to draw from Brett's earliest analyses of queerness in *Peter Grimes*, paying less attention to the ambivalent ways in which Brett complicates the notion of allegory and representation throughout his later work. Nonetheless, where he is critical of Brett's approach, Harper-Scott recognises Hindley's contributions as being "less problematic insofar as Britten's class situation is more clearly to the forefront" (p. 145). "Class" for Harper-Scott "transcends almost everything, even gender and race… in the political situation of human beings". His scepticism of queer musicology specifically, is really a scepticism of broader identity politics and the proliferation of identity categories which, Harper-Scott suggests, merely serves to obscure class struggle: "it is not simply that these identities are

[8] Brett reads McClatchie (1996), who explores the way in which queerness might be said to be coded into the plot of *Owen Wingrave*, with reference to the figure of the closet and the notion of 'coming out'.

swallowed up by Capital: In fact, the construction of them *is a principal motive force* of contemporary capitalism" (p. 149). Though Harper-Scott views Hindley's comments on class in relation to queerness as important, he nevertheless tars Hindley with the same brush as he does Brett (1977), McClatchie (1996), and indeed Carpenter (1992), all of whom, he suggests, condense (reduce) Britten and his works to sexual matters.[9]

Moreover, it should be noted that Hindley's scholarship has, in recent years, raised significant ethical concerns, after the suggestion that the real intention behind his writing was somewhat nefarious (Pace, 2014). Harper-Scott (2018) summarises:

> Hindley had many paedophile fantasies about Britten's operas, and although critics have of course failed to condone his fullest ambition as a critic, they have generally welcomed his research for its supposed insights into Britten's queer aesthetic. Hindley was a retired civil servant who has recently been revealed to have played a significant role in the attempted normalization of paedophilia in the late twentieth century in Britain [Pace, 2014]. As a civil servant he saw to it that Conservative and Labour governments gave around £70,000 to the Paedophile Information Exchange, a pressure group. And in his essays on Britten's operas he barely concealed a critique of contemporary society in his sympathetic view of the possibility of a fully developed intergenerational sexual union. (p. 293)

It will remain a challenge for Britten studies to reckon with the complexities and ethical issues thrown up by this revelation. However, returning to queer Britten scholarship more generally, Harper-Scott (2013) speaks favourably of Whitesell (2003), whose contributions he argues, "are perhaps the most sophisticated and provoking of all queer readings of Britten." He continues:

> Whitesell's gambit is to imply simply that such an identity preexists the text and is the subjective situation from which the queer knowledge speaks. The queer identity

[9] Indeed, in a similar manner, I am rather reminded of the way in which the Freudian school of psychoanalysis explicated mental illness principally in terms of sexual development and libidinous desire.

> pinpointed by Whitesell is potentially more universalizable than that of Brett, Carpenter, Hindley or McClatchie (he explicitly states that he does not intend 'to reduce all meaning in Britten to a sexual basis' [Whitesell, 2003, p. 689] – let alone a homosexual one), and in principle the 'queer knowledge' of Britten's operas could just as easily come from any sexual, cultural, economic or racial outsider. (Harper-Scott, 2013, p. 146)

Queerness, in this sense, does not necessarily point to a particular 'flesh and blood' minority identity, one that is configured in the interest of Capital. Rather, queerness is deployed, in Whitesell's account as a structuring, immaterial element of the text. Where this becomes particularly pertinent for my thesis is in Harper-Scott's reference to the work of philosopher Alain Badiou, particularly his critique of what we now describe as "identity politics":

> What inexhaustible potential for mercantile investments in this upsurge – taking the form of communities demanding recognition and so-called cultural singularities – of women, homosexuals, *the disabled* [emphasis my own], Arabs! And these infinite combinations of predicative traits, what a god-send! Black homosexuals, *disabled Serbs* [emphasis my own]… Each time, a social image authorizes new products, specialized magazines, improved shopping malls… The capitalist logic of the general equivalent and the identitarian and cultural logic of communities or minorities form an articulated whole. (Badiou, 2003, p. 10)

In other words, it is arguably only the non-normative, subversive potential queerness that can operate against the normative interests of Capital. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, it is precisely the inclusion of disability in the critique of the proliferation of minority identity categories that McRuer (2006) challenges in his deployment of the notion of crip. Crip identities, as I shall explore, much like critically queer identities (Butler, 1990) continually resist capitalist commodification.

Queer anti-futurity

Building on the subversive, anti-capitalist potential of queer non-normativity, Crawford (2013) draws from Edelman's (2004) *No Future* to suggest a radical re-reading of *Peter Grimes*

as a subversive queer stance against the figure of the Child: "fixation and indirect termination of children", the death of the two boy apprentices, that is, in *Peter Grimes* "is not at all unrelated to 'homosexuality'" (Crawford, 2013, p. 34). Edelman describes the notion of 'the Child' as an illusory cultural figure, representative of what he terms 'reproductive futurism', the ideological and ontological priority afforded to the domesticity of the heteronormative family unit, and childbearing (Edelman, 2004, p. 4). In this sense, *Peter Grimes* can be read as a subversive tale which "turns a story about the death of children into a tragedy of an adult!" (Crawford, 2013, p. 34). As such, *Peter Grimes* offers "a refutation of a certain kind of cultural reproduction as well: the reproduction of a world wherein suicide probably *is* the best option for an adult if someone even suspects he or she has done harm to a child" (p. 35). The cultural work done by the opera, in this sense, is a kind of queer reversal in which we mourn non-normatively, not for the death of children, but rather for the adult in whose name The Child was killed.

Given the child-abuse controversies surrounding Britten and his sexual attraction to young boys that is outlined by Carpenter (1992) and is given a fuller exploration by Bridcut (2011), and the revelation of Hindley's connection with the Paedophile Information Exchange, further qualification of this point is needed. The figure of the Child, it should be stressed, does not refer to any literal children, but merely points to the way in which the concept of the Child is mobilized to serve ideological ends:

> In its coercive universalization, however, the image of the Child, not to be confused with the lived experiences of any historical children, serves to regulate political discourse – to prescribe what will count as political discourse… (Edelman, 2004, p. 11)

Having given an overview of some of the ways in which Britten's operas have been interpreted in relation to queerness, I have begun to highlight some of the ways in which this might relate to disability. Queerness and disability intersect closely in relation to Britten: Britten's queerness is psychopathologized in much of the early biographical and analytical literature; the controversy surrounding Kildea's assertion of Britten having syphilis reveals some of the co-stigmas surrounding illness and queerness that persisted at the end of the 20th century; in relation to modernism, queerness can be understood as a subversion of the norm, a

fragmenting of the subject, but also an ideological critique of reproductive futurism. McRuer (2017) argues that Edelman's anti-futural thinking "is saturated with disability", in that the Child, "the one projected into the future, is always ablebodied". In considering the ways in which queer anti-futurity relates to notions of crip, later in this thesis I will draw from Crawford's queer anti-futural reading of *Peter Grimes* as I begin to shape my own analysis of Britten's stage works in relation to disability.

Society and politics

Britten biographies have all remarked on the formative influence of a number of politically left-leaning contemporaries on Britten's outlook throughout his young adult life. Particularly significant in this regard was Wystan Hugh Auden; this is drawn out well by Mitchell (1981) who describes Britten and Auden's creative collaboration (particularly during the year 1936). In addition to his youthful association with the Marxist Left, via Auden, Britten had a life-long inclination towards pacifism. Oliver (1996) describes events in Britten's final year at South Lodge Preparatory School where he had angered his teachers by writing an essay entitled 'Animals' in a firm stance against animal cruelty and subsequently expressing anti-war sentiments (p. 25). Upon their return to Britain from the U.S. in 1942, Britten and Pears were registered as conscientious objectors (Carpenter, 1992, p. 174). This anti-war sentiment is reflected thematically in a number of his compositions over the span of his creative output, *Our Hunting Fathers, Pacifist March, War Requiem*, and *Owen Wingrave* being particularly notable examples.

Alongside Auden, another influential, politically left-leaning figure was Montagu Slater, Britten's librettist for *Peter Grimes* (Brett, 2006, p. 40-42). Slater was a founding editor of *The Left Review* (first published in 1934), a journal dedicated to left-leaning political causes and to the struggle for socialism, against fascism and imperialism. In the development of the libretto for *Peter Grimes*, Slater's contribution was to heighten the political undertones of the opera (Brett, 2006, p. 40). Brett (2006) implies that Britten's youthful association with socialist causes can be characterised as a mere "alliance" (p. 40) rather than a direct affiliation. In a sense, this accounts for the way in which, as his career developed and as he assimilated into the British establishment, Britten's association with socialist groups was to

weaken. By contrast, Kildea (2013) gives a stronger account of Britten's youthful interest in left-wing politics:

> Britten mentions political ideologies in his diary… and in early August [1935] this newly minted Communist sympathizer attempted to strike an accord with [his mother]. "Letters after dinner, & try to talk communism with Mum, but it is impossible to say anything to anyone brought up in the old order without severe ruptions." (Kildea, 2013, p. 106)

Curiously, Brett (2006, p. 40) appears to draw too easy an equivalence between pacifism and homosexuality. In doing so, Brett is able to sustain a narrative that Britten's associations with artistic left-leaning circles in the 1930s (Auden, Isherwood et al.) had more to do with his wanting to belong to a group of like-minded, queer artists than it did with his true political inclinations. Britten's pacifism might have given him a basic sympathy with a socialist perspective, but nonetheless, it was a philosophical stance against war (which moreover, for Brett, is linked to his queerness) that was to remain a priority for Britten throughout his life, rather than the economic aspects of socialism[10]. McClatchie (1996), in his work on *Owen Wingrave*, also draws close connections between queerness and pacifism:

> According to society, Owen [as a pacifist] has, like a homosexual, made an inappropriate object choice on which to expend his energies: he decided to fight fighting. It is not the technique that is wrong – just as a homosexual knows how to love, Owen knows strategy, he knows how to fight; at fault is the object to which the technique is directed. In other words, he makes a 'queer' choice. (p.66)

However, where McClatchie (and possibly also Brett) refer merely to a structural, abstract connection between queerness and pacifism, Keller (1952, p. 350) outlines pacifism psychoanalytically:

[10] It is also worth noting that pacifism as a philosophical ideal is often formulated as being as much at odds with the left-wing revolutionary politics of the mid-twentieth century as it is with the right-wing fascism earlier in the century. This is explored by Butler (2020, p. 13)

> Britten is a pacifist. It is an established fact that strong and heavily repressed sadism underlies the pacifistic attitudes [he cites Glover, 1947]. About the vital aggressive elements in Britten's music… there cannot indeed be the faintest doubt, and those whose ears are not sensitive enough to recognise the sadistic component at least in his treatment of the percussion will still be able to confirm our observation upon an inspection of his libretti, children's opera included. (p. 86-87)

Through his interpretation of pacifism in Glover's psychopathological terms, incidentally the same terms he uses to explain homosexuality (Glover, 1950), Keller outlines a reified psychological link between queerness and pacifism. Such a link, I suggest, is problematic from a disability studies perspective, and is therefore of importance for this present thesis. In establishing a connection between queerness and pacifism in relation to psycho-sexual development, certain terms of the debate have effectively already been determined in advance. I draw out the inherent difficulties in untangling queerness and disability further in the next chapter.

The relationship between politics and modernism

In spite of Britten's eventual giving up of socialist associations, there is almost a complete scholarly consensus that Britten was something of a quiet revolutionary figure, whose contributions to forging a more equitable world were made through his music, though often in ambiguous, fraught ways. However, against this grain, Harper-Scott (2018) suggests that Britten was more ideologically complicit than is often assumed. By ideological complicity, Harper-Scott refers to the adherence to the "enormous web of legal, economic, moral, cultural and political ideas, all acting to the furtherance of capitalist interests" (p. 7). Ideology, in this sense relates to art and culture as much as it does to society and politics. From this perspective, aesthetic post-tonal innovations of European modernism (sometimes referred to as the 'emancipation of dissonance') have a political significance: the way in which tonal hierarchies are resisted in the music of Schönberg and the Second Viennese School corresponds with the resistance against social and political hierarchies and the attempt at forging a more equitable society. For Harper-Scott, the way in which Britten's musical voice developed in response to, but ultimately refusing, the ruptures of European modernist

aesthetics reveals his underlying complicity to the liberal ideologies of the time. For Harper-Scott, then, Britten's fraught status within the modernist musical canon can be characterised politically. Britten, it would seem, pays mere lip service to ideological rupture and the potential for a better world.

Britten certainly was inspired by the European musical modernist innovations of the early 20th century. The point for Harper-Scott, however, is that Britten merely incorporated them into an altogether more conservative framework. For instance, Stein (in Mitchell and Keller, 1952, p. 247) argued that Schönberg's first Chamber Symphony was a clear influence on Britten's early chamber music. Evans (1979) adds that in Britten's *Sinfonietta* (Op. 1), though the sonorities Britten employs are distinct from Schönberg's the two works share a similar handling of thematic motivic development. However, Evans claims that Britten's free superimposition of melodic material in contrasting tonal settings is "far from a renunciation of tonality's structural propensities but shows a mastery of their adaptation that is a more remarkable achievement in an Op. 1 than would be many more iconoclastic procedures." (p. 19). This echoes, Harper-Scott's argument, that the emancipation of dissonance (the so-called Schönberg event), rather than transforming Britten's creative process, became a feature in a style that was ultimately conventional.

The concept of ideology has some traction in critical disability studies. Tobin Siebers (2008) defines the notion of the 'ideology of ability' as a series of ideas, narratives, myths and stereotypes that constitute the distinction between ability and disability. Amongst his varied descriptions of the ideology of ability are the ideas that: "ability is the ideological baseline by which humanness is determined. The lesser the ability, the lesser the human being" and "ability is the supreme indicator of value when judging human actions, conditions, thoughts, goals, intentions, and desires" (p. 10). To articulate ideology in this way is to place the notion of ability at the centre of the "enormous web of legal, economic, moral, cultural and political ideas, all acting to the furtherance of capitalist interests" (Harper-Scott, 2018, p. 7). Harper-Scott's ideas represent one of the most recent strands of Britten scholarship and as such have yet to receive significant scholarly critique. Thus, my analysis of Britten's stage works, drawing on Harper-Scott's ideological critique of Britten in relation to ideology of ability, modernism and disability, is well positioned to make an useful contribution to the field.

If Harper-Scott suggests Britten's status in relation to modernism is precarious, Longobardi (2005a) holds that his work can be more readily established as modernist. For Longobardi, a key feature of Britten's music in relation to modernism is its intertextuality. The incongruity, complexity, ambiguity and ambivalence that surround *Death in Venice*, the way in which it resists definitive interpretation, are the result of a network of multiple authorial voices. In a sense, such intertextuality always surrounds opera, a highly collaborative art form; but such a "heteroglossic networks of associations" (p. 53) tend to be a particular feature of modernism, modernist opera, and Britten's stage works in particular.

For Siebers (2010), disability is one of modernist art's "defining characteristics" (p. 3) and operates as an artistic resource. Developing this idea, Straus (2018) applies these ideas to musical modernism:

> Modernist music does many things, of course, and for many different reasons, but it maintains a fundamental interest in disability. In moving disability representation from a stigmatized periphery to a valorized center of artistic expression, modernist music claims disability. (p. 3)

This aligns with Simi Linton's claim that disability denotes a "sense of pleasure in and celebration of the disabled body" (p. 3) and a sense of disability affirmation (Linton, 1998). Of central importance to my thesis will be the question of where Britten's modernism (if he can indeed be called a modernist) reproduces ideology (moreover, the ideology of ability) and where it, in Straus' sense of the phrase, claims disability in a more affirmative manner.

The question of whether Britten can be called a modernist is indeed a persistent one. Whittall (2001) sheds some light on the matter in bringing Britten into close comparison with one of his contemporaries, the Polish composer Lutosławski, whose position with respects to modernism is also often a point of scholarly contention (Reyland, 2015). Critical scholarship had previously tended not to draw compositional connections between the Britten and Lutosławski's music and Whittall attributes this, in part, to the fact that Lutosławski and Britten held "very different values" (p. 5). Britten dedicated much of his energy towards

opera and vocal music, whereas Lutosławski said of himself, "I am a bad opera-goer. The combination of conventional theatre theatrical realism with music, so that the actors sing instead of speaking, strikes me as shocking or at best derisory" (Lutosławski, 2007, p. 261). Nonetheless, Whittall argues that there are certain modernist stylistic qualities that the two shared. Both composers, for instance, make use of "limited aleatoricism" in their work, and, at times, both explore "total chromaticism" (p. 7). However, Lutosławski was certainly more deeply involved in the musical developments of the second half of the twentieth century than Britten was (Whittall, p. 4-6), and his total chromaticism was altogether more radically designed than Britten's conservative post-tonal approach (p. 7). Moreover, whereas Lutosławski's sense for compositional innovation was sparked by hearing John Cage's experimental work, *Concert*, many of Britten's innovations were inspired by the traditional music he heard on travels to Asia "in keeping with his emphasis on the social role rather than the self-generating and self-referential structures of serious musical expression" (Whittall, p. 6)—more will be said about this below. Regardless of how and where Britten and Lutosławski gained inspiration for their respective modernist tendencies, neither composer can be said to have truly embraced the avant-garde. Whittall suggests instead that Britten and Lutosławski "refresh[ed] and strengthen[ed] the modern musical mainstream, reinforcing a validity that has helped it to persist into the new millennium, and continue to flourish" (p. 19).

East and South East Asian influences

Central to the question surrounding Britten's musical modernism is his engagement with non-Western musical traditions. Over the winter and spring of 1955-56, Britten and Pears embarked upon an extensive tour across the globe culminating in a series of performances in East and Southeast Asia. During the tour, Britten and Pears spent a two-week period on Bali in Indonesia with no concert commitments, to explore the island culture and experience some of the local gamelan musical traditions. Britten was fascinated and inspired by the timbres, forms and textures of the music he heard on Bali and, upon returning to England, his compositional style was to become greatly influenced by the instruments and techniques of Balinese gamelan. Later in the tour, Britten and Pears travelled to Japan where, invited by a British Council representative, they experienced a performance of a traditional Noh play, *Sumidagawa* by Juro Motomasa (1395-1431). Many stylistic elements of Noh, its minimalist

approach to staging and stage direction, and the incorporation of highly stylized gesture and dance, can be observed in several of Britten's later stage works. In particular, White (1970, p. 207), Kennedy (1981, p. 84) and Evans (1979, p. 467) have all identified the ways in which Britten was explicitly influenced by Noh Theatre, and *Sumidagawa* specifically, in the creation of his first Church parable, *Curlew River*. White, for instance, draws from the account Britten himself gave of the origins of the work in a back-cover note to its published libretto. According to White (1970), both Britten and his librettist, William Plomer, had an aligned, essentially unitary, vision for the church parable from the earliest stages of its development. Indeed, Kennedy gives a similarly straightforward account of the collaborative process between Plomer and Britten: "Plomer convincingly converted the work from its Buddhist philosophy to a Christian outlook, and Britten framed the work with the plainsong sung by the Abbot and the monks as they leave the church in procession" (Kennedy, 1981, p. 85).

However, Alexander (1988) demonstrates that, in contrast to the previously held scholarly consensus, the creative journey leading to *Curlew River* was a "long and tortuous one, protracted over more than eight years and marked by repeated changes of plan, radical revisions and draft after draft of the libretto" (p. 242). Significantly, Alexander reveals that the choice to 'Christianize' the *Sumidagawa* story was made somewhat later in the creative process than had previously been described in the earlier critical accounts. In the first instance, Britten envisaged a *direct translation* of the Noh play into English, whilst retaining the original Japanese setting and names, rather than the more artistically free transposition into an English setting of the final version. Both Plomer and Britten, Alexander notes, showed some concern over whether direct translation of *Sumidagawa* was an appropriate endeavour; the way forward was still not entirely clear. Britten felt that a looser adaptation of the Japanese play into an English setting would bring its own problems: "the magic of the Japanese names would be lost and… there would be no very good reason for Peter Pears to do a female part, something that he and Britten had looked forward to" (p. 238).

The decision that Britten reached was to give the work a medieval, pre-Conquest East Anglian, monastic setting, where it would seem plausible for a female character to be played by a man and that something of the stylized nature of the Noh could authentically be preserved. Alexander sums this up: "Clearly [Britten] was determined to avoid the danger of producing

pastiche, while being equally determined to assimilate some of the musical techniques, gestures and sonorities of *Sumidagawa*" (p. 243). In *Curlew River*, Britten crafted a work whose Japanese influences are indelibly clear whilst successfully avoiding any sense of 'superficial exoticism'. The development of the form of the church parable genre was, at least for Alexander, Britten's solution to some of the challenges inherent in the reimagination of one culture's traditions by someone outside of that culture; "he showed his satisfaction with it by using the same pattern for his other two parables, *The Burning Fiery Furnace* and *The Prodigal Son*" (p. 243). This point is further developed by Salfen (2017) who highlights the "modular nature" of the church parables which, he suggests was derived from the Noh form. Additional comment on the genesis of the church parables is given by Cooke (1995) and Elliot (2006).

Alexander's detailed work with the Britten-Plomer letters in addition to Reed, P. Cooke, M. and Mitchell, D. (Eds.) (2008), which made some of Britten's correspondence with Plomer more widely accessible, have ensured the continued scholarly interest in the influence of Britten's Asian tour on the development of his subsequent musical style. Carpenter (1992), for instance, in his recounting of the early development of what was to become *Curlew River*, following Alexander, emphasises Britten's sensitivity in not wanting to produce a mere pastiche of Noh theatre and his total respect for the traditional art form (p. 389). In addition, Carpenter highlights the way in which fragment transcriptions of pieces Britten heard performed by Balinese gamelan orchestras (earlier in the tour) found their way into Britten's ballet *The Prince of the Pagodas* (p. 371-372) which was to be completed upon Britten's return to England. Accounts of the importance of both the experiences of gamelan and of Japanese Noh in Britten's later stage works are further explored by Oliver (1996), Kildea (2014), and Powell (2014), as indeed does Brett (2001).

Arguably, Cooke (1998, 1999) offers more sustained exploration of the Asian influences upon music Britten and his music. Cooke's contention is that the influence runs deeper than these obvious musical borrowings. In particular, Cooke situates Britten's incorporation of Asian musical traditions within a wider context of Britten's broadening compositional technique and style in the mid-1950s. Cooke identifies an increasing 'motivic economy' within Britten's music of this period in addition to an effective and inventive deployment of twelve-tone

techniques (in *Canticle III* and *The Turn of the Screw* in particular). According to Cooke, Britten was, at this time, "wondering which direction his style would now develop. The Asian adventure, with perfect timing, opened his ears to other traditions of musical economy and structural clarity while his compositional thinking was clearly running along similar lines" (Cooke, 1999, p. 167).

Britten's openness to new musical ideas, and outward-looking approach was, according to Cooke, evident as early as the 1930s (Cooke, 1999, p. 169). Britten's diary entries reveal that he had an "incipient interest in non-Western music". In May 1933, Britten was rather impressed by a concert of Indian music and dancing which took place at the Ambassador Theatre. Five years later, Cooke continues, Britten became involved in Ezra Pound's efforts to put on a Noh play, two decades before the Asian tour. Furthermore, Cooke explores Britten's earlier introduction to Balinese Gamelan by Colin McPhee between 1939-42. McPhee, a Canadian ethnomusicologist, had previously lived in Bali and studied and theorised the island's music. Britten met McPhee during his stay in North America and performed some of McPhee's transcriptions of Balinese Gamelan for two pianos. Cooke suggests that material from these transcriptions served as inspiration for a number of Britten's compositions from the period 1939-1956. For example, the 'Sunday Morning' interlude from *Peter Grimes* drew directly from McPhee's piece entitled 'Taboeh Teloe', and characteristic of both the *Grimes* interlude and McPhee's work is a prominent underlying punctuation figure (1999, p. 168). Other examples of Balinese inspirations, namely complex heterophonic techniques, developed from McPhee's transcriptions, and an increasing fondness for the sonorities of metallic percussion, can be found in the Prologue to *Paul Bunyan* (1940-41), and *The Turn of the Screw* respectively.

Whilst in Ubud, Bali, on January 17th 1956, Britten wrote to Imogen Holst about the music he heard there: "The music is fantastically rich – melodically, rhythmically, texture (such orchestration!!) and above all formally. It is a remarkable culture… At last I'm beginning to catch on to the technique, but it's about as complicated as Schönberg" (Reed, Cooke, Mitchell (Eds.), 2008, p. 385). For Cooke (1998) there is a clear link between Britten's interest in Asian music and his broader, life-long interesting in expanding his composition style more generally:

> the parallel reminds us that it was precisely the dodecaphonic techniques with which he had been experimenting before his departure that had forced him to find the opportunity for 'some deep thinking' about general compositional issues during his world tour. (Cooke, 1998, p. 171)

Cooke could be interpreted as suggesting that, for Britten, interest in Asian music was not necessarily a form of "exotic indulgent curiosity" but rather, a more authentic form of searching that characterised his engagement much more broadly with the musical world around him. Similarly, Holloway (1984) sees *Curlew River* quite innocuously as "a crossing place and synthesis" between western and East Asian art forms (p. 220) and Evans (1979) suggests that Britten merely sought "to bridge the gap between the pure Noh conventions and the Western artistic legacy by abandoning all specifically Japanese reference" (p. 468).

There are clearly, however, complex issues that are always at play in the discussion of engagement with music from non-Western cultures and traditions. In his review of Cooke (1998) for example, Tenzer (2000) is mindful of the ways in which the concept of *Orientalism* (Saïd, 1978) might be hugely significant with regards to Cooke's discussion of Asian influences in Britten's music. For Saïd, "the Orient was almost a European invention" (p. 1); 'western' discourses about the 'East' are deeply and problematically rooted in and produced by colonial histories, characterised by domination, othering and exploitation of the East by the West. Tenzer cedes that Cooke does briefly acknowledge Saïd in his discussion but argues that a more extensive incorporation of his post-colonial approach to the concept of *Orientalism* and appropriation might offer a richer critique. Tenzer writes:

> Britten was (like all of us), a child of his time. Things have changed, and sincere evocations of the type exemplified by Prince of the Pagodas would be viewed askance today, as a kind of cheap imitation. These concerns are appropriate: ultimately there is more than a hint of Orientalism in Britten's approach, since he unfailingly used these musics in dramatic contexts to portray the all-too-familiar "exotic" states of innocence and unattainability. (p. 191)

It is this very association of East Asian and Southeast Asian musical traditions with notions of 'innocence and unattainability' in Britten that Brett (2006, pp. 129-153) complicates. Brett identifies the fact that many of the passages in Britten's music that have been heard and marked as 'exotic', 'oriental', or 'quasi-oriental' have also become analytically coupled with dramatic tropes of queerness. Quint's first vocal entry in *The Turn of the Screw*, for example, often interpreted as generically 'oriental' is also key, for Brett, to the ghost character's queer interpretation. Brett identifies a similar strategy in the portrayal of Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. "If Quint is marked as homosexual and threateningly so by his "oriental" music, then Oberon is similarly designated by his countertenor voice" (p. 142). However, ultimately, Brett does not read the oriental otherness of sexual 'perversion' (i.e. queerness) present in these two operas as evidence of the co-demonisation of the queer and the non-European. Rather, in Britten, Brett finds a more complex picture: that the orientalism of these works invokes at once fear, shame, but also defiance (p. 148). Indeed, with regards to the issue of orientalism and exoticisation in the conception of *Curlew River*, Brett suggests:

> Britten opened up conditions in which he was able to pay homage to an Eastern tradition by adapting and imitating some of its musical and dramatic procedures without patronizing it, and without using it as a vehicle for the projection of Western fantasies. It is a project that tries hard to avoid the colonizing impulse, though of course it reflects the romantic utopianism also associated with the phenomenon of orientalism in the West. (p. 148)

Rupprecht (2001) accedes Brett's point about the connections between queerness and Orientalism that play out in Britten's work but urges that it is "important to move the discussion beyond biographically tinged speculation" (p. 156). On the whole, though, Rupprecht sidesteps the question of appropriation in Britten's music. For instance, he underplays the Japanese influence on the church parables, referring instead to a more universalised notion of ritual as underpinning the works (p. 222). However, Sheppard (2001) is more disparaging of Britten's engagement with East Asian music, suggesting that:

> Brett's attempt to redeem Britten from charges of Orientalist thinking is misdirected, for the Japanese remained Britten's ultimate exotic. Far from putting "Western

> musical history at risk" [as Brett puts it] in these works, Britten played it safe by recasting Noh in a Christian musical idiom. (p. 154)

Wiebe (2013), somewhat agreeing with Sheppard, argues that "Britten did domesticate the foreign by Christianizing it and transplanting it, and removing elements to which he felt no connection, or indeed that made him uncomfortable" (p. 160). However, she places Britten and Pears' cultural exchange within a broader context of international politics in the 1950s and 1960s, when there was "growing commitment [in the west] to international exchange and reconciliation [at] the height of the Cold War" (p. 160). In this sense, Wiebe interprets Britten's whole project of cultural exchange in relation to Cold War politics, involving "gestures to internationalism as form of peace building" (p. 160), and thus attempts to redeem Britten's interest in Japan on the grounds that it was part of an altogether more noble project, "to breed sympathy rather than antagonism or ignorance". To say this, Wiebe continues, "is not to suggest that sympathetic identification undoes Orientalist hierarchies. Rather, it is to explore how this particular form of Orientalism works through sympathy" (p. 160).

Harper-Scott (2018) is however unsatisfied with Wiebe's implication that Britten was effectively imbricated in notions of (as he puts it) "Cold war propaganda" (p. 220). However, Harper-Scott develops another of Wiebe's claims, namely that Britten's encounter with Japan and the composition of *Curlew River* were an attempt at "self-education" (p. 220). Moreover, Britten's Japanese exchange "moves from the perception of absolute difference to one of commonality, and finally to a determination to learn from others" (Wiebe, 2013, p. 166, cited in Harper-Scott, 2018, p. 221). Harper-Scott extends Wiebe's point by highlighting the significant extent to which Britten and Pears had invested in "collecting books of art, plays and other literature, literary criticism, music and musical studies, and travel literature, all about Japan", even though Britten had only been in Japan for twelve days in 1956 (Harper-Scott, 2018, p. 221). Indeed, he suggests:

> They were by no means experts, but… we can reliably suppose that they had a very sound grasp of the culture which impressed them not only as tourists, and certainly

> not as stooges of Cold War cultural imperialism, but as reasonably well-informed amateurs. (p. 221)

If, between them, Harper-Scott and Wiebe have problematised the issue of cultural appropriation in relation to Britten's East Asian exchange, the links Brett draws between Orientalist otherness and queerness have largely been neglected. Brett's assertions are, for the most part, accepted in contemporary Britten scholarship, but with the essential caveat that mentions of queerness should be kept brief. This is unfortunate given that further attention to the connections between queerness and racialized otherness in relation to Britten might have significant contemporary relevance in relation to intersectionality and the mechanics of oppression. For the present study, intersectional theory is of considerable importance. As I explore in the next chapter, McRuer (2006) highlights that crip interactions between queerness and disability are indeed only fully legible when placed in global political contexts. East Asian and South Asian influences in Britten's music might have seemed remote to the discussion of disability, but it should now be clear that they are in fact essential. Indeed is it not the very notion of 'remoteness' that, in the context of Orientalism, warrants critique in this context?

Religion

A further theme that has emerged in the scholarship surrounding Britten's life and works is that of Christian spirituality. Growing up, Britten was influenced by the 'low church' Anglicanism of his mother and, throughout his youth, was evidently a committed Christian himself. However, as he grew older, Britten's religious views changed somewhat and a belief in the doctrines of Christianity was no longer central importance in his life that it once had. Particularly good accounts of this are found in Allen (2003) and in the biographies of Britten by Carpenter (1992), Kennedy (1981), Powell (1996), and Kildea (2013). Scholars have argued that whilst Britten may have turned away from Christian beliefs and practices, certainly by the mid 1930s, his music was to remain indelibly influenced by Christian spiritual themes. Indeed, Britten is reputed to have said of himself that whilst he was no longer, strictly speaking, religious, he felt that his music was (Allen, 2003, p. 439). In this section, I draw out some of the scholarship surrounding Britten's relationship to spirituality and the Christian

faith. Additionally, here I highlight the ways in which religious matters are highly significant in relation to a (critical) disability studies perspective.

Religious model of disability

Within disability studies discourses, it is often remarked that the history of attitudes towards disability have been significantly shaped by religious beliefs. (Judeo-)Christian religion and disability certainly have a fraught and interconnected relationship. Disability studies scholars have defined a so-called 'religious model of disability' (amongst those who have written about this are McClure, 2007; Pardeck and Murphy, 2012; Henderson and Bryan, 2011). The paradigm posits that disability has its origins in the divine, conceived as either punishment from God, a sign of individual, familial or societal wrongdoing, or conversely, as a form of divine testing, a pathway towards salvation and even a mark of intimacy with God. Such conceptions of disability have their origins in pre-modern culture (Snyder and Mitchell, 2001, pp. 379-380), but are very much still part of the complex ways in which disability is understood in contemporary society, both in a religious setting (Dunn 2015, p. 10 and Karna 1999, p. 13) but also in secular settings where Judeo-Christian religious philosophical and moral perspectives continue to bear great influence on wider literary and cultural practices (Rimmerman, 2013). Outside of religious settings, the religious model of disability finds a similar expression in a secular setting: the so-called 'moral model of disability' (Goodley, 2017, p. 6-7) which conflates disability with moral wrongdoing, the sense in which disability is a price to pay for some moral failure and indeed the sense that disabled people are inherently to be pitied.

The Hebrew Bible is replete with portrayals of disability (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000; Scull, 2011, pp. 7-9), but for a long time, disability studies and biblical scholarship had little interaction (Schipper, 2006; Melcher, 2019). Additionally, present in Christian New Testament scripture are the many narratives involving the curing of disabilities: Christ's 'healing' of a blind man in John's Gospel and the events in the book of the Acts of the Apostles where Peter and John heal a disabled man in Jesus' name are pertinent examples. Similarly, Scull (2011, p. 9) identifies the New Testament accounts of demonic possession as being representations of madness and mental illness. Such narratives have been identified by Metzger (2011) and Hull (2001) as perpetuating notions of disability as lack, presenting

disability as something to be overcome at all costs. Avalos (2019) gives an overview of the ways in which disability studies and biblical studies have reckoned with the challenge of these problematic Biblical portrayals of disability.

Britten's ambivalent attitude towards religion—the combination of his religious upbringing and his subsequent turning away from the Christian faith in his young adulthood—are not particularly exceptional; nor are they without precedent or unusual given growing secularisation. Gilbert (1980) attributes the decline of institutional Christianity in Britain to the development of industry, technology, and a greater understanding (and manipulative control) of the natural world, suggesting that belief in God was gradually becoming effectively redundant. Other historians of religion have since expanded upon, critiqued and at times resisted Gilbert's account. Davie (1994), for instance, explores the idea that Britain, since 1945 was a nation of "believers" if not "belongers" (pp. 12 -13). Davie refers to the way in which, whilst there was evidently a decline in church-going in postwar Britain, religious belief and less formal modes of religious expression were nonetheless on the rise. Additionally, Wolffe (1994) argues, in contrast to Gilbert's secularization hypothesis, that the industrialization era in Britain first saw a *growth* in official Christianity, and that the decline occurred somewhat later, as the initial industrial momentum began to wind down. Indeed, for Wolffe, the decline of official Christianity might in fact be better described, rather than as secularization, as a proliferation of more diverse forms of unofficial, quasi-religious sentiments. Wolffe also notes the increasing association of religion with nationalism and imperial militarism from the second half of the 19th century and suggests that, in response to the world wars and the subsequent public scepticism of military force, distrust of official religion correspondingly increased. What is clear is that broader social, political and economic factors contributed to the reasons why someone (particularly someone of Britten's sensibilities) might have turned away from religion in the mid-twentieth century. However, sensitivity to the persistence of a religious or spiritual substrate in his work is important particularly in relation to an exploration of figurations of bodily, sensory and cognitive difference.

Crip theology

Whilst broader technological innovations and changing social and political attitudes have certainly been acknowledged for their role in the post-war decline of church-going (Wolffe, 1994; Davie, 1994; and Gilbert, 1980), it will be useful for the present study to consider these factors alongside broader social, cultural and political attitudes towards disability. Betcher (2016) relates so-called 'radical theology' or 'death of God theology' (a branch of theological thought that seeks to account for the late nineteenth and twentieth century rise of secularism) to crip theory, arguing that "in this disability theology" (which she later calls 'Crip/tography'), "God… becomes ruined time, emptied, that nothing-something, so that we are face-to-face with each other – with the sensual flush of sentience and its precarious vulnerability, its injurability" (p. 113). Lieffers and Chamberlain (2021) develop a crip theology through connections between the concept of crip time (as explored by Kafer, 2013) and what they have termed 'sacred time'. "Flexing in time, waiting and being waited for, the Christian God seems to know crip time. And the faithful might know it, too: they might ponder how their own practices of sacred time can treasure the sanctity of relation beyond medicalized capitalist-technological imperatives and heed the call to challenge and upend curative [ie. normative] time and the damage it does" (Lieffers & Chamberlain, 2021). Whilst critical disability theology and crip theology are currently only burgeoning ideas within theological scholarship, they are highly relevant to my work on Britten, particularly in relation to Britten's shifting religious perspectives and the way in which religious themes are used throughout his stage works.

Religious themes in Britten's stage works

Elliot (1986, 2006) suggests that the persistence of religious or spiritual elements in Britten's works ought not to be taken too lightly or be downplayed as less significant than other interpreters of Britten's music have suggested (2006, pp. 4-5). Elliot is particularly wary of the tendency, as he sees it, to reduce the meaning of Britten's operas to matters of pacifism and sexuality and he is particularly disparaging of Brett in this regard (2006, p.38). Rather, for Elliot, a tendency towards a spiritual world view underscores much of Britten's output. Elliot (1986) opens with an epigraph attributed to Michael Kennedy (1981) who identified that spirituality, or a 'spiritual leitmotif' was a core component of Britten's musical idiom that had

its origins in *Peter Grimes* (Elliot, 1986, p. 28). Elliot does not quite go as far as suggesting that Britten's operas offer a unified and unambiguous Christian message, but he nonetheless suggests that "the Christian tradition does encompass many of the moral concerns that are manifest in the operas" (p. 28). For instance, Elliot highlights the social role that religion and the established church plays in the settings of both *Peter Grimes* and *Albert Herring* and draws out the manner in which the 'moral message' of the two operas, "that innocence becomes corrupted, that the greater the innocence the greater is the sense of rejection felt by the fallen" (p. 28), has clear Christian undertones. Elliot identifies the rather more explicit way in which *The Rape of Lucretia* is 'framed' as a Christian parable by the roles of the Male and Female Chorus, suggesting a link with Britten's church parables of the 1960s. Indeed, Elliot suggests that Captain Vere's prologue and epilogue soliloquies in *Billy Budd* also anticipate the framing techniques of the church parables, and is thus evidence of the continuity of the religious element within Britten's operatic writing (p. 30). Indeed, *Billy Budd*'s all-male cast, Elliot adds, further points to the monastic situation of the church parables. *Billy Budd* has yet more explicit Christian connections, Elliot suggests, through the words of Claggart who misappropriating words from John's gospel sings "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it and suffers". Further, the role of the Novice can be related to the Gospel figure of Judas, both figures accepting payment for the betrayal of their respective friends. Elliot supports his view that Christian religious themes are central to the plot of *Billy Budd* with reference to Kennedy (1981, p. 197):

> He [Kennedy] observes that "Billy is sentenced by a man who does not believe him guilty (a Pontius Pilate figure), that "his vigil before execution suggests Gethsemane," and that Billy's call to Vere from the scaffold "is the equivalent of 'Father, forgive them'." (Elliot, 1986, p. 33)

Crucially though, for Elliot it is through the tonal opposition of B flat major and B minor that Britten develops the (Christian) opposition of good and evil in a highly stylised way throughout it. The prominence of tonal tension and ambiguity in Britten's later operatic style, in *Gloriana* for instance, is evidence of Britten's operatic Christian 'denoument' (as Elliot puts it).

In considering the *Turn of the Screw* and *Death in Venice*, Elliot admits that the Christian spiritual elements are perhaps more difficult to find. However, Britten's use of Gamelan instrumentation and heterophonic writing connects both operas with the more overtly Christian works of the three church parables and *Noyes Fludde* where such influences (alongside other East Asian influences) are used to great effect to represent the spiritual world (p. 35). Furthermore, Elliot cites a conversation he had with Donald Mitchell highlighting the similarity of Aschenbach's recitatives in *Death in Venice* to the telling of the Christian story of Christ's crucifixion in the Schütz Passions (in which, notably, Peter Pears had sung the part of the Evangelist): a further Christian connection (p. 42). Elliot is adamant that the opera should not be interpretatively reduced to a 'homosexual allegory', and instead argues that it is "another of Britten's operas in which the [Christian/spiritual] conflict between good and evil, purity and corruption, is confronted" (p. 43). For Elliot then, Britten's operas present a Christian spiritual message in spite of Britten's turning away from formal religion in his young adult life. If it is a rupture of the notion of religiosity in which we might locate alternative models for thinking about disability, Elliot presents rather Britten's religious continuity.

Allen (2003, 2006), however, takes a different approach to the exploration of spirituality, suggesting that Britten incorporates Christian themes in his operas whilst resisting a Christian message, that is to say a redemption is offered but refused. In *Peter Grimes*, for example, Allen asserts that Grimes is caught between the false and hypocritical Christianity of the Borough and the redemptive Christianity of Ellen. However, Peter's rejection *by* the former and rejection of the latter "harmonizes the critical tradition of viewing *Grimes* as either nihilistic Classical tragedy or as Christian moral parable" (2002, p. 103). Allen explores this idea of the refusal of Christian redemption in relation to *Billy Budd*, referring to E.M. Forster's (the librettist of *Billy Budd*) description of Billy's death as Vere's 'temporary salvation'. For Allen (2006) this amounts to a Faustian pact rather than a truthful Christian salvation, with Christian spirituality operating merely as a subconscious aspect of Vere's coming to terms with his own failure to save Billy. Allen draws parallels with Britten's life, interpreting the persistence of Christian elements within his operas as evidence of the dualistic struggle that Allen sees as existing within Britten's psyche between a sense of adult guilt and a childhood innocence, leading to a need to re-engage with Christian themes throughout his work. It should be noted, however, that an objective of the present thesis is to resist such tendencies

to psychoanalyse Britten in relation to his music. Indeed, some consideration will be given below to the ways in which the scholarship surrounding Britten has often attempted to psycho-pathologize Britten; this is drawn out in relation to discourses of disability. Nevertheless, Allen offers a view of spirituality in Britten that is markedly different from Elliot's. For Elliot, the religious elements of Britten's operas are evidence of the continuation of a Christian outlook despite turning away from formal religion. Allen's view, in contrast, is perhaps more in line with Brett's (1984) who argues that Britten mobilises Christian themes as a form of critique. Where Allen and Brett's perspectives differ, however, is the way in which Brett suggests that the critique of religious institutions entails a dismissal on socio-political grounds. Allen, however, interprets the critique in rather more intimate terms as a rejection and a substitution of a Christian grace, with a musical grace of sorts.

Hoekama (2015) writes from an unabashed Christian perspective, suggesting that Britten had a unique ability to "evoke transcendent dimensions of reality" (p. 238). Perhaps in line with Elliot's perspective on spirituality in Britten's music, Hoekama suggests that Britten writes "sacred music for a secular age" (p. 262), that Britten's music represents the persistence of religious inclination in spite of formal religion's decline. Hoekama is clear, though, that, whilst spiritual elements are evoked in Britten's works, no such thing close to a theological discourse can be said to exist within Britten's music. Hoekama remarks, however, that the writers of the New Testament often found salvation not merely in heavenly visions, but through worldly signs. In other words, for Hoekama, Britten's lack of explicit theological exegesis does not undermine the significance of the spiritual contribution in his music.

Taking a broader socio-political approach to the exploration of Britten's music in relation to religion and spirituality is Wiebe (2006), who explores the Christian elements of Britten's music in relation to the notion of 'national faith', placing *Noye's Fludde* and the church parables within the context of broader attempts to renegotiate national identity post-empire. Drawing from history of religion scholarship, Wiebe engages with the idea that, rather than an overwhelming secularization, 1950s Britain saw a diversification of religious forms, many of which were expressed culturally within the arts as part of British post-war recovery. In this sense, Wiebe interprets *Noye's Fludde* as symbolic of national renewal at a moment of possibility. It is in relation to this post-war moment of possibility that I wish to draw out points

in relation to disability throughout this thesis. The 1950s witnessed a renegotiation of national conceptions of subjectivity, citizenship, welfare and the limits of the state, conceptions which (as drawn out by Borsay, 2005) were essential to the history of social policy surrounding disability in Britain. The cultural and artistic involvement of Britten in these cultural renegotiations, I will suggest, was significant.

In summary, religion and spirituality permeate Britten's operas. Britten's own relationship to the religion of his upbringing shifted over his lifetime but spirituality was nonetheless a prominent aspect of his operatic style. There is perhaps a significant amount at stake in the discussion surrounding the extent to which the spirituality of Britten's operas represents either a continuation of religious affiliation or a critique of religion. Religion and disability are connected in complex ways via the religious and moral models of disability. One question that might be asked, therefore, is whether Britten's incorporation of religious elements in his operas has a role to play in the shifting of attitudes surrounding disability. Further, the socio-cultural role of the 'national faith' (espoused in Britten's works as explored by Wiebe) is involved in the post-war construction of the individual and the fraught development of the welfare state. Brett (1996) makes the point that "*Peter Grimes*, not unincidentally, emerged at the dawn of the welfare state … and it reflects many of the questions that occupied British society at the dawn of that great social experiment" (p. 75). In this way, the religious elements in Britten's operas and his particular brand of religion are part of the cultural history of a significant moment of potential in British disability history.

Disability

It is the contention of this thesis that disability is highly relevant to the study of Britten and his music, his stage works specifically, and that Britten studies is a particularly rich setting for the discussion of disability in relation to musicology and music analysis. In the process of giving an overview of what I understand to be the central topics of debate within the scholarship surrounding Britten, I have already highlighted some of the ways in which connections with disability perspectives might be drawn. Importantly, these connections have been drawn in two distinct ways: firstly, through an exploration of non-normativity and otherness as it circulates around Britten's life and works, and secondly, through situating the discussions about Britten's operas within larger socio-political and historical contexts.

In addition to such connections between Britten studies and critical disability theory, there are aspects of Britten's life and works that, it can be argued, involve disability in direct, albeit perhaps hitherto unacknowledged, ways. For instance, in considering Britten's operatic works, it is notable that disability, impairment and illness feature significantly as aspects of plot and character. The 'Music and Disability Interest Study Group' of the Society for Music Theory and the 'Music and Disability Study Group' for the American Musical Society maintain an online database of musical representations of disability with a particular focus on the operatic repertoire (https://www.lsu.edu/faculty/bhowe/disability-representation.html). Britten's operas feature significantly in the database; of his sixteen operas, seven have been identified in the STM-AMS database as involving the representation of disability: concerning the plot of *Death in Venice*, it has been identified that Venice is threatened by the outbreak of disease, cholera, and that Aschenbach is represented as 'disfigured' with disabilities associated with his age being contrasted with Tadzio's youthfulness; *Curlew river* features an impairment that the database refers to as a 'mental disorder' or 'madness', with the opera's narrative recalling a 'parable' of rehabilitation; Thisbe's 'mad scene' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has been identified (again by Blake Howe) as being a parody of *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Donizetti. The appearance of Quint and Miss Jessel in *The Turn of the screw* has been interpreted as a representation of delusion. The title character of *Billy Budd* stutters, and the character Peter Grimes is depicted as having delusions, exhibiting irrational behaviour and as being a social outlier. Alongside these named portrayals of disability, we might include the title characters of *Albert Herring* and possibly *Owen Wingrave* finding connections with portrayals of neurodiversity and/or cognitive impairment. Nedbal (2015) suggests that the title character of Britten's *Albert Herring* was prefigured by Pears' portrayal of Vašek from Smetana's opera, *The Bartered Bride*. In Smetana's opera, Vašek stutters and, as is suggested by the STM-AMS database, is 'feeble-minded'/has a cognitive impairment. Nedbal notes that historically the role was often performed in a highly satirical manner, as a comedic caricature of speech disfluency and cognitive impairment (pp. 226-277). Twentieth-century English productions prompted writers on Smetana's opera to describe Vašek as a "village idiot", "a stammering loon", and a "half-wit" (p. 278). However, in contrast, Nedbal continues, Peter Pears' portrayal of Vašek in the Sadler's Wells Opera production of *The Bartered Bride* in 1943 was altogether more nuanced and received reviews suggesting that Pears had elevated the

profile of Vašek to that of a central character, performed sympathetically and without relying on caricature. Nedbal's argument is that Pears' portrayal of Vašek was the inspiration, not only for Billy Budd (because both characters stutter) but also, given the many similarities in characterisation, plot, style, and village *mis-en-scène*, for *Albert Herring* and the character of Albert himself.

Additionally, Schneider (1999), with reference to his own autism, identifies a number of literary (and operatic) representations of social outsiders in Britten's operas. He notes the ways in which many of these portrayals are often negative, stereotyped, and/or villainous. However, he remarks: "One notable exception to this would be the very sympathetic heroes of Britten's operas. Consider for example, Peter Grimes, Albert Herring, Billy Budd and Owen Wingrave, all of whom are oddballs if not outcasts" (p. 39). Whilst there is a significant body of analytical and interpretive scholarship in support of Schneider's claim that Britten's portrayal of the protagonists were sympathetic, there has not necessarily been a scholarly consensus on the matter. Brett, for example, mentions Shawe-Taylor's disquiet around creating "in sensitive listeners a warm sympathy for, and even identification with, a character who in the unmusical light of day may seem a brutal child abuser" (Brett, 1996, p. 76).

In addition to the ways in which scholarship has demonstrated that disability is represented significantly throughout Britten's operatic output, there is also a sense in which disability discourses are relevant to the biographical accounts of Britten's life. Carpenter (1992, p. 28, 29, 30) and Kennedy (1981, p. 4), for instance, both remark on the way in which, throughout Britten's life (and especially in his youth), he was affected by frequent bouts of illness and this is explored in relation to their presumed impact on Britten's composition process. In the re-telling of Britten's life through the medium of biographical narrative, these accounts become connected to and explanatory of Britten's heart condition in his later life (Carpenter, 1992, pp. 542-585; Kildea, 2013, pp. 532-563). Furthermore, Carpenter's account adds a particularly psychological dimension to the discussion as it implies that aspects of Britten's illnesses as a child might have had an essentially psychosomatic origin (p.141). Alongside the way in which Carpenter builds up a psychological profile surrounding Britten's bouts of illness, he gives a similarly psychological explanation for Britten's queerness. For instance, Carpenter considers the hypotheses that firstly, Britten's queerness originated from a traumatic

experience of childhood sexual abuse (p. 20) and, secondly that Britten's 'overly close' relationship with his mother also played a significant role in shaping his sexuality (p. 24). Earlier in this chapter, I highlighted the way in which the work of Hans Keller offered interpretations of Britten's life and works in psychoanalytical, Freudian terms. Such claims can be criticised for being overly conjectural and reductive; Kildea (2013) identifies and is sceptical of the tendency of Britten biographers to speak of the origins of Britten's sexuality in such psychopathological terms (p. 29). Nonetheless, the propensity to encapsulate both illness (disability) and queerness within discourses of psychopathology is highly persistent within the literature surrounding Britten's life. Another connection between the discourses of disability and queerness emerges from Kildea's assertion that Britten had syphilis (2013, pp. 532-534, p. 538, p. 537) and that this had been obscured from public knowledge owing to the prevalence of syphilis amongst communities of homosexual men in the late twentieth century and the stigma accordingly associated with this. In response to Kildea's revelation there was a scurry of scholarly activity intent on disproving what was seen as an attempt to denigrate Britten's name (e.g. Petch, 2014; Higgins, 2013). What is particularly notable is the way in which so much appears to be at stake in the debate and the implication that musicological insight can somehow be reduced to forensic medicalised details.

In addition to the disability-related aspects of the Britten biographical scholarship and the representations of disability found within his operas, the literature surrounding Britten converges with disability in additional important ways. Britten wrote a foreword to *Therapy in Music for Handicapped Children* (Nordoff and Robbins, 1971, p. 9). Nordoff and Robbins were pioneers of a practice that was to become known as music therapy, in which participatory music making is used as psychological therapeutic / clinical intervention. Though Nordoff and Robbins developed their methods for and with disabled children, the field of music therapy has since gained international recognition as an allied health profession that is of value for disabled children and disabled adults alike. In his foreword, Britten expresses that Nordoff and Robbins' explorations were important work: "I can recommend this book wholeheartedly not only to humanitarian readers, but to my musical colleagues as well. We can all learn from it" (Britten, 1971).

Recently, criticisms of music therapy have been raised for the way in which the field tends to perpetuate a medicalised individual model of disability (Straus, 2014; Honisch 2014). Straus writes:

> What we might call 'normative music therapy' accepts that many sorts of human variability should be understood as illnesses, diseases, or other sorts of pathological medical conditions, and offers music as a source of normalization, remediation, and therapy toward a possible cure… But for many human conditions, cure is neither possible nor desirable. (2014, para. 2)

Though Straus is highly critical of normalizing practices within the field, he ultimately remains optimistic about the potential value of music therapy: "If music therapists either cannot or should not offer remediation and normalization, they nonetheless have inestimable gifts to offer, especially the gift of shared pleasure through mutual music-making" (para. 5). Indeed, Straus highlights the important contribution music therapists can make to disability social justice: "Everyone, disabled or not, should have access to music, and music therapists are ideally suited to provide this access. But to do so, they may have to be willing to detach themselves from the medical model…" (para. 6).

The early music therapy practices developed by Nordoff and Robbins (recounted in *Therapy in Music for Handicapped Children*) are, to a significant extent, representative of what Straus terms 'normative music therapy' and accordingly, in his foreword, Britten initially participates in this normalizing and potentially stigmatising discourse. For instance, speculating on Nordoff's initial experiences in collaboration with Robbins, Britten writes: "I imagine Paul Nordoff previously knew little of this *tragic side of life* [emphasis added], and it was a shattering experience for him to come into contact with it" (Britten, 1971). However, in an additional sense, Britten appears to be rather more interested in the value of music therapy outside of the field's normalizing and medicalising remit:

> I am not qualified to comment on the importance of the psychological cures that these two men have achieved… But this I can say—the book is as well highly important for musicians, particularly composers. At this curious moment in musical history the

> validity of communication in art has itself been called into question, and it is wonderful to have a book where the concentration is entirely on just this, on communication pure and simple. (Britten, 1971)

This aspect of Britten's response to early developments in music therapy is pertinent in relation to his broader views on the social value of music. Upon receiving the First Aspen Award, Britten spoke about the role of an artist within society:

> The ideal conditions for an artist or musician will never be found outside the ideal society, and when shall we see that? But I think I can tell you some of the things which an artist demands from any society. He demands that his art shall be accepted as an essential part of human activity, and human expression; and that he shall be accepted as a genuine practitioner of that art and consequently of value to the community. (Britten, 1964, p. 16)

The link Britten makes here between musical and societal flourishing is an important one and resonates strongly with Straus' statement (cited above) that music should be accessible for all people in society. Moreover, Britten was particularly concerned that the musical *avant-garde* was beginning to sever this connection between music and social good (Philipsen, 2014, p. 216) and he made this clear in his Aspen Award speech, stating:

> There are many dangers which hedge round the unfortunate composer: pressure groups which demand true proletarian music, snobs who demand the latest *avant-garde* tricks; critics who are already trying to document today for tomorrow, to be the first to find the correct pigeon-hole definition. These people are dangerous - not because they are necessarily of any importance in themselves, but because they may make the composer, above all the young composer, self-conscious, and instead of writing his own music, music which springs naturally from his gift and personality, he may be frightened into writing pretentious nonsense or deliberate obscurity. (Britten, 1964, p. 12)

In this context, Britten's response to Nordoff and Robbin's work is particularly illuminating. Britten's reference, in his foreword, to the "curious moment in musical history [at which time] the validity of communication in art has itself been called into question" surely relates to the "dangers which hedge round the unfortunate composer… snobs who demand the latest *avant-garde* tricks" as identified in his Aspen Award speech. For the present purposes, it is interesting, then, that Britten notes the crucial role that disability might play in strengthening the bond between art and society, and in shoring up what Britten saw as the essence of art, "communication, pure and simple" (Britten, 1970), or as Straus (2014) put it, "the gift of shared pleasure through mutual music-making" (para. 5). Though of course it could not be articulated in such terms at the time, I would argue that Britten's attitude towards music is therefore somewhat commensurate with Straus' vision for a non-normalizing, non-medicalizing music therapy.

Nordoff and Robbins describe one of their early initiatives: "We had hit upon using a 'cello with one string and two violins, each with one string. These were so tuned that a mildly dissonant chord, encompassing two octaves and a sixth, sounded when they played together" (Nordoff and Robbins, 1971, p. 24). His imagination having been captured, Britten writes: "I long to introduce my friend Rostropovich to the one-stinged 'cello, to find out what *he* could do with it" (Britten, 1971). For Britten, then, Nordoff and Robbin's early music therapy work had the potential, not only to foreground what Britten saw as essential to music (and its societal function), "communication, pure and simple" (Britten 1970), but also for musical innovation. To put it in other words, this is the notion that musical innovation somewhat depends upon disability.

Clare Hammond (2012) writes about Britten's *Diversions*, Op. 21, a work written for piano left-hand and orchestra. The work was composed for, dedicated to, and commissioned by Paul Wittgenstein, a Viennese-born pianist who became disabled having lost his right arm in World War I. After returning from the War, Wittgenstein began to explore and develop his one-handed piano technique; Leopold Godowsky's *Studies on Chopin's Études* (transcriptions of several of Chopin's études for piano left-hand) proved to be particularly useful for this. The *Studies*, composed between 1894 and 1914, were designed to be exceedingly challenging technical exercises written for the left hand alone. Godowsky did not necessarily have a one-

armed pianist in mind when composing them. Rather, he conceived of the work as an investigation into the limits of piano technique. In his preface to the *Studies*, Godowsky asks: "If it is possible to assign to the left hand alone the work usually done by both hands simultaneously, what vistas are opened to future composers, were this attainment to be extended to both" (Godowsky, 1903, p. vii). For a disabled pianist such as Wittgenstein, though, Godowsky's work was indispensable core repertoire.

Coming from a great deal of family wealth, Wittgenstein had the means to commission additional left-hand piano works from several eminent 20th-century composers, including Richard Strauss, Korngold, Hindemith, Ravel, Prokofiev and, of course, Britten (Howe, 2010). Hammond (2012) identifies the innovations of Godowsky's left-hand piano writing and subsequently uses her analysis as a model for comparing the approaches taken in two of Wittgenstein's commissions, Ravel's *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*, M. 82 (commissioned in 1929), and Britten's *Diversions* (commissioned in 1940).

Hammond summarises that the chief aims of Godowsky's *Studies* were to transcend self-imposed limitations and to push the boundaries of piano technique (2012, pp. 31-32). One of the key innovations deployed by Godowsky in his writing to achieve these aims was the consistent use of the left-hand thumb to "project a melody above accompanimental figuration played by the remaining fingers" (Hammond, 2012, p. 34). Hammond suggests that this is, in fact, one respect in which a left-hand pianist has an advantage over a two-handed player. The thumb, which is a naturally stronger finger than the fourth and fifth fingers, is located on the right-hand side of the left hand and is therefore well positioned to play the highest notes of the texture (i.e. often the melody) when only the left hand is playing. When two hands are playing, however, it is the naturally weaker fourth and fifth fingers of right hand that are frequently called upon to project an upper melody. Hammond highlights that, in the *Piano Concerto for the Left Hand*, Ravel exploits this feature of left-handed pianism throughout the work: "every principal melodic statement is played almost entirely by the thumb" (2012, p. 60). Through the extensive melodic use of the thumb, Hammond suggests,

Ravel creates the aural illusion of two hands playing and, in doing so, develops a narrative whereby the one-handed pianist overcomes his or her supposed inherent limitations.[11]

Additionally, Hammond identifies that Ravel makes use of rapidly alternating high and low chords to produce the illusion of two parts moving in simultaneous contrary motion. In this way, the left-handed pianist is seemingly able to defy what is possible for one hand to play. Moreover, in comparison with his concerto for two-handed piano (*Piano Concerto in G Major*, M. 83), "[Ravel] avoids pitting the soloist, who may have less strength than a two-handed pianist, against the orchestra and offers that soloist extended, highly virtuosic, unaccompanied passages" (Hammond, 2012, p. 74). In all, Hammond describes Ravel's compositional strategy as one of concealment, in which disability, the pianist's one-handedness, where it cannot be overcome, is consistently hidden, or disguised.

By contrast, in Britten's *Diversions*, the melodic use of the thumb is very rare and there is, overall, a significant blurring of the distinction between melody and accompaniment (Hammond, 2012, p. 90). Furthermore, Britten frequently employs a single-line approach to his one-hand piano writing. For instance, the opening movement, 'Recitative', whilst highly virtuosic, features a consistently single-line approach, without the need for the pianist to balance multiple voices (p. 94), in effect making a something of feature of one-handed pianism. Furthermore, unlike Ravel, Britten does not refrain from writing extended sections where the pianist and orchestra play together (p. 103). In this way, Hammond suggests that Britten not only dissolves the boundaries between melody and accompaniment, but also those between soloist and orchestra. Where Ravel sought to conceal one-handed pianism and Wittgenstein's disability, Hammond thus argues that Britten, in his *Diversions* sought rather to affirm the creative and expressive potential of disability in ways that, for Hammond, celebrate difference. "For [Britten] the left-handedness of the performer is not a burden, but should be celebrated… In its audibly one-handed textures, *Diversions* does not attempt to be anything other than it is, and in its formal scheme is decidedly unpretentious" (pp. 106-107).

[11] There is, of course, a great irony at play here. As has been indicated, there is in fact no inherent limitation to be overcome with respect to the ability to project a melody. To the contrary, the one-handed/left-handed player in some senses has the advantage over the two-handed player: the perceived limitation, in this case, is unfounded.

Many of the features of Britten's *Diversions* that Hammond identifies as celebrating Wittgenstein's disability, his left-handed pianism, can also be recognised as aspects of Britten's musical language more broadly. At the age of 50, Britten said of his own compositional process: "Music for me is clarification; I try to clarify, to refine, to sensitize… My technique is to tear all the waste away; to achieve perfect clarity of expression, that is my aim" (Schafer, 1963, p. 118). Britten's single-line approach in the *Diversions* seems, on the whole, to correspond closely to what Mark (1983) identifies as a characteristic simplicity, "an economy of material" and "clarity of form" within Britten's music (p. 8). p. 2). Disability, in a certain sense seems bound up with Britten's personal style.

Britten's vocal writing has also been described as having a directness and a clarity to it (Rupprecht, 2001) and I am intrigued by the possibility that it too may be bound up with a disability aesthetic. George McKay (2013), writing about the intersections of popular music and disability, coins the term '*mal canto*' as a subversion (a cripping) of the operatic tradition of *bel canto*. Though McKay uses the term in the context of popular music, I think that *mal canto* could be an important lens to think through the ways in which Britten voices disability. As it happens, *Bel canto* itself often comes to be associated with disability—in operas of the *bel canto* period, the characteristic florid singing style reaches its apogee in the operatic mad-scene (Willier, 2002). However, McKay writes: "While the voice of the *bel canto* tradition may be about masking its physicality and effort in a legato display… the voice of what I am calling *mal canto* is capable of speaking to us in the sung language of pop about the experience of the disabled body" (p. 72). In a *bel canto* mad-scene, the representation of disability, however, is a particularly rarefied one. Conversely, perhaps a *mal canto* mad-scene might be one in which madness is represented as an embodied phenomenon, in which the boundaries between mind, voice and body are broken down.

Much of Britten's vocal writing was composed with a particular voice in mind, that of his partner, Peter Pears. Pears, it is often remarked, possessed a distinctive voice. Carpenter (1992) explains that a sometime colleague of Pears in the BBC Singers, Anne Wood, remembered him as being "intensely sensitive to words, with the music coming out of the words" and that "he was able to colour his voice without having to think much about it" (p.

101). Carpenter's response to a recording of Pears singing Britten's *Les Illuminations* in 1941 is especially relevant:

> Pears had now developed his characteristic voice, not an Italian *bel canto* nor even an English 'cathedral tenor', but a strange and unique sound in which any technical limitations were lavishly compensated for by the strong personality it expressed. Britten was surely thinking of Pears when he said in a radio programme many years later: 'The only thing which moves me about singers… is that the voice is something that comes naturally from their personality, and is a vocal expression of their personality. I loathe what is normally called "a beautiful voice", because to me it's like an over-ripe peach, which says nothing.' (Carpenter, 1992, p. 151)

Rather than writing *bel canto* vocal parts for a *bel canto* singer, then, Britten was invested in crafting a *mal canto* style, for a *mal canto* singer. Of course, this is quite far removed from McKay's original usage of the term *mal canto*, the way in which "the disabled body sounds the corporeal and cognitive experience and knowledge of its own disability through its strained, damaged or disfluent voice…" (McKay, 2013, p. 85). I am, however, suggesting that disability is not wholly *unrelated* to the discussion of Pears' non-normative (or at least somewhat unconventional) singing voice and the creative potential that Britten saw in it.

In this chapter, I have outlined some of the prominent themes that have emerged in the field of Britten studies. In particular, I suggest that there exist several elements of the scholarship which pertain to disability directly (although it is not the case that these elements have hitherto been identified in relation to disability studies). Representations of disability/impairment are significantly numerous amongst Britten's operatic protagonists, aspects of the biographical literature are involved in psychopathologizing discourses of queerness and disability, Britten's perspective on the role of music in the community might have implications from a disability studies perspective, and Britten's collaboration with disabled performer, Paul Wittgenstein provokes exploration from a disability studies perspective.

Furthermore, I have highlighted that other central aspects of the discourse surrounding Britten's life and works might also productively be engaged in dialogue with critical disability studies and, especially, crip theory. Queerness, for instance, has become an important part in the analysis of Britten's operas; 'cripping' the queer in Britten's operas has subversive potential to speak back in response to the co-pathologization and co-criminalisation of disability and queerness, of non-normative minds, bodies, and desires. As is explored elsewhere in this thesis, to crip is to take account of the ideological, material, and economic conditions that produce and sustain ableism. Musicological discussions referring to the socio-economic climate of mid-twentieth century Britain can therefore complicate a disability studies analysis of Britten's music. Harper-Scott's ideological critique of Britten's operas (2018) is particularly pertinent in this regard.

Re-articulating Britten studies from a critical disability studies/crip/queercrip perspective surely raises questions about authenticity and appropriation. Some of these issues, I argue, circulate within Britten studies around the (south) eastern Asian influences on Britten's musical development. Additionally, discussions surrounding the relationship of Britten's operatic output to musical modernism raise questions about authorship and about subjectivity. I suggest that these are issues that are central to the notion of queercrip. In tracing some of the key topics of debate in the Britten scholarship, and in drawing out their implications, it is evident that they give the *context* for the development of a rich discussion in relation to disability.

Chapter 4 - Britten and critical disability studies

Having identified the field of music and disability studies as a maturing one, this chapter outlines some of the ways in which the field might profit from the application of specific concepts developed under the auspices of *critical disability studies* (CDS). CDS is an emergent approach to thinking through the phenomenon of disability, placed in its social, cultural, political and historical contexts (Hall, 2019). This chapter draws out some of the theoretical insights of CDS and offers up a sense in which they may be particularly informative for the articulation and interpretation of disability representation in the stage works of Benjamin Britten, specifically. I suggest that, in particular, McRuer's *Crip Theory* (2006) is of especial relevance. Similarly, I urge that musicological analysis of Britten's operas indicates ways in which the field of music and disability studies is ripe for its critical turn: a point which is given elaboration in the next chapter.

Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) consider the relationship between the body of scholarship that has come to be referred to as CDS and previous iterations of disability studies, asking whether the development of CDS at the turn of the 21st century marked a paradigm shift from the earlier approaches or whether it might more accurately be described as a maturing of the discipline (p. 48). They conclude that, in significant ways, CDS is indeed continuous with the early shape of the field of disability studies: both CDS and early, or 'traditional' disability studies share a fundamental commitment to disability justice and emancipation outside of the academy and both are deeply invested in the de-medicalisation and de-pathologization of disability, understanding and interpreting disability as more than a mere medical issue. In this section, I trace the development of CDS from its traditional disability studies roots and suggest that the critical discipline has emerged from the cross-pollination of early disability studies in Britain and in North American settings. In some senses, such cross-pollination was also mediated by the uptake of disability as a category of analysis by the increasingly transdisciplinary outlooks of literary and cultural studies, the demand for recognition by self-advocacy activism of people with 'learning difficulties' / cognitively disabled people, and by the recognition within the academy, more broadly, of the need to consider global perspectives, particularly in the light of postcolonial theory.

Mike Oliver (1983) gave this idea scholarly clarification, coining the 'social model of disability' which was to become foundational to British disability studies. The social model shared the UPIAS' distinction between 'impairment' and 'disability', with impairment understood as illness, injury or congenital condition leading to a loss of bodily function. Disability, by contrast, under this model, came to be described as the limitation of opportunities to participate in society on an equal level to others as a result of social and environmental barriers, on the basis of such bodily difference. In addition to forming the distinction between impairment and disability, the social model placed its emphasis on the category of 'disability' rather than that of 'impairment', suggesting that the 'problem' of disability is located in exclusionary societal practices, structures and systems rather than being located within disabled individuals themselves. From its inception, then, early British disability studies was linked to grassroots activism, both in remit but also through the personal efforts of individuals who were involved in political lobbying whilst also developing their ideas in academic settings. The early British disability scholarship was highly politicised and the activism of the 80s and 90s, scholarly.

In North American contexts, early disability scholarship and disability activist movements at the end of the 20th century were similarly linked. In the United States, taking inspiration from the black civil rights movement, the Gay Liberation movement, and movements opposed to American involvement in the Vietnam war, disabled people's organisations such as the 'American Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities' gave rise to an understanding of disability as a positive minority identity (McRuer, 2002, pp. 223-224; Goodley, 2011, p. 13). Indeed, such an understanding, or minority model, of disability came to characterise much of the early disability studies scholarship in both the US and Canada, where the main focus tended to be on aspects of shared disability identity and collective marginalised experience.

Dan Goodley (2011) writes of the connectedness of both the British and North American early disability studies disciplines to their respective disabled people's movements: "[s]ocial and minority approaches were direct responses to oppression and they helped to fuel the activism of the disabled people's movement. Through the rise of these perspectives disability studies was born" (p. 13). Activism begets theory begets activism.

However, both the British social model of disability and the so-called minority model of North American disability studies have not been without their detractors. Indeed, many of the problematics surrounding the social model in particular have generated what were to become central debates within the field of CDS. It is therefore appropriate to outline some of the complexities surrounding the disability/impairment binary here. Such complexities, I urge, have yet to be fully mobilised in relation to the analysis of music, and it is in this sense that I argue that the field of 'musical and disability' might yet take its 'critical turn'.

As early as 1997, Hughes and Paterson (alongside others, such as French, 1993; Crow, 1992; Corker and French, 1999) attended to the ways in which the social model, by emphasising disability and its social construction, tended to view embodied aspects of impairment, such as pain, functional limitation and chronic illness, as being of secondary importance. Hughes and Paterson (1997) were struck by the fact that issues of the body had, at the time of writing, become central within political, philosophical and literary debates, but were seemingly absent from disability studies under social model approaches. Additionally, the authors note that, whilst aspects of impairment and the body had always been at the centre of disability activism, academic theoretical accounts of disability often endeavour to exclude them: "Forms of resistance, and the struggle for bodily control, independence and emancipation are embodied. Yet while impairment is present in practice and in the narratives which reflect it, it remains theoretically embryonic" (p. 326). Hughes and Paterson called for a more embodied approach to thinking about disability and its social constructedness, a 'turn to impairment'. The body, it was noted however, was not entirely dismissed under the social model, but rather became understood even more definitively as the proper object of medicine. "The social model – in spite of its critique of the medical model – actually concedes the body to medicine and understands impairment in terms of medical discourse" (p. 326).

Disability studies, for Hughes and Paterson, ought to take greater account of the body, certainly. However, simultaneously, they called for impairment itself, as well as disability, to be conceived of as having a sociality. Butler (1990) had, earlier in the decade, written critically of the, by then often cited, distinction between sex (considered to be biological) and gender (understood in social and performative terms), that "sex is always already gender", expressing

the idea that the so-called 'biological fact' of sex had a social inflection. Such theoretical groundwork within the field of gender and queer studies most likely would have influenced Hughes' and Paterson's thinking about embodiment in a disability context, particularly, I suggest, in light of the coalitions between disability movements and Gay liberation enabled by the minority identity politics that held a central place in the early North American disability studies scholarship. Whilst Hughes' and Paterson's critique of the social model was levied within a British disability studies context and such rethinking of the distinction between impairment and disability was clearly influenced by the rise of theories of embodiment within the wider academy internationally, it is perhaps also the case that the minority identity thinking that shaped North American disability studies approaches specifically, and the coalitions between disability studies and queer studies that were able to flourish as a result, might have facilitated the application of Butler's third wave feminism within a disability context more readily.

Goodley (2001) raises the point the so-called turn to impairment was not necessarily an outright rejection of the social model and the disability/impairment distinction, but that the need to consider *impairment*'s social origin was perhaps already latent within early formations of disability studies (p. 209). Goodley describes the way in which the disability/impairment binary and the concomitant emphasis on disability and its social constructedness, is particularly problematic in relation to 'learning difficulties'. For all the social model efforts to underline the social constructedness of disability, 'learning difficulties' have, nonetheless, typically retained their status as naturalised impairment.

> …whereas people with physical impairment are rightfully afforded a socio-historical position in the social model… people with 'learning difficulties' are consistently underwritten. Thrown into the category of naturalised, irrational 'other'. (p. 211)

Rather than being emancipatory, then, the social model has tended to exclude people with 'learning difficulties'; their voices, alongside those with sensory impairments, cognitively disabled/impaired people and those with mental illnesses have often been marginal to the disability rights movements, the most prominent voices within the early disability rights movement belonging to physically disabled people. In contrast, however, Barnes (1991)

suggests that, in Britain, the social model was, to an extent, over time, expanded to incorporate non-physically impaired/disabled people and, as Cameron (2014) adds, that "Deaf people, blind people, people with mental health issues and people with learning difficulties" increasingly were becoming active in the disability movement, "[…] involving the development of an understanding that the interests of people with different impairments are not separate, and that disabled people have much to gain by talking to each other…" (p. 41). Under such an expanded version of the social model, conceptualisations of access accordingly needed to be broadened in scope to signify the elimination of social, cultural, and economic barriers over and above merely physical and architectural ones. Nonetheless though, in practice, this was not always achieved, as Simone Aspis articulates:

> People with 'learning difficulties' face discrimination in the disability movement. People without 'learning difficulties' use the medical model when dealing with us. We are always asked to talk about advocacy and our impairments as though our barriers aren't disabling in the same way as disabled people without 'learning difficulties'. We want concentration on our access needs in the mainstream disability movement. (Simon Aspis of *London People First*, quoted in Campbell and Oliver, 1996, p. 97, requoted in Goodley, 2001, p. 210)

The access needs and rights of those with learning difficulties, cognitively disabled/impaired people, and those with mental illnesses, had arguably been given mere lip service under the social model of disability. Goodley (2001) further complicates disability studies and the social model by noting that the lack of consideration of 'learning difficulties' in the aforementioned disability studies 'turn to impairment' is particularly concerning. The fact that 'learning difficulties' have so often been denied a social interpretation but have also been omitted from the move to reemphasise impairment is worrying. Perhaps even more striking is the fact that, so often, 'learning difficulties' are defined in close reference to social and behavioural norms anyway. It is curious then that, under the social model, 'learning difficulties' should have ever been excluded from social interpretations of disability in the first instance. Secondly, in the light of the former exclusion, it is additionally curious that, in the turn to impairment, 'learning difficulties' should experience a further exclusion. Thus, for Goodley, neither the strict adherence to the social model nor its rejection can be wholly satisfactory. Goodley calls for

a social understanding of 'learning disabilities', but one that, where appropriate, also attends to aspects of impairment. He writes: "I would suggest that we need to enter into a dialogue about the *possible and perhaps necessarily exaggerated social origins* of the 'learning disabilities impairment' *per se*." (p. 213). Clearly, the distinction between disability and impairment does not hold up without some qualification: "The aim now is to move from the social model of disability to mutually inclusive social theories of disability and impairment that are open and inclusive to people who have been labelled as having 'learning difficulties'." (p. 225).

In sum, a number of factors have challenged early disability studies approaches, in particular: the need to attend to embodied aspects of physical impairment which are too readily dismissed by the social model, the influence of the post-modern turn within cultural studies to reinscribe the body, and the demand for recognition of the rights and access needs of cognitively disabled people and those with 'learning difficulties'. It is perhaps out of consideration of these issues that the field of CDS has flourished. Thus, CDS, alongside its recommitment to social justice and coalition with disability movements and self-advocacy movements, turns its theoretical gaze towards the binary opposition of disability/impairment, and in doing so, engages with those of mind/body, identity/materiality, and society/individual amongst others. As Schalk (2017) writes, the field "involves scrutinizing not bodily or mental impairments but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations".

As a *critical* discipline, CDS draws from and has links to the thought of the Frankfurt School, a sociological approach that seeks to uncover the ordinarily hidden contingent 'origins' of social and political culture, discourse and institutions. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), two thinkers associated with the School, Adorno and Horkheimer, coined the notion of the 'culture industry', outlining the ways in which popular mass-produced culture maintains the ideological status quo and operates so as to keep mass society unaware of their suffering under capitalism. Adorno's critique of Britten tended to view his eclectic modernist style (alongside that of Shostakovich and Copland) as pandering to mass-culture (Chowrimootoo, 2018, p. 15). More broadly, though, the Frankfurt School's cultural turn is reflected in CDS' exploration of the ways in which disability is (re)produced in literary and cultural domains,

exemplified by the presence of *The Journal of Cultural and Literary Disability Studies*, a prominent journal in the field.

The term *critical* has philosophical connotations beyond the Frankfurt School. Within the field of CDS, Tremain (2005), for example, employs a Foucauldian analysis, or 'critique' to the study of disability, "scrutiniz[ing] a range of widely endorsed practices and ideas surrounding disability including rehabilitation, community care, impairment, normality and abnormality, inclusion, prevention, genetic counselling, accommodation and special education." (p. 3). Tremain considers the mechanisms through which concepts surrounding disability and impairment themselves become thinkable, suggesting that "the shifting limits and borders of the classification of impairment demonstrate its historicity and cultural specificity" (2017, p. 93). Similarly, Carlson (2009) applies a Foucauldian approach to the study of cognitive disability to elaborate its historicity and St. Pierre and St. Pierre (2008) engage Foucauldian concepts in their work on speech disability, identifying Speech-Language Pathology as a mechanism by which speech is brought under biopower.

CDS, in a similar move to 'traditional' disability theory and disability studies, rejects the medical, pathological and deficit models of disability. However, where traditional disability theory engaged with constructivist (social) models, or spoke in terms of material oppression, critical disability seeks to find a way of upholding both, seemingly opposite, positions. In some ways, the field has to find a balance between the social/cultural constructionist position, and the material and embodied position (both of which are challenges to traditional disability theory). Siebers' *Disability Theory* (2008) lays out important theoretical groundwork. Siebers brings to light the 'ideology' of ableism. One 'trap' that a theory of disability might fall into is 'turning disability into ability'. Siebers balances the theoretical with material accounts of persistent ableism. Siebers puts forward a theory of 'complex embodiment'. Through this, Siebers acknowledges the effects of chronic pain, secondary health effects etc. Bodies, in this way are environmental, representational and corporeal. Siebers also complicates a binary logic of 'the closet' as it applies to disability. He offers alternatives such as 'strategic exaggeration' and 'disguising one disability with another'.

Cripping Britten's operas

Britten's stage works have variously been analysed within the context of his queerness, since Philip Brett (1977). Indeed, since then, seemingly unrelated elements of the operas often gain discursive unification through the lens of queer interpretations and queer close reading of his musical output - in some senses, to the extent that it often seems radical when Britten's queerness is not mentioned in analysis.

However, what is additionally noticeable is that there is an unspoken and unacknowledged vector or element of (psycho)pathologization, normativity, and criminality that run through the discourse surrounding Britten's operas. That is to say that disability related language (via psycho-pathologization, normative behaviour expectations, and criminality) is evident in the discourse surrounding both Britten's life and his stage works.

Biographical accounts tend to focus on the psycho-sexual-pathologization of Britten's life, but links between sexuality, and psycho-pathologizing mechanisms and mental illness are present, as traces of unspoken elements. Reference is made frequently to Britten experiencing periods of illness throughout his life, and these are often 'psychologised' and interpretive meaning about Britten's sexuality is frequently drawn from this.

Analysis of some of the central roles in the operas tend to be laden with disability related language, yet it is my experience that a suggestion of the validity of a disabled/crip reading of, say Peter Grimes, is met with analytical suspicion. However, in order to challenge the compulsory nature of able-bodiedness, crip readings of operas therefore do important and productive work. Furthermore, the ambiguity surrounding Britten's characters speaks to the intersectionality of sexuality and dis/ability – particularly given the fact that at the time Britten was writing, sexuality was both pathologized and criminalized. In this way, Crip theory can be positioned as a 'way in' for talking about Britten's stage works with reference to disability without depending on crass and essentialist diagnosing of characters.

Crip theory explores the connections of disability and queerness through mutually constituted embodied-material-discursive practices. Crip theory is expanded on a global stage with reference to late twentieth and twenty first century political ideological stakes.

However, the implications for reading early historical periods are also present. Terminologies of ableism, visibility/invisibility, critical identities are all useful in a cultural context too – crip practices can be cultural practices / musical practices / operatic practices. Crip operates in tandem with queer. Crip is both intersectional and 'transsectional'. By transsectional, I speak to the way in which crip and queer meet, but also the way in which queer is in a sense always already grounded in crip.

This chapter outlines other approaches within a critical disability studies perspective (crip theory is not the only development within critical disability studies). Rosemary Garland-Thomson's notion of the misfit is also important, as is the notion of materiality of metaphor and narrative prosthesis developed by Mitchell and Snyder (2000). In addition, posthuman (transhuman, dishuman) accounts developed in relation to disability (Goodley, 2017) are also of import within the development of critical disability theory and critical disability studies. These are explored briefly in this chapter for their utility for nuanced readings of Britten's protagonists. In a sense, this chapter sets the groundwork for reconsidering Britten's operas in the light of the theoretical concepts of crip, queercrip and misfit. Moreover, this chapter explores how disability operates formally within the texts (text taken to signify the whole opera, both libretto and music).

Crip Theory

In his book, *Crip Theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability* (McRuer, 2006), Robert McRuer explores connections between dis/ability and sexuality and does so in relation to what might be termed the neoliberal capitalism of our own times. The usage of the terms 'dis/ability', 'sexuality' and 'neoliberal capitalism' warrants some explanation. First, throughout this chapter, I intend the term 'dis/ability' to relate both to 'disability' and 'able-bodiedness' in a corresponding manner to the way in which 'sexuality' relates to 'heterosexuality', 'homosexuality', 'bisexuality', 'asexuality' (and to other categories of sexual desire) as a placeholder. McRuer (p 2) uses the term 'embodied identity' to signify much the same concept. Secondly, there are, broadly, it should be stated, two distinct meanings of 'sexuality': one relating to the designation of the object or 'orientation' of one's sexual desire (as in 'homosexuality' and 'heterosexuality'), and the other relating to sexual empowerment and autonomy. This chapter is principally concerned with the first meaning but nonetheless

acknowledges a correlation with the second: sexuality (sexual autonomy) can only be claimed where one is able to express one's sexuality (sexual 'orientation') freely. Thirdly, by neoliberal capitalism, McRuer tends to refer to the "dominant economic and cultural system" at work since the last quarter of the twentieth century, characterised by a prioritisation of "unrestricted flow of corporate capital… the privatization of public services, [and] the deregulation of trade barriers and other restrictions on investment and development…" (McRuer, 2006, pp 2-3). It should be noted that the meanings of neoliberalism and neoliberal capitalism, as terms of political analysis, are often persistently elusive. Golumbia (2016) remarks on neoliberalism's multiple meanings, urges for greater clarity of definition to accompany its analytical employment, but nonetheless exhorts its utility. In contrast, detractors of neoliberalism often claim that ambiguous or generalised definitions of the term are evidence of its analytic redundancy (Venugopal, 2015). However, generalised definitions are in fact useful as a means of finding connections between different registers of thought – in this case, the political, the sociocultural, and the economic. McRuer's definition, highlighted here, therefore is both sufficient and productive. Throughout his analysis, McRuer attends to the complex ways in which these dominant systems relate to and indeed germinate the interrelationships between dis/ability and sexuality.

This chapter seeks to expand on McRuer's various contentions by developing his insights with reference to the cultural milieu of the second decade of the 21st century. In another sense, mediated by a 'cripped' critique of temporality, this chapter also attends to the possibility of exploring the ways in which McRuer's work illuminates cultural texts that emerged prior to the present neoliberal paradigm: specifically, in the case of my wider project, to the connections between dis/ability and sexuality in the stage works of Benjamin Britten. A 'cripped' critique of temporality refers, in one sense, to a disruption of the priority given to linear interpretations of history; such interpretations tend to make the assumption that the 'historical process' can be best characterised as one of continual, directional progress – and there is certainly significant scholarly philosophical precedent for a such a perspective in Montesquieu (1748), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), Immanuel Kant (1784-5) and G. W. F. Hegel, who for example, writes that "[h]istory is the process whereby the spirit discovers itself and its own concept" (1857, p. 62). In contrast, however, a cripped critique of temporality aligns itself with a position that history, whilst certainly comprising change, cannot

unproblematically be characterised as a process of human normative advancement. Such a position has been developed significantly in postmodern historiographical thought (Gadamer, 1960), and, as is explored here, critical disability theorists have demonstrated the involvement of normative, able-bodies in the formation of linear interpretations of history. Kafer (2013) highlights that, within the dominant, linear conceptions of history, disability is often conceptualised as an "obstacle[] to the arc of progress" and that "the only appropriate disabled mind/body is one cured or moving toward cure." (p 28). Disability is, in a manner of speaking, incompatible with 'the future' in dominant linear conceptions of history and progress. However, Kafer offers an alternative, "imagin[ing] futures otherwise, arguing for a cripped politics of access and engagement based on the work of disability activists and theorists" (p 4). Furthermore, the notion of cripped temporality is also relevant epistemologically and semiotically, challenging the manner in which knowledge can be acquired and meaning produced. If the inbuilt linear, normative assumptions of progress are critiqued in a general (historical) sense, the manner in which knowledge *progresses* from the thing-that-is-known, and in which signs relate to the signifier and the signified, might then also be subject to that same critique. These ideas are developed throughout this thesis, but it is enough to note at present that cripped temporality, in this sense, destabilises representation, and redefines its boundaries and directionality. It is in this context then, that Britten's stage works, written prior to the present neoliberal paradigm, the subject of McRuer's analysis, gain currency.

Conjunctional analysis - intersectionality

Michael Berubé, in his foreword to *Crip Theory*, identifies and is very much critical of the ways in which cultural theorists have engaged with multiple forms of identity (a process that might termed "conjunctural analysis") and often take a merely "additive" approach whereby multiple identity categories that form the basis of oppression are "checked off one by one as they are theoretically accounted for", leaving little room for a nuanced critical appraisal of the complex interactions *between* the categories themselves (McRuer, 2006, pp vii-viii). Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality* in contrast to such additive approaches. Writing within the context of the conjunction of race and gender, drawing from the lived experience of discrimination faced by Black women, Crenshaw identifies the way in which the discursive tendency to treat race and gender as "mutually exclusive categories of

experience and analysis" is highly problematic. Presenting case studies, Crenshaw demonstrates the ways in which antidiscrimination legal structures of the time did not account for the unique modality of discrimination experienced by Black women:

> Black women's claims were rejected and their experiences obscured because the court refused to acknowledge that the employment experience of Black women can be distinct from that of white women, while in other cases, the interests of Black women were harmed because Black women's claims were viewed as so distinct from the claims of either white women or Black men that the court denied to Black females representation of the larger class. (p. 148)

Crenshaw admits the apparent contradiction in stating that "Black women are the same [as either Black men or white women] and harmed by being treated differently, [and] that they are different and harmed by being treated the same" (p. 149). However, such a contradiction merely speaks to the "conceptual limitations" of the additive approach that intersectionality does work to challenge. Indeed, Crenshaw observes such conceptual limitations in many expressions of feminism of the time (p, 154). In a similar vein, Butler (1990, p. 143) notes and is critical of the ways in which various "theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class and ablebodiedness invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.' at the end of the list". Though feminist scholarship has indeed acknowledged the interactions of gender with other identity characteristics, Butler is mindful of the way that such analyses "invariably fail to be complete", in part because of the "illimitable" nature of the "process of signification itself" (p 143). For Butler, it is the inherent limitations of language that obscure interconnections between identity characteristics; as Butler says: "There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very 'taking up' is enabled by the tool lying there" (p. 145). It is significant that Butler describes additive approaches to identity interconnectivity as "horizontal" (p 143), speaking to the linguistic tendency to analyse interactions between identity characteristics as a chain, sequentially, one-by-one, rather than acknowledging the simultaneous and multifarious nature of those interactions.

Berubé (in the foreword to *Crip Theory*) draws a further criticism of many forms of 'conjuctural analysis': namely, the ways in which disability perspectives specifically are often excluded in additive approaches; Berubé explains this conspicuous exclusion of disability by suggesting that it owes to the fact that disability is "already so complexly intertwined with everything else" (p. viii). In contrast to such an approach, *Crip Theory* accommodates the ever shifting and unstable boundaries between identity categories and, speaks to the ways in which efforts to re-enfranchise oppressed groups (those disenfranchised on the basis of identity categories) have often involved a 'mobilizing' of disability where (as Berubé points out) "you find people scrambling desperately to cast somebody else as abnormal, crazy, abject, disabled" (p. viii). Seemingly progressive social movements that champion the rights of oppressed groups, often do so by distancing themselves from a disabled subjectivity. Baynton (2001) both acknowledges the manner in which disability has figured in the justification of historical oppression of three groups (women, African Americans, and immigrants), and the manner in which "[a] common strategy for attaining equal rights [is one that] seeks to distance one's own group from imputations of disability and therefore tacitly accepts the idea that disability is a legitimate reason for inequality…" (p 51). Baynton writes: "Arguments for racial inequality and immigration restrictions invoked supposed tendencies to feeble-mindedness, mental illness, deafness, blindness, and other disabilities in particular races and ethnic groups" (p 34). For African Americans, disability was used to justify slavery. Medical professionals had even implied that enslaved Black people would be likely to acquire mental and physical disabilities if they were given freedom. Baynton notes how arguments *against* such racial inequality tended to rely on "vigorous denials that the groups in question actually had these disabilities; they were not disabled, the argument went, and therefore were not proper subjects for discrimination. Rarely have oppressed groups denied that disability is an adequate justification for social and political inequality" (p 34).

Furthermore, the manner in which public protest is often prioritised in anti-oppression social justice work effectively excludes many disabled people from participation in these movements. McRuer identifies how the counter-globalisation Fourth World Social Forum held in Mumbai in 2004 was met with criticism owing to the conference organisers' failure to provide access for disabled people and for the refusal to include a disabled speaker on the plenary panel (2006, p 42). Indeed, central to McRuer's thesis is the idea that the very notion

of an alternative to global capitalism, that a better world is possible, so often requires disability to be positioned as the "object against which an imagined future world is shaped." (p 3). Such future imagining occurs materially, through the exclusion of disabled people from progressive social justice movements. It also occurs discursively, as highlighted above, where arguments against the marginalisation of groups on the basis of race and gender so often involve a rhetorical dissociation from disability, effectively shoring up the marginalisation of disabled people. Perhaps, though, this future imagining also occurs in a more abstract, meta-discursive sense, where the very notions of 'progress' and a 'better' world are bound up with inherent ableist conceptual and linguistic limitations. That is to say that the *concept* of progress always already requires the *concept* of an object against which an imagined future world is shaped. In contrast to such future imaginings though, McRuer's 'Crip' approach, strives (perhaps seemingly impossibly) for a different route towards emancipation, one in which no one is left behind. McRuer resists making claims about what a new, better world would look like, but rather creates the conditions for a more open-ended and dynamic interpretation of progress. To achieve this though, the conceptual and linguistic tools available must be challenged – horizontal thought must be rendered multidimensional. It is in this way, then, that McRuer's perspective throughout *Crip Theory* can be conceived as striving to be *intersectional*.

Thinking about dis/ability and sexuality

Connections between dis/ability and sexuality have indeed been variously acknowledged in different scholarly contexts for well over 20 years. It was perhaps Foucault who set the scene for a great deal of scholarship in the field when he explored the pathologized pasts (and presents) of disability (*Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, 1961, and *The Birth of the Clinic*, 1963) and of sexuality (*A history of sexuality, vol. I*, 1976), writing evocatively about pathologizing mechanisms as a discursive function of power structures in both cases. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault explores the development of the modern concept of 'mental illness'. Prior to Foucault's work, the nineteenth century's psychiatric medical treatment of madness was understood as an advancement on earlier, brutal and so-called unenlightened perspectives. However, Foucault challenges this assumption in suggesting that the psycho-medicalisation of madness is in fact a powerful mechanism of control. Similarly, in *The Birth of the Clinic*, Foucault argues that clinical

medicine and the 'medical gaze' reduce individuals to 'symptoms' and 'anatomies' and are another manifestation of coercive power. In *A history of sexuality*, Foucault resists the 'repressive hypothesis' that sexuality (qua sexual agency) has been repressed in the modern age. Rather, Foucault contends that sexuality is counterintuitively in some ways more prolific in the modern period, only that it has been transformed into a discursive phenomenon whereby it is the subject of increasingly detailed verbal scrutiny. One of the key ways in which sexuality has become discursive, Foucault suggests is through the "Sciencia Sexualis" (the science of sexuality). Through scrutinising sexuality in this way, the discourse surrounding sexuality becomes another mechanism for controlling bodies. Foucault draws out a common thread, developing the theme of discursive power throughout his work. In this sense, it could be said, that power is what connects sexuality and dis/ability. What follows here then is a brief outline of specific other scholarly contexts in which dis/ability and sexuality's relatedness has been explored since Foucault's paradigm shifting work.

The following outline is not exhaustive but nonetheless demonstrates some of the connections that have been drawn, towards the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the 21st, between sexuality and dis/ability. Towards the end of the twentieth century, a series of articles in *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, (Majiet, 1993a, 1993b, and 1996) explored the ways in which disabled women specifically are frequently denied a sexual life, sexual empowerment and a sense of sexual agency, and how this relates to wider notions of inequality on the basis of sexuality and gender. Majiet writes, "Life is measured and assessed by an 'able-bodied' society. This is extended to deny disabled women the active celebration of our sexuality. Disabled women as individuals and as a collective must claim and redefine our sexuality as a way of acknowledging and affirming ourselves as women first" (1996, p 79). In this sense, Majiet primarily draws a connection between disability and sexuality (qua sexual autonomy) rather than sexuality (qua sexual orientation). However, given that sexual autonomy and empowerment are impossible without the ability to express one's sexual orientation or preferences freely and safely, Majiet's work does indeed foster dialogue between dis/ability and sexuality (qua orientation). In this sense, the fact that disabled women are less likely than their able-bodied counterparts to be afforded sexual freedom of expression comes hand-in-hand with an assumption of their heterosexuality. Furthermore, the fact that disabled women are less likely than their male

counterparts to be given sexual agency only serves to amplify that assumption. In addition, in 'Disabled Women and Sexuality', Majiet writes that "Women with disabilities must contend with the media's image of… the feminine mystique, which is defined by the traditional, heterosexual marriage" (p 43). Where disabled women's sexual autonomy *is* acknowledged, there often is nonetheless an implied assumption of heterosexuality. Throughout this series of articles, then, Majiet develops a strong sense of the fully-enmeshed nature of sexuality, dis/ability and gender.

Other connections between dis/ability and sexuality have been drawn out by Alexander and Gomez (2017) who explored the negative impact that cultures of sexual disempowerment have specifically upon the lives of intellectually disabled people. Alexander and Gomez conducted their sociological study in Australia, highlighting the significant lack of access to "concomitant sex literacy and education about sex and sexuality" that many intellectually disabled people experience. The article identifies that such a lack of access is seemingly supported by a series of cultural myths and fears surrounding sexuality and disability: that for example, "unbridled sexuality will become rampant sex offending, or that people with intellectual disability cannot be good parents. There are general misassumptions that people with intellectual disability only want to date other people with disabilities or that those adults with intellectual disability who choose to become sexually active will then be forced to relinquish their bodily integrity. There is an ableist fetishism about disability which mocks the person with disability in sexual relationships and makes heroes of the non-disabled partners…" (p 117). Such ideas speak inherently about sexuality (both in terms empowerment and orientation for the reasons highlight above) as much as they do disability; through exploration of such socio-cultural myths and misassumptions, Alexander and Gomez effectively draw up closer connections between dis/ability and sexuality in very much complementary ways to Majiet in her feminist work.

Foucault's interdisciplinary approach in which he interprets pathologizing mechanisms as a discursive function of power for both dis/ability and sexuality is perhaps in some senses a precursor of 'Medical Humanities' and the cultural study of the body, fields that draw meaning from the discourse surrounding medicine and anatomy. In this vein, contemporary discourse surrounding reproductive rights is also evidence of the interconnectedness of

dis/ability and sexuality. Pralat (2015) for example, complicates narratives of Assisted Reproduction Technologies (ARTs) in relation to sexuality and the discourses surrounding HIV/AIDS from the time of the crisis of the 1980s up to the time of writing. Pralat derives meaning from the connections between AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) and AID (artificial insemination by donor) and between the practices of 'breeding' in both (intentional) viral transmission and in reproductive contexts and in this way, he explores historical connections between sexuality, gender, reproduction, and disability and relates these to institutional and market capital mechanisms. In this sense, then discourse surrounding reproductive rights is always already fully imbricated in the discourses of sexuality (in both senses of the word).

A cultural studies perspective

Developing his own intersectionally rich crip theory (taking his cue from Foucault, and sharing in the discourses surrounding Majiet, Alexander and Gomez, and Pralat's work, amongst others') McRuer explores connections between dis/ability and sexuality, taking an approach which largely aligns with a broader *cultural studies* perspective (2006, p 2). Through this, McRuer analyses cultural practices and institutions in relation to power structures, identity formation and ideology. One key tenet of cultural studies that McRuer upholds is the bringing of concepts that often pass as the natural order of things under closer critical scrutiny. One connection between sexuality and dis/ability, a common theme, is that homosexuality and disability are both defined in opposition to heterosexuality and ablebodiedness respectively rather than being afforded a presence in their own terms. In the light of this, McRuer explores how heterosexuality and ablebodiedness gain currency as the norm, and seemingly pass as the natural order of things. In a typically cultural studies modality, then, instead of drawing comparisons between the homosexual subject and the disabled subject as other projects have done, McRuer shifts attention towards the then unexplored connectivity between heterosexuality and ablebodiedness. McRuer explores how, despite *disability* and *homosexuality's* (*queerness'*) shared pathologized past (à la Foucault) and the links explored in more contemporary sociological scholarship, there has, on the whole, been a lacuna regarding *ablebodiedness and heterosexuality's* interrelatedness (2006, p 1). Significantly though, McRuer emphasises that not only does a cultural studies approach seek to understand the origins and mechanisms by which concepts seemingly pass as the natural

order of things, but consequently, such an approach indeed also does work to effect change. McRuer's work, in this way, is politically highly charged, exhorting that a new, better and, as we shall see, 'cripped' world is possible. It is this vantage point then that renders McRuer's crip theory highly novel and proves to be of import in my own project in which I demonstrate the ways in which Britten makes visible the mechanisms by which sexuality and dis/ability are interrelated. It is the contention of this chapter that McRuer's positioning of crip theory, and (as is shown throughout this project) the tendency of Britten's stage works to complicate the representational connections between sexuality and dis/ability, both do destabilising work on the hegemonic position of naturality so commonly afforded to ablebodiedness and heterosexuality.

Mindful of this approach whereby McRuer attends to the categories of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality to destabilise their hegemonic status and passing as the natural order of things, McRuer's title 'Signs of *queerness* and *disability*', might, at first glance, appear to be somewhat misleading. In some senses, it might more appropriately and accurately be entitled: 'Signs of *heterosexuality* and *able-bodiedness*'. A possible apparent contradiction at the centre of this critical perspective is therefore raised: how is it possible to reconcile an intention to gather insight about disability (and/or queerness) with a more intended focus on able-bodiedness and heterosexuality? Put another way, a rhetorical turn towards able-bodiedness and heterosexuality that seeks to destabilise the boundaries between and limits of able-bodiedness/disability and queerness/heterosexuality brings about many of the same problems as the, seemingly well-meaning, able-bodied admonition that sometimes follows identity work: "Actually we are all disabled in some way, aren't we?" (Linton, 1998, pp. 12-3; Gill, n.d., pp. 46). McRuer asserts quite clearly that this sort of complacent position is to be avoided:

> An able-bodied/heterosexual society doesn't have to take seriously disabled/queer claims to rights and recognition if it can diffuse or universalize what activists and scholars are saying as really nothing new and as really about all of us. In other words, the question "aren't we all queer/disabled?" can be an indirect way of saying, "you don't need to be taken seriously, do you?" (2006, p 158)

When the critical gaze is recast towards able-bodiedness and heterosexuality those categories begin to denaturalise. Effectively, as soon as able-bodiedness and heterosexuality are brought under closer critical scrutiny it becomes instantly apparent that exclusive heterosexuality, and absolute able-bodiedness are mere fictions; there is indeed a productive sense that this sort of work undermines any attempt at the justification of marginalisation on the basis of not being able-bodied and heterosexual. How can anyone be marginalised for not being able-bodied and heterosexual when able-bodiedness and heterosexual evidently do not exist (at least not straightforwardly)? Indeed, it is often remarked amongst disability activists and theorists that it is an incontrovertible fact that all of us become disabled if we live long enough. However, such a universalisation of experience can also be, in some instances, dangerous: the fact is that many people *are* discriminated against on the basis of declaring their sexual preferences or on the basis of what their bodies, minds, and senses can or cannot do. In this way, to assert one common, universal experience is to deny that material oppression exists.

Indeed, *Crip Theory*'s shift of focus towards the mechanisms of identity work has led some scholars to raise concerns. Bone (2016), for example, is critical of McRuer's work suggesting that it potentially silences disabled perspectives because it "permits anyone to claim 'disabled' as an identifier by 'coming out crip'." Nonetheless, McRuer is explicit in stating that his project does not seek to "dematerialize disability identity" (2006, p 35), rather suggesting that it engages with a "critique of identity". A 'critique of identity' it should be noted, is a wilfully rhetorically ambiguous device: in one sense it speaks of a critique 'characterised by' identity, one that understands ablebodiedness' ideological foundations and thus argues against justifications for the oppression of disabled people; in another sense, a 'critique of identity' is simultaneously mindful of the limitations of identity work (a critique 'against' identity) and the ways in which the delineation of minority identities as socially constructed undermines the recognition of material oppression. In its ambiguity, then, McRuer's 'critique of identity' emerges as a dynamic piece of cultural work that follows the identity mechanisms through which disability and queerness become situated in time and place without obscuring their material factualities. McRuer's positioning of both ablebodiedness and disability as identity subjectivities does not mean to say he is claiming they do not exist. Rather, McRuer suggests that able-bodiedness is as much an identity position as disability is (disentangling

able-bodiedness from an implicit naturalness) and, simultaneously, that disability subjectivities have as much value as able-bodied ones.

Complicating (in)visibility

McRuer is able to carry out his critique of the ablebodied 'passing as the natural order of things', and the marking of disability as 'deviant other' by exploring the concepts of 'visibility' and 'invisibility'. Queer theory has variously recognised that heterosexuality, given that it often seemingly passes as the natural order of things, has long passed as 'invisible'. McRuer (2006, p 209) refers to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick:

> To the degree that heterosexuality does not function as a sexuality … there are stubborn barriers to making it accountable, to making it so much as visible, in the framework of projects of historicizing and hence denaturalizing sexuality. The making historically visible of heterosexuality is difficult because, under its pseudonyms such as Inheritance, Marriage, Dynasty, Family, Domesticity, and Population, heterosexuality has been permitted to masquerade so fully as History itself – when it has not been presented itself as the totality of Romance (1994, pp. 10-11).

In contrast, 'homosexuality' is, made to 'stand out', appearing as highly 'visible' and even 'conspicuous'. McRuer repositions this use of the terms 'invisible' and 'visible', transposing them, for his purposes, to the discussion of dis/ability. In this way, it is disability that 'stands out' as highly 'visible' and able-bodiedness that remains 'invisible' (passing as the natural order of things). McRuer writes, "I locate both… [sexuality and dis/ability] in a contemporary history and political economy of visibility" (p 2). Such a cultural studies approach that critiques the apparent passing as the natural order of things effectively then seeks to render the invisible visible, and to bring the very nature of what it means for something to be visible under closer critical scrutiny.

However, it ought to be admitted, invisibility and visibility are often contradictory and challenging terms. Although, for the most part, McRuer appears to be employing the term visible to refer to the nature of disability and queerness as conspicuous spectacles and the

term invisibility correspondingly to refer to heterosexuality and able-bodiedness' apparent 'naturalness', he nonetheless remarks:

> visibility and invisibility are not, after all fixed attributes that somehow permanently attach to any identity, and it is one of the central contentions of [*Crip Theory*] that, because of changing economic, political, and cultural conditions at the turn of the millennium, the relations of visibility in circulation around heterosexuality, able-bodiedness, homosexuality and disability have shifted significantly." (p 2)

McRuer continues by describing the way in which the relatively extended historical period during which disability and homosexuality (queerness) were rendered invisible has given way to our present, neoliberal epoch in which they have increasingly become "more visible and even at times spectacular. Neoliberalism and the condition of postmodernity, in fact, increasingly need able-bodied, heterosexual subjects who are visible and spectacularly tolerant of queer/disabled existences" (p. 2). McRuer here speaks to the manner in which seeming progress with regards to attitudes towards minority groups, under the auspices of neoliberal social advancement, is often, in reality, only ever mere lip service, and a patronising tolerance rather than a significant move towards true emancipation. Indeed, where minority difference is (begrudgingly) acknowledged, it is often exploited for commercial and capital gain through the transformation of minority identities into target markets. For example, LGBTQ+ Pride celebrations across the world have in some senses been sullied by the way in which opportunistic large corporations are quick, very publicly, to wave their rainbow flags in support, when it has the potential of exploiting the so-called 'pink pound' (the extra disposable income of same-sex couples who historically have been less likely to raise children) for boosting sales. There is often, however, a marked disparity between the corporate demonstration of apparent solidarity and the unchallenged structural inequality on the basis of sexuality that often exists within the companies themselves.

Indeed, there is another sense in which it becomes challenging to account for the distinctiveness of visibility and invisibility in relation to disability and ablebodiedness (and indeed of heterosexuality and queerness): (in)visibility can refer, in addition to the manner highlighted above, to a sense of political representation, the ways in which the voices and

perspectives of particular groups are (or are not) heard and acknowledged. It is clear that disability and queerness are certainly not often fully visible, under this second meaning attributed to (in)visibility. Disabled and queer voices and perspectives are indeed often silenced and ignored, and there is significant underrepresentation of those perspectives throughout contemporary societal and cultural spheres. Arising from these two distinct interpretations and usages of '(in)visability' then is an apparent contradiction and confusion.

However, in a number of ways, (in)conspicuousness is in fact related to political (dis)representation. Where (in)visibility is used to describe both conspicuousness and political and social representation, the notion of a 'conspicuous absence' emerges - a term that can be usefully employed to account for the fact that disability is marked out (made visible) precisely because of and in its political dis-representational invisibility. David Bolt, in a presentation at the Inaugural Conference of the Cultural Disability Studies Research Network (2007), referred to the discontinuity that arises between the preponderance of disability representations within literary texts and the 'curricular absence' of disability in British University English Departments and literary journal publications (at the time of speaking). Interestingly though, Bolt notes how such a discontinuity sparked his own interest in literary disability studies, and indeed contributed more widely to a 'growing literary movement' within the academy. Conspicuous absences are, it can be argued, generative. That is to say that a conspicuous absence cannot be ignored: when something is clearly missing, the need for action is provoked. In another sense, though, Parkins (2014) explores, in relation to the spectacular visibility of women in the first decades of the twentieth century, the notion that (in)visibility (qua conspicuousness) is intimately related to dis(representation) via the construction of mysterious unknowability and illegibility. Parkins explores the way in which women's 'visual prominence' (in the realms of fashion and leisure pursuits) in the mass culture of the turn of the twentieth century, perhaps counterintuitively, contributed to political disrepresentation and a deferral of liberation (p 59).[12] In this sense, women's increased public visibility, mediated by the shoring up of an illegible 'mysterious feminine' (p

[12] Parkins' analysis is given in contrast to studies that "have tended to stress the ways that spectacularisation facilitated by new leisure and consumption practices inserted women into the public sphere, thereby visibly challenging the ideological banishment of femininity from the realm of meaningful human action…". She notes: "though this is valuable and often excellent work, this claim can end up equating visibility with liberation" (p 59)

58) was not translated into political representational visibility. Perhaps then, the ambivalence surrounding the contrasting definitions of (in)visibility is not merely a product of homonymity, but rather is evidence of complex phenomena at play. With regards to dis/ability and sexuality then, disability and queerness, within a neoliberal setting are sometimes made spectacular in a way that nonetheless renders them illegible and mysterious and politically dis-enfranchised. Able-bodiedness and heterosexuality, however are, within the same neoliberal setting, made spectacular in a way that is *not* mysterious and illegible. Furthermore, those ways in which the later part of the twentieth century have seen increased political representation for disabled people, where disabled people have gained representational visibility, have also (mediated by illegibility, mystery, and conspicuousness) perhaps in some senses undermined the very goal of seeking representation.

Recognising reductionism in disability studies and LGBT studies

As much as the concepts of visibility and invisibility explicate the socio-political effects of the passing of some identities as natural and the marking of others as unnatural, it is clear that the notion of the political economy of (in)visibility can, at different moments, be applied in different ways. Indeed, at times, both visibility and invisibility might actually apply simultaneous in confounding ways. Furthermore, the delineation of disabled and queer subjectivities as either visible or invisible also speaks to the prevalence of a certain reductionism that can occur within social rights movements and within the academy. For example, Fraser (2018, p 3) identifies that the so-called 'first-wave' of disability studies, with its roots in the disability rights movements of the last decades of the 20th century, "focused above all else on the physical body", and that cognitive disability was often unacknowledged, and indeed rendered invisible by the discipline at large. In this way, efforts (academic and otherwise) to increase the visibility of disability in the political economy can also serve, perhaps counterintuitively, to render some disabled people invisible. One reason for this is presumably that it is visible markers of difference that are often an inevitable starting point in efforts to secure socio-political representation; visible markers are, in this way, more likely to be acknowledged by society at large. Interestingly, Parkins (2014) is critical of such visual

bias with regards to the disenfranchisement of women (and her argument is highly poignant with respects to disability too):

> In an 'ocularcentric' (Jay, 1994) or visually oriented culture, to see is to *know* – or at least, this is the ideological positioning of sight in modernity, which has deep roots stretching back to Ancient Greece. The spectacularisation of certain types of bodies implicates them in an objectifying episteme premised on the dream of transparent access to subjects. (p 60)

In this ocularcentric sense, cognitive disability is unknowable and therefore both mysterious (yet conspicuously 'visible') and simultaneously not-worth-knowing (representationally 'invisible' and therefore non-existent).[13] Ocularcentrism and the notion that 'to see is to know' is itself inherently ableist in relation to visual impairment and vision disability. Disability reductionism and the erasure of cognitive disability and indeed of that of other 'invisible' disabilities, chronic illnesses, and sensory disabilities is perhaps typified by the ubiquitous association of disability and 'what it means to be a disabled person' with the International Symbol of Access, a figure who uses a wheelchair and is only deemed significant with relation to car parking spaces and public toilets. Furthermore, the categorising of disability into physical disability, cognitive disability, sensory disability, chronic illnesses and other 'invisible' disabilities itself does little to acknowledge the variety of lived-experiences within and between those categories.

In a corresponding way, with regards to queerness, a certain reductionism is also culturally prevalent. So often (within academic as well as contemporary cultural settings), homosexuality is taken to be the sole non-heterosexual identification of sexuality and there is an implicit assumption that homosexuality itself is a homogenous identity; the lived experiences of gay men are frequently prioritised over those of lesbians. Bisexuality and asexuality are often erased, rendered invisible, and other emergent sexualities tend be subsumed within other categories. In addition, the increased tolerance and valorising of

[13] Indeed Parkins continues: "This has been deeply harmful to marginalised people, whose apparent transparency is perceived to render them possessable." (p 60) Ocularcentrism, in this sense renders cognitive disability not only not worth knowing, but not even worth 'possessing'.

queer narratives of coming out (particularly within early 21st century media representations) so often contribute bisexual and asexual erasure: bisexuality is often culturally construed as a mere steppingstone towards a true gay coming out; asexual people are often misunderstood as 'not having met the right person yet'; bisexuality and asexuality are still often met with suspicion or disbelief. Marginalised communities-within-communities then ('invisible', sensory and cognitive disabilities within disability rights movements and disability studies communities, and bisexualities and asexualities within queer communities) are, in their invisibilities, also rendered visible in that 'conspicuous' sense. Clearly then, the concepts of invisibility and visibility are deeply entangled and throw up as many problems as clarifications that they seek to assert.

Compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness

Having explored that visibility and invisibility are not fixed political categories, in addition to the other complexities that have been drawn out above, McRuer employs a theoretical currency taken from queer theory, that of 'compulsory identification' (Rich, 1983). In queer theory, the notion of compulsory heterosexuality accommodates the fluctuating, problematic economy of (in)visibility (highlighted above). The notion speaks to the fact that heterosexuality is taken as given, and that, even where queer subjectivities are acknowledged, they are treated as marginal, or lesser, homogenised, and conspicuous. Rich's "organizing impulse is the belief that it is not enough for feminist thought that specifically lesbian texts exist. Any theory or cultural/political creation that treats lesbian existence as a marginal or less 'natural' phenomenon, as mere 'sexual preference', or as the mirror image of either heterosexual or male homosexual relations, is profoundly weakened thereby, whatever its other contributions" (1983, p. 178). These reductions that Rich highlights are not sufficiently scrutinised by merely tracing (in)visibility. The notion of compulsory identification, then relates to notions of in(visibility) but points out reductions and accommodates the fluctuating political economy of visibility. McRuer inheriting from Rich's ideas, applies compulsory identification to able-bodiedness. Reframing Rich's argument might demonstrate the ways in which disability is, even where it is acknowledged, often treated as marginal, lesser, conspicuous, and homogenous.

With this in mind, in *Crip Theory* McRuer explores the processes whereby queerness and disability have at various moments in modern history been obscured, sometimes have been rendered illegible and mysterious but also have been made visible and conspicuous – and as such have been policed and pathologized. McRuer suggests that, whilst homosexuality and disability often appear to be lauded and championed, under the present neoliberal formation, the situation in fact ought more accurately to be characterised as one of mere toleration. At best, McRuer suggests, democratic (queer and disabled) communities are insidiously "transform[ed] into target [capital] markets" (p 3). The constant factor, running throughout modernity's policing and pathologizing of disability and homosexuality and neoliberalism's spectacular tolerance, is heterosexuality and ablebodiedness' compulsory status and not merely their (in)visibility (in addition to homosexuality and disability's). McRuer explores how compulsion can function in day-to-day settings: "Bérubé writes of how he "sometimes feel[s] cornered by talking about Jamie's [his son who has Down syndrome] intelligence, as if the burden of proof is on me, official spokesman on his behalf". The subtext of these encounters always seems to be the same: "In the end, aren't you disappointed to have a retarded child?... Do we really have to give the person our full attention?" (p. 8). This, McRuer, drawing from Bérubé, suggests is a common experience that typifies the operation of compulsory able-bodiedness.

It is through the notion of compulsory identification ('compulsarity') that McRuer finds able-bodiedness and heterosexuality (and therefore disability and homosexuality/queerness, and dis/ability and sexuality) to be interwoven. McRuer refers to Edelman's analysis ('Tearooms and Sympathy; or, The Epistemology of the Water Closet') of popular representations of a sexual scandal that involved Lyndon B. Johnson's (36th U.S. President, who held office from 1963-1969) chief of staff, Walter Jenkins, who was arrested in 1964 for performing "indecent gestures" with another man in a public toilet. McRuer, via Edelman, identifies the way in which, in response to the Jenkins 'sexual crisis' and other contemporaneous instances of same-sex 'perversion', compulsory heterosexuality sometimes operates by delineating or composing the image of 'the homosexual' directly and outrightly as 'the other'; "this figure was understood as a distinct type of person, whose difference was legible on the body" (McRuer, 2006, p 11). At other times, the delineation and demarcation of 'the homosexual' involves a mediation of sorts, whereby 'the homosexual' is conceived of as disabled in some

way (either figuratively or literally drawn from the legible difference on the body, or from the contemporaneous cultural equivalence of homosexuality and mental illness) in order to shore up the compulsory nature of heterosexuality. In this case, the mechanism of compulsory heterosexuality must admit the compulsory status of able-bodiedness in order to state its own compulsory nature. Compulsory nature ('compulsarity'), in this way itself becomes synonymous with able-bodiedness. There are, correspondingly, most likely (or at least theoretically) moments where it is compulsory able-bodiedness that admits the compulsory status of heterosexuality in order shore up *its* proper compulsory nature. Sometimes, then, compulsory heterosexuality masquerades as compulsory able-bodiedness; alternatively, compulsory able-bodiedness masquerades as compulsory heterosexuality; at yet other times the two are ushered in together and there is a reciprocal interplay where the two simultaneously and dynamically reinforce each other.

Normative aspects of compulsory heterosexuality/able-bodiedness

McRuer relates 'compulsarity' to normalcy[14]: to be heterosexual and ablebodied under these auspices is to be *normal*. Analysing normalcy and 'compulsarity' together brings to light compulsarity's correlate, compulsion and its concomitant normative implications. Compulsion and normalcy both imply a moral element, whereby being normal is not merely desirable but also in some senses mandated. McRuer (2006) writes that compulsarity "functions by covering over, with the appearance of choice, a system in which there really is no choice".

In this way, compulsion (compulsory nature) is simultaneously about desire and about discipline: ablebodiedness and heterosexuality might both then be understood as 'compelling' (compelling being interpreted simultaneously as an adjective and also as a verb). This is particularly interesting with regards to discussions surrounding sexuality and dis/ability that entail some form of a 'born this way' argument. Relating to sexuality, 'Born this way', arguably brought into mainstream popular cultural discourse by the singer, songwriter and actress, Lady Gaga, perhaps had its origins in 1971 with a Motown hit song, 'I was born this

[14] McRuer refers both to the theories of normalcy (*Enforcing normalcy*, Lennard Davis, 1995) and Rosemarie Garland Thomson's conception of the 'normate' in *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997).

way' (written by Bunny Jones) which was first recorded the singer, Valentino in 1975, and subsequently by Carl Bean in 1978. Lady Gaga would almost certainly have been aware of the overtly politicised history of the song that inspired the title of her own, and indeed of the implications with regards to the minority status of African Americans and the role of Motown in the Civil Rights movement the mid 20th century U.S. Following on from the overwhelming success of Lady Gaga's own 2011 hit song 'Born this way', the Born This Way Foundation (BTWF) was set up as an NPO (non-profit organization) to take a stand against anti-LGBT bullying and hate. Central to the BTWF message is the proclamation that being LGBT is not a choice, but rather an aspect of an individual's essential nature and reality. As well-meaning and powerful as this message undoubtedly is, it does not arrive unproblematically. As articles in *New York Magazine* (Singal, 2014) and *INTO* (2017) highlight, the issue at hand is the implication brought about by 'born this way' that, if there were a choice, it would certainly *not* be desirable to be LGBT, and that, so the argument goes, LGBT rights should only begrudgingly be afforded because there really is no choice; only mere tolerance and pity are engendered. In some senses, the resonances of 'born this way' in a disability setting are striking: so often the medicalisation of disability is seemingly justified by the understanding of disability principally as a biological and not at all social reality – not to mention the way in which disabled people are often subject to able-bodied gazes and curiosities: "were you born that way?". However, if 'born this way' speaks of a refusal to accept compulsion or coercion, by affirming the material reality of LGBT subjectivities, then the assertion indeed echoes the demand for representational visibility that has underscored so much of the late twentieth century disability activism.

The question remains, therefore, as to how the two analyses or interpretations of 'born this way' might be reconciled. Whilst not wishing to bastardize the phrase, perhaps it might tentatively, but productively be reimagined as '*born(e)* this way' in order to preserve a sense of ambiguity over the meaning ascribed to the phrase. Where 'born' is univocal, the word 'borne' (the past participle of 'to bear') has a multiplicity of meanings including, 'to have carried a weight', 'to have conveyed', 'to have been called by', 'to have conducted oneself', 'to have taken responsibility', 'to proceed in a specified direction', 'to have given birth', 'to have been born by' etc. Several of these meanings productively challenge the potential biological determinism of Lady Gaga's mantra.

Having begun to discuss some of how dis/ability and sexuality continue to be linked via the normalizing tendencies of compulsory able-bodiedness and compulsory sexuality, it is perhaps worth considering where, for McRuer, the limits or boundaries of the two concepts might lie. Sometimes, the relationship between dis/ability and sexuality might be characterised by parallelism: one interpretation of McRuer's work is that dis/ability functions in some ways, *analogously* to sexuality, such that arguments can be borrowed from queer theory to construct a new theory that applies in a complementary, yet distinct way to dis/ability. However, dis/ability and sexuality are not always parallel subjectivity-producing concepts: in some other senses dis/ability is very much at the heart of thinking about sexuality and is in fact prior to it. At yet other times, the two are brought in together by normalcy. Furthermore, sometimes normalcy undergirds able-bodied and/or heterosexual subjectivities, and at other times it is synonymous with it/them; sometimes it is heterosexuality and/or able-bodiedness that undergird(s) normalcy. A nuanced interpretation of McRuer's work, therefore, takes this/these dynamic process(es) into account. Sexuality, then, is not a mere metaphor for dis/ability, and nor is dis/ability a mere metaphor for sexuality; normalcy is in some sense an overarching producer of the two identity axes, but it is nonetheless also sustained by the dynamic interplay between them all.

Neoliberal flexibility

Having laid out that heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are compulsory positionalities, and that sometimes (particularly in a neoliberal context) their compulsory status renders homosexuality and disability highly visible, conspicuous and even spectacular (as well as invisible, illegible, and mysterious), McRuer demonstrates the existence of a certain 'flexibility' operating within the mechanisms of compulsion. This (neoliberal) flexibility, McRuer suggests, had not been sufficiently acknowledged by queer theory or by disability studies (p 3). With the neoliberal arrival of a new, flexible heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, absolute heterosexuality and able-bodiedness are somehow disbanded but nonetheless, heterosexuality and ablebodiedness retain their compulsory nature and homosexuality and disability remain conspicuous; 'flexibility' is the new 'certainty'. The term 'flexibility', however, warrants a closer analysis. McRuer refers to Martin (*Flexible Bodies: The*

Role of Immunity in American Culture from the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS, 1994): in the context of the preponderance of Hollywood cinematic representations of characters whose appeal tends to rely upon a 'eureka moment' of sorts, the character trait (or trope) of 'flexibility' is essential. In this sense "*Flexible*… is virtually synonymous with heterosexual and able-bodied: the bodies in question are often narratively placed in an inevitable heterosexual relationship and visually represented as able" (p 16). In another sense, 'flexibility' is frequently conjured as the image of masculinity, a muscularly well-defined, gymnastic, fit body, which participates in the images of able-bodiedness and macho-heterosexuality. In addition, McRuer (2006) writes:

> As numerous theorists of neoliberalism have argued, even as new social movements were calling for an expansion of economic and social justice, these dramatic changes in the processes of production and consumption essentially reined in or curtailed it, marking the beginning of the largest upward redistribution of wealth… that the world has ever known. Culturally, these changes were facilitated by the well-nigh universal valuation of flexibility (p. 17)

The flexibility afforded by neoliberalism, then, gives rise to mere tolerance, patronising condescension and, transformation of "vibrant public and democratic cultures" into "target markets", as McRuer states "inaugurat[ing] an era that paradoxically is characterised by more global inequality and less rigidity in terms of how oppression is reproduced and extended" (p. 3). Such flexibility turns out to be, rather than a move towards emancipation, a flexibility in relation to the specific modality that oppression takes. This resonates with moments in our contemporary society where, emerging from new social movements at the end of the 20th century, difference is not only seemingly destigmatized, but also often celebrated. Underneath this guise of 'progress' however, the flexibility of the mechanisms at play insist that difference, queerness and disability remain subjugated. One example is that of the disability-related practice of direct payments. The Direct payments scheme (cash payments distributed by local authorities since 1997 in the U.K. directly to eligible recipients of social care – many of whom are disabled – who are then able to organize their own support) in theory, ought to foster autonomy and 'independence' (whatever that turns out to mean). However, in practice, as Glasby and Littlechild (2002) have noted, the uptake and

administrative delivery of the scheme had been slow, and as David and Janet Leece (2006) highlight, the disproportionate use of direct payments by middle-class, affluent disabled people, "effectively created a two-tiered system in social care": neoliberal flexibility, in this case, counterintuitively generating greater inequality. McRuer accompanies accounts of neoliberal flexibility in political social settings with analyses of cultural, textual representations that sustain or 'crystallise' contemporary attitudes towards sexuality and dis/ability. McRuer's *Crip Theory*, then, inhabits that space between the political/economic/societal and the cultural/textural/literary. It is precisely the manner in which McRuer weaves stories told in a variety of cultural settings with the playing out of these stories in the political world that serves as the inspiration for my project where I seek to derive meaning, from Britten's operatic representation of the connectedness of dis/ability and sexuality, for the 'real world' in which lived-experience matters.

In probing this notion of neoliberal flexibility a little further, the old proverb that 'the exception proves the rule' and attendant discussions that surround its meaning might provide insight. It seems that, in the manner that McRuer explores neoliberal flexibility with respects to sexuality, where homosexuality emerges as an *exception* to the dominant, compulsory identity of heterosexuality, it might indeed be said that such an *exception proves the rule* of heterosexuality. In a corresponding fashion, the same could be said of (*exceptional*) disability *proving the rule* of able-bodiedness. Perhaps one interpretation that emerges from spelling out neoliberal flexibility in these terms speaks to the way, à la Butler (after Foucault) in which representation (both textural and political) is always involved in and produced by the terms of the ruling hegemonic structures themselves (Butler, 1990, pp. 2 - 3). Lennard Davis (1995) explores the history of the notion of the 'norm' and how it relates to the development of statistical practices in the 19th century (p. 26). Inherent in the statistical concept of the norm is the idea that a set of data will always fit underneath a "normal distribution" curve. In this sense then it is precisely the exceptional positions that designate the norm, and in that sense, the norm or the 'average' is indeed more fictitious than the exceptions that construct it.

However, it is perhaps rather the *interconnectedness* of dis/ability and sexuality that plays the most significant part in the ways in which these *exceptions prove* their *rules*. The involvement of compulsory ablebodiedness in the establishing of the compulsory status of heterosexuality

(and vice versa) is relevant to the specific way in which *exceptionality proves* the compulsory, hegemonic *rule*. That is to say that, in moments where the compulsory status of heterosexuality is in crisis, where queer subjectivities assert themselves all over, the taken-for-grantedness of compulsory able-bodiedness is employed to make a case for re-establishing heterosexuality's compulsory status. In this way, homosexuality can be flexibly accommodated, though only in as far as it adheres to able-bodied norms; perhaps a salient example of this is the way in which LGBT communities often prioritise the image of the 'fit', implicitly ablebodied, musclebound gay man. Furthermore, where able-bodiedness comes under crisis (where disabled identities and subjectivities come out all over) the status of compulsory heterosexuality reasserts itself. Disabled subjectivities can be accommodated, but only as long as they conform to heterosexual norms. This speaks both to the commonplace misassumption that disabled people are necessarily heterosexual (as identified above in relation to Majiet's work) and also to the conditional acceptance of disability subjectivities within a heteronormative framework of family life, domesticity and marriage. Overall, in this sense, homosexuality might be said to *prove the rule* of compulsory ablebodiedness, and, mediated by these two processes, homosexuality thereby effectively proves the rule of heterosexuality, and disability effectively proves the rule of ablebodiedness.

McRuer presents a sustained analysis of the 1997 James L. Brooks film, 'As Good As It Gets', to demonstrate how compulsory ablebodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality mutually sustain each other and to give an example of cinematically 'crystallized' contemporaneous 'flexible' attitudes towards disability (pp. 19 – 29). McRuer's analysis highlights moments where compulsory heterosexuality shores up compulsory ablebodiedness, and other moments where compulsory ablebodiedness shores up compulsory heterosexuality. In particular, McRuer presents a disabled reading of the central character, Melvin (played by Jack Nicholson). Significantly, McRuer avoids 'diagnosing' Melvin as disabled, but rather analyses the way in which the character is "undeniably linked to other people with disabilities…" (p. 21). Crucially, McRuer points out that the ways in which Melvin relates to discourses of disability "dissolve", and, "as his love affair with Carol develops, the behaviour[al difference] audiences have been encouraged to look at slowly disappears… During the film, in short, Melvin's identity flexibly contracts and expands. Able-bodied status

is achieved in direct proportion to his increasing awareness of, and need for, (heterosexual) romance." (p 24). Following McRuer's analytical style, Barounis (2009), explores this mechanism as revealed in the films 'Brokeback Mountain', depicting the development of a sexual relationship between two men in the American West, and 'Murderball', a documentary film narrating the rivalry between the Canadian and U.S. wheelchair rugby teams in their preparation for the 2004 Paralympic games. In his article, Barounis builds on McRuer's ideas to explore the way that Brokeback Mountain's queer narrative relies upon a shoring up of ablebodied (masculine) physical ideals, and notes Murderball's critique of 'ablebodiedness' relies on hypermasculinity and heterosexuality.

Flexibility as deviation from the norm

Having highlighted the ways in which it is often precisely the intersection of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality that allows neoliberal flexibility to operate coercively, it is worth noting that, at other times, neoliberal flexibility nonetheless appears to deem certain deviations from heterosexuality and able-bodiedness as acceptable. Contemporary queer communities, for example, have frequently highlighted the way that wider society often does indeed validate non-heterosexual perspectives so long as an otherwise heteronormative/monogamous lifestyle is nonetheless adopted. Similarly, disability is often validated and perhaps even valorised in wider society as long as those disabled people 'pass' (or are seen to be at least trying at all costs to pass) as able-bodied. Much of the discourse surrounding the 2012 London Paralympic games, where disability was brought into mass media focus, appeared in the first instance to champion disability; "We're the superhumans" was the slogan co-opted by Channel 4 to publicise the games. However, there was often a sense in which this seeming championing was contingent upon disabled people 'compensating' for their disability with extraordinary talent and athletic achievement, in a sense appearing to mitigate for the disability; the slogan was subsequently heavily criticised for its 'supercrip' representation of Paralympians. The concept of the 'supercrip' came into popular usage towards the end of the twentieth century to describe the way in which some disabled people and character depictions are represented as inspirational, over-coming all the odds. Haller (2000) writes:

> Society holds few expectations for people with disabilities – so anything they do becomes "amazing." Any disabled person who does any basic task of living becomes "inspirational." And any disabled person who does more than daily living, such as competing as a professional golfer or playing pro baseball with one arm becomes a Supercrip.

Alaniz (2014) remarks that the figure of the supercrip can nonetheless be powerfully appealing as it "moves, soothes and stirs" (p. 32) and inspires those who come across it. Serving in contrast to the depiction of disabled lives as tragic or pathetic, the figure of the supercrip might in some senses provoke a positive and optimistic message. Interestingly, Alaniz, in his analysis, draws out the ways in which the figure of the supercrip (especially in a U.S. context) is related to the image of the superhero, "associat[ing] this new persona with national values, with 'truth, justice and the American way,' reassuring disabled and non-disabled alike that we really are 'one people… indivisible,' united by our can-do spirit" (p. 32).

However, as Haller (2000) notes, "The power of the Supercrip is a false power", given that it implicitly enforces the perspective that only a superhero or a person with exceptional or extraordinary gift or ability could live a meaningful disabled life. In this sense then, the supercrip and the image of the inspirational disabled figure serve to set unrealistic, wholly unachievable standards for disabled validity (able-bodied passing). Veritable achievements of disabled people are in this way undermined and contained: disabled people are placed into an impossible situation whereby they are simultaneously expected to achieve great things and to achieve very little. It is interesting, for instance, to consider the applicability of supercrip representation in 'Billy Budd' with regards to his stammer in relation and contrast to his singing ability. In other words, to note how the cultural discourse surrounding singing as a cure for speech dysfluency (whilst perhaps having some speech-clinical basis) might gain further legibility in relation to the supercrip narrative.

Ultimately, even as flexibility operates in these settings, where deviations from the norm are deemed sufficiently small so as to be acceptable, or where deviations can be compensated for, there is of course, through mutual participation in the norm, always an interplay here

between heterosexuality and able-bodiedness. With regards to the flexible heteronormative accomodations of queerness, a constructed sense of wholeness (and therefore able-bodiedness) is preserved at any rate. That is to say that the prioritisation of the monogamous relationship and the family unit is an able-bodied prioritisation as well as being a heterosexual/heteronormative one. Correspondingly, there is perhaps something markedly heteronormatively sexualized about the some of the supercrip portrayals of para-athletes that dominated media representations of the 2012 paralympic games, as highlighted by Flindall (2018, p. 164), where gender norms and conventional standards of beauty are effectively shored up.

As Good As It Gets?

McRuer suggests that for many LGBT communities and for disabled people, a "subordination in a society than nonetheless claims to value diversity, is often as good as it often gets" (p 19). Rather aptly then, in his analysis of the 1997 film *As Good As It Gets* (directed by James L. Brooks), he demonstrates the way in which queer and dis/abled subjectivities interact and sustain each other throughout the film via their compulsory counterparts. McRuer suggests that, in this sense, *As Good As It Gets* can also be taken to represent a range of contemporaneous cultural texts. Central to his analysis of the film is the notion of flexible subjectivities that ultimately foster able-bodied and heteronormative epiphanies in the developing love affair between the two main characters, Melvin and Carol.

McRuer explores the representation of disability in relation to the central character of Melvin but also to two supporting characters, Simon (an acquaintance of Melvin and Carol), and Carol's son, Spencer. Portrayed as rather bigoted and purposely antagonistic, Melvin (played in the film by Jack Nicholson) is identified as living with obsessive-compulsive disorder; Simon, who is gay, is depicted as becoming mobility impaired following an attack by burglars; and Spencer, according to his mother, has "gotta fight to breathe. His asthma can just shoot off the charts, he's allergic to dust, and this is New York, so his immune system fails on him whenever there's trouble… An ear infection, whatever, sends us to the emergency room five, six times a month." (quoted in McRuer, 2006, p. 19). The variety of disability representations in the film, portraying both hidden and visible disabilities in complex and multi-faceted ways, certainly is to be productively acknowledged. That being said, it is not the intended outcome

of McRuer's extended analysis reductively to ascertain whether disability is represented 'positively' or 'negatively'. Rather, he complicates the way in which these disability representations emerge and operate throughout the film. For example, he notes the ways in which Melvin is "living with a disability of sorts" and that his obsessive-compulsive disorder "pulls [him] into the orbit of medical and psychiatric institutions designed to guarantee the production of 'docile bodies'." (p. 20). McRuer thus resists a reductive 'diagnostic fixing' of Melvin as disabled, but rather draws out the way in which, through his interactions with the institution of psychiatry, Melvin is subject to dominating, pathologizing institutional powers on the basis of his behavioural difference. McRuer's particular invocation of Foucault's notion of 'docile bodies' demonstrates the way in which Melvin's disability, rather than being solely an essential biological or physiological reality, is in fact conjugated by discourses of power. For Foucault, a docile body is one that "may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved", in other words, made useful and productive, brought into a system of what he calls docility-utility (Foucault, 1975, p. 137). The system of docility-utility encapsulates the manner in which docile bodies (those which are ready to be transformed and improved) are rendered more economically useful, and as a consequence of their increased utility, become subsequently *more* docile; the cycle repeats. In this sense, in the opening scenes of *As Good As It Gets*, Melvin is depicted as existing *outside* of the system of docility-utility, owning to his non-normative behaviour. However, McRuer writes: "during the last two or three centuries bodies have been monitored for signs of behavioral and physical difference that might impede their productivity; these signs of difference have been duly marked and, if possible, "transformed, and improved" (McRuer, p. 21). There is a sense in which disability not only marks an individual as not-docile (outside the system of docility-utlity) and therefore as an economic 'burden'; but that disability is also the very thing that provokes the disciplinary powers of transformation and 'improvement' in the first place. Describing Melvin's behavioural non-normativity as 'pulling' him "into the orbit" of the system of docility-utility, in a manner of speaking, points to the fact that disability already signifies docility as much as it does non-docility. In this sense, then, the representation of Melvin as living with a disability "of sorts", subject to the settings of medical and psychiatric institutions, serves as a reminder that the distinction between ablebodiedness/normalcy/docility and disability/abnormalcy/non-docility collapses under the totality of the relational system of docility-utility.

In contrast, McRuer acknowledges the fact that, in many ways, Melvin, however, is *dissimilar* to many people who live with disabilities (McRuer, 2006, p. 21). "He is certainly not one of those involved in the movement to develop a minority consciousness among people with disabilities… and those marked as obsessive-compulsive have not yet been near the forefront of such a movement." Here, he highlights the fact that the analytic instability of the category of disability itself has a material correlate in that many disabled people's rights movements have been exclusionary, particularly with regards to behavioural difference and cognitive disability.

This having been said, McRuer justifies his analysis of Melvin in relation to disability by suggesting that, "[w]hether or not Melvin is a good representative of a person with disability, however, he is undeniably linked to other people with disabilities" in various ways (p. 21). The opening credits of the film encourage the viewer, McRuer suggests, to "see behaviour that sets Melvin apart from others and from unacknowledged norms". Further, as highlighted above, McRuer explores the ways in which Melvin is institutionally labelled as living with obsessive-compulsive disorder and this is presented to the viewer giving seemingly "comprehensive" explanation for his actions (p. 22). In addition, he briefly explores the way that Melvin is characterised as isolated, in line with the general tendency within cinema to "isolate disabled characters from their able-bodied peers as well as from each other" (Norden, 1994, p. 1). McRuer notes that such isolation is depicted in *As Good As It Gets* as deserved. The film, he asserts, conflates flawed aspects of Melvin's character, his bigotry and unfriendliness, with his disability. "[A]n obsession with order and cleanliness that translates into ritualistic behavior that is uncomfortable for people around [Melvin]… need not simultaneously translate into bigotry" (McRuer, 2006, p. 23). Culturally pervasive ableism, however, sadly all-too-readily equates disability with character flaws. McRuer is mindful of the manner in which *As Good As It Gets* is not concerned with truth or falseness of such claims about disability, "but with truth effects: the message that does not need to be sent, because it has already been received…" (p. 23). For McRuer, a great deal of cinema (of which he takes *As Good As It Gets* to be representative) is in particular danger of essentialising disability and shoring up its culturally pervasive tropes. However, it is not only the film itself, but also the subsequent analysis of it that might succumb to this danger. Any cultural product, such as a

literary work, a film or an opera, presents a narrative occurring within a world that is necessarily incomplete; only the elements of that world that are necessary for the storytelling at hand are embellished. Fragmented and unstructured, this is a world in which identity is therefore *inherently* more likely to be represented as essential and natural. In the type of film analysis found in *Crip Theory*, however, by stressing the particular social, political and institutional milieu within which Melvin's disability is inscribed, as well as relating it to other troping cultural conventions of the genre, McRuer effectively *re-worlds* the narrative and brings the implicit disability essentialism under critical scrutiny.

Of course, it should be stated, *As Good As It Gets* is, for all intents and purposes, set in the *real* and contemporary world. Exploring Melvin's disability with reference to the pathologizing institutional discourse of 20th century psychiatry is possible precisely because it actually features in the film's narrative: "At one point Melvin, clearly distressed, enters a building with the sign Fifth Avenue Psychiatric Group on the wall" (p. 22). However, no matter how real or fleshed out the setting of *As Good As It Gets* might be, the film can only ever represent those features of wider institutional discipline as far as they are useful for the film's narrative, ie. not nearly sufficiently enough to explore fully disability's contingency. Conversely, even films, literary works, operas etc. set in fictional or timeless worlds, might correspondingly be 're-worlded' and implicit systems of disciplinary power embellished; after all, fictional worlds emerge from real ones. The point here is that, where implicit relations of docility-utility are obscured within a narrative, disability, along with other marginalised minority identities ultimately remain individualised and essentialised; such relations are equivalently obscured regardless of whether the narrative's setting is 'real' or fictional. Indeed, in the analysis of cultural texts itself, there is perhaps also something unavoidably 'fixing' or essentialising about the in pursuit of identifying characters as disabled, the interpreter effectively taking on the role of diagnostician. Where disciplinary and pathologizing structures remain furtive within a text, such mechanisms are, in this sense, effectively transferred to an analytic mode.

McRuer's analysis of *As Good As It Gets*, whilst complicating disability representations, as shown above, highlights the use of subordinate disabled and queer subjectivities to "buttress" compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness. The supporting character of

Simon, Melvin's gay neighbour, can be understood as functioning to this end. Non-normative characters like Simon are now tolerated, McRuer explains, because of "recent historical emergence of queer/disabled subjects unwilling to acquiesce to their own abjection" (pg. 24) Given that queerness and disability would both threaten the "performance of [compulsory] able-bodied heterosexuality, both must be safely contained – embodied – in others". Simon's presence in the film serves to keep queerness/disability at a safe distance. Since queerness/disability must now be tolerated, such toleration is put to use, flexibly, to usher in compulsory heterosexuality and compulsory able-bodiedness. There are perhaps two ways in which this occurs. It is through Simon's counsel that the heterosexual relationship between Melvin and Carol is facilitated. Secondly, Simon figures as the *other* against which Melvin's heterosexuality and his (relative) able-bodiedness are defined and secured. The securing of Melvin's heterosexual able-bodiedness occurs through a series of what McRuer describes as "epiphanies" (p. 26). As he writes:

> … [Melvin's] links to representations of other people with disabilities dissolve, however, as [he] experiences a heteronormative epiphany: as his love affair with Carol develops, the behaviour audiences have been encouraged to look at slowly disappears, meaning that diagnosis of his condition is no longer relevant. The romance ends his isolation, of course, and he is represented at the end of the film not as a bigot but as a romantic with a heart of gold… The film concludes with a fairly traditional reconciliation between the male and female leads. In the last frame, as Melvin and Carol enter a bakery together, he realizes that he has stepped on a crack in the pavement. Thus the heteronormative epiphany that ends the film is once more visually linked in this frame to Melvin's own able-bodied epiphany. (pp. 24 - 28)

It is the taken-for-grantedness, or truth effect, of compulsory heterosexuality here that shores up compulsory able-bodiedness where disabled and queer subjectivities are merely, flexibly, tolerated as part of a narrative of overcoming. In this way, queer and disabled subjectivities enter the scene together (in the character of Simon) playing out as a narrative device that ultimately provokes Melvin's heterosexual epiphany – through such a transformation, Melvin is depicted as overcoming his disability, and "having served their purpose, Simon, disability, and queerness are then all hustled off-stage together." (p. 27).

These sorts of representations are certainly not the overt ableism or heterosexism that existed earlier in the 20th century, but offer a new, flexible form of oppression that characterises, for McRuer, the present neoliberal situation.

It is interesting, however, to bring the concept of an epiphany under a closer critical scrutiny than perhaps McRuer does. Epiphanies, for all their mystique, are characterised by the gaining of cognitive clarity, and a sense of being at-ease and whole. Such notions are inevitably bound up with ableist hierarchies that value normative forms of cognition over diverse ones. In this sense, heterosexual epiphanies are always constitutively able-bodied. In a similar manner, it could perhaps be argued that an able-bodied 'epiphany', a transformation, a cure, always correspondingly involves an element of (hetero)sexuality. I shall return to this point later as I argue that heteronormative institutions of domesticity (marriage and the family), productivity and futurity facilitate compulsory able-bodiedness.

Critically queer/disabled: crip subjectivities

Having drawn out, earlier, some of the ways in which the well-known proverb, 'The exception that proves the rule' can be useful for expanding the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality and ablebodiedness operate, it is worth noting that at least one alternative interpretation is possible. Whilst this particular usage is no longer commonly employed, the word 'prove' also can refer to a 'testing' of the rule rather than a 'confirming' of the rule (as was signified in my initial exploration of the proverb in relation to compulsory heterosexual able-bodiedness). In this second sense, then, queerness and disability challenge the dominant status of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness. That is to say that queer and disabled perspectives position themselves as a challenge to the hegemonic compulsory status of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness. McRuer, after Judith Butler, explores the inevitability surrounding the emergence of queer experiences to 'test' the status of heterosexuality, precisely because of heterosexuality's ultimate instability. "[H]eterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phatasmic idealization of itself – and *failing*. Precisely because it is bound to fail, and yet endeavors to succeed, the project of heterosexual identity is propelled into an endless repetition of itself" (Butler, 1991, p. 21). That 'endless repetition', in a neoliberal context, might be said to

constitute a flexible tolerance of a queer identity that 'refuses to acquiesce to its own abjection'. Butler argues for the inherent persistence of queer subjectivities:

> heterosexuality offers normative sexual positions that are intrinsically impossible to embody, and persistent failure to identify fully and without incoherence with these positions reveals heterosexuality itself not only as a compulsory law, but as an inevitable comedy. Indeed, I would offer this insight into heterosexuality as both a compulsory system and an intrinsic comedy, a constant parody of itself, as an alternative gay/lesbian perspective. (Butler, 1990, p. 122)

Butler is mindful of the inevitability of queer persistence, not merely because queer experiences always exist historically and will always refuse to be silenced (especially given heterosexuality's fiction), but also because there is always something inherently queer itself about the 'fetishistic' assertion of heterosexuality. Similarly, disability and disabled perspectives will always continue to challenge compulsory able-bodiedness precisely because able-bodiedness is itself inherently unstable. Furthermore, this instability is, in some senses, always already disabled. In this way, neoliberalism and postmodernity (re)produce a new homosexuality and disability as well as a new heterosexuality and ablebodiedness. As McRuer describes, the system of compulsory ablebodiedness creates crip identifications and practices even as it militates (or works) against them (McRuer, 2006, p. 35).

McRuer's central thesis then is this: that neoliberalism, as much as it flexibly tolerates queerness and disability, also produces new subjectivities. McRuer calls these new subjectivities *critically* queer and *critically* disabled perspectives. These emerge, 'testing' the rule of heterosexuality and able-bodiedness, but refusing mere accommodation and toleration. McRuer contrasts such critical subjectivities to the notion of *virtually* queer and disabled subjectivities (p. 30). Critical subjectivities, it can be said, arise out of virtual subjectivities in response to a neoliberal capitalist flexibility. Such critical positions tend to resist definition, however, because compulsory heterosexuality and able-bodiedness will always work to tolerate positions of alterity as much as it subordinates them (pg. 29), and, as a consequence, critical positions will be in a process of continually re-defining themselves. It is perhaps for this reason that McRuer anticipates the need for a continual inauguration of

new and expansive terminologies. For example, McRuer imaginatively positions the term 'severely' disabled as productive, with 'severe' performing subversive cultural work:

> 'Severely disabled'… would reverse the able-bodied understanding of severely disabled bodies as the most marginalized, the most excluded from a privileged and always elusive normalcy, and would instead suggest that it is precisely those bodies that are best positioned to refuse 'mere toleration' and to call out the inadequacies of compulsory able-bodiedness. (p. 31)

McRuer asserts that neither gender trouble nor ability trouble is sufficient to break down compulsory heterosexuality or compulsory able-bodiedness as "failure to approximate the norm… is not the same as the subversion the norm" (Butler, 1991, p. 22). Butler suggests that a critical perspective could operate subversively by "working the weakness in the norm". McRuer's work, then explores instances or moments, in society and in culture, where critically/severely queer and disabled perspectives can emerge and flourish. Much of this work involves a "talking back" to able-bodied and heterosexual "terms of containment" (McRuer, 2006, p. 40). In a similar manner to the usage of the word 'queer' to reclaim a derogatory term, the reclaiming of the derogatory disability term, 'cripple' does similarly subversive work; it is from this reclaiming that crip, and crip theory, emerge as critical terms.

McRuer's defines 'crip', as a subject position that relates to a critically, or severely disabled perspective, in this sense working as a corollary to 'queer'. Crip refers at times to a critically disabled position, used in parallel with a queer positionality; at other times, though, crip operates by incorporating a queer perspective. This means to say that sometimes Crip operates within the realm of queer. Sometimes in fact queer is crip, and crip is queer, owing to the way in which the compulsory nature of heterosexuality and ablebodiedness intimately links the two subjectivities. Queer subverts compulsory ablebodiedness, and crip subverts compulsory queerness. However, often crip subverts both compulsory ablebodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality together, at once. Crip is therefore an expansive positionality, both reframing queer with regards to disability but also expanding the concept to account for the ways in which subject identities are porous and intersectional. In this sense then, crip might be described as 'post-queer', but in other senses it invites queer to expand. McRuer is

mindful of the ways that other subjectivities must flourish to replace crip and queer. Indeed, there is not a sense in which crip and crip theory are intended to be the final say on expressions of disabled subjectivities. The fluctuating, dynamic positionality is crucial to McRuer's thesis: what is central, for him, is the way in which the terms queer and crip "might affect or effect certain desirable futures – feminist and antiracist mobilization, coalitional alliances. These desirable futures mark queer as a critical term, as crip is a critical term, that in various times and places must be displaced by other terms." (p. 41).

McRuer acknowledges the work of Sandahl where she explores the dissolving boundaries of queer and crip. Sandahl writes that crip is "fluid, and ever-changing, claimed by those whom it did not originally define" (2003, p. 27). Furthermore, she highlights that crip has come to include those with sensory and mental impairments as well as those with physical impairments whom it originally included. Shifts in the expansiveness in crip identifications have therefore seen a corresponding shift in political representation defining who is included under disability equality provision. In addition, Sandahl also raises the question of whether someone who is not currently disabled might identify as crip. There are instances of queer identifications by heterosexual people (though these have certainly not been without controversy), but Sandahl notes that this has not necessarily been as seriously considered in a crip setting. Following this, McRuer explores why crip identifications by nondisabled people are always going to be unlikely: firstly, that a (dis)identification involves an ongoing process, that material advantages do not disappear merely because of an initial disavowal. Secondly, a dissent from the binary division of disabled and nondisabled requires nonetheless a recognition of that binary anyway. Thirdly, that there is a fine line between refusal / dissent and a patronising tolerance and appropriation. Effectively, in exploring this tricky area, McRuer seems also to be providing the first steps towards a theory of allyship, exploring how one can tread the boundaries between a dissent from hegemonic structures without mobilising a patronising tolerance. Perhaps dissent from binary divisions proves to be an inevitable challenging in and of itself: a disavowal of binary distinctions perhaps unwittingly serves to create a further theoretical division than inevitably ends up being hierarchical, namely the binary division between binarism and non-binarism themselves.

McRuer introduces the term disidentification as the way in which the hegemonic apparatus of identification is rejected for some other way of claiming identity. In this sense, crip and cripping involve a disidentification rather than a mere identification. Munoz speaks about disidentifications in his book: Disidentification: *Queers of colour and the Performance of Politics* (1999) and it is in this vein that McRuer applies disidentification to Crip.

McRuer suggests that his own project of tentatively positioning a 'crip theory' steers towards the risky side of the theoretical position, stretching the boundaries of crip (dis)identifications. For him, nondisabled (responding to Sandahl) possibilities of coming out crip are indeed imaginable. He explores, with caution, his own coming out crip in which he talks about, with reference to his HIV serostatus, omitting to declare which 'side of the condom' his exposure to the virus was.

An interesting contemporary debate within popular culture might illuminate the point about the fluidity of the term crip. In 2002 Christine and the Queens' popular song 'Cripple' rose to popularity. The term cripple in the song is used expansively, seemingly standing in place of 'queer' and speaking to queerness' need for fluidity. However, the song's title had a controversial reception and was retitled 'Tilted' as a way of avoiding causing offense with the use of the word 'cripple'. "Yes I actually do enjoy being a cripple" were the original lyrics. In some ways this was an ambiguous disidentification. 'Tilted' is an interesting alternative choice of title to 'Cripple'. Perhaps the word 'tilted' speaks to compulsory 'harmony', 'balance', 'wholeness', and 'symmetry' which are all aspects of compulsory ablebodiedness. Tilted also speaks defiantly and in contrast to compulsory 'straightness'. The analytical power of this alternative word to 'crip' resonates with the idea that other terms can and do emerge fluidly to work critically both with but also against queer and crip. However, in addition, there is a sense that tilted works as a flexible response to crip and queer subjectivities.

McRuer explores how Anzaldúa's (1987) queer writing about race can be used as a model for the way in which Crip might work more broadly than cultural work that could be done by the term disabled. Anzaldúa was a queer theorist whose writings often have a problematic relationship to the canon of queer writing. McRuer explores how, in part, this is due to the historical failure of queer theory to acknowledge queer positionalities outside of the higher

economic countries. McRuer suggests that Anzaldúa might properly be considered a pioneer in the field of queer theory, regardless of whether Anzaldúa's usage of the term queer in a critical academic context was the germinating instance. McRuer suggests that certain crip theorists have tried to connect Anzaldúa to crip theory, attempting to draw links between crip and the health issues that Anzaldua experienced in later life and the impact of this on her writing. However, whilst McRuer resists this oversimplification, he notes that that crip nonetheless runs throughout Anzaldúa's analysis. McRuer highlights the subjectivities that Anzaldúa produces: "The squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead: in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'." (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 3). Anzaldúa's theory of Borderlands and Bridge Building is one that McRuer identifies as part of a crip project. Perhaps there are indeed ways to think about Anzaldúa's and McRuer's crip as building a theoretical grounding to a sense of allyship – a queer, racial, crip allyship. This aspect of crip theory is potentially of importance to my project investigating the representations of disability in the stage works of Benjamin Britten. Queer and displaced readings of Britten's works might in this way have a direct crip subjectivity-building effect. Essentially, rather than speculating how Britten might have related to disability rights movements had he lived and worked through the 80s and 90s, the concept of crip might open a possibility for reading Britten's work as directly involved in a fluidly crip project.

Perhaps, having explored crip theory in some detail here, it becomes possible to think back to the nature of McRuer's understanding of intersectionality. Clearly, the relationship between queer and crip is multifaceted and is of course futher inflected by location, time, race, class etc. Queer and crip sometime enter together as queercrip; at other times, crip brings queer onto the stage; sometimes queer brings crip onto the stage. It is common practice for two interrelated concepts to be described in academic settings as 'bedfellows'. It might be possible to draw out significance from such a metaphor of queer and crip being bedfellows, and there is certainly something particularly queer about the usage of such language in an academic context: the terms seem almost to be operating 'reverse-euphemistically'. Perhaps then, the relationship of Crip and Queer might be productively reimagined as romantic. The term might also be expressed (in a disability register) in terms of interdependence, and a rejection of compulsory individualism. Intersectionality then gains

an important insight – the interconnectedness of alternative, non-hegemonic subjectivities must always be contestatory, given that any conjunctional analysis, even non-additive modes, must also proceed from distinctions; crip resists this by continuously refusing definition.

Indeed, there is an interesting moment in chapter 2 where McRuer clarifies: “this is not a diagnosis, and is not intended to provoke a rehabilitation”. This is interesting from a representation perspective. Representations often are accompanied by a normative claim, particularly with respects to psycho-pathologizing discourse. In this sense, a representation Enacts a sort of ‘fixing’, and a fixing perhaps brings about a sense of discipline or rehabilitation. The analysis of the representational process can participate, in this way, in the pathologizing process. This is particularly prevalent in a literary studies tendency towards and involvement in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic literary studies tread the often difficult line between close readings and a seemingly truth-discovering discernment. A recent video-essay discussing the mental illness of the Joker in the most recent film, treads this line carefully. Instead, McRuer suggests that a close reading is possible, one that does not fix an analysis but offers other possible worlds. In an accessible, cripped world, a hierarchy of representational interpretations would not be relevant, and this is what queer or crip readings proffer. This is a particularly pertinent offering with regards to my own project – analyses of operatic characters, in examining a portrayal of disability, will often follow a rigid, fixing path where the burden of proof sits on the side of a compulsory ablebodiedness that insists upon an ablebodied reading unless disability invokes some sense of narrative flexibility. To read as crip representations that may or may not often be read as such is to engage in important critical work that destabilises compulsory ablebodiedness and compulsory heterosexuality. In this sense the subversive act of cripping cuts through reality, into the narrative, unsettling and unmooring texts and the critical frameworks that render them legible. My endeavour here is thus to deploy the conjoined concepts of cripping and queering both to explore and trouble our understanding of Britten’s work.

Chapter 5 – Analysis I: Representations of Madness in Peter Grimes' mad-scene

Introduction

Claire Seymour (2004) has a chapter on Britten's grand opera, *Peter Grimes* (Op. 33), throughout which she punctuates her analysis with the question, "Who is [Peter] Grimes?" (pp. 41, 61). There is certainly an air of elusiveness and persistent ambiguity that surrounds the operatic protagonist. Seymour is of course only one of many who have pondered Peter Grimes' nature and the opera's meaning since it was first performed in 1945[15], and a lively interpretive musicological debate continues to this day: Harper-Scott's (2010) existential contextualisation of the character of Grimes being a recent significant scholarly contribution.[16] On the whole, the most prominent interpretations of the opera seek broadly to outline the way in which the character of Grimes is mistreated by and excluded from his wider community (the Borough), ultimately leading to his tragic death. A number of these scholarly responses to *Peter Grimes* have, in part, been shaped by comments made by Britten and Pears themselves. In an interview, where he spoke about the earliest stages of the opera's development, Britten remarked:

> A central feeling for us was that of the individual against the crowd, with ironic overtones for our own situation. As conscientious objectors we were out of it. We couldn't say we suffered physically, but naturally we experienced tremendous tension. I think it was partly this feeling which led us to make Grimes a character of vision and conflict, the tortured idealist he is... (Britten, cited in Carpenter, 1992, pp. 203)

Following this prompt, certain scholarly interpretations of the opera have placed Grimes' persecution in the particular context of wartime politics, Britten's conscientious objection and his pacifism. Wilson (1947), for instance, suggests that "*Peter Grimes* is the whole of the

[15] *Peter Grimes* was given its first performance on 7th June, 1945 at Sadler's Wells Theatre in London. Reginald Goodall was the conductor. Pears performed the title role and was joined by Joan Cross as Ellen Orford.
[16] I spotlight Harper-Scott's recent (at the time of writing) work here in order to emphasise that questions surrounding Peter Grimes certainly remain issues of high contemporary relevance.

bombing, machine-gunning, mining, torpedoing, ambushing humanity, which talks about a guaranteed standard of living yet does nothing but wreck its own works…" (pp. 223-224). Overall though, whilst Britten's remarks on the matter appear to be somewhat definitive, it is the more generalised and universal theme of the 'individual against society' to which many scholarly analytical interpretations of *Peter Grimes* have attended. In this vein, Pears expressed:

> Grimes is not a hero nor is he an operatic villain. He is not a sadist nor a demonic character, and the music quite clearly shows that. He is very much of an ordinary weak person who, being at odds with the society in which he finds himself, tries to overcome it and, in doing so, offends against the conventional code, is classed by society as a criminal, and destroyed as such. There are plenty of Grimeses around still, I think! (Pears, 1946).

Others have, in the light of Britten's sexuality and his relationship with Pears, offered queer readings of *Peter Grimes* (and indeed of Britten's operas more generally); most famously, Brett (1977, 1983), but also, significantly, Hindley (1992, 1995), and Whitesell (2003) all suggest, to varying degrees, that queerness, in particular, is an important interpretive key to the opera and that the borough's exclusion of Grimes can broadly be understood in relation to mid-twentieth-century homophobia. Yet others have elaborated religious and spiritual interpretations, especially through exploration of the Christian theological concept of soteriology, concerned with themes of salvation, redemption, and atonement (in particular, Allen, 2003; Hoekama, 2015). Elliot (2006) is clear that he does not necessarily see *Peter Grimes* as a "Christian parable – there is no apparent redemption" though he suggests that "it is a moral parable, and the parable has Christian implications and a strong Christian undertone" (p. 127). It is, however, my contention that the discussion about Grimes' character and meaning, in addition to the particular interpretations mentioned above, can be enriched by reading Britten's opera in close relation to disability.

The psychopathological reading of the character of Grimes

One of the main aims of this chapter is to demonstrate that disability is indeed already a significant latent feature of the discourse surrounding *Peter Grimes*, albeit one that is rarely

announced as disability directly. Throughout the scholarship, both in the opera's initial critical reception, and in its subsequent musicological interpretation and analysis, the character of Grimes has frequently been described using (often moralistic) psychopathological terms. I give further elaboration to this point throughout this chapter, but I am referring here to the way in which Eric Blom (1945), for instance, reporting on the first production of the opera at Sadler's Wells, suggests that *Peter Grimes* is "a study of a distempered character…".[17] A further example is White (1970), who, in his analysis of the opera, refers to the operatic protagonist as "what might be called a maladjusted aggressive psychopath" (p. 116). The psychopathological reading of Grimes has been notably persistent and has latterly even achieved medical/psychiatric credentials. Published in *Medical Humanities*, psychiatrist - Durà-Vilà and musicologist - Bentley (2009) suggest:

> throughout the opera we hear and see accumulating evidence of his psychopathology… From a psychiatric point of view, the character of Grimes shows a complex combination of several personality traits belonging to different personality disorders (such as schizoid and dissocial)… Grimes appears to have, at the very least, personality traits, if not personality disorder, although one might question whether the composer fully intended this particular interpretation (Durà-Vilà and Bentley, 2009, p. 108).

Similarly, Cordingly (2015) gives the character of Grimes something of a psychiatric diagnosis as he writes: "[Grimes'] dysfunctional and self-destructive behaviour lies way beyond what would generally be considered as normality. An assessment reveals that he has many of the traits […] consistent with Cluster A: paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal personality disorder" (p. 75). For the present purposes, I am not particularly interested in confirming or denying the accuracy of this sort of diagnosis. Rather, I am merely suggesting that its presence alludes to cognitive disability. Those who describe Grimes using psychopathologizing language do not necessarily have anything like the full richness of meaning and cultural significance of the term (cognitive) disability in mind when writing. However, I contend that such a reading of

[17] Use of the specific word 'distempered' is possibly adopted from Crabbe's description of his own characterisation of Grimes.

Grimes, though somewhat limited in scope, nonetheless sets a precedent for a closer reading of Grimes in relation to cognitive disability.

The social reading of the character of Grimes

In addition (and perhaps in contrast) to the use of psychopathologizing language to describe (and even diagnose) Grimes, there is another enduring strand of the scholarship that turns out to be of relevance to notions of disability and to a disability studies perspective. Pears' comment (to which I have referred above) that Grimes is "at odds with the society in which he finds himself" (1946, p. 3) places the societal oppression and social exclusion that the character of Grimes is made to face in sharp relief. In a similar vein, E.M. Forster (1972) writes of Britten's Grimes: "We leave him with knowledge that it is society who has sinned, and with compassion" and, considering Grimes' tragedy, that "[t]he community is to blame" (p. 179); as Brett (1983) puts it, *Peter Grimes* evinces "the social experience of oppression" (p. 192). A notably comprehensive analytical study of the mechanics of Grimes' oppression is found in Rupprecht (2001) as he outlines the ways in which the Borough uses Grimes' name against him as a form of violence. Rupprecht attends to the sense in which, throughout the opera, Grimes comes to internalize such "hate speech" (pp. 52-62) and is ultimately directed, by society, towards his "self-destruction" (p. 51). A social reading of *Peter Grimes* attends far more closely to the ways in which Grimes is mistreated by the Borough community than to any aspects pertaining to his essential nature. Thus, from such a perspective, the borough's designation of Grimes as pariah, as outsider, as outcast, is ultimately an arbitrary one.

The psychopathological reading versus the social reading

Whilst psychopathological descriptions of Grimes' character allude to cognitive disability, social readings of the opera might seem to lead away from such an interpretation, at least in the first instance. This is to say that the greater the extent to which Grimes' situation is understood to be a social matter, the less appears to be stated about his essential (supposedly psychopathological) nature. If we are to read Grimes as being unjustly victimised by the wider Borough community, certain seemingly unusual (non-normative) aspects of his behaviour come to be explained—perhaps we might even say that they come to be explained away. Grimes' interactions in the courtroom during the opera's prologue, his interjection in the local tavern (the "Great Bear" aria of Act 1), his aggressive outbursts with Ellen and with his boy

apprentice in Act 2, and of course the so-called mad-scene of Act 3, Scene 2 are all particular moments where his psychopathological nature is supposedly most obvious. A social interpretation of the opera, however, would suggest that these moments can instead be viewed as entirely reasonable and rational (i.e. normative) responses to the experiences of pervasive societal exclusion and marginalisation.

Admittedly, I have perhaps devised something of a false dichotomy here, between the psychopathological and the social readings of *Peter Grimes*. Thus far, I have presented these interpretations is as if the two are entirely separate and competing ways of understanding the opera. As it happens though, the two readings are most often thoroughly interwoven throughout the discourse, at least in certain respects. Those readings that, on balance, give greater attention to Grimes' social situation (over and above aspects of his essential character, that is), do nonetheless maintain that certain moments of the opera can best be described in psychopathological terms. A social reading would have it that Grimes' behaviour in Act 3, Scene 2 (in particular) can be understood to be the deleterious culmination of the borough's pervasive mistreatment of him. However, even from such a perspective, this moment of the opera is nevertheless understood to be a so-called mad-scene. Grimes' behaviour here is practically unanimously interpreted as non-normative and it is invariably described using some form of psychpathologizing language regardless of the extent to which its causal factors are identified as social. Such a reading of *Peter Grimes* then, to put it another way, would have it that Grimes is driven mad by the borough's mistreatment of him, but that he is nonetheless mad, all the same. Moreover, even those accounts of the opera that quite overtly read the essential character of Grimes in psychopathological terms do nonetheless acknowledge the negative impact of the Borough upon him. I am thinking here especially of the psychiatric accounts of Durà-Vilà and Bently (2009), and Cordingly (2015). With reference to the *Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition* (DSM-IV) (American Pyschiatric Association, 1994) and the *International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision* (ICD-10) (World Health Organisation, 1994), Durà-Vilà and Bently write:

> In act 3, scene 2, Grimes has a 'mad scene' that could lead, according to DSM-IV, to a diagnosis of a 'brief psychotic disorder (298.8) with marked stressors ('acute and transient psychotic disorder with associated acute stress' (F23.81), according to ICD-

> 10). The extreme emotional distress that Grimes has been subjected to precipitates an acute and transient psychotic state, with an eventual return to his premorbid level of functioning before the opera's finale (2009, p. 108).

In this view, prior to the opera's conclusion, whereas the borough community "see Grimes as mad", "Britten is clearly leading us to a different interpretation" (p. 108). Referring to Grimes' "Great Bear" aria at the end of Act 1, Durà-Vilà and Bentley continue: "Although Grimes' 'poem' could superficially seem thought-disordered, one cannot escape the conclusion that the genuineness of the music is leading us to a different interpretation of his words" (p. 108). For Durà-Vilà and Bentley then, it is only the concluding scenes of the opera where Grimes can properly be interpreted as psychopathological. Cordingly (2015) defines Grimes's behaviour in the mad-scene, somewhat differently, not as evidence of a psychotic state as such (as Durà-Vilà and Bentley do), "but rather a dissociative response, a brief psychotic episode in a vulnerable personality confronted by the reality of being accused of murder" (Cordingly, 2015, p. 83). From this perspective, Grimes' extreme affective state in Act 3, Scene 2 is the result of a broader societal mistreatment upon his underlying psychopathological personality disorder. Thus, in both of these ostensibly psychopathological accounts of Grimes, society is nevertheless implicated, to a degree. For Cordingly, societal factors exacerbate aspects of Grimes' underlying psychopathological nature; for Durà-Vilà and Bentley, however, society (the Borough) is ultimately the origin of it.

In sum, much of the *Grimes* scholarship evidently merges psychopathological and social readings of the opera. Socially oriented readings never fully divest Grimes of his psychopathological credentials. Conversely, readings that, on balance, emphasise Grimes' psychopathology, nonetheless admit a degree of social mediation. However, very little, if any, scholarly attention has hitherto been given to the potential inconsistencies inherent in such combinations. For any given interpretation of the opera, psychopathological aspects seem to strengthen the argument that Grimes' death is an inevitable, albeit tragic, consequence of his essential nature. On the other hand, aspects pertaining to Grimes' social situation appear significantly to weaken that particular conceit. Such aspects scrutinise the behaviour of the Borough towards Grimes, and thus, in relation to his persecution and his subsequent death, tend to emphasise the sheer arbitrariness of Grimes' nature. Throughout much of the

discourse surrounding *Peter Grimes* then, where the psychopathological and social readings converge, something of a pervasive internal contradiction emerges, one which has been persistently evaded throughout the scholarship. In my own reading of the opera, I choose, however, to foreground this inherent tension. I turn towards, rather than away from, contradictions between aspects of Grimes' essential, non-normative, nature and those of his social situation; in this regard, I find the insights and language of disability studies and disability theory to be particularly illuminating.

A disability studies approach to the interpretation of Grimes

Adopting traditional disability studies terminology, we might say, of the Britten scholarship, that the psychopathological descriptions of Grimes' character are chiefly concerned with matters of impairment—that is "the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment": Disabled People's International (DPI) definition (Disabled Peoples International, 1982; Goodley, 2017, p. 9). Contrastingly, we might contend that the readings of the opera that attend to Grimes' oppression engage, rather, the social category of disability—that is "the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers": the DPI definition (Disabled Peoples International, 1982; Goodley, 2017, p. 9). Indeed, going further, we might even entertain that the psychopathological (impairment) readings of Grimes most closely align with individual deficit and medical models of disability. The social interpretations of the opera accordingly correspond, we might also be tempted to suggest, with the social model of disability.

However, as I considered earlier in this thesis, impairment and disability are both complex and slippery concepts and the attempt to draw a rigid distinction between them is somewhat fraught. A critical disability studies perspective highlights, among other things, both the need to (re)attend to the embodied aspects of disability and to consider the ways in which impairment is itself as socially and culturally constructed as is disability. Work within the field of critical disability studies, therefore, questions the traditional disability studies claim that the social model is the definitive way to speak about disability. In response to criticism that the social model has received since he first articulated the concept, Oliver (2013), however, clarifies that the notion, strictly speaking, had a very specific strategic aim in the context of

1980s British disability politics. The model was never intended to be an all-encompassing, rigorous ontological argument about disability. Rather, the social model merely sought to shed light on the ways in which British societal, political and economic structures had a negative impact on disabled people's lives, and that the situation for disabled people could be improved by making changes to society. Oliver states: "I have never seen the social model as anything more than a tool to improve people's lives and I have been happy to agree that it does not do many of the things its opponents criticise it for not doing" (p. 1025). Thus, I contend that the social model, the individual (medical) model and the notion of a rigid distinction between disability and impairment clearly do not form an entirely appropriate framework for the critical analysis and interpretation of *Peter Grimes*, or of any other cultural text, for that matter. Furthermore, given that the *Peter Grimes* scholarship most often presents something of a combination of the psychopathological (impairment-related) and the social (disability-related) interpretations, any notion that the discourse could be categorised and separated into two distinct strands is ultimately untenable anyway. However, I maintain that a conceptual distinction between impairment and disability does prove to be of some provisional use for the present purposes. By deploying both the terms impairment and disability in relation to *Peter Grimes* and subsequently exploring the inherent contradictions in doing so, I come to the following conclusion: that *Peter Grimes* and the scholarship surrounding it can effectively be said to play out—or indeed to dramatize—the tension between impairment and disability, a tension which has itself been a central debate and point of renegotiation within the field of critical disability studies for at least the past two decades.

Given that the opera can so readily be interpreted in such terms, it seems rather curious that, for the most part, the scholarship surrounding *Peter Grimes* has hitherto neglected to consider the insights of disability studies. Given the pervasiveness of the psychopathological strands of the discourse surrounding *Peter Grimes*, even outside of a disability studies context, I find it surprising that word "disability" has not more frequently been used in the interpretation of the opera. There are, I think, two likely reasons for this: firstly, although disability has been defined in UK legislation with reference to both physical and mental (cognitive) disability since the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944 (incidentally, the year prior to the premier of *Peter Grimes*), the term is nonetheless still pervasively assumed to refer primarily to physical disability. Indeed, one major criticism of the British disability

rights activism of the 1960s and 1970s was the way in which the perspectives of cognitively disabled people were often excluded. The UPIAS (1976), for instance, initially defined disability solely with reference to physical impairment, though this was fortunately later expanded by the disabled people's movement to take greater account of cognitive and sensory disability as well (Barnes, 2007, p. 207). Furthermore, anecdotally, when discussing my research on an informal basis with others, outside of an academic setting, and when suggesting that the character of Peter Grimes can be read in relation to disability, I have frequently been met with responses along the line of: "but madness isn't a proper disability, is it?".

Secondly, in the analysis of *Grimes*, psychopathologizing language is often used to point to some other, supposedly grander, interpretive claim. In this way, the societal marginalisation and oppression that the character of Grimes experiences throughout the opera come to be interpreted, rather than in disability terms, in relation to hostile mid-twentieth-century attitudes towards queerness (Brett, 1977), to the marginalisation experienced by those with dissenting attitudes to war (Wilson, 1947) and, in religious terms, to the problem of evil (Elliot, 2016). Although disability and impairment can both be identified as important aspects at the centre of Grimes' characterisation, they are rarely acknowledged in the final interpretation. Thus, throughout my analysis that follows, I am reminded of Bérubé's contribution to literary disability studies (2016) in which he states that "disability has a funny way of popping up everywhere without announcing itself *as* disability" (p. 1). By attending *tout court* to the representation of disability in *Peter Grimes* (in some senses, we might say, resisting a certain interpretive impulse), I am able to read Grimes' exclusion more directly in relation to disability-prejudice and dis/ableism.

A notable exception to the pervasive scholarly evasion of a disability reading of *Grimes*, however, is found in the work of David Horne (2018). As part of his lecture series at the Royal Northern College of Music on 20th-century opera, Horne suggests that we know that the character of Peter Grimes "has a disability, a mental illness: we don't know what it is, but clearly there is something there" (Horne, 2018). Consequently, this observation allows Horne to draw close connections between *Peter Grimes* and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, between Peter Grimes's cognitive disability and Porgy's physical disability respectively, and to reflect

upon the mutual mechanics of societal disability oppression of the two operas. Kennedy (1981) had already drawn broader similarities between the two operas, and it is interesting to note the way in which Horne's disability reading of *Peter Grimes* allows him to elaborate on those connections in particularly rich ways. Though Horne is not necessarily explicitly invested in a disability studies approach, his reading of disability and disability oppression in *Grimes* (and *Porgy and Bess*) is nonetheless highly politicised. Elsewhere, writing more specifically from a literary disability studies perspective, Edgar Schneider (1999) points to the character of Peter Grimes (and indeed a number of Britten's other operatic protagonists to boot) in relation to his own autism. I will comment further on both Horne and Schneider's respective disability readings of *Peter Grimes*, but it is worth acknowledging here that, together, they represent uncommon exceptions to an as-of-yet underdeveloped disability reading of *Peter Grimes* (and, indeed Britten's operas more generally), to which my work attends.

Peter Grimes in the database of musical representations of disability

One further reference to disability in relation to *Peter Grimes* (as opposed merely to the psychopathological descriptions of his character and the deployment of disability as metaphor, that is) is found in the database of musical representations of disability, maintained by the SMT-AMS (https://www.lsu.edu/faculty/bhowe/disability-representation.html). As I highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, the database has been developed within a music and disability studies context with one of its main aims being to highlight the ubiquitous presence of disability in musical works (and in stage works, especially). I shall return to the specific entry on *Peter Grimes* shortly, but I want to take a moment to reflect upon the way in which entries to the database, in spite of its stated aim, only directly identify instances of impairment within musical works (without necessarily referring to the full richness of meaning of disability, as such). I would argue that disability representation (as opposed to the representation of impairment, that is) can thus only be gleaned from the database somewhat indirectly. Strictly speaking, representations of impairment only formally become about disability in two senses: either in relation to the sorts of interactions that impaired characters have with others in a given text, or operatic work (the sorts of interaction that have been given theoretical elaboration by Ato Quayson (2007) and his concept of aesthetic nervousness; or through the sorts of responses that the presence and

portrayal of impairment elicits in the reader (or the audience), outside of and in response to the text. Nonetheless, the SMT-AMS database does do disability representation work insofar as it calls attention to the sheer pervasiveness of representations of impairment in musical works. In this sense, the database sheds light on the fundamental disparity between the ubiquitous presence of impairment in the repertoire and the relative inattention given to disability/impairment in the scholarly literature surrounding it. Thus, the database calls us to reflect somewhat upon the politics of compulsory ablebodiedness and the (in)visibility of disability (both its conspicuous absence and its invisible presence, that is). It is for this reason, that I take the SMT-AMS database to be a particularly useful starting point for the exploration of disability representation in Britten's operas, and for the present purposes, *Peter Grimes* in particular.

The database holds that *Peter Grimes* features a representation of "mental illness (madness)" in that the character of Grimes "exhibit[s] irrational behaviour and delusions…". In addition, it is noted that "…[he] is depicted as a social outlier". Throughout the second half of this chapter, I attend to Grimes' so-called madness, his "irrational behaviour and delusions", giving especial focus towards what has variously been described as his mad-scene (Act 3, Scene 2 of the opera). I find this to a be a particularly useful way in which to begin my discussion about the character of Peter Grimes in relation to cognitive disability. As I have highlighted above, both the psychopathological and social strands of the *Grimes* scholarship maintain, at least to some degree, that the events of Act 3, Scene 2 are evidence of Peter Grimes' madness. Though there is somewhat less agreement over whether Grimes is to be read in relation to cognitive disability throughout the earlier moments of the opera, there is broadly a consensus that, at the opera's conclusion, Grimes does indeed go (or rather is driven) mad.

Madness, of course, is a rather ambiguous and controversial term. Its use, as Scull (2011, 2015) acknowledges, might seem somewhat anachronistic, inappropriate, and even offensive; by and large, in contemporary society, to call someone mad is considered pejorative and stigmatizing. Indeed, the present-day field of psychiatry might see the use of the term madness as "a provocation, an implicit rejection of their claims to expertise in the

diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders, and symptomatic of a wilful refusal to accept the findings of modern medical science" (Scull, 2011, p. 1). Common sense then might dictate that the term mental illness be used in preference to that of madness as a softer, more enlightened, modern alternative. However, as Scull continues, "madness was a term widely and unselfconsciously employed by both sufferers and their would-be healers, as well as by society at large" throughout Western history until only two centuries ago (p. 2). The term madness, alongside its various cognates, including the terms insanity, lunacy, craziness, unreason, and at times idiocy, only gradually became linguistically taboo through the 19th century. Given that Britten's operatic protagonist is based upon George Crabbe's 1810 poetic characterisation of Grimes, and that the opera itself is seemingly set loosely at around the same period, the use of the term madness in relation to Peter Grimes is indeed thus quite appropriate.

Moreover, in his analysis of disability aesthetics in modernist music, Straus (2018) justifies his deployment of the term madness in preference to that of mental illness as he, following the general trend of disability studies, argues strongly against the reduction of disability to pathology (p. x). He highlights that alongside such a medical model approach, under which "madness is partitioned into (endlessly shifting) diagnostic categories, and normalizing cures are sought for these apparent diseases" (p. 89), there has also historically been a tradition of conceptualising madness in religious terms, "as a mark of divine punishment or transcendent vision" (p. 89). This seeming paradoxical formulation of madness as both punishment from God and divine blessing, has additionally persisted throughout history in secular settings. In what might be termed a moral model, madness has been seen both as a sign of moral failure as well as denoting rather the opposite, purity and innocence. However, in contrast to medical, religious and moral conceptions, Straus exhorts a way of thinking through madness (and disability more broadly) in which it can be understood "as a (potentially valuable) human difference rather than a deficit, pathology or disease" (p. 89). Such a perspective strives to look beyond the religious, medical and moral models towards something altogether more socio-politically situated; it is in this spirit that the present research proceeds. To employ the term mental illness exclusively over that of madness in my analysis of Britten's music then, would be to ignore the significance of the other ways in which madness has been reckoned

with culturally throughout the centuries and would be to miss the opportunity to perceive disability as potentially valuable, claimable difference.

Following the exploration of Grimes' madness, I shall then turn, in the next chapter, to consider the way in which SMT-AMS database describes Grimes as a "social outlier". In some senses, this identification is striking: the notion of the social outlier resonates far more strongly with social constructivist accounts of disability than with the instances of impairment which, as I have discussed above, tend to be the database's primary concern. That the category of the social outlier should be included in the database alongside categories of impairment is intriguing. Given that the notion of the social outlier presumably refers to social, interpersonal and, significantly, behavioural norms, I will come to argue that *Peter Grimes* can usefully be interpreted in relation to (what might be termed) developmental disability.

Developmental disability, as I have explored in chapter 3, confounds the distinction between disability and impairment in important ways. Descriptions (and even medical diagnoses) of developmental disability often tend to be articulated in relation to the idea of "normal" (normative) social behaviour. The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th Ed.) (DMV-5), an international standard reference used by medical practitioners, gives one diagnostic criterion for Autism Spectrum Disorder, for instance, as: "Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation…" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 50). Thinking about developmental disability (and indeed cognitive disability, more broadly) in impairment-related terms, inherently betrays its own social contingency.[18] In considering the character of Peter Grimes in relation to cognitive disability and developmental disability, I find Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (2011) critical theoretical elaboration of the terms misfit and misfitting, and the concepts of neurodivergence and neurodiversity (Singer, 2017) to be particularly generative as I seek to trouble and traverse the disability/impairment binary.

[18] We might even suggest that it is true to say that impairment, more generally, also betrays its own contingency. In a sense, impairment is always already disability.

I am, however, mindful of a further statement made by Bérubé (2016) in relation to the literary and cultural study of disability: his imperative to move away from the mere identification of characters within texts as disabled; he writes with a certain sense of characteristic dry irony: "I am determined to cure disability studies of its habit of diagnosing fictional characters" (p. 20). Bérubé is more interested in the ways in which disability can be deployed as a text's "ethical core"[19], that is, the way in which disability (or rather, certain ideological attitudes towards ability and disability) structures the unfolding of narrative and the construction of textual meaning; we might say, the way in which disability pre-exists the text. For Bérubé, to give sole focus to the identification, or as he puts it "diagnosis", of fictional characters as disabled is therefore to miss the point somewhat. In this sense, I seek to draw out the ways in which disability is deployed structurally, or formally, in *Peter Grimes*, rather than merely to present the case that (cognitive) disability is Grimes' definitive interpretive key. Thus, to use a turn of phrase employed by Prystash (2018) in interview with Bérubé, I make something of an interpretive move from "content to form".

This is not to say, however, that the elaboration of aspects of Grimes' character relating to disability is not important work: indeed, for too long, readings of *Peter Grimes* (whether queer, spiritual, political or, indeed, philosophical) have, as I have highlighted above, relied upon the symbolic use of (cognitive) disability to make their interpretive claims—we might say that, for too long, the meaning of disability, qua disability, has been deferred. Mitchell and Snyder (2000) call this phenomenon, the deployment of a disability as mere symbol, "the materiality of metaphor". They suggest that, "while stories rely upon the potency of disability as a symbolic figure, they rarely take up disability as an experience of social or political dimensions" (p. 48); Mitchell and Snyder coin the term *narrative prosthesis* to refer to this "pervasive dependency of artistic, cultural, and philosophical discourses upon the powerful alterity assigned to people with disabilities" (2000, p. 51). By recapturing the way in which Grimes is characterised (or is at least coded) as cognitively disabled (or neurodivergent) throughout the opera, I seek to re-establish disability as lived, social and political experience rather than reducing its status to that of mere metaphor.

[19] Bérubé takes the term from Quayson (2007, p. 19)

Thus, in attending both to the way in which disability emerges as an aspect of Grimes' character and, simultaneously, turning away from disability-as-diagnosis towards disability as a structuring aspect of the opera, my move from content to form might more accurately be described as a refutation of the very distinction between form and content—a distinction, which, as I demonstrate throughout this chapter, is ultimately rendered untenable by Britten's operas, and by *Peter Grimes* in particular. In other words, in its characterisation of disability and its structural deployment of disability, *Peter Grimes*, I will come to conclude, crips the literary, cultural and artistic distinction between form and content. Before proposing that the character of Peter Grimes can be read as a mad, neuroqueercrip misfit (theoretical, category-bursting terms that will all be given further elaboration later in this thesis), I must first turn to the source material on which Britten's opera was based: George Crabbe's *The Borough* (1810).

George Crabbe's The Borough and the portrayal of Peter Grimes' madness

Britten's opera is loosely based on an 1810 collection of poems by George Crabbe, *The Borough*; Britten's operatic fisherman Peter Grimes, and he of Crabbe's poetry make for an interesting comparison. Whilst Britten's portrayal of Grimes is largely sympathetic, Crabbe, however, depicts his Grimes as brutally violent and criminal. E.M. Forster (1941) wrote about Crabbe's poetry in his essay for *The Listener*, which, famously, was the catalyst for Britten and Pears' return to England after their emigration to the United States in 1939, and indeed was to be the impetus for the development of Britten's grand operatic adaptation of Crabbe's poetry (see, for instance Walter White, 1970, p. 35; Brett, 1983, p. x; Carpenter, 1992, pp. 155-157). In his article, Forster described Crabbe's Grimes vividly as a "savage fisherman who murdered his apprentices and was haunted by their ghosts", referring to him as "the criminal Grimes" (Brett, 1983, p. 4). Peter Grimes is by no means the sole subject of *The Borough*, nor is he necessarily the most prominent character. Indeed, Grimes only appears in one of the 24 separate poems (or Letters) which together make up the larger collection. Clearly Britten's decision to position Grimes as the subject of an entire opera thus owes significantly to *The Listener* essay and the way in which the character of Grimes was foregrounded by Forster's reading.

In Letter XXII of *The Borough*, Grimes, as a youth, murders his own father, a violence which casts a shadow over his adult life. Crabbe describes Grimes' character rather bluntly: "With greedy eye, he looked on all he saw, / He knew not justice and he laughed at law; / On all he marked he stretched his ready hand; / He fished by water and he filched by land" (Crabbe, 1810, *Letter XXII*, from *The Borough*, 1810, lines 40-44). As an adult, Grimes takes on three successive boy apprentices, whom he finds at the local workhouse, and each of whom, over the course of the poem, comes to an untimely death. The first, whose name we learn is Sam, suffers at Grimes' aggressive hand and is subject to multiple beatings and severe neglect. Grimes is heavily implicated in the boy's subsequent death, though the village folk are nevertheless unable to prove his guilt:

> For three sad years the boy his tortures bore,
> And then his pains and trials were no more.
> "How died he, Peter?" when the people said,
> He growl'd – "I found him lifeless in his bed"
> …
> Much they suspected, but little they proved
> And Peter passed untroubled and unmoved.
> (Crabbe, 1810, *Letter XXII*, *The Borough*, lines 98-102; 106-107)

Crabbe's Grimes then takes, and again violently mistreats, a second boy apprentice whose name we do not learn but who, like the first, dies under similarly suspicious circumstances. Again, the village jury is out on Grimes' culpability, and he is easily able to take on yet a third apprentice. Later, out at sea, this unnamed apprentice also dies. Whilst, for a third time, Grimes' guilt cannot strictly be proved, he is nonetheless ostracised by the villagers and, from then on, is forced to carry out his fishing alone, restricted to the dark and insalubrious areas of the borough shore. Guilt ridden, Grimes begins to experience frequent mad delusions of the vengeful ghosts of his father and (it seems) two of his boy apprentice victims. Towards the poem's close, becoming increasingly suspicious of Grimes' mad behaviour, the villagers transport him to a parish-house where, after recounting his visions of his victims, exhausted and at his wit's end, Grimes dies. "Then with an inward, broken voice he cried, / 'Again they come!' and mutter'd as he died" (George Crabbe, *Letter XXII*, *The Borough*, 1810).

In a preface to his poetry, Crabbe adds an explanatory note about the character of Peter Grimes:

> The mind here exhibited is one untouched by pity, unstung by remorse and uncorrected by shame… no feeble vision, no half-visible ghost, not the momentary glance of an unbodied being nor the half audible voice of an invisible one would be created by the continual workings of distress on a mind so depraved and flinty. (Crabbe, 1810, as cited in Forster, 1941; Brett, 1983, p. 16)

The Grimes of Crabbe's poem is tough, violent, and ultimately, innately evil (Spiegelman 1986, p. 543); his hallucinations and subsequent death are thus depicted as the fitting consequence of his essential immorality.

Britten's Grimes

Britten's interpretation and recharacterization of Grimes renders him, on the whole, far more morally ambiguous than Crabbe's. About the difference between Crabbe's and Britten's respective Grimeses, Claire Seymour (2004) for instance, summarises:

> Crabbe's was harsh, dull, and an insensitive murderer, for whom no possibility of mercy intervenes. Britten's however is a 'misunderstood Byronic hero', 'sensitive, touched by pity, stung by remorse, and corrected by shame.' Crabbe's Grimes embodies the dark side of a morally weak society, which the poet satirises but does not judge, whereas Britten's Grimes is the victim of a cruel society, which is criticised and condemned (p. 41).

The opera opens with Grimes on trial for the death of his first apprentice. However, in Britten's and his librettist, Slater's account, in contrast to that of Crabbe, we hear nothing of Grimes' childhood violence, nor are we given any clue at all that Grimes was particularly heavy handed with the first apprentice. Moreover, from the opera's very opening scene, during the coroner's inquest at the town hall, the music seems to indicate Grimes' innocence. His opening utterances, as Kennedy (1981) notes, are accompanied by "sustained chords—like

the halo string sound surrounding Christ's part in the *St. Matthew Passion* [by Bach]" which "are the first strong clue that Britten wants our sympathy for him, and it is significant that as soon as the emotions are engaged Britten abandons dry recitative for *arioso*" (p. 170) (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).

Fig. 5.1. Bach *St Matthew Passion* (BWV 244), mvt. 2, demonstrating the use of sustained string chords (*recitativo accompagnato*) to accompany the part of Jesus. The part of the Evangelist, by contrast, is accompanied by a sparser, *recitativo secco*, texture.

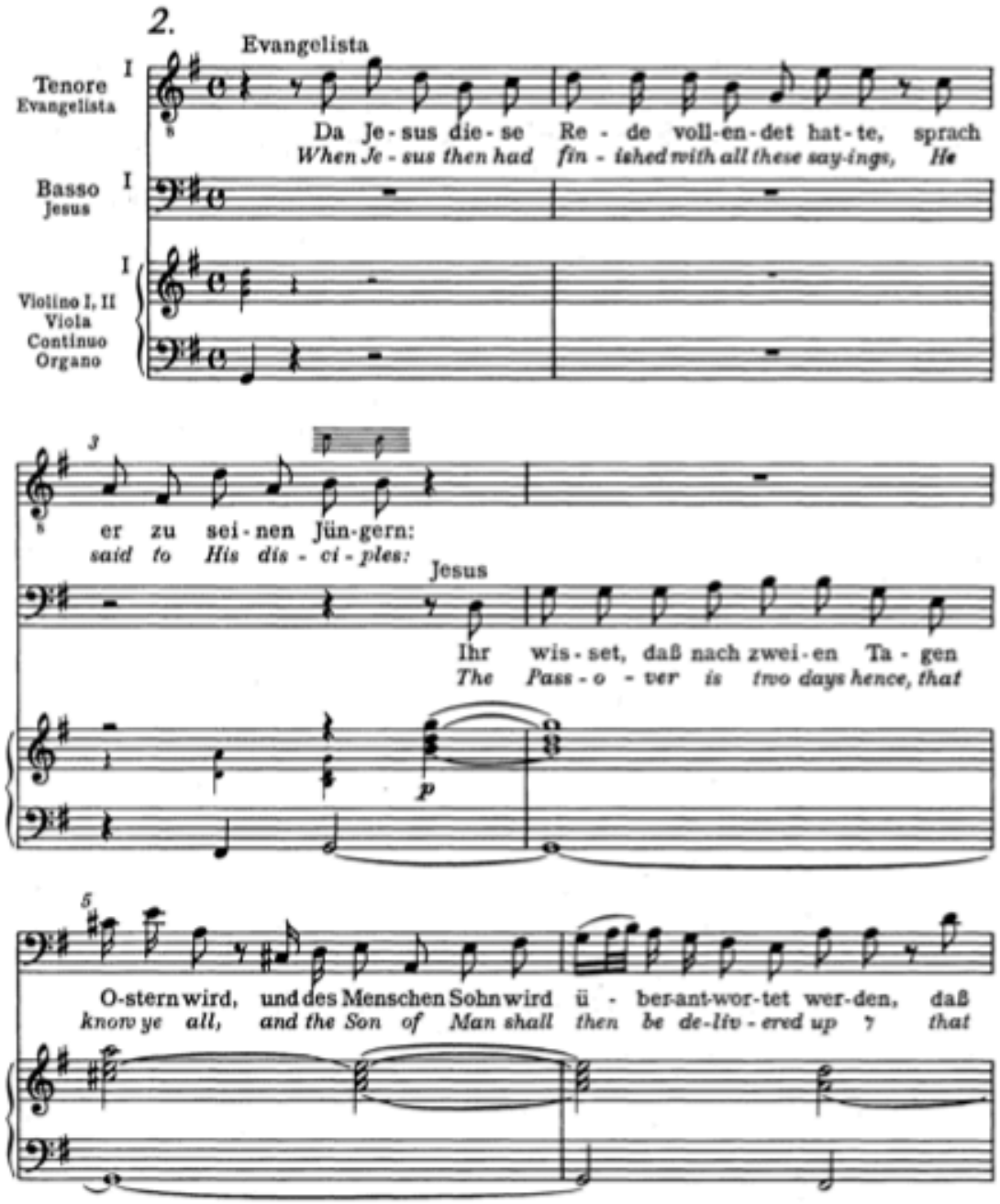
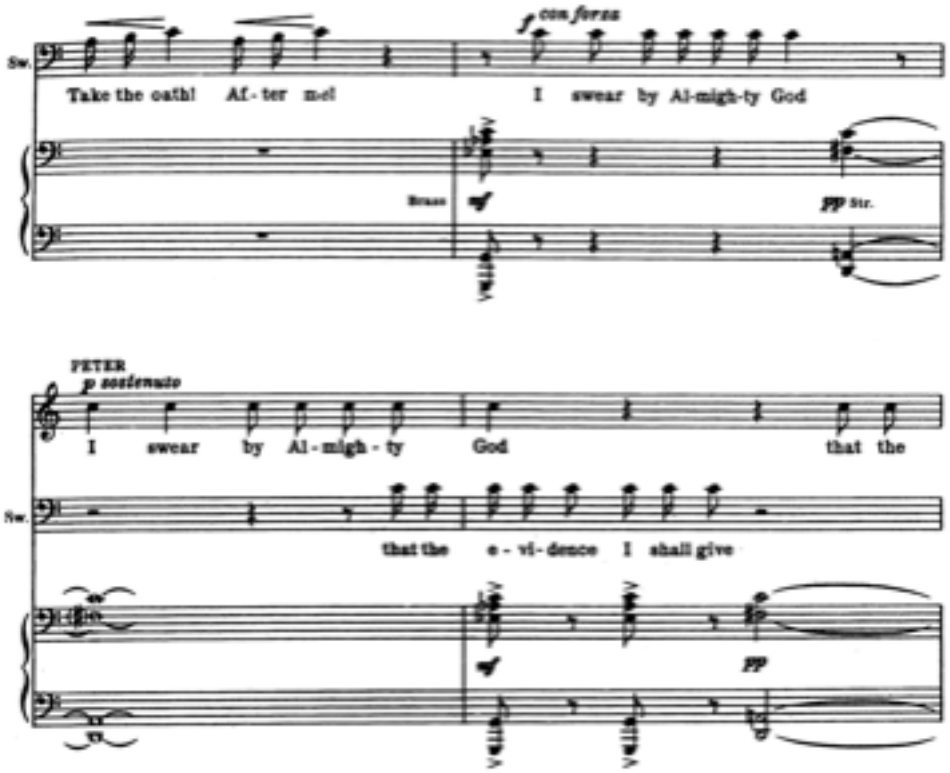


Fig. 5.2. Britten *Peter Grimes* (Op. 33), Prologue, demonstrating the contrast between Swallow's dry (*secco*) brass accompaniment and Grimes' soft string accompaniment.



Furthermore, Britten's Grimes is depicted as having important interpersonal (though complicated) relationships, in contrast with the seeming total isolation experienced by the contemptible Grimes of *The Borough*. Grimes' relationship with Ellen Orford is a striking addition to Britten's opera, most notably highlighted in her support of Grimes at the inquest in the opera's Prologue, and during the subsequent Act 1 so-called Love duet. Crabbe did write about an Ellen Orford (of whom Britten's Ellen is clearly an adaptation) in Letter XX of *The Borough*. However, in Crabbe's poetry, Ellen's life is seemingly unconnected and unrelated to that of Grimes. In Britten's adaptation, the invention of Grimes' relationship with Ellen, however fraught it might turn out to be, serves to imply his innocence and, significantly, to humanize him somewhat.

As it happens, Ellen's story in *The Borough*, itself features notable representations of disability.[20] Ellen, for instance, is described as having a cognitively disabled daughter:

> *Lovely my daughter grew, her face was fair,*
> *But no expression ever brighten'd there;*
> *I doubted long, and vainly strove to make*
> *Some certain meaning of the words she spake;*
> *But meaning was there none, and I survey'd*
> *With dread the beauties of my idiot-maid.*
> (Crabbe, 1810, *The Borough*, Letter XX, lines 212-217)

Furthermore, towards the end of the Letter, Ellen, who had been employed as a teacher, becomes blind and is forced to leave the school where she had been working. Crabbe's Ellen says "I lost my sight, and my employment gone, / Useless I live, but to the day live on" (lines 330-331). Neither of these particular representations of disability, Ellen's visual impairment, nor the presence of a cognitively disabled daughter, are retained in Britten's adaptation of Crabbe's poetry. There is, of course, no particular reason to suggest that Britten should have attended to all opportunities to include depictions of disability in his adaptation of Crabbe's poetry—disability representation is certainly not one of Britten's stated aims in composing *Peter Grimes*, and a wider public disability political consciousness would not begin to emerge until at least two decades later. However, given that my broader argument in this thesis is that Britten's operas (and *Peter Grimes* in particular) sustain the representation of disability in unique and generative ways, it is therefore important to note that Crabbe's *The Borough* offers considerable opportunity for expansive and complex disability representation that Britten nonetheless clearly misses.[21]

[20] Moreover, Kathleen Béres Rogers (2022) highlights that disability (alongside poverty and pollution) is a very much central concern throughout *The Borough* more broadly.

[21] In particular, cognitive disability is additionally represented elsewhere in Crabbe's *The Borough*, in a further instance that does not appear in Britten's operatic adaptation of Crabbe: McDonagh (2008, pp. 79-101) identifies the instance of an "ancient Widow's" cognitively disabled son in Letter XVIII of *The Borough*. It would be interesting, although beyond the scope of this thesis, to explore the implications of *The Borough's* two representations of cognitively disabled children (that is Ellen's daughter, and the Widow's son) across gendered lines, in relation to 19th century depictions of poverty and work.

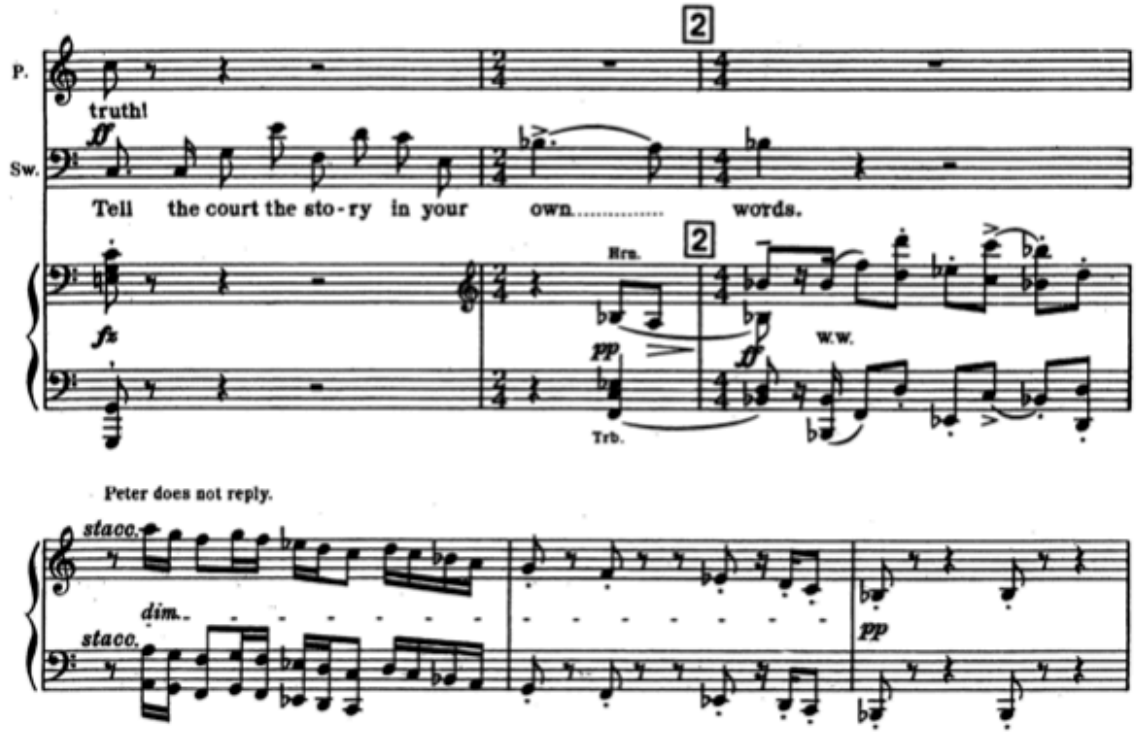
In Britten's reshaping of Crabbe's poetry, in addition to his relationship with Ellen, Grimes is depicted as having a friendship of sorts with the characters of Balstrode, a retired sea-captain, and Ned Keene, the Borough's apothecary. Balstrode does not feature in *The Borough* and is thus a novel addition to Britten and Slater's work. Balstrode's presence in the opera though, similarly to that of Ellen, serves to characterise Grimes (somewhat) favourably, in spite of the way in which he is nonetheless ostracised by the Borough community at large. Ned Keene, or his name at least, derives from Letter XXI of *The Borough*, which takes as its subject an Abel Keene. Beyond sharing a surname though, Crabbe's Abel Keene and Britten's Ned Keene bear little resemblance. Ned Keene's characterisation as an apothecary, though, is most likely based on Crabbe's depiction of a 'Quack' doctor in Letter VII of *The Borough* (Walter White, 1970, p. 101). At the end of the opera's Prologue, Swallow, the lawyer who has been questioning Grimes, proclaims: "Peter Grimes, I here advise you! Do not get another boy apprentice. Get a fisherman to help you, big enough to stand up for himself". In the following scene, Grimes attempts to pull his boat into shore but is unable to do so without assistance. He calls out for help, but initially no one comes and it is only Balstrode and Ned Keene who come to his aide. In showing solidarity with Grimes at this moment, or at least demonstrating a basic sympathy for him, the pair evince a kernel of likeability in Grimes' character. Indeed, later in the act, Balstrode expresses (albeit tentatively) some belief in Grimes' innocence regarding the first apprentice's death. He contemplates: "Your boy was work-house starved; Maybe you're not to blame he died" (Britten, *Peter Grimes*, four bars after Reh. Fig. 40). In response, Grimes vividly recalls the events out at sea that lead to the first apprentice's death.

[Peter:] Picture what that day was like, that evil day!
We strained into the wind, heavily laden.
We plunged into the wave's shuddering challenge.
Then the sea rose to a storm over the gunwales,
And the boy's silent reproach turned to illness.
Then home among the fishing nets,
Alone, alone, alone with a childish death.

(Britten, *Peter Grimes*, Reh. Fig. 41)

The clarity and seeming veracity of Grimes' recollection here might thus have put an end to the matter if only he had been able to produce it at the opera's prologue. However, during the inquest, at Reh. Fig. 2, after Grimes swears to tell "the whole truth and nothing but the truth", Swallow commands: "Tell the court the story in your own words.". The stage direction at this moment indicates that "*Peter does not reply*". The sudden return of the boisterous Bb major woodwind theme that opens the opera and the way in which Swallow, whose questioning becomes increasingly leading, and who constantly undermines and interrupts Grimes, suggests, more accurately that Grimes is in fact not allowed to reply nor given the time to state his case fully (Fig. 5.3). Britten's setting of events in the opening court scene then, call us not so much to be suspicious of the character of Grimes himself as rather to be critical of the judicial process to which he is subject. Later, as I develop my reading of Grimes in relation to cognitive disability and neurodivergence, the opening scene of the opera might call us to reflect upon our own time, and the ways in which disabled people are routinely let down by the contemporary criminal justice system, whether as witnesses, victims of crime, suspects, or offenders - as is highlighted by Beckene, Forrester-Jones and Murphy (2020), Loucks (2007); and Jones and Talbot (2010). I shall return to this point momentarily.

Fig. 5.3. *Peter Grimes*, Prologue: Swallow leads proceedings at Grimes' trial over the death of his first apprentice.



Grimes' apprentices

Throughout the course of Letter XXII of *The Borough*, Grimes takes on (and quite definitively is implicated in the deaths of) three apprentices. In *The Borough*, Crabbe refers to Grimes as a "savage master" (Letter XXII, line 86) and describes his mistreatment of the first apprentice in gruesome detail:

> Pinn'd, beaten, cold, pinch'd, threaten'd, and abused -
> His efforts punish'd and his food refused, -
> Awake tormented, - soon aroused from sleep, -
> Struck if he wept, and yet compell'd to weep,
> …
> Thus lived the lad, in hunger, peril, pain,
> His tears despised, his supplications vain:
> …
> For three sad years the boy his tortures bore,
> And then his pains and trials were no more.
> (Crabbe, *The Borough*, Letter XXII, lines 79-82; 89-90; 93-94)

The second apprentice, in Crabbe's work, was found dead, having fallen from the mast of Grimes' fishing boat into its well, amongst the caught fish. Though Grimes claimed that his apprentice's fall was accidental, upon post-mortem inspection of boy's body, suspicions about Grimes' involvement in his apprentice's death were subsequently aroused (lines 111-114). The third apprentice, we learn, was also subject to severe mistreatment at Grimes' hand (lines 134-135) and died having been forced to accompany Grimes out at sea in particularly harsh weather conditions, despite being extremely unwell at the time (lines 138-152).

In the operatic setting, however, there are only two apprentices: William Spode, whose death occurred prior to the events of the opera, and a second apprentice, whom we come to know by first name only, as John. The circumstances surrounding William Spode's death, and

Grime's involvement in it are persistently ambiguously presented, though the opera does ultimately seem to imply Grimes' innocence. However, with regards to the second apprentice, John, Ellen raises concerns in Act 2, Scene 1 as she discovers bruising on the young boy's neck. To this, Grimes responds that the apprentice had acquired his injuries accidentally, merely "[o]ut of the hurly burly!". Later in the scene, at Ellen's suggestion to Grimes "We were mistaken to have dreamed… Peter! We've failed, we've failed!", the stage directions indicate that "*Peter cries out as if in agony—strikes Ellen, whose work basket falls to the ground*" (Reh. Fig. 17). Subsequently, in Act 2, Scene 2, at Grimes' hut, we also witness, first-hand, Grimes' aggressive manner with John: frustrated and hurrying, Grimes declaims, *con violenza*, "I'll tear the collar off your neck!". Whilst he may not be guilty of murder, Grimes is nevertheless depicted as behaving somewhat aggressively towards both Ellen and the second apprentice. It should still be noted though, that, compared with Grimes' treatment of his apprentices in Crabbe's poetry, the operatic Grimes' is nonetheless significantly less violent.

Brett (1983; 1996 and 2006) considers the development of the libretto of *Peter Grimes* from its earliest drafts. He reveals some of the ways in which Grimes was transformed from a character whom we can either pity or hate (as in *The Borough*), to one with whom we can more readily identify (2006, p. 43). A draft libretto manuscript in Slater's hand paints Grimes' interaction with his second apprentice at the hut in a far more explicitly violent manner than that which appears in the final version of the opera:

[Peter:] By God I'll beat it out of you.
Stand up. (*lash*) Straighter. (*lash)* I'll count two
And then you'll jump to it. One.
Well? Two.
(*The boy doesn't move. Then Peter lashes hard, twice. He runs. Peter follows*)
Your soul is mine.
Your body is the cat o' nine
Tail's mincemeat. O! a pretty dish
Smooth-skinned & young as she could wish.

Come cat! Up whiplash! Jump my son

Jump (*lash*) jump (*lash*) jump, the dance is on.

("Peter Grimes. Act II, sc. 2. Libretto, typescript," BPL 2-9401385, BPL., as cited in Brett, 2006, p. 43)

Whereas this early version of Act 2, Scene 2 depicts Grimes as especially violent (similarly to the Grimes of Crabbe's poetry, that is), the Grimes of the final operatic version is much tamer. Moreover, later in the scene, in the final version of the opera, it is the encroaching Borough mob, knocking at the door of Grimes' hut, that causes him to become momentarily distracted, at which point the apprentice John falls off the cliff and dies. "In other words, the community is directly implicated in the boy's death…" (Brett, 2006, p. 42). In sum, it appears that Britten's final version decriminalises Grimes. Where Crabbe's Grimes is depicted as a violent murderer, in Britten and Slater's adaptation (in its final version, at least), the situation is rather more complex. The operatic Grimes may have had momentary aggressive outbursts, but the ultimate blame for the death of the second apprentice certainly cannot solely be placed on him.

Grimes' madness and death

Despite the differences in the characterisation of Grimes, some of which I have highlighted above, there is nonetheless an important similarity: following the deaths of their respective apprentices, both Grimeses experience mad delusions, and both subsequently die. The particular circumstances surrounding the deaths of Britten and Crabbe's Grimeses do however differ markedly. In *The Borough*, after the death of his third apprentice, Grimes begins to experience frequent mad visions of his murdered victims:

Cold nervous tremblings shook his sturdy frame,
And strange disease – he couldn't say the name;
Wild were his dreams and oft he rose in fright,
Waked by his view of horrors in the night, -
Horrors that would the sternest minds amaze,
Horrors that demons would be proud to raise:
(*The Borough*, Letter XXII, lines 223-228).

Grimes becomes increasingly physically affected to the extent that he is taken into a parish house where he receives a curious mixture of both contempt and pity:

> *Here when they saw him, whom they used to shun,*
> *A lost, lone man, so harass'd and undone;*
> *Our gentle females, ever prompt to feel*
> *Perceived compassion on their anger steal;*
> *His crimes they could not from their memories blot,*
> *But they were grieved and trembled at his lot.*
> (*The Borough*, Letter XXII, lines 255-260).

In Crabbe's poetry then, the onset of Grimes' madness is portrayed as a fitting, if tragic, consequence of his essential moral failings. His death is ultimately brought about by the complete and utter exhaustion he experiences, the result of his guilt-induced madness. The letter closes: "Then dropp'd exhausted, and appear'd at rest, / Till the strong foe the vital powers possess'd; / Then with an inward, broken voice he cried, / 'Again they come!' and mutter'd as he died" (lines 372-375). In this way then, Crabbe's portrayal of Grimes' madness is typical of 19th century literary depictions of disability more generally. Holmes (2018) highlights that, throughout literature of the long 19th century,[22] corresponding with wider societal attitudes of the time, disability typically was associated culturally with either hopelessness or immorality. The association of disability with hopelessness is exemplified by by the physically impaired character of Tiny Tim in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), who inspires the readers' pity. Contrastingly, the association of disability with immorality, inspiring "fear and repugnance", is exemplified by Robert Louis Stevenson's villainous Long John Silver from *Treasure Island* (1883), and Edward Hyde in The *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)—and a host of other literary monstrous villains, to boot (Holmes, 2018, p. 65).[23] By the 19th century, literary and artistic representations of madness, specifically, had already gained significant cultural prominence, from the evocative depictions of life in the

[22] By the long nineteenth century, Holmes (2018) refers specifically to the dates 1789-1914.
[23] See also Huff and Holmes (2020).

asylums in paintings by Hogarth (*A Rake's Progress*, 1733) and Goya (*The Madhouse*, 1812-1819), to the earlier portrayal of the mad literary character of Don Quixote by Cervantes (1605; 1615), all instilling a sense of madness-as-spectacle and developing a perception of 'the mad' as objects of ridicule. In Crabbe's poetry, then, Grimes appears to be not only exemplary of 19th century literary representations of disability, but also part of a longer lineage of cultural depictions of madness that stretches back for over two hundred years.

Whereas the Grimes of Crabbe's poetry has visions of his murdered victims, effectively demonstrating his guilt over his father and his apprentices' deaths, the operatic Grimes' madness is depicted somewhat differently. In Act 3 Scene 2 of Britten's work, Grimes is highly distressed and verbalises his fragmented recollections of earlier moments of the opera. About his apprentices, Grimes sings "The first one died, just died. The other slipped, and died…" (4 bars after Reh. Fig. 47), certainly no clear admission of guilt. Grimes continues, though, "and the third will…". Perhaps Grimes admits here that his rough treatment of his apprentices has inevitably contributed to their deaths, and that any further apprentices could only have similar fates. By "and the third", though, it is also likely that Grimes is referring to himself, with suicidal thoughts, that his own is to be the third death.

The decision to remove Grimes' visions of his father and of the dead apprentices, however, and thus to decriminalise Grimes, to establish his innocence, was made at a surprisingly late stage in the opera's development. Brett (2006) outlines:

> If the idea of the "individual against the crowd" was to work, and if the drama were to become an allegory of oppression (both external and internalized), then the process of Grimes' self-destruction had to be felt to be the direct result of his social situation, so that everyone in the audience could recognize a little of themselves in him. A set of psychological circumstances that would make his sadism explicit, or suggest a fundamental Oedipal conflict, would undermine this process. "Once we'd decided to make it a drama of the individual against the crowd," as Peter Pears once explained to me when I asked him why the father and dead apprentices had been excised, "then those things had to go." (p. 44)

Thus, in the final version of the opera, Grimes' madness is drawn out, not necessarily as a consequence of personal moral collapse (as in Crabbe's poetry and the earliest versions of the opera libretto), but rather as intrinsically linked to broader social conditions. E. M. Forster draws this out particularly well in an essay where he considered Britten's adaptation of Crabbe's Grimes for the operatic medium.

> It amuses me to think what an opera on Peter Grimes would have been like if I had written it. I should certainly have starred the murdered apprentices. I should have introduced their ghosts in the last scene, rising out the estuary, on either side of the vengeful greybeard, blood and fire would have been thrown in the tenor's face, hell would have opened, and on a mixture of Don Juan and the Freischutz I should have lowered my final curtain. The applause that follows is for my inward ear only. For what in the actual opera have we? No ghosts… no murders, no crime on Peter's part except what is caused by the far greater crimes committed against him by society… We leave him with the knowledge that it is society who sinned, and with compassion (Forster, "George Crabbe and Peter Grimes", reprinted in Brett 1983, p. 7-21).

In the opera, however, following the mad-scene, Britten's Grimes is urged by his friends Ellen and Balstrode to sail his boat out to sea and to drown himself in it. At first, Ellen attempts to comfort Grimes, singing "Peter… We've come to take you home. O come home out of this dreadful night! See, here's Balstrode. Peter don't you hear me?" (six bars after Reh. Fig. 51). Just before Reh. Figure 53, Ellen and Balstrode are given spoken, rather than sung, text, bringing an especial intensity to this moment of the opera. It becomes clear that the pair have, in fact, not come to take Grimes home. Rather, they have come to encourage Grimes to take his own life. Balstrode speaks to Peter: "Come on, I'll help you with the boat." Ellen initially expresses some resistance to Balstrode's suggestion, evidently struggling to come to terms with what the pair had come to convince Grimes to do. She stands back and it is Balstrode who directs Grimes: "Sail out till you lose sight of the Moot Hall. Then sink the boat. D'you hear? Sink her. Good-bye Peter." It seems to Ellen and Balstrode that Grimes' continued existence within his community, simply, is no longer possible. Grimes' friends believe that there is no way that Grimes will ever be able to turn the tide of public opinion,

and that death is his only escape from the approaching angry Borough mob. In the opera then, madness is not itself the cause of Grimes' death, as appears to be the case in Crabbe's poetry. Rather, Grimes' madness is depicted as symbolic of the increasingly impossible social situation in which he comes to find himself.

In contrast to Crabbe's typically 19th century depiction of Grimes' madness then, it initially appears that Britten's adaptation turns away from a moralistic representation of disability towards something altogether more compassionate. Britten focuses less on Grimes' essential supposed criminality, and more on the ways in which his status as criminal is socially mediated and produced. However, following the first production of *Peter Grimes*, one anonymous critic (Anon., 1945), suggested, "[d]espite attempts to present this bully in a sympathetic light with the help of Ellen Orford, [Grimes] remains a repellent character whose fate arouses little pity" (Chowrimootoo, 2018, p. 48). Furthermore, Desmond Shawe-Taylor (1945) wrote that the move to portray Grimes more sympathetically forges a narrative problem at the centre of the opera: "what neither composer nor librettist seems to realize is that, after all, the sympathetic schoolmarm was wrong… whereas poor Mrs. Sedley was dead right." (quoted in Brett, 1983, p.155). He continues: "I know that operas are not ethical treatises… [b]ut is there not something shocking in the attempt to win our sympathies for a character simply because he is an outlaw and an enemy of society." (p. 155). For some then, Britten's attempt at a sympathetic and compassionate adaptation of the character of Grimes and his madness was not entirely successful.

Moreover, regardless of whether Britten's attempt at portraying Grimes sympathetically was convincing, there is perhaps also an important question to be raised about whom such ideas come to benefit. Chowrimootoo (2018) outlines the way in which, at the time of *Peter Grimes'* first production, there was a growing critical suspicion of literary and cultural 'sentimentality' in British literary circles. In the light of this, Chowrimootoo suggests that "[o]ne of the principal ways critics sought to distance *Grimes* from the fantastical aspects of operatic sentimentality was by invoking 'realism' – a concept even more slippery than sentimentality" (p. 32-33). Of this, the two responses to the first production of Grimes that I highlighted above (Shawe-Taylor's and that of the anonymous critic) are very much typical examples. However, for Chowrimootoo, the opposition of early 20th century realism to sentimentality is

ultimately a false one. In reference to Orwell's critique of 'Dickensian' literary realism as a form of "middle-class sentimentality" (1940, p. 66), Chowrimootoo writes:

> In going on to describe class boundaries as a "plate-glass pane of an aquarium," Orwell implied that genuine contact was as undesirable as it was impossible. Just as no one would actually want to live among the fishes, so realism's appeal lay in a kind of voyeuristic spectacle, in which middle-class readers could experience the *illusion* of working-class contact without the water gushing in – that is, without compromising their own privileged positions and traditions (p. 41).

Though he is writing principally about the class divide, Chowrimootoo's application of Orwell to Britten's opera certainly has some resonance with issues surrounding disability representation (the representation of madness) too. Whether or not Britten's (mad) protagonist is compassionately portrayed or not, the fact that *Peter Grimes* might itself be understood as offering a sense of "voyeuristic spectacle" effectively consolidates not only "a vision for middle class consumption" (p. 41), but also a voyeuristic spectacle of disability for ablebodied consumption: a patronising moralism that can only ever either pity or deride, and nothing else besides. Moreover, were not sympathy and compassion always already in danger of moralistic condescension? Indeed, it might be said that, in a literary and cultural disability studies context, the representation of innocence cannot always be said itself to be innocent.

Having outlined how Britten, his librettist Montegu Slater, and other collaborators adapted the character of Peter Grimes for the operatic stage and having explored issues surrounding the representation of disability (and of madness in particular) in both Crabbe's poetry and in the operatic setting, I now turn more closely to the way in which musical elements and Britten's distinctive compositional voice shape disability representation in interesting ways. As a starting point, I draw from Straus (2018), who has developed the most comprehensive account of 20th-century musical representations of disability to date.

Modernist musical madness

Straus (2018) explores modernist musical representations of madness in relation to the emergence of schizophrenia as a prominent diagnostic category of madness at the turn of the twentieth century. Straus refers to the prominence of the work of the Swiss psychiatrist Bleuler, central to whose conception of schizophrenia is the presence of hallucinations or heard voices and *splitting*, that is to say, the separation of consciousness into distinct 'layers'.

> Characteristic of schizophrenic hallucinations is the preference for the auditory sphere and for the sphere of the body sensations. Almost every schizophrenic who is hospitalized hears "voices," occasionally or continually... The most common auditory hallucination is that of speech. The "voices" of our patients embody all their strivings and fears, and their entire transformed relationship to the external world. (Bleuler, 1950, p. 97)

Straus also notes that discourses surrounding madness in the twentieth century were diverse. Bleuler's conception of Schizophrenia was merely one of the ways in which madness came to be understood over the course of the twentieth century. For instance, psychoanalytical interpretations of madness, built upon Freud's psychological theories of libido and the structure of the unconscious mind, held a rival position to Bleulerian psychiatric models in the first half of the twentieth century. Straus highlights that, though different perspectives located madness' origins (and thus, its so-deemed proper cure) differentially, the notions of heard voices and splitting nonetheless continued to be held to be the fundamental ways in which madness could be described and identified.

Straus states that modernist music specifically represents madness' "divided consciousness" through "[musical] stratification into conflicting [textural] layers" and represents the "hearing of voices" through musical quotation of "stylistically and structurally incongruous music" (p. 94). However, it is not only in modernist music, Straus suggests, that the representation of madness occurs in this way. In particular, the use of musical quotation has pervaded the history of Western art music as a whole rather significantly: "of course, every piece hears voices in a sense—that is simply an aspect of intertextuality: every piece incorporates and references other pieces" (p. 94). However, Straus argues that modernist music deploys

representations of madness in particularly rich ways. Further, it is the sense, in modernist music, that musical quotation (both inter- and intratextuality) often has a "distinctive, intrusive quality; they may seem to impair the normal functioning of the piece they come to inhabit" (p. 94) that modernist music comes to represent madness. Where all music, Straus argues, 'hears voices' to a certain extent, modernist music does so in a particularly intrusive and heightened sense.

I shall return anon to the discussion of modernist musical representations in close relation to *Peter Grimes*, specifically. However, to give some context, I briefly turn to the manner in which representations of madness have been particularly pervasive throughout the history of opera, in general.

Operatic madness

Brener (1990), in a short letter published in the *Psychiatric Bulletin*, suggests that the representation of madness or mental illness in opera can broadly be classified into three distinct periods: the period in which the 'mad-scene' predominated; the "shunning of mental illness in opera"; and the "rise of the psychoanalytical opera". The inclusion of the mad-scene, Brener suggests, was the prominent mode of representing madness in the classical and early romantic operatic period, and that, in this way, madness was often depicted as a form of resistance to oppressive social and cultural circumstances. Ellen Rosand (1991), discussing the emergence of opera in seventeenth-century Venice, goes as far as suggesting that, at that time, "every new opera had its mad-scene", Cavalli's *Egisto* (1643), and *Giasone* (1649) being pertinent examples (p. 358). Further, Rosand remarks upon the way in which the mad-scenes of the period involved both 'feigned' and 'real', and both temporary and permanent madness. The "shunning of mental illness in opera" occurred at the height of the romantic era (during the middle of the 19th century), where, "opera composers steered away from madness… prefer[ing] to use physical illness as a symbol of purity", and finally, as Brener puts it, the "rise of the psychoanalytical opera" was initiated in the final decades of the 19th century and has perhaps been the dominant mode of representing madness in opera since (1990, p. 563). By "psychoanalytical opera", Brener refers to the way in which, after Freud, and the foregrounding of the Oedipus story in relation to the meaning of madness, madness in modernist opera tended to use "Greek legends as a metaphor for the emotional human

condition". Brener's notion of the psychoanalytical opera points to the way in which the representation of madness was no longer restricted to a definitive mad-scene as such, but rather came to pervade operatic works as a whole. Though Brener's divisions are perhaps rather prescriptive, Willier (1992), in his *Grove Music* article (published online in 2002), gives a similar account, describing the tradition of the mad-scene as:

> An operatic scene in which a character, usually the soprano heroine, displays traits of mental collapse, for example through amnesia, hallucination, irrational behaviour or sleepwalking. The mad scene, which became particularly popular during the early 19th century… supplies a brilliant vehicle for the display of a singer's histrionic and vocal talents. It traditionally involved elaborate coloratura writing and commonly the participation of a wind instrument, often the flute or, in particular, the English horn. (Willier, 2002)

Perhaps the first 'fully-fledged mad-scene', though, appeared as early as 1641 in Sacrati's *La finta pazza*. By the mid-18th century, operatic mad-scenes were abundant, and were especially prominent in a number of Handel's dramatic stage works.[24] The development of the convention can be followed through to the middle of the 19th century, with Act 3, Scene 2 of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* having become perhaps the most famous instance, and effectively the exemplar, of the tradition. Subsequently, as Willier suggests: '[i]f the mad scene was largely obsolete by 1875, madness as an operatic preoccupation only became more pronounced after that date, *Angst* and paranoia playing a central part in many operas, such as *Salome*, *Elektra*, *Erwartung*, and *Wozzeck*' (Willier, 2002).

Brener and Willier thus appear to agree that the heyday of the operatic mad-scene was the late classical and early romantic period. Beyond the middle of the 19th century, the convention of the mad-scene proper tended not to be as prominent. However, it should nonetheless be noted that, at around that time, Verdi did write a mad-scene of sorts for Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, and it is often speculated that, had he written his *King Lear*, adapting

[24] The AMT-SMT database of musical representations of disability highlights operatic instances of mad-scenes throughout the history of opera particularly comprehensively.

Shakespeare's tragedy, that the inclusion of a mad-scene would have been especially apt. As it happens, pencil markings in Peter Pear's copy *King Lear* indicate that, Britten, too, had considered setting the play operatically. Unfortunately though, neither Verdi's, nor Britten's *King Lear* ever came to fruition.

Brener is perhaps also right in suggesting that, for many modernist operas, madness comes to pervade the entire dramatic work rather than merely being contained (perhaps we might even say confined) into a unitary mad-scene. However, that madness became something of a fundamental, structuring component of modernist opera is not to say that the delineated mad-scene was no longer put to use. In Stravinsky's *Pilgrim's Progress*, for instance, a mad scene accompanies Tom Rakewell's institutionalisation at Bedlam hospital. Given its dramatic potential on the stage, that the mad-scene should have remained a prominent feature of opera is perhaps ultimately inevitable. As I explore Britten's portrayal of madness in relation to the character of Grimes, I will consider the way in which Britten both employs the stock device of the mad-scene, but also represents madness pervasively throughout the opera as a whole.

The Act 3, Scene 2: the mad-scene

Peter Grimes is, as we shall see, a character whose madness is represented musically throughout Britten's opera (not just at the opera's culmination), very much in alignment with modernist opera's psychoanalytical turn (Brener, 1990), and its tendency to be preoccupied in the main with "*Angst* and paranoia" (Willier, 2002). However, here, I make the claim that, though madness does indeed permeate the opera, *Peter Grimes* Act 3, Scene 2, in particular, can quite definitively and appropriately be referred to as Grimes' mad-scene, and can therefore be understood as having a direct, genealogical connection with some of the earliest works in the operatic repertoire. Indeed, Britten himself used the term mad-scene, in a letter to Ronald Duncan, writing:

> We are having a terrific time with Grimes - & Peter & I are pretty well re-writing his part. Montagu agreed to the new mad-scene, & I kept your part in it fairly quiet, & although I murmured that you helped us a bit! (Mitchell and Reed, 1991, p. 1243)

Not long after this, Britten and Duncan went on to work together to write *The Rape of Lucretia*, arguably containing a mad-scene of its own: Lucretia's aria, "Give him this orchid". If Britten was to stake his claim for a place in the operatic canon, the inclusion of an operatic mad-scene was certainly the way to do it. Kennedy (1981) associates the inclusion of a mad-scene in *Peter Grimes* with Britten's appropriation of the traditional operatic form of "set pieces (arias, choruses, quartets, etc.) linked by recitative" more generally, rather than taking up the developing tendency (since the latter half of the 19th century) for operas to be through-composed (p. 169).

> [O]ne [cannot] forget the amazement in 1945 that the composer in his first 'grand opera' should show such mastery of well-tried ingredients – the big choruses, a storm, an aria against the background of a church service… a dance, and a mad scene. These were indeed old bottles into which to pour new wine, but it was the wine that (rightly) everyone noticed. (p. 169)

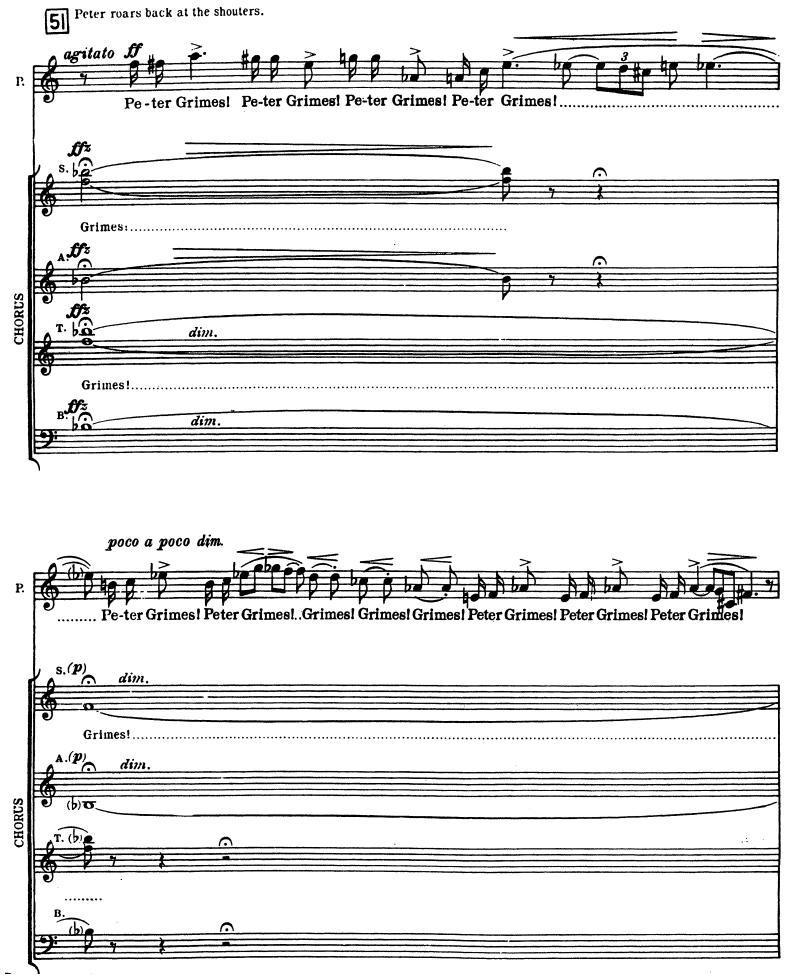
Interestingly, Grimes' mad-scene shares its Act and Scene number with that of Donizetti's exemplar heroine, Lucia; both are found in Act 3, Scene 2 of their respective operas. Whilst perhaps nothing more than mere coincidence, this is nonetheless a connection between the two operas' respective representations of madness. Pipes (1990) identifies a number of typical characteristic features of late 18th century / early 19th century operatic mad-scenes: in particular, the heightened use of florid, *coloratura* passages (p. 15); extended moments of unaccompanied singing (pp. 26-28); extensive musical quotation; and, often, the incorporation of an *obbligato* wind instrument part (p. 31-32). In *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the *obbligato* part is given to the flute; elsewhere, for instance in *Anna Bolena*, it the English horn that takes on this function. Such features, I suggest, are closely reproduced in Grimes' mad-scene.

Whilst there is no *obbligato* instrument as such accompanying Grimes in this scene, the use of an off-stage Tuba to emulate the sound of a distant Fog-horn, playing a repeated Eb that decays and drops a semitone in pitch to a D each time it sounds, might be a rough corollary. Additionally, Britten's vocal writing for Grimes, throughout the scene, is virtuosic, with a wide range, and with some elaborate melismatic writing (Fig. 1). The passage is largely

unaccompanied (interjections from the 'Fog-horn' and the chorus notwithstanding), and accurate pitching and intonation thus pose great technical challenge for the singer but, accordingly, offer opportunity to demonstrate virtuosity; incidentally, Peter Pears' perfect/absolute pitch would therefore have been particularly expedient for his performance of the role.[25]

[25] Elsewhere, in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the 'play-within-a-play', *Pyramus and Thisby*, performed by the rude mechanicals at Theseus' palace, itself involves an obvious parody of the 19th century mad scene tradition. Indeed, the scene has been identified as a specific parody of the Lucia mad scene. Following Pyramus' death, Thisby, has an extended passage of notable florid singing which is accompanied by a solo obbligato flute. Similarly, in Britten's first church parable, *Curlew River*, the Madwoman's madness is depicted through the use of extended unaccompanied melismatic figures accompanied, once again, by a solo flute.

Fig. 5.1. Excerpt from Grimes' mad-scene



Moreover, there are several moments in the scene where Grimes recalls material from earlier in the opera: the mad-scene is characterised by intratextuality. Or, as Rupprecht (2001) puts it, "the scene's madness, musically speaking is an effect of fragmentary verbal and melodic quotations…" (p. 68). For instance, Grimes' angular phrase, "Accidental circumstances" mimics and recalls Swallow's vocal gestures from the prologue, and indeed, the opera's very opening woodwind declamatory melody. With the phrase, "Turn the skies back and begin again!", Grimes quotes text from his earlier so-called visionary aria in Act 1, and, though not a direct musical quotation, the melodic material in this section is nonetheless instantly recognisable as deriving from Grimes' earlier aria too. Following this, Grimes recalls the

musical round, “Old Joe has gone fishing”, first heard in Act 1, Scene 2 at the Boar Inn, sung by the full chorus. Other melodic elements that are present in the mad-scene, are taken from earlier exchanges with both Ellen and Balstrode. Grimes sings, “Ellen! Ellen! Give me your hand, your hand…”, recalling musical figures from the love duet at the end of the Prologue. Through this extensive deployment of intratextural reference, it is thus as if Grimes pieces together events that have transpired earlier in the opera, though fractured and fragmented within his memory, emerging somewhat as fleeting and intrusive heard voices.

One particularly important motif in the opera gains its first explicit expression in Grimes’ cry at the beginning of Act 2, “And God have mercy upon you”. The significance of this “x-motif” (Evans, 1979) or the “Grimes motif”, as Kennedy (1981) calls it, is made clear by the way in which it is immediately taken up in the proceeding *Allegretto* “accompaniment figure” (Evans, 1979, p. 113) and is subsequently reiterated several times over by Auntie, Ned Keene, Boles and, eventually the gathering chorus as they conspire against Grimes and march towards his hut (Fig.). In the mad-scene, then, at Reh. Figure 50, Grimes seals his fate, as he utters “To hell with all your mercy! To hell with your revenge, And God have mercy upon you”, clearly redolent of the Act 2 motif. Indeed, Evans suggests that “it is not too far-fetched to see (since one can undoubtedly hear) in the last great shouts… [of the chorus], the crucial x-motif” as well (p. 115). I continue my discussion of the Grimes motif in chapter 6 as I explore the ways in which (cognitive) disability is deployed as a structuring, formal aspect of, not just *Peter Grimes*, but Britten’s operatic oeuvre more generally.

Interlude VI - the mad-interlude

The Act 3, Scene 2 mad-scene is immediately preceded by an interlude which, as Rupprecht (2001) suggests, “begins a process by which the protagonist will cease to exist, physically and musically” (p. 67). Throughout this so-called mad-interlude, as in the mad-scene itself, we hear melodic fragments of utterances spoken earlier in the opera by Grimes, “distanced and distorted, with Peter’s voice mysteriously articulated in wordless orchestral timbres” (p. 67). A flute solo (Act 3, beginning four bars after Reh. Fig. 44) recalls Grime’s earlier remarks to Balstrode, “They listen to money” (Act 1, one bar after Reh. Fig. 44). An oboe solo (Act 3, beginning one bar after Reh. Fig. 45) quotes material from Grimes’ visionary Act 1 aria, “Now

the Great Bear and Pleiades". Additionally, the clarinets (Act 3, beginning four bars after Reh. Fig. 45) refer to Grimes' words to Ellen from Act 2, fifteen bars after Reh. Fig. 16), "Wrong to plan!". Furthermore, the muted horns' seventh chord, which is repeated throughout the interlude, recalls the string accompaniment to Grimes' words as he takes the oath: "I swear by Almighty God" in the opera's Prologue, five bars after Reh. Fig. 1. Other themes from earlier parts of the opera are also present in "extreme registral distortions" throughout the interlude (Rupprecht, 2001, p. 67). Rupprecht suggests that pub song, "Old Joe has gone fishing" of Act 1, Scene 2, beginning at Reh. Fig. 79, becomes "a strained solo for high violins" in the interlude (Act 3, Reh. Fig. 45). Moreover, Ellen's question to Grimes in Act 2, Scene 1 (beginning 13 bars after Reh. Fig. 16), "were we mistaken?", appears as a bass line in the mad-interlude (Act 3, beginning 5 bars after Reh. Fig. 45).

Fragmented intratextuality as Grimes' madness

Intratextuality is thus one of the central ways in which Grimes comes to be represented as mad, both in the mad-scene itself and in the orchestral interlude that precedes it. Moreover, such intratextual quotation appears to be, at least in the first instance, an almost random array of unmoored melodic and verbal fragments. Rupprecht, however, suggests that "[d]riving this apparently random surface, though, is a very clear mood progression… introduced always by the choric 'Grimes' cries to which Peter's thoughts are responses" (p. 68). The fragmentation of Grimes' thoughts then is punctuated by the chorus' cries of "Grimes". I use the term punctuated, here, both in the sense that the chorus' interjections are recurrent throughout the scene, but also in the sense that Grimes' thoughts are structured by them. Rupprecht points out that it is largely the focal pitches of the chorus' outbursts, that drive Grimes' replies (pp. 69-70). Clearly then, in Rupprecht's view, Grimes' fragmented utterance in the mad-scene cannot ultimately be understood without reference to the chorus, to the Borough, to society.

Chapter 6 – Neuroqueer Grimes

In the previous chapter, I explored the representation of madness in *Peter Grimes*, giving particular focus to Act 3, Scene 2, Grimes' so-called mad-scene. I identified the way in which the depiction of Grimes' madness at this point in the opera aligns somewhat with that of the longstanding operatic and dramatic tradition of the mad-scene. The operatic mad-scene, as I have highlighted, has its origins in some of the earliest works of the repertoire but was a particularly prominent feature of late 18th century and 19th century works. I have shown that the musical representation of madness in Grimes' Act 3 Scene 2 corresponds with the traditional, late 18th century and 19th century operatic mad-scene: in particular, the presence of unaccompanied florid singing in Grimes' mad-scene and the use of intratextual reference align closely with features of the typical operatic mad-scene. In addition, I have highlighted presence of extensive melodic reference in the so-called 'mad-interlude' (Rupprecht, 2001) that ushers in Grimes' mad-scene itself. The way in which earlier themes are subject to "extreme registral distortion", in the mad-interlude can be understood, I have suggested as the fragmentation or 'splitting' of Grimes' consciousness.

Whilst musically, Grimes' madness is portrayed in a manner that corresponds with the operatic mad-scenes of the 19th century, I have shown that the dramatic and narrative portrayal of madness in Britten's opera is somewhat at odds with broader 18th and 19th century literary depictions of disability. Crabbe's 1810 poetry, on which Britten's opera is based, depicts Grimes' madness as a fitting consequence of his immoral actions. Britten and Slater's adaptation however presents a rather more sympathetic characterisation of Grimes. Though we do not learn, with any sense of certainty, whether the operatic Grimes is innocent of the murder of his apprentices, Britten's music seems at least to imply that he is (see, for example, Kennedy, 1981, p.170). By underplaying Grimes' guilt, Britten's portrayal of madness might at first seem to be clearly differentiated from the moralistic, criminalised and pathologized madness of Crabbe's Grimes. Such a compassionate depiction, in some senses serves to decriminalise and depathologize the character of Grimes. However, this sympathetic depiction can also been viewed, as I have suggested, as a patronising and no less moralistic characterisation than Crabbe's depictions of Grimes'.

In this chapter, then, I turn to consider the ways in which we might say that Grimes is characterised in relation to (cognitive) disability throughout the opera, as a whole, and not merely at the opera's denouement, in the mad-scene itself.

Grimes' psychopathological descriptions revisited

As highlighted above, a number of scholarly interpretations of the opera have tended to use (psycho)pathologizing language to describe the character of Peter Grimes. One prominent example is White (1970), for instance, who refers to the operatic protagonist as "what might be called a maladjusted aggressive psychopath" (p. 116). Though her language is less direct than White's, Howard (1969) also speaks of Grimes' "maladjustments" (p. 13) and elsewhere remarks on his "verbally uncommunicable character" (p. 15). One critic described the opera as a "somber tale of an ill-adjusted fisherman" (as cited in Chowrimootoo, 2018, p. 43) and another recalled an anecdote about the broad public excitement surrounding the first production of Peter Grimes:

> [leaving] the bus he heard the conductor shouting at the top of a loud voice: "Sadler's Wells! Any more for Peter Grimes, the sadistic fisherman!" (as cited in Chowrimootoo, 2018, p. 31).

Kennedy (1981) writes that "Grimes is represented as the introvert outsider – psychopathic, to be sure – at war both with his nature and his fellow-being" (p. 169) and continues by relating Grimes' nature to circumstances surrounding, and themes present within Christopher Smart's poem, *Jubilate Agno*, written between 1759 and 1763 whilst Smart was confined at St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics in Bethnal Green, London. Britten had set Smart's poetry to music in his cantata, *Rejoice in the Lamb* (1943), which he composed, as it happens, only a couple of years prior to writing *Peter Grimes*. Smart's words: "For they said, he is besides himself… For Silly Fellow! Silly Fellow! Is against me and belongeth neither to me nor to my family" (beginning 1 bar before Reh. Fig. 20) resonate strongly, as Kennedy sees it, with "the essence of Britten's Grimes" and the accusations of madness he faces throughout the opera (p. 169).

The pathologizing language surrounding Peter Grimes is often deployed specifically in relation to the events leading up to the opera's conclusion, which Howard (1969) describes as Grimes' "mental breakdown" (p. 22). Evans (1979) refers to it as Grimes' "demented monologue"; Payne (1963) speaks of Grimes' "delirium"; and Kennedy (1981), Seymour (2004), Rupprecht (2001), Brett (2006), and Harper-Scott (2010) all deploy the term mad-scene specifically to refer to this particular moment in the opera. However, in addition, there is also sense in which the psychopathological language surrounding Grimes makes a more basic claim about his essential characterisation. In other words, cognitive disability is represented in the characterisation of Peter Grimes throughout the opera, and not merely at its tragic conclusion.

Musical representation of cognitive disability throughout Peter Grimes

As I have mentioned previously, Kennedy (1981) makes the point that the "haloes of sound" that surround Grimes in the Prologue of the opera, are like those found in Bach's St. John Passion. In making this observation, Kennedy sought to highlight the inherent innocence of Britten's characterisation of Grimes. Such an observation is, itself, not unrelated to disability. In the previous chapter, I highlighted that one of the ways Grimes' cognitive disability is represented at the opera's denouement is through the extensive use of melody quotation. In the case of the mad-scene, such quotations are taken from earlier moments of the opera: in other words, the mad-scene is characterised by intratextual quotation. During the Prologue, however, allusion to Bach's St. John Passion can be characterised as intertextual (as opposed to intra-) quotation. Straus (2018) writes of the musical representation of madness:

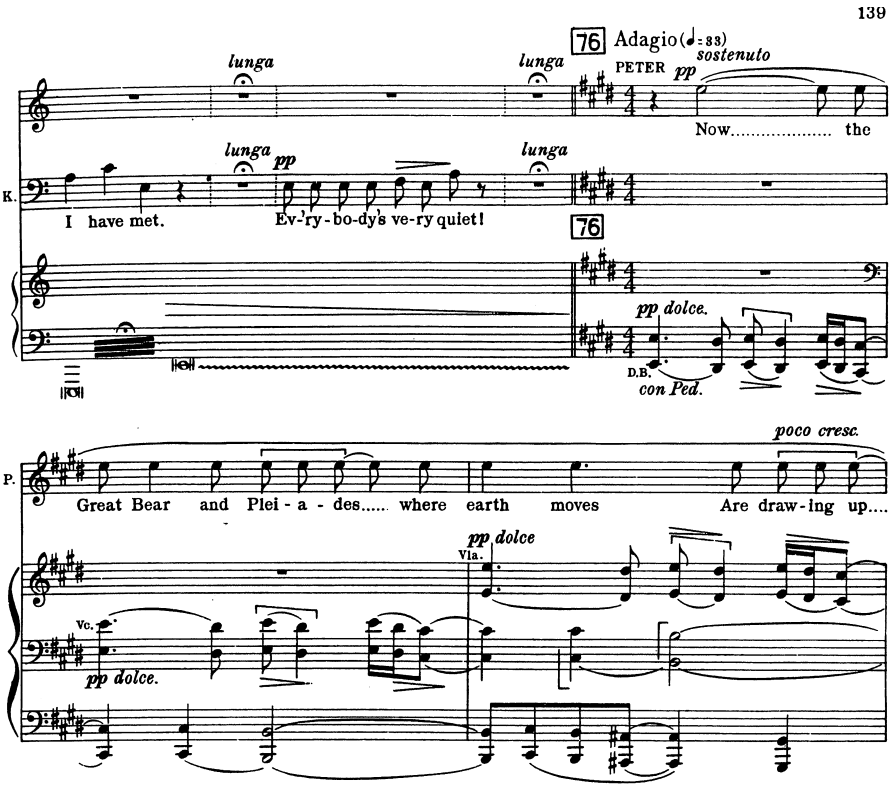
> As an epitome of its pervasive polyvocality, a lot of modernist music seems to hear voices, often in the form of quotation of other pieces that are stylistically and structurally incongruous with the main body of the music. (p. 94)

There is a sense then that Grimes' first utterance in the opera's Prologue, itself, somewhat represents cognitive disability. Moreover, the association of Grimes with the figure of Jesus Christ, through intertextual reference to the Bach Passion, might thus effectively also reproduce the long-standing literary and cultural trope of the holy fool. Something similar can also be observed in Britten's final opera, *Death in Venice*. Kennedy (1981) suggests that

Aschenbach's rhythmically free recitative soliloquies "originated in Britten's admiration for Pears's singing of the Evangelist in Passions by Schütz" (p. 254).

In his Act 1 aria, "Now the Great Bear and The Pleiades", Grimes sings predominantly on one note, an E natural. It goes without saying that in operas, arias usually tend to be melodically elaborate; Grimes' monotonous singing here is certainly non-normative. Moreover, the text of the aria is concerned principally with the sky and the stars, and a sense emerges of Grimes' visionary, poetic character. Additionally, given the contrast between the static nature of Grimes' singing for the majority of the aria, and its flowing muted string accompaniment, in canon at the octave, the music seemingly separates into distinct stratified layers (Fig. 6.1). For Straus (2018), the stratification of musical texture into discrete layers represents a form of madness, the splitting of consciousness (p. 28). Indeed, in response to Grimes' aria, the chorus mutter '"He's mad or drunk!" (Act 1. Reh. Fig. 77).

Fig 6.1. Excerpt from Grimes' aria "Now the Great Bear and the Pleiades"



The string accompaniment to Grimes' aria involves a four-note descending scalic pattern which alludes, in the first instance, to the earlier love duet between Grimes and Ellen, as the two sing together "My voice out of the pain…" and "here is a friend" (Fig. 6.2). The love duet itself begins bitonally, with Ellen singing in the notated key of E major, and Peter in that of F minor. In one sense, this moment of the opera clearly portrays an element of difference between Grimes and Ellen, and a sense that communication between the pair is somehow fraught. White (1970) suggests: "Occasionally Britten feels justified in using bitonality to emphasize Peter's maladjustment, and then he sometimes tries to reconcile the simultaneous use of hostile keys by enharmonic means" (p. 118). The deployment of bitonality, itself, can also be understood as a representation of cognitive disability, of madness and the splitting of consciousness (Straus, 2018, p. 28). Bitonality is deployed elsewhere in Peter Grimes in the Act 1 Storm interlude (Act 1, beginning at Reh. Fig. 58) (Fig. 6.3). Britten deploys bitonality to similar effect in many of his other operas: in *Billy Budd* to emphasise a difference in character between Billy and Claggart (Seymour, 2007, pp. 141-142) and in *Gloriana* to represent Elizabeth's "psychological instability" upon Essex's arrival (2007, p. 172), for instance.

Fig. 6.2. Excerpt from Grimes and Ellen's "Love duet"

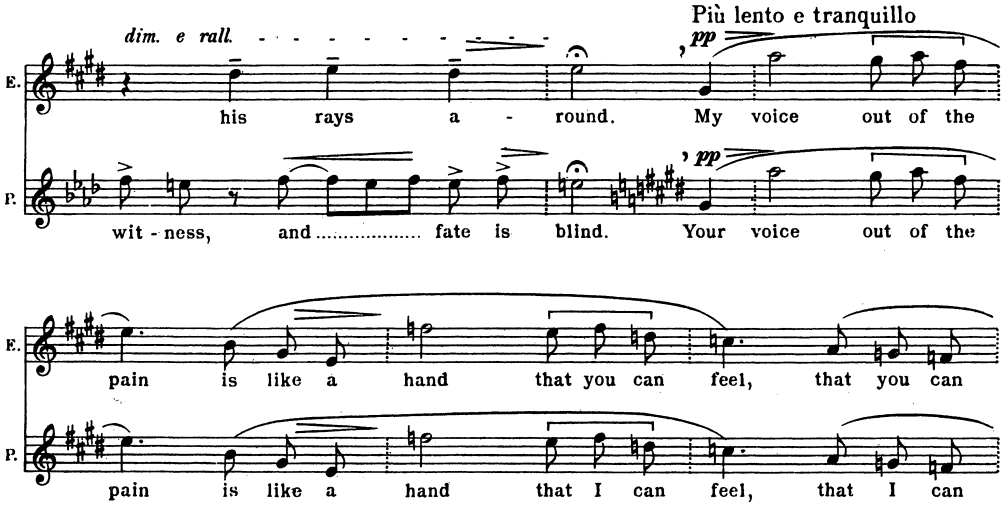
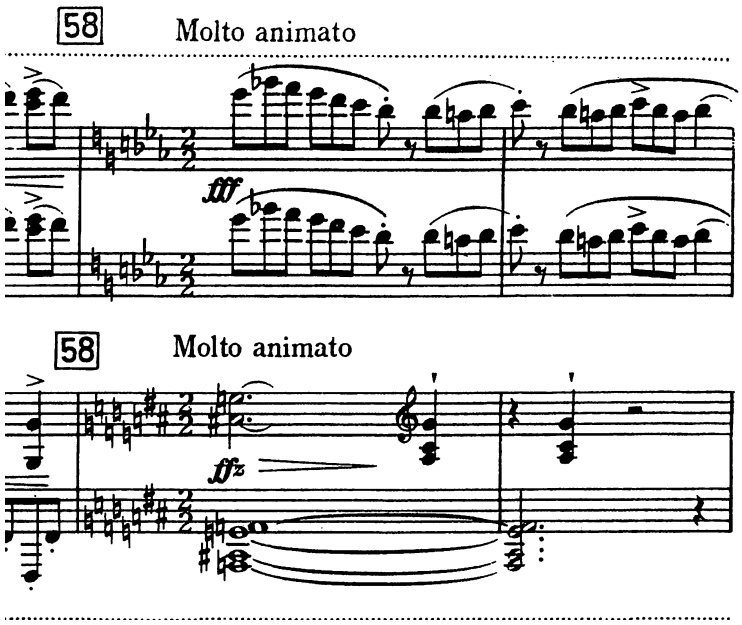


Fig. 6.3. Excerpt from the Act 1 Storm Interlude (two piano reduction)



The use of bitonality in *Peter Grimes* is put to use in order to represent disability as an aspect of Grimes' essential nature, but it is also deployed as a musical aesthetic choice, more generally, thus perhaps representing madness in an abstract, formal sense.

Can music really represent disability?

Thus far, throughout my analysis of *Peter Grimes*, I have found Straus' ideas about the musical representation of disability to be particularly useful. However, as I highlighted in the introduction to this thesis, one problematic element of Straus' reading of disability representation in music is the specificity with which he relates various musical features to particular impairments. In my view, Straus is correct to associate non-normative musical features with disability (that is, non-normative minds and bodies), but I observe that there is considerable overlap between his accounts of the representation of various sorts of disability. For instance, Straus (2018) suggests that physical deformity/disfigurement is represented musically through the "pervasive fragmentation of form" (p. 72). But elsewhere, as we have seen, musical fragmentation, Straus suggests, represents cognitive disability as well. Moreover, musical stasis, for Straus represents mobility impairment, but also "idiocy" (p. 105).

I am largely in agreement with Straus that modernist music, in many ways, subverts 19th-century textural, formal and harmonic norms. Furthermore, given the long-standing history of relating musical structures and musical works to the body, I think Straus is correct to claim that modernist music therefore implies the subversion of bodily norms too. Moreover, do we not also conceive of musical works with reference to the mind, to psychological states and to affect? In this sense, then, we can surely also claim that modernist music implies the subversion of cognitive norms as well as bodily norms. It is in this sense then, that I agree that "Disability is right at the core of musical modernism; it is one of the things that musical modernism is fundamentally about" (Straus, 2018, p. ix). Moreover, not merely modernist music, but music of any period can involve non-normative features; Straus point, though, is that modernist music subverts established 19th-century musical norms particularly pervasively and in particular important ways. However, although we can think about music with reference to our minds and our bodies in a general sense, we certainly do not tend to think about music with specific reference to arms, legs and amygdalae. This is to say that music has the capacity to represent disability, but perhaps not impairment. Moreover, we might even say that the musical representation of disability thus confounds the distinction between cognitive and physical disability.

In relation to the character of Grimes, then, we might more appropriately use the term "neurodivergence" to refer to Grimes' non-normative mind rather than attempting any specific psychiatric diagnosis. We know, from the libretto, that Grimes experiences mad delusions at the opera's denouement. It is also possible to claim that many of musical features that come to be associated with Grimes' madness in the mad-scene are pervasive aspects of his characterisation throughout the opera as whole. Thus, I would argue we can at least determine that the character of Peter Grimes involves the representation of cognitive disability in the broadest of senses. The word "neurodivergent", is particularly useful here as it speaks to a broad "continuum of sensory, affectual, and cognitive processing" (Rosqvist, Chown, and Stenning, 2020, p. 2). Rather than articulating any rigid definitional or diagnostic boundaries, the concept of neurodivergence is a capacious one. Before considering other terms that may be particularly usefully employed in relation to the character of Grimes, I want to return, for a moment, to another notable strand of the *Grimes* scholarship, that concerning queerness.

Psychoanalytical and psychosexual interpretations of Grimes

Hans Keller (1952), writing as a music critic but also drawing heavily from his practice as a psychologist, describes Grimes' nature in psychoanalytical terms, suggesting that "in each of us, there is something of a Grimes, though most of us have outgrown or at least outwitted him sufficiently not to recognise him too consciously" (pp. 111-124). Indeed Keller (2013) surmises that "Peter could serve as a model exhibit of the obsessional personality in a psychological museum and his sadism is therefore far more latent than manifest" (p. 19). In this way, Keller elaborates upon the notion of Grimes' psychopathological nature, outlining its psychosexual, or developmental, origins (Keller, 1995). Keller's assertions are perhaps less condemnatory and criminalising than some of the other psychopathological character descriptions highlighted above. Though Keller speaks sympathetically of Grimes' nature, his assessment of Grimes in relation to psychoanalytic theories of psychological immaturity is no less psychopathologizing.

Brett's queer reading of Grimes

Keller's psychoanalytical (or psychosexual) interpretation of Grimes was recognised by Brett who, in his trailblazing queer reading of the opera, writes:

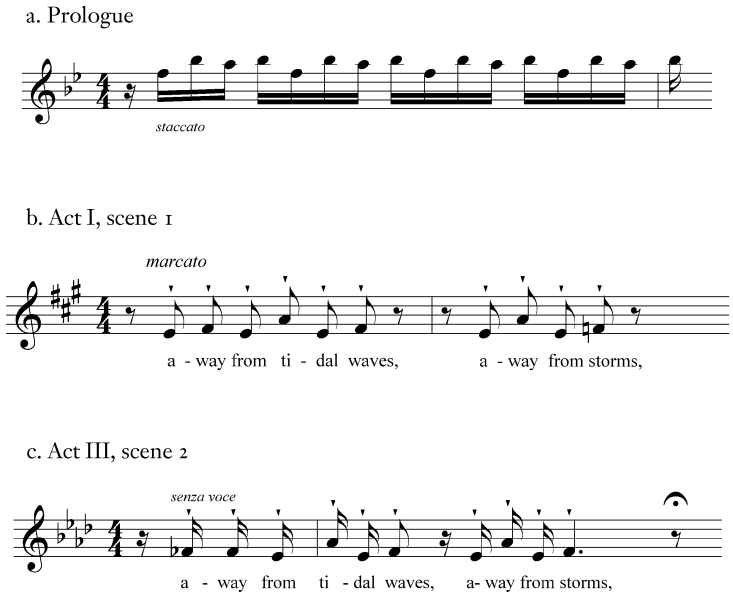
> In the most sensitive account of Peter Grimes to date…, Hans Keller, who draws usefully on psychoanalytic theory as well as a secure musical and dramatic instinct, points out that Peter "cannot show, let alone prove his tenderness as easily as his wrath, which, alas, the people on stage don't hear. Thus he is destined to seem worse than he is, and not as good as he feels. Peter Grimes is the story of the man who couldn't fit in". (1983, p.182)

As he develops his queer interpretation of the character of Grimes, Brett insists that he "goes further than Keller's psychoanalytical abstractions" (p. 183), concluding that "[t]here is every reason to suppose that the unspoken matter is what in 1945 was still the crime that hardly dare speak its name, and that it is to the homosexual condition that Peter Grimes is addressed" (p. 187). Brett argues that Grimes' psychopathological characteristics, in psychoanalytic terms: his immaturity, his "difference of nature – proud, aloof, rough and visionary" (p. 185) represent homosexuality throughout the opera allegorically. In one sense, this is typical of the way in which literary and cultural texts frequently reduce disability to the status of mere metaphor (a point developed by Mitchell and Snyder, 2000, to which I shall return later in this chapter). However, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that, in Brett's reading, the psychopathological/psychoanalytic aspects of Grimes' character are merely (and arbitrarily) symbolic of homosexuality. Indeed, Brett alludes to a more complex connection, in *Peter Grimes*, between psychopathology and homosexuality in two important ways. On the Act 2 quarrel between Grimes and Ellen, and Grimes' subsequent violent outburst, Brett writes:

> Grimes accepts society's judgement, he also implicitly accepts the role forced on him by the prejudice and inhumanity of his fellow beings. He becomes the criminal he is thought to be… [I]t is characteristic of stigmatized people to internalize society's judgement of them… A common result of this internalization is that in the attempt to conform the person represses anger and eventually comes to distrust all feeling to such an extent that on top of the burden of insecurity and self-hatred is heaped the paralysis of depression. Sometimes however, the dam holding back the anger and guilt bursts with a resulting deluge of senseless violence. (1983, pp. 193-194)

The psychopathological elements of Grimes' nature refer, in this way, to the deleterious psychological impact of oppression in general, and homophobia in particular. Secondly, Brett draws from Walter White's analysis of *Peter Grimes* in which he connects the *staccato* "angry crowd's motif in the courtroom Prologue" with Grimes' melody in Act 1 Scene 1 and its reappearance in the Act 3 Scene 2 mad-scene (Brett, 1983, p. 186; White, 1970, p. 118) (Fig. 6.4).

Fig. 6.4. Comparison of figures, taken from Brett (2006, p. 20)



Brett (after Walter White) points out that Grimes' statements are clear inversions of the crowd's earlier motive. For Brett this is "a musical clue to his perverse relationship with the Borough through the inverting and turning inwards of the outward forces of oppression" (Brett, 1983, p. 186). Brett is, I feel, particularly sensitive to an alternative use of the word "inversion", one that relates to 19th-century and early 20th-century language surrounding homosexuality (see, Havelock, 1915, for instance). In a later article, discussing a queer interpretation of *The Turn of the Screw*, Brett recalls his discussion of the use of musical inversion to denote the impact of oppressive forces upon Grimes.

> Inversion is a technical process in music which Britten had used before… to symbolize the protagonist's internalization of society's disapproval. It cannot be simple-

> mindedly equated with the use of the word to mean sexual deviance in the language of nineteenth-century sexologists, but certainly the present theme operates along suggestive lines. (Brett, 2006, p. 96)

Although Brett resists drawing too close a connection between melodic inversion and "sexual inversion", this additional meaning is at clearly at least a latent one for Brett. We must remember that homosexuality, in the first iteration of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1952) was described as a form of mental illness. Indeed, this was only changed as recently as 1970s.

Furthermore, another important part of Brett's scholarship on *Peter Grimes* is the exploration of the libretto's development. Brett (2006, pp. 34-51) charts its evolution by considering Britten and Pears' provisional ideas about the possible a scene structure for the opera. Brett also considers Montagu Slater's earliest versions of the libretto text, and later changes that were made to Slater's work by Britten and Pears with the assistance of the opera's stage director Eric Crozier and Ronald Duncan (who was to be librettist for Britten's next opera, *The Rape of Lucretia*). Brett highlights that the earliest draft scenarios, written in Pears' hand, were particularly striking for the way in which they emphasised the sexual element of Grimes' behaviour towards the boy apprentice (p. 39). Brett continues: "Peter [Pears] must have realised this was going too far, for in another draft on board the *Axel Johnson* the following spring as the young couple sailed to England, he changed the hut scene to emphasize Grimes's violence" (p. 40). As he transformed Britten and Pears' initial ideas into the first drafts of the libretto, Slater developed the societal aspects of the opera, drawing out the way in which the whole community (and not just Peter Grimes himself) was implicated in the death of the second apprentice and the way in which Grimes was, throughout the opera, the victim of unjust social marginalization. Brett writes that under Slater's hand, the "hypocritical community [is] represented not only as in perpetual struggle with the sea but also as obsessed with conformity and enforcing 'standards' to its own arbitrary liking" (p. 42). However, as Brett continues:

> Although Slater constructed the social aspects of the opera along lines that (so far as we can tell) Pears and Britten had not previously imagined, he did not feel the need

> for a complete change of direction... He appears rather to have relished the hints of loose-living and sadism [i.e. the moralistic pathological elements] in Peter's drafts, even those of homoeroticism. (p. 42)

Thus, though Slater's efforts developed the notion of the individual against society (a notion to which I shall return shortly), in his draft libretto he maintained a sense of the "psychological profile that set up the audience either to pity the protagonist or to hold him in contempt, but not to identify with him" (p. 43). Outlining the way in which the final alterations to the libretto involved removing the "set of psychological circumstances that would make [Grimes'] sadism explicit, or suggest a fundamental cause in an Oedipal conflict" (p. 44), Brett makes the claim that, in the opera's final iteration, Peter Grimes becomes "a nonexistent entity, finally, apart from the community and its actions, and this is what makes him an allegorical figure rather than a 'character'" (p. 45). For Brett then:

> If the idea of the 'individual against the crowd' was to work, and if the drama were to become an allegory of oppression (both external and internalized), then the process of Grimes's self-destruction had to be felt to be the direct result of his social situation, so that everyone in the audience could recognize a little of themselves in him. (p. 43-44)

I think there is an interesting development in Brett's thought surrounding *Peter Grimes* here. Brett's initial queer reading of the opera claimed some hidden, subsumed queer truth in Britten's characterisation of Grimes. However, in Brett's later writing, he takes pains to emphasise the sense that Grimes might be read as an allegory of queerness but that definitive allusions to homosexuality had been all but exhumed from the text.

What is at stake, in Brett's renegotiation of the extent to which Grimes can be considered essentially queer versus a mere allegory for queerness, is, I would argue, disability representation. By this, I mean to say that where aspects of the libretto and the music seem to allude to queerness, they can only do so in relation cognitive non-normativity. Brett's point about inversion is one such case: Grimes' internalisation of oppression, his inversion, can only be understood as having a latent queer meaning in reference to psychopathologized

conceptions of homosexuality. Moreover, Brett's account of the way in which queerness was gradually exhumed from the text in the development of *Peter Grimes* itself assumes something of a psycho-developmental basis of homosexuality. Additionally, Brett's notion that the final version of Grimes is an "allegory, not a 'character'" (Brett, 2006, p. 45) further raises the issue of disability, simply because disability is so often deployed within a text merely as metaphor. Thus, I want to make a rather strange sounding claim: precisely because certain psychopathological elements had been removed from the text at a late stage in the development of *Peter Grimes*, disability is, even more so, a latent feature of plot.

Neuroqueering / cripping Grimes

Given that the discourses of disability and queerness are linked in significant ways (Mcruer, 2006; Mcruer and Mollow, 2012; Walker, 2021), it is perhaps important to find ways to discuss the character of Grimes in simultaneous relation to the representation of queerness and that of disability. In chapter 3 of this thesis, I explored the notion of crip and cripping as a way of expressing the subversive potential of disability in coalition with queerness. Of Grimes then, we might suggest that he is crip, or that he "performs cripping".

As I have described, many of the musical representations of disability in *Peter Grimes* relate not merely to the character Grimes himself, but rather more broadly, in relation to the social fabric and the environment. In other words, disability is formally or structurally deployed. The move from content to form in some senses, then, seems to relate to the move from individual models of disability to a 'social model' (though significantly not necessarily THE social model).

A key feature of the scholarship surrounding Peter Grimes has been to explore the way in which he is made a social outsider. Thus, the elements of the music that point to bodily or cognitive difference might be understood as a marker of stigma (Goffman, 1963) and of being marked as different. As Goffman notes, "The term stigma, then, will be used to refer to an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed" (p. 3). In this sense, Grimes' tragedy can arguably be understood as the internalised effect of stigma and shame.

Understood in this way, there is a problematic element at play here, namely that the cognitive difference as the outcome of the social impact of exclusion secures a sense in which cognitive difference is itself stigmatised. Perhaps one way to speak about the ambivalent relationship between content and form is through the use of the notion of misfitting as developed by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011).

Misfitting is a concept that locates the 'problem' of disability in the fit between the individual and society, rather than inhering in either the society itself or the individual. In this way, we avoid the problem of diagnosis being moved from individual to society (which in some senses happens in the anti-psychiatry movement which diagnoses society as 'sick') and the fact that the social model unwittingly ignores embodied aspects of disability/impairment. Given that the scholarship surrounding Peter Grimes dramatizes the tension between the social and individual aspects of disability, it might be helpful to think of Grimes in relation to an aesthetics of misfitting. This also speaks to the opera's content and form and to a profound and troubling ambivalence my reading of the work in this chapter sets out to illuminate.

Chapter 7 – Analysis III: Representation of Disability – a turn from content to form

Characterised by the contrast of a rising interval of a semitone, and falling minor thirds, the Grimes motif that I have suggested becomes associated with his tragic ending and his neurodivergence is I would argue implicated in a broader representation of madness beyond the work itself. Allen (1999) highlights the significance of rising semitones at the point at which the relationship between Peter Grimes and Ellen is established at the beginning of the opera. During their Act 1 bitonal 'love duet', Peter laments, "The truth… the pity… and the truth", with the interval of a rising semitone emphasised as well as that of the falling minor third on the word "pity". Ellen takes up the minor 3rd connecting "pity" with "Peter", the two words already sharing a degree of phonological assonance. The distance of a semitone is also established as the figurative (perhaps ultimately insurmountable) distance between the characters of Ellen and Grimes: the two simultaneously sing in the keys of E major and F minor respectively for most of their duet. At the *Più lento e tranquillo*, the pair come together in (a written) E major, where the rising semitone figure is developed, appearing as a rising compound semitone (minor 9th) which, as Allen (1999) describes, becomes a significant part of Grimes' musical vocabulary and indeed permeates the orchestral interludes as well. Incidentally, expressive use of that particular interval, the minor 9th, is deployed in the representation of madness in Britten's late cantata, *Phaedra*: at Reh. Fig. 8, the title character sings "Phaedra in all her madness stands before you.", and, at Reh. Fig. 11, "Alas, Alas, my violence to resist you made my face inhuman, hateful".

Detailed exploration of motivic development in *Peter Grimes* is found throughout Evans (1979), Kennedy (1981), and Allen (1999). For the present purposes though, it is worth drawing out a further point: the aforementioned intervals of the rising semitone and the falling minor third are also significant components of the so-called 'DSCH' motif, a well-known and frequently deployed musical cryptogram referring to the composer Dimitri Shostakovich. The four-note motif, comprising the pitches D, Eb (in German musical notation, the note Eb is named 'Es' – hence the letter 'S' in the cryptogram), C, and B (named 'H' in German notation), was extensively deployed as a "personal motto" (Roseberry, 2009, p. 232) by Shostakovich. Shostakovich's *Tenth Symphony* (Op. 93) is most often highlighted as his first

deployment of the motive in his music[26]. His later *String Quartet No. 8* (Op. 110) has been described as the piece most fully "saturated" with the motive (Brown, 2006). Indeed it is possible to see works composed prior to the *Tenth Symphony* as containing precedents to the DSCH motive, if not definitive occasions of the motive proper. Brown at least considers the possibility that these early precedents to the DSCH motive, were part of an "interesting (if unlikely) scenario that Shostakovich deliberately revealed his motto in stages, purposefully forging a decades-long, inter-opus narrative of self-realization, culminating with his explicit self-assertion in the Tenth Symphony" (p. 100).

It has been suggested that, in Britten's 1943 cantata, *Rejoice in the Lamb* (which is cited in the SMT-AMT database of musical representations of disability as representing "mental disorder (madness)", with the accompanying comment that "[t]he cantata sets the poetry of Christopher Smart, who wrote his *Jubilate Agno* while committed to an asylum in London". In the organ part, we hear a transposed, but intervallically faithful, version of the DSCH motif as the chorus sing "For the officers of the peace are at variance with me", and then again at "and the watchman smites me with his staff", to chilling effect. Britten then sets the words "Silly Fellow! Silly Fellow!" sung in octaves by all choral voices to the same four-note motif: the implication being that the abuses and accusations of madness hurled at Christopher Smart by the "officers of the peace" correspond with the experiences of Shostakovich under the oppressive Stalinist state. It is of course impossible, however, to discern whether or not these instances of DSCH were deliberate.

As it happens though, the DSCH motif appears to have been used again elsewhere in Britten's oeuvre, in *The Rape of Lucretia*, as an important motivic element of Lucretia's Act 2 aria, "Give him this orchid" (Roseberry, 2009, p. 229). Throughout the aria (which indeed might itself be described a moment of frenzied madness) we hear transposed reproductions of the motif five bars after Figure 72, again two bars later, and two further times over the course of the following three bars. Indeed, the final section of the aria, from Figure 73 onwards, involves repeated instances of DSCH (again in a transposed version) in the woodwinds, as well as

[26] Though the *Tenth Symphony* was not completed until 1951, and received its first performance in 1953, Wilson (1994) highlights that early sketches of the piece dated from 1946.

multiple truncated, three-note variations of the motive. Interestingly though, whilst the first phrase of Lucretia's aria, "Give him this orchid" very closely resembles a faithful (albeit transposed) version of DSCH, its final interval is however a descending tone rather than the semitone that occurs in Shostakovich's personal motto. Lucretia's utterance here, the modified form of DSCH, itself clearly echoes an earlier passage sung by Tarquinius to Lucretia from Act 2, Figure 28: "Give me your lips…", before he attacks her.

Evans (1979) argues that these utterances (Tarquinius' at Act 2, Figure 28 and thus Lucretia's phrase "Give him this orchid") are in fact the result of the combining of two other important motives established earlier in the opera: a descending scalic figure associated with the character of Tarquinius (which Evans calls motive 'x'), and a five-note figure, motive 'y', which is closely and persistently associated throughout the opera with the uttering of Lucretia's name (p. 131). For Evans then, in the moments before Tarquinius rapes Lucretia, and in the opening phrase of Lucretia's subsequent aria, we hear the musical motivic implications of the imposition of Tarquinius (motive x) upon Lucretia (motive y). A clear link is established between Tarquinius' intentions (and actions), and the resulting affective state in which Lucretia finds herself. That the combined x and y motive so quickly further develops through Lucretia's aria perhaps demonstrates something of the spiralling effect of trauma. I find it particularly intriguing that the DSCH motive should emerge as the outcome of motivic development throughout Britten's opera rather than being introduced as basic, fundamental motivic material in its own right. Either this undermines the assertion that Britten deliberately included reference to Shostakovich in The Rape of Lucretia (in which case, we should perhaps also question how deliberate its presence in *Rejoice in the Lamb* is), or there is a sense in which Britten adds nuance the notion of the act of naming and what it means to be named.

Indeed, concluding her Act 2 aria, Lucretia declaims "For all men love the chaste Lucretia!" singing her own name melismatically to the five-note motive y. Though that motive is used extensively throughout the opera by others, and as a recurring orchestral motive to refer to Lucretia, it is only at the end of her aria that she sings the figure herself. It is as if, at this moment, Lucretia finally internalises, and accepts as true, the oppressive ways that others make use of her name. Strikingly, the *tessitura* at which Lucretia sings motive y means that

the figure contains within it the precise notes of DSCH, that is D, Eb, C and B natural (albeit ordered differently). There is something intriguing about the way in which Shostakovich's personal naming motto finds its full intervallic realisation through Lucretia's frenzied madness (as I have outlined above) but achieves its exact pitches at the precise moment at which Lucretia internalises the oppressive acts of naming present earlier in the opera. Since within the opera, 'motive y' is not sung directly to Lucretia on stage by any of the other characters, the implied mechanism and process of such internalisation is far more subtle: occurring in the orchestra, at the structural, or we might even say subconscious, level of motivic development.

The musical and dramatic potential of acts of naming is not, however, unique to *The Rape of Lucretia*. Indeed, Rupprecht's rigorously analytical interpretation of *Peter Grimes* draws out the way in which the "tragedy of *Peter Grimes* turns on acts of naming" (2001 p. 32). As Harper-Scott (2010) summarises, "the opera's dramatic power" is constituted by the violent force which language and naming can have when wielded by groups and individuals:

> the way that the Borough and Grimes respectively configure their musical presentations of his name outlines the main thrust of his tragedy, from his calling to the dock to the chilling wails of his name during the man-hunt. In other contexts, statements take on illocutionary force – saying becomes doing – such as, in the decisive turning-point of the opera, when Grimes makes a life changing decision to the words, "So be it, and God have mercy upon me!" (p. 364).

Here we have come full circle. I highlighted above that Grimes' utterance "God have mercy upon me!" (the so-called Grimes motive, recalled importantly, in Grimes' Act 3 mad-scene, at Reh. Fig. 50) is itself related to the DSCH motive (albeit somewhat loosely). The fact that Lucretia's tragedy similarly seems to 'turn on the act of naming', through allusion to Shostakovich's personal DSCH motto, is somewhat uncanny.

In addition to the relatedness of Shostakovich's personal motto to the Grimes motive, there are moments throughout *Peter Grimes* at which DSCH seems to figure more explicitly. Given that Britten appears to have made clear use of DSCH in his 1943 cantata, *Rejoice in the Lamb*, and that he uses, develops and indeed deconstructs the motive throughout *The Rape of*

Lucretia, it does not seem entirely unlikely for Britten to have made additional use of the motive in the intervening period, during the composition of *Peter Grimes*.

Thus in *Peter Grimes*, at the end of the Act 1 'love duet', we can also hear something akin to 'DSCH' as Grimes and Ellen sing "…out of the pain", "that you can feel", and "here is a friend". However, in each case, the final interval is a descending tone rather than the semitone that would more accurately reproduce the DSCH motif. Whilst this might initially seem to discredit my observation, the fact that instances of the DSCH motive in *Rejoice in the Lamb* and the *Rape of Lucretia* are widely acknowledged certainly gives significant weight to my suggestion. Additionally, given that the moment appears at the end of an extended passage of unaccompanied singing (in two different keys simultaneously, no less), a drifting of pitch is not unlikely. The final written E sung together by Grimes and Ellen, at this moment, is met with a soft high E played by the flutes and the violins (a possible deliberate and practical compositional subtlety to allow for a degree of inconspicuous correction of the vocal pitch, if necessary). All this is to say that in the (somewhat likely) event that the vocal parts have become flat in intonation and are subsequently adjusted at the last moment to match the re-entry of the orchestra, the effect is such that an intervallically faithful version of the DSCH motif is heard at "here is a friend" even though it is not actually written as such in the score. Furthermore, in a sense, the figures we hear at "…out of the pain", and "that you can feel" in the *Grimes* love duet correspond with Lucretia's phrase "Give him this orchid" (with the final interval being a whole tone rather than the semitone of the DSCH motive proper). The subsequent, and late, iteration of DSCH heard at "here is a friend" corresponds, then, with the way in which the DSCH motive proper emerges only after the initial distorted versions that we hear at the opening of Lucretia's aria.

Grimes' repetition of the Grimes motive in the mad-scene and his reiteration of motivic material from the 'love duet', "Ellen! Ellen! Give me your hand, your hand…", are therefore both effectively intratextual references and are, simultaneously, instrusive intertextual ones. As intratextual references, these figures reproduce musical and textual material from earlier in the opera, depicting the manner in which Grimes is seemingly troubled by his memory of fragments of prior moments of the drama. Intratextuality is a significant characteristic

feature of the 18th / 19th century mad-scene tradition and appears to be reproduced here as the depiction of Grimes' intrusive mad hallucinations.

As intertextual references, though, such figures relate directly to Britten's earlier use of the DSCH motif in *Rejoice in the Lamb* and, of course, its particular association there with madness. In addition, the allusions to the DSCH motive in Grimes' mad-scene also foreshadow the prominent use of the motive at Lucretia's moment of frenzied madness in *The Rape of Lucretia*. Moreover, the deployment of DSCH in *Grimes* establishes a link with the music and circumstances of Shostakovich, thus having a somewhat intrusive quality in relation to the narrative of *Peter Grimes* itself. That is, intertextuality confounds or disturbs the opera's plot, and does so somewhat persistently. As Straus highlights, intrusive intertextuality is a prominent feature of modernist music and one which he suggests represents madness. In this way, I read the allusions to DSCH in Grimes' mad-scene as forms of intrusive heard voices themselves. Of course, such heard voices do not operate at the level of plot, but rather seem to intrude upon the musical work, as a whole, in a more abstract, or formal sense. I shall give further consideration anon to the connections and discontinuities between depictions of Grimes' madness (in the libretto and its musical setting) and the more abstract representations (or deployments) of madness that emerge as formal aspects of the work.

Biographically, knowledge of Britten's respect for Shostakovich (signalled further by his later dedication of the third church parable, *The Prodigal Son*, to the Russian composer) certainly adds weight to the conjecture that Britten might have made deliberate use of the DSCH motive in his own works. Conlon (2013) describes the basic sympathy that Britten shared with Shostakovich in relation to the censorship of the Russian composer's work under the Stalinist regime of mid-20th century: "The story of their friendship and mutual admiration across the barrier of the Cold War is an extraordinary one" (p. 448). Conlon offers the suggestion that Shostakovich used (motivic) code within his symphonic writing to express sentiments that would, if more openly stated, have been disallowed and suppressed by the Soviet state, with severe repercussions for the composer:

> Shostakovich had fallen in love with a young woman and would have divorced his wife and offered marriage to the young lady. She declined and subsequently left for Spain and married a documentary film producer who was filming the Spanish Civil War. His last name was Karmen. Themes from Georges Bizet's Carmen are interwoven throughout the Fifth Symphony; the great "apotheosis" is taken from the opera's "Habanera." Elena, the young woman, had a nickname: "Lala." In solfège, "la" is the note A Natural. It is first sounded and repeated three times at the beginning of the symphony and, at the end of the symphony, is obsessively repeated two hundred fifty-two times! (p. 543)

Conlon subsequently draws out connections between Shostakovich's predilection for motivic code within his compositions and the way in which Britten's operas can be understood as being, in a more general sense, coded expressions of his queerness prior to the (partial) decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967; though he does not make specific reference to Britten's own inventive use of motivic development, the idea that Britten might have coded Shostakovich's personal motto into his own works (as I have elaborated above) certainly does fit rather conveniently into Conlon's interpretation of the relationship and connection between the two composers.

> Benjamin Britten lived in those same turbulent times but on the Western side of the Cold War divide, enjoying freedom of speech and most civil liberties: the right to dissent (he was a conscientious objector as far back as 1930s) and a near complete lack of censorship. Britten could choose to write what he wanted; Shostakovich couldn't. Despite all of this, Britten chose code as well. In his choice of subjects (primarily, though not exclusively, of the operas) and their treatment, he was one of the first to deal with homosexuality and homoerotic relationships in his works. (pp. 450-451)

However, by something in the way of cautionary counter-argument to the above, I am especially intrigued by the way in which Conlon casts the well-rehearsed queer interpretation of Britten's operas (following Brett, 1983; Hindley, 1992 and McClatchie, 1996 et al.). In the

imaginary of Cold War code breaking and double agents. What is interesting about this particular rhetorical framing is the way in which it betrays its ideological roots. Harper-Scott (2012) demonstrates the way in which histories of musical modernism, especially Vols. IV and V of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Taruksin, 2005a, 2005b), tend to reduce the understanding of the twentieth century to an opposition of US. and USSR between capitalism and communism, and eventually to a narrative of U.S. exceptionalism and capitalist triumphalism.

> The history Taruskin tells can easily be summarized, because, allowing for the odd idiosyncratic tweak, it is the principal ideological narrative of our age. The story goes that every intellectual and political current in Europe in the nineteenth century was building inexorably towards the catastrophes of the twentieth century, since which point Europe has been in terminal decline and is now economically, politically, militarily, and morally defunct. The victor of history is the American political-economic model, and no alternative can be imagined… (Harper-Scott, 2012, p. 20)

Harper-Scott continues:

> Taruskin devotes considerable time to feeding Russian composers into his history of the nineteenth century… [and, by doing so] prepares the ground for the assumptions of volumes IV and V, that the USA-USSR axis of the later twentieth century not only holds the central economic and political fact of the period but *inevitably does so* (Harper-Scott, 2012, p. 21).

For Harper-Scott, the way in which Taruskin holds the Cold-War to be the culmination of 20th-century history effectively renders the American so-called 'triumph of capitalism over communism' an interpretive 'quilting point'. By 'quilting point', Harper-Scott is referring specifically to Zizek's usage of Lacan's notion of the '*Point de Capiton*' (Lacan, 1993, pp. 267-268): for Lacan, a *point de capiton*, or 'quilting point' is a concept or signifying idea around which meaning is conferred, and without which all meaning can only ever be arbitrary. Lacan introduces this idea to describe the condition of psychosis and the effects of trauma, the psychotic or traumatised individual being characterised fundamentally as lacking such

conceptual quilting points; Zizek (2008) uses Lacan's notion, however, to explore the concept and function of ideology, and the way in which ideology so easily passes as the natural order of things. Ideology, in this sense, refers to the manner in which a series of ethical, economic and political assumptions come to structure meaning, acting as quilting points for the way in which we think about the world and our place in it more generally.

The connection Conlon (2013) draws between Britten and Shostakovich, then, might only at first seem to be an obvious and a logical one: both Britten and Shostakovich, through their music, so the argument goes, challenged the oppressive circumstances in which they found themselves. Shostakovich, through ingenious use of motivic code, was able to subvert harsh cultural censorship under the Soviet state. Britten, similarly, the argument continues, alludes to the plight of homosexuals in mid twentieth-century Britain, through the deployment of metaphor and ambiguous characterisation of his protagonists in order not to draw too close attention from the uninitiated. However, Conlon's choice to foreground the Cold-War divide in his comparison between the two composers, accordingly taking the Cold-War to be the historical axis around which twentieth century music can be understood, infers (perhaps unwittingly) that Shostakovich and Britten's ultimate struggle was against state interference: Soviet communism, and British post-war socialist economic policy, respectively. Indeed, this economic quilting point would have us understand that the gradual decriminalisation of homosexuality in Britain (towards the end of Britten's life) was, at least in part, due to the increasing priority given to individual liberties in British society throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

I raise the issue of quilting points, then, in relation to Conlon's work not to critique his conclusions, in fact I am in basic agreement that certain productive connections can clearly be drawn between Britten, Shostakovich and their respective musical outputs. Rather, in relation to disability, the notion of the ideological quilting point is of particular relevance for two specific reasons. Firstly, Lacan developed the term 'point de capiton', as I highlighted above, in the context of psychoanalysis and the identification of psychosis and trauma, psychotic and traumatised speech. Zizek, by adopting the term to explore the unconscious political and economic assumptions that come to structure consciousness more broadly, establishes something of a link between ideological critique and madness; or at least suggests

that ideological critique necessarily involves an element of non-normative, 'unquilted', thinking. Secondly, I am interested in the ways in which the queer liberation of the final decades of the 20th century was co-opted and therefore shaped by, the expansion of neoliberalism and constructions of the individual, independent, flexible consumer-self. As I outlined in chapter 3, McRuer pays close attention to the manner in which "vibrant public and democratic cultures that might constrain or limit the interests of global capital" are "insidiously… transform[ed] into target markets" by neoliberal states (McRuer, 2006, pp. 2-3). Both LGBT and disability communities are examples of such democratic cultures. If Conlon's work betrays its unspoken, unacknowledged capitalist quilting point in relation to the interpretation of Britten as a (quiet) queer liberationist, this illuminates what it is at stake ideologically as I craft my interpretation of Britten as sympathetic in relation to disability oppression and exclusion.

In what follows, as I continue to consider the representation of disability in *Peter Grimes*, I follow Conlon's cue to attend to the connections between the music of Britten and Shostakovich. However, I do not wish merely to reproduce the ideological quilting points inherent in the conflation of Shostakovich's experiences of living under the Stalinist regime with Britten's experiences of being queer in a somewhat anti-queer hostile, pre-Stonewall, pre-Wolfenden report environment. To do so, as I have elaborated above, would be to shore up the (erroneous) notion the conditions of the free market are the conditions through social progress has been (and can be) achieved.

I aim to proceed, therefore, as far as is possible, in an 'unquilted' manner, wishing to avoid speculating over whether Britten's use of DSCH was deliberate. Nor do I wish to come to definitive conclusions about Britten's intention behind its deployment: whether Britten intended by it to send a message of sympathy to Shostakovich, and whether indeed it was Britten himself who invented the motto (as Britten's early extensive deployment of it might imply). Rather, I aim use the mere possibility of the presence of DSCH in *Grimes* to explore broader links inherent within the music of Britten and Shostakovich. I take DSCH, in this sense, to be symbolic of the kind of eclectic modernist compositional language employed by both composers.

For Brown (2006), speculation about the origins of the DSCH motive and questions about intention of use are largely beside the point. Rather, Brown is interested in the way in which DSCH is related more broadly to what he calls Shostakovich's "characteristic techniques of modal lowering… modal clash and scalar tightening" (p. 71). Modal lowering refers to the flattening of scale degrees, a prominent feature of Shostakovich's music. The related technique of modal clash, describes the appearance of two forms of a scale degree sounding either simultaneously or in very close proximity (p. 79). Scalar tightening refers to the "contraction of a scale segment into a narrower span" (p. 81). Brown suggests that, together, these frequently deployed techniques provide the necessary conditions for the DSCH motive to emerge. DSCH is itself a "particular transposition and ordering of the [0134] tetrachord" (p. 69). Subsequently, Brown suggests, the use of the three aforementioned compositional techniques necessarily produces an abundance of [0134]s. Manipulation and rearrangement of such tetrachords led to DSCH becoming a compositional possibility for Shostakovich, eventually "achiev[ing] his motto in the Tenth Symphony" (p. 89).

> In sum, Shostakovich employs three related techniques – modal lowering, modal clash, and scalar tightening – all of which can produce musical environments containing [0134]s. From within these environments, Shostakovich eventually began seizing on [0134], highlighting versions of it that emerge more distinctly from their surroundings, much like a sculptor seeing a shape in the stone and then carving it out. (p. 82)

The development of DSCH, then, seems to depend upon what we might call non-normative musical elements. By this, I mean to suggest that modal flattening, modal clash and scalar tightening can be described as deviations from conventional, normative, 18th and 19th century musical forms. In this sense, following Straus (2018), we might say that these compositional features, which Brown argues have led to the development of DSCH are themselves representations of disability, of non-normative bodies and minds. We can say this, I would suggest, because of the way in which musical forms are so frequently and persistently conceived of in reference to discourses of the body, and, furthermore, "that music has been widely understood as involving actors, agents and characters in an unfolding story or drama" (Straus, 2018, p. 15). The generative value of non-normative compositional techniques (in

this case, modal flattening, modal clash and scalar tightening) can thus be read, to use Straus' phraseology (which he takes, accordingly, from Simi Linton) as "claim[ing] disability as valuable resource" (p. x).

Moreover, McCreless (2021) adds that [0134] is also the product of Shostakovich's broad "predilection for chromatic parallel minor thirds" (p. 88), that is, two successive harmonic intervals of a minor third, a semitone apart: "I submit that [this] might have served as another factor that led him consciously, or unconsciously to his motto" (p. 88). Fascinatingly, in considering the extensive use Shostakovich made of this particular figure, McCreless continues: "what is it? A motive? a topic? a contrapuntal technique? a stylistic quirk? a cipher? a tic? It shares features of all of the above" (p. 88). From a cultural disability studies perspective, and in the context of neurodivergence, McCreless' description of the successive chromatic minor 3rd figure as a 'tic' is surely conspicuous.

Elsewhere, in his analysis of triadic twentieth-century Russian music (of which Shostakovich was, of course, an important producer), Segall (2013) foregrounds the prominence of 'common-third-relations' (that is "the relation joining triads that share a chordal third") in mid-twentieth century Russian music and as a topic of Russian music analytical discussion (Mazel, 1962; Tiftikidi, 1970; Orfeyev, 1970; and Kholopov, 2003). Segall outlines similarities between Russian conceptions of common-note-relations and those of the North American neo-Riemannian analytical school. One important difference between the two analytical approaches, however, is the way in which neo-Riemannian perspectives tend to prioritise the relations between chords that are directly adjacent. By contrast, Segall explains that Russian analytical approaches occasionally broaden the scope of the notion of common-note-relations to incorporate connections between "formally analogous places within a composition" (p. 84). In this sense, we might consider the significance of common-note-related scales and keys as well as that of common-note-related adjacent triads.

Russian theorist Lev Mazel suggests that the Peter Grimes love duet in the prologue is an example of this sort of relation between keys. Ellen's E major and Peter's simultaneous F minor are common-third-related (the mediant of E major, G#, being the enharmonic equivalent of Ab, the mediant of F minor). In neo-Riemannian terminology, the

'transformation' between F minor and E major is known as 'SLIDE': the common-third (G#/Ab) of the two chords (or in this case, keys) remains in place and it is the two pitches that form a perfect fifth in the chords/keys that shift, or slide, both by a semitone. Incidentally, Rupprecht (2001) has given detailed commentary on the presence of the SLIDE transformation elsewhere in Britten's operatic output, in *Billy Budd* (pp. 90-96).

The keys of F minor and E major, taken together, clearly could provide necessary conditions for modal clash. However, although Grimes and Ellen do sing in two different keys throughout the love duet, for the most part their respective interjections alternate (with only slight overlaps). Furthermore, given that the passage is unaccompanied, the clashing effect of Britten's bitonal writing here is minimal. When Ellen and Grimes eventually do sing together in a (written) E major, the effect is such that the two keys amalgamate: effectively then, the pair sing in E major with significant modal flattening. Such modal flattening, as Brown notes, can provide the environment for forms of [0134] tetrachords (and thus DSCH) to emerge. As I highlighted earlier, the melodic figures as Grimes and Ellen sing "out of the pain…", "that you can feel…", and "here is a friend", closely resemble DSCH, but they are not exact reproductions. However, the point here is that modal flattening is an important aspect of Britten's melodic writing and that this can be understood in relation to the broader deployment of common-third-related harmonic schemes. Modal flattening can be said to produce some of the major motivic material in the love duet and, arguably, it is this material upon which the crucial Grimes motive is based. There is a sense in which the deployment of the Grimes motive throughout the final parts of the opera, ushering in Grimes madness, and the direct quotation of material from the love duet in the mad-scene itself thus represent madness, in one sense, by virtue of intertextuality (the depiction of mad heard voices). Not only that, but because those musical figures themselves inherently are related to and depend upon non-normative compositional effects (modal flattening and the use of bitonality specifically in this case), the use of this musical material can be understood directly as a representation of disability. Though Grimes' mad-scene is depicted as his tragedy, material reproduced in it depends somewhat upon the generative potential of non-normative musical features. To co-opt Straus' point again, it is as if Britten's melodic writing thus claims non-normativity here as a generative artistic resource.

However, there is also a sense that the bitonality and modal flattening of the love duet, which produce important motivic material for the mad-scene, can be understood, or rationalised, in terms of the notion of common-third-relation. From a neo-Reimannian perspective, Grimes' F minor and Ellen's E major respectively can be understood as closely and logically connected (by their shared G#/Ab), as a SLIDE transformation. Although F minor and E major are not presented in the love duet as a chord progression (parsimonious, or efficient voice leading from one chord to the next being the usual concern of neo-Reimannian theory), understood within the context of twentieth-century Russian theory and analysis, it is possible to understand the transformation in a more formal or abstract sense. The unexpected, non-normative occurrence of bitonality, then, is rendered normative from a certain analytical vantage point. Moreover, the ensuing modal flattening that becomes a significant part of Britten's melodic language (at least partly the result of admixing of the two keys) is similarly normalised by modern theoretical, analytical approaches. The material recalled at the mad-scene, though generated in some senses by musical non-normativity, is nonetheless ultimately rationalizable.

Straus (2006, 2011, 2018, 2021) describes music theory as a "normalizing discourse". He writes:

> In short, disability causes a commotion (Sandahl and Auslander, 2005) and a narrative emerges to contain, quell, and resolve it. Standard music theories follow this conventional narrative of overcoming. The narrative commotion might be created by a chromatic note, a modulation to a strange key, or the absence of a proper tonic recapitulation – in each case, a music-theoretical narrative arises to normalize the abnormal element, to rationalize it with respect to some conventional norm… (2018, p. 159)

On neo-Reimannian theory specifically, Straus explains how, in its focus on 'parsimonious voice leading', harmonic elements that do not function tonally can still be understood, rationalised, normalised through the logic of common tones and efficient voice leading: "It is also norm based, but the norms are no longer those of traditional tonal theory" (p. 170).

An adage of disability studies has for a long time been that 'if we live long enough, we will all become disabled', serving as an important reminder of the fuzziness of the boundaries between disability and notions able-bodiedness. McRuer, however insists rather that "sooner or later, if we live long enough, we will all become normate" (2006, p.198). By this, he refers to the neoliberal proclivity to transform vibrant, potentially subversive, democratic cultures into 'target markets'. McRuer's point is important when we consider the critical fate of recent developments in post-tonal music. Music that makes use of non-normative musical features often becomes championed or considered (perhaps inevitably) to have a kind of aesthetic advantage. I would suggest however that when we should be cautious about the impulse to incorporate non-normative features that resist analysis. Instead, we should arguably allow for disruption, difficulty and trouble.

Coyle (2019) identifies Britten's characteristic use of the major mediant (III) chord, which he calls something of a "Britten fingerprint" (p. 50), and relates it (somewhat tentatively) to its appearance in the hymn tune, Woodlands, composed by Walter Greatorex who was Britten's music teacher at Gresham's when he attended the school between the years of 1928 and 1930. A particularly noteworthy deployment of the "sudden light" of the major mediant is present in the Dawn interlude in Grimes (Coyle, 2019, p. 51): out of the prevailing F Lydian tonality of the interlude emerges a bright A major chord in the brass, to evocative effect. Such a device can perhaps also be rationalised in the context of common-third-related harmony. A neo-Reimannian perspective would call the transformation from a major I chord to a major III chord, a compound transformation, comprising an L (Leading Tone Exchange) transformation and then a P (Parallel) transformation. However, certain recent developments of music theory have further rationalised neo-Reimannian compound transformations via augmented triads (Douthett and Steinbach, 1998).

Exploring the representation of madness in *Peter Grimes*, my primary focus has been the Act 3 Scene 2 mad-scene and I have identified a number of musical features used to represent madness at this point in the opera. I have noted how florid, largely unaccompanied singing by the mad protagonist and extensive intratextual reference are deployed in the characterisation of Grimes' madness. In this sense, Grimes' mad-scene fits into a longer tradition of the traditional operatic mad-scene dating from the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Though the musical portrayal of madness in the Grimes mad-scene is typical of traditional operatic representations of madness of the early 19th century, Britten's adaptation transforms Crabbe's 1810 poetry. What has become abundantly clear is that the musical representation of madness in the mad-scene is inseparable from the music that is deployed to represent Grimes' character throughout the earlier parts of the opera. Indeed, the representation of Grimes' madness reaches musically beyond the character of Grimes, in a move from content to form. My discussion of disability representation in *Peter Grimes*, thus explores the idea that disability is not only an aspect of Grimes' characterisation, but that it is also deployed as a formal or structuring component of the opera more broadly. I use the terms 'deployed' and its cognate, 'deployment', following Michael Berubé's assertion that disability can figure in relation to a text without that text necessarily being about disability. In this sense, the representation of disability in *Peter Grimes* does not, strictly speaking, depend upon definitive interpretation of the character of Peter Grimes as disabled. In fact, I take the view that any definitive reading of Grimes is to be resisted, and that, crucially, it is the ambiguity that surrounds the character of Grimes that lends itself to a broader understanding of madness as a constitutive and formal feature of the work.

Bringing together aspects of the libretto, the music, and the staging of *Peter Grimes*

Throughout this chapter and the previous two analytical chapters, I have explored the representation of disability in *Peter Grimes* and the ways in which disability and queerness intersect in the opera and the discourses surrounding it. I have sought to crip *Peter Grimes* and have engaged with the opera on three distinct, but interconnected levels. Firstly, I have considered, particularly in chapter 5, aspects of the libretto of *Peter Grimes* that pertain to disability. Secondly, in chapter 6, I have observed the ways in which certain musical elements of the opera support such disability readings (crip readings) of the opera and the character of Peter Grimes himself. Finally, in concluding my analysis in this chapter, I suggest that *Peter Grimes* (the opera as a whole) is fundamentally structured by a disability aesthetic.

Crabbe's poetry, on which Britten's work is based, portrays the character of Peter Grimes as unquestionably guilty of murder. Grimes' madness and his subsequent death thus come to be depicted as fitting consequences of his violent and criminal nature. Criminality and disability are indelibly linked in Crabbe's 1810 work. The libretto of the operatic adaptation,

however, portrays Grimes as far more morally ambiguous. In chapter 5, I outlined how the libretto of *Peter Grimes*, especially in its final version, significantly underplays Grimes' violence. Though we cannot be certain, from the text of the libretto, whether or not Grimes was guilty of his first apprentice's death, we do learn about the circumstances surrounding the death of his second, John. In Act 2, Scene 2, Grimes' treatment of John is admittedly callous but, ultimately, it is the oncoming crowd and a knock at the door that distracts Grimes from ensuring his apprentice's safety; subsequently, John loses his grip and falls off the cliff edge to his death. As Brett (2006) puts it, the wider borough community is implicated in the young boy's death (p. 42). Grimes' subsequent madness, then, is less a product of his guilty conscience (as in Crabbe's original) than the stigmatic impact of the borough community's victimisation of him. Grimes' innocence in the operatic adaptation (or at least that fact that he is not individually responsible for John's death), thus somewhat decouples criminality and disability (his madness at the opera's denouement).

Moving from my analysis of the libretto, in chapter 6 I explored the ways in which the operatic Grimes' innocence is emphasised through the music. Pears (1946) suggests: "[Grimes] is not a sadist nor a demonic character, and the music quite clearly shows that" (p. 3) and, though Seymour (2004) is not entirely convinced of the operatic Grimes' innocence, she suggests that "Grimes is technically guilty yet musically innocent…" (p. 96). One significant moment at which this innocence is demonstrated musically is during the coroner's inquest at the opera's prologue. As Kennedy (1981) highlights, Grimes' opening interjections are underscored by string "halos of sound" (p. 170), a musical device used by Bach that is often identified as representing Jesus' divinity throughout the *Matthew Passion*. If Grimes' innocence is established by these halos of sound, I have argued that the string chords have an additional dramatic function, serving to other Grimes, to mark him as different from the rest of the Borough community. Additionally, throughout the opera, Britten reinforces the sense of Grimes' difference from the wider borough community through the frequent use of juxtaposed tonalities. Payne (1963) points to the way that the "opera's dramatic movement" is a product of an oscillation between the "two great poles of A and E flat, keys at opposite ends of the tonal spectrum [being a tritone apart]", thus establishing Grimes' incompatibility with the wider borough community (p. 20). For instance, the chorus' first sung entry in the prologue (2 bars after Reh. Fig. 4), is in E flat; an early moment in Act 1 ("What harbour

shelters peace…", Reh. Fig. 49), where Grimes expresses himself and his aspirations, is contrastingly in A major. Following Grimes' soliloquy, "Now the Great Bear…", later in Act 1 (itself in E major, closely related to the tonal pole of A), the perturbed chorus break into a round in Eb, "Old Joe has gone fishing (Reh. Fig. 70). Furthermore, Walter White (1971) highlights that both musical augmentation and inversion come to be especially associated with the character of Grimes, to mark his difference from the wider Borough community (pp. 117-118) and the "inverting and turning inwards of the outward forces of oppression" (Brett, 1983, p. 186). In these ways, Peter Grimes's otherness is established musically, and the opera can be read as a somewhat universal story of the deleterious effects of marginalisation and oppression on the basis of difference, whatever that difference may be (Harper-Scott, 2010).

Though Grimes can be interpreted as an outsider in the most general of terms, Brett (1977) reads the character of Grimes in specific relation to homosexuality. An important aspect of Brett's argument follows from Walter White's analytic observation that musical inversion marks Grimes' difference from the rest of the Borough. Brett suggests that such inversion symbolizes the process of internalization of societal oppression and its disastrous effects but also points out that the notion of inversion, itself, connotes 19th- and early 20th-century sexology discourses, in which the term 'sexual inversion' was used to mean homosexuality (2006, p. 96). Thus, for Brett, *Peter Grimes* can be understood as an allegory for oppression on the basis of homosexuality in particular, whilst, on the "surface level of the plot", Grimes' difference is his "visionary side" (Brett, 1977, p. 997). In my analysis, I have acknowledged that 19th-century and early 20th-century discourses surrounding homosexuality were steeped in psychopathological language. Moreover, the very idea that homosexuality can be described as sexual inversion is heavily invested in cognitive and behavioural norms. Brett's queer reading of the opera, I have suggested, can be related to (cognitive) disability; the very possibility of reading the opera as symbolic of queer oppression depends somewhat upon the (often unacknowledged) identification of Grimes as cognitively/behaviourally non-normative. Therefore, one of the reasons that the character of Grimes can be read as pointing towards queerness is that he can be interpreted in clear relation to cognitive disability and neurodivergence. However, this disability/crip coding is only ever partially acknowledged. Throughout the scholarship it is accounted for with reference Grimes' 'visionary side' and his 'poetic nature'. In the discourse surrounding particular productions there is a similarly a

conspicuous reluctance to acknowledge aspects pertaining to disability fully. In a recent interview for *The Times* on his performance as Grimes in Deborah Warner's 2022 production of *Peter Grimes* at the Royal Opera House, tenor Allan Clayton remarks: "We [Clayton and Warner] talked about [Grimes] being a drunk, we talked about him being neurodivergent, or having a tic, or anything like that. And I don't think that's the case" (Fisher, 2022). The article continues, "Clayton believes instead that when the curtain goes up Grimes has already experienced a completely relatable 'severe psychotic break' from witnessing the death of his first apprentice". Clayton concludes, "He's not a very 'different' character. It's just that he is different enough."

Although a disability reading of Grimes has not yet been widely acknowledged, it can readily be observed, especially in relation to the narrative span of the whole opera. Given that the string halo accompaniment (a chord comprising the notes D, F sharp and C) to Grimes' first utterances during the inquest, in the prologue, can be interpreted as signifying his innocence to the listener, it is striking that, towards the end of the opera, in Interlude VI (Act 3, starting at Reh. Fig. 44), the very same 'innocence chord' is played throughout by muted horns. At the close of the chorus' preceding "Vengeance Song" (as Rupprecht, 2001, p. 62 calls it) the horns build the chord between cries of Grimes' name: at first, a single horn plays a lone D (perhaps working diegetically as something of a hunting call); subsequently, a second horn joins on an F sharp, incidentally forming the same major 3rd of the opening notes of Interlude III (at the opening of Act 2) in which the horns are suggestive of the ringing of the Sunday morning church bells. The innocence chord is then completed by a third horn at the start of Interlude VI itself where the horns present the figure alongside "distanced and distorted" instrumental rearticulations of vocal utterances from earlier stages of the opera (Rupprecht, 2001, p. 67). At the close of the final orchestral interlude, the sopranos and altos of the encroaching chorus / borough mob reiterate innocence chord with their cries of "Grimes!", ushering in the start of the so-called mad-scene proper (Act 2, Scene 2, Reh. Fig. 47).

It is curious that this musical feature, which I have named the innocence chord, seemingly bookends the opera in an entirely contradictory fashion: at the start of the opera, the chord establishes Grimes' (Christ-like) innocence, whereas at the opera's denouement, it is seemingly turned and weaponised against him, by his pursuers, in absolute belief of his guilt.

I suggest that this ambivalence is, however, explicable when considered in the context of cultural disability studies. Disability studies scholars have pointed to enduring literary and cultural tropes, in the representation of cognitive disability, of the 'holy fool' and the 'sweet innocent' (see for instance: McDonagh, 2008; Straus, 2018; Holmes, 2004; Kriegel, 1987; Norden 1994). The holy fool and the sweet innocent are interconnected stigmatising cultural figures that relate especially to cognitive disability, in which disability is reduced to powerlessness and naivety, often inspiring pity, and altogether amount to an undermining of the agency of (cognitively) disabled people. In this sense, the innocence established at the opera's opening (in relation to the death of the first apprentice), can be interpreted as having been manipulated and turned against Grimes as a form of cognitive disablism at the opera's close.

It is notable that the use of the innocence chord at the opening of the opera is non-diegetic (i.e., it does not sound within the world of the narrative but rather operates as an interpretive cue for the listener), whereas, at the end of the opera, the chord is sung eerily by the borough mob (the sopranos and altos of the chorus), and thus figures diegetically. If this development does disability representation work, as I have argued it does, then it is evident that, throughout *Peter Grimes*, the representation of disability cuts diagonally across the distinction between the diegetic (content) and the non-diegetic (form). The turn from content to form, and the subsequent breaking down of the distinction between them, has been the principal focus of this chapter. I have explored the way that certain musical features (instances of the motif DSCH, especially) can contribute to the characterisation of disability. However, I have argued that instances of DSCH in *Peter Grimes* are also a product of Britten's broader neo-tonal compositional approach. Disability representation in Britten's *Peter Grimes*, then, does not wholly depend upon the reading of the character of Peter Grimes as disabled, though it is certainly enriched by it. Finally, in this chapter, I have considered some of the ideological implications of thinking about disability representation as a formal, structuring aspect of Britten's music. Such implications are most clearly played out, however, in the context of aspects of the opera's production and staging.

In the recent Royal Opera House production (to which I referred above), the connection between the opera's opening scene and Grimes' mad-scene is brought into focus by Warner's

contemporary staging in interesting ways. Rather than setting the prologue in the Moot Hall (as is indicated in the opera's stage directions and is conventional), Warner stages it with the same outdoor shoreline setting as she does the opera's conclusion. Floating above the stage is an abandoned fishing boat, and, over a visibly distressed Grimes (Allan Clayton), hangs an aerial performer, who, similarly to Grimes, is dressed in full fishing garb. The chorus approach with flashlight torches and the music of the prologue proceeds *in situ*. A literal interpretation of this staging would suggest that the inquest takes place mere moments after the death of Grimes' first apprentice (who, presumably, is represented by the aerial performer). In this way, the similarity of the staging of the opening scene with that of the opera's conclusion, serves to highlight the repetitious and cyclical relationship between societal stigma and crime (i.e., that criminality is socially reproduced). However, by drawing too close a parallel between the prologue and the opera's denouement, a sense of the very process by which the chorus turns Grimes' innocence against him as the opera develops, is potentially lost, as is, I suggest, the possibility for an important disability insight and critique of the ideology of ability. Rather, such an interpretation merely supports (albeit in a powerful way) the somewhat conventional (and somewhat ideologically complicit) perspective of the opera that the borough's mistreatment of Grimes leads to the (further) development of his undesirable behavioural traits, which in turn arouse (greater) suspicion of him amongst the community. In this sense, the tragedy of *Peter Grimes*, as a literal reading of Warner's production draws out, is that the cycle of victimisation and abuse is sadly bound to repeat itself for as long as Grimes is living.

An alternative interpretation of Warner's staging, though, would be to view the aerial performer not as Grimes' apprentice, but rather as symbolic of Grimes' own tragic fate at the opera's conclusion. In this more ambiguous interpretation, the music and the words of the opening inquest need not necessarily match up directly with the visual aspects of the staging (the encroaching chorus mob and the distressed Grimes). The events transpiring on stage foreshadow the opera's ending but, importantly, do not imply the necessity of it. The connection between the inquest and Grimes' mad-scene is highlighted, but notably, we must still discover the crucial moment when the chorus turns Grimes' innocence against him as a form of ableism. In such an interpretation, the tragedy of *Peter Grimes* is that the community is so intensely caught up in the ideological fictions of ability.

In conclusion, *Peter Grimes* provides both the content and the context (the form) for thinking about disability representation, it offers the potential for cripping definitions of musical modernism, and, under the right conditions, even exhorts a critique of the ideology of ability.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion

My work throughout this thesis has contributed to the subdiscipline of music and disability studies. I have explored the representation of disability in musical works; the stage works of Benjamin Britten, specifically. Britten was writing at a time when attitudes towards disability in Britain were shifting in important ways. After two world wars, disability was becoming a far more visible aspect of wider British society than it had been over the previous two centuries. The return of wounded soldiers from the First World War drove technological developments in prosthetics. If societal responses to disability, in the 18th and 19th centuries can be characterised largely in terms of institutionalization and sequestration, in the early 20th century, a greater focus was given to attempts at rehabilitation and normalization of disabled people.

Attitudes towards disability after the Second World War

During the Second World War, many British employed people had registered for service and there was, consequently, a significant labour shortage. Efforts to address this shortage led to increased employment for many disabled men and women who had previously been excluded from the labour market. Furthermore, men and women who had become disabled in war were accordingly compensated, to a degree, under the War Pensions Scheme, for their efforts and services to the country. The Labour government's social welfare reforms between 1945-1951 secured a basic standard of living and economic stability for all. However, although, the situation for disabled people in Britain was broadly improving, those who became disabled in war were given notably preferential treatment to disabled people who had not fought. Indeed, to a large extent, millions of disabled people had been failed by the welfare state during this time, and it was perhaps not until the mid 1960s that a political consciousness surrounding disability began to be consolidated.

The prevalence and persistent of eugenic thought in British society

In 1883, Francis Galton had coined the term eugenics to refer to the practices of encouraging individuals with certain desired traits to procreate, and conversely of discouraging (or forcibly prohibiting) those with undesired traits from having children, all in the name of supposedly

engineering a better, fitter society. Such thinking was inherently racist and classist as well as being fundamentally ableist. By the early 20th century, eugenic thought had become increasingly widespread and numerous eminent individuals within British society became proponents of it, including William Beveridge, whose 1942 report on living conditions in Britain was foundational to the development of the welfare state. In the context of Nazi Germany, eugenic theories were used to justify the mass murder (often termed the involuntary euthanasia) of millions of Jews and disabled people. Once the horrors of the Holocaust had been uncovered, eugenics accordingly became considerably less influential throughout Britain. However, certain forms of eugenic thinking nonetheless persisted throughout the 20th century and arguably continue to hold sway in medical, political, and legal discourses to this day.

Within the context of such, often-contradictory, 20th century societal attitudes towards disability, I have been able to explore some of the complexities and ambivalences of disability representation in Britten's works. I have suggested that, rather than speaking about the ways in which culture reflects wider societal attitudes we might more accurately suggest that cultural works refract them. In relation to Britten's stage works, this is to say that the complexities surrounding attitudes towards disability throughout the 20th century emerge throughout the repertoire in interesting and unexpected ways.

Portrayals of disability in Britten's stage works

I have identified the pervasiveness of disability throughout Britten's stage works, highlighting that several of Britten's protagonists can quite clearly be interpreted in relation to disability. The protagonist of *Billy Budd*, and also the smaller role of John Shears in *Paul Bunyan* both stutter. Where, in Britten's earlier operetta, Shears' disability is deployed for comic ends, Billy Budd's disability, in the 1951 opera, is portrayed rather more compassionately, though ultimately, tragically. Madness is portrayed in *Peter Grimes*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, Britten's cantata *Phaedra*, his church parable, *Curlew River*, and, in a parodied version of the traditional operatic mad-scene, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The characterisation of both Queen Elizabeth in *Gloriana* and Gustav von Aschenbach in *Death in Venice* feature the portrayal of age-related disability. Additionally, *Death in Venice* portrays the disabling effects of an outbreak of cholera. Furthermore, holding an expansive conception of disability, I have also

argued that it is possible to the think about the characters of Peter Grimes, Billy Budd, and also the protagonists of *Albert Herring*, *Owen Wingrave* and *Death in Venice* (Gustav von Aschenbach) all in relation to neurodivergence. Britten's often-acknowledged and well-documented compassion for the outsider within his stage works, I have argued, can thus be read as a comment on the routine (mis)treatment of disabled people by society.

I have claimed that, in one sense, the fact that Britten so often and so consistently places a disabled character (or, at least, a character whom we can think about in close relation to disability) at the centre of his stage works is striking. Moreover, I have asserted that this is especially true given that Britten was writing at a time when disabled people were so often excluded from society at large. Many of Britten's stage works were written prior to the emergence of disabled people as politicised minority group. Some of Britten's later stage works, those written since the mid-1960s (the church parables onwards, that is), were composed at a time when a public and political consciousness around disability was beginning to develop. However, accounts of Britten's life do not indicate that he was invested in the concerns of disability pressure groups at the time. Nor is there any evidence that Britten was notably aware of the beginnings of the British disability rights movement. Accordingly, there is no particular reason to assert that Britten would have been especially conscious of the growing public and political discourses surrounding disability. Thus, if Britten's stage works can be read as raising questions about disability justice, as I have argued that they can, this almost certainly would have been unwitting on Britten's part.

Cultural logic of euthanasia – the kill/cure paradigm

Although disability figures centrally throughout Britten's stage works, it is nonetheless often depicted tragically, frequently coming to be closely associated with death and dying. For instance, if we read the characters of Peter Grimes, Billy Budd and Owen Wingrave in relation to disability, as neurodivergent, then their respective deaths seem to perpetuate the longstanding cultural and literary trope that disability is a narrative problem to be resolved. Such a resolution, cultural disability scholars have pointed out, most often requires disabled characters within a text either to be cured (often miraculously), or to be killed (for the apparent greater good). We can call this phenomenon the cultural logic of euthanasia. The deaths of Peter Grimes, Billy Budd and Owen Wingrave all seemingly fit this paradigm. In

Peter Grimes, I have argued, Grimes' non-normative mind and behaviour is ultimately considered to be irredeemably unacceptable by his wider Borough community. By the end of the opera, Grimes has been fully convinced that he simply would be better off dead, and accordingly takes his life by sailing his boat out to sea and drowning himself in it. In other words, since Grimes cannot be cured, the cultural logic (of euthanasia) at play determines that he must be killed.

Though my present research has, for the most part, focused on *Peter* Grimes, it is possible to draw out similar themes in many of Britten's other stage works. Future research could use my disability reading of *Peter Grimes* as a model for exploring some of Britten's other stage works. For example, Billy Budd's disability is portrayed as something of a narrative problem and a danger: Billy's stutter becomes closely associated with a lack of bodily control, ultimately leading to Billy's accidental killing of Claggart. Billy, as the cultural logic has it, is a danger to society and the social order, the only possible narrative resolution accordingly being his death. Billy's own acceptance of this fate only further serves to secure the idea that, somehow, his death is necessary.

Owen Wingrave, who is presented as experiencing and understanding the world non-normatively (thus placing him in the sphere of neurodivergence, even if we do not wish to go as far as suggesting that his character is a portrayal of disability, as such) dies at the opera's conclusion under seemingly paranormal circumstances. A possible criticism of *Owen Wingrave* is that the plot seems caught between the mundane and the supernatural. Owen is depicted as an outsider within his own family and his difference cannot seemingly be accommodated or resolved. His death, though, curiously appears wholly unrelated to much of the predominantly domestic plot. Although we learn of a dark family history tainted by murder, and allusions are made to the paranormal, there is no portrayal in the opera of ghosts as such. We cannot even be sure of the precise circumstances surrounding Owen's death. However, I have argued that if *Owen Wingrave* is not haunted by actual ghosts, the opera is nonetheless haunted by a certain cultural reproduction. Inconsistencies of plot are, I argue, smoothed over by the reproduction of the cultural logic of euthanasia and the kill/cure paradigm. Owen's differences cannot be resolved and thus, the paradigm has it, ultimately, he too, like Billy Budd and Peter Grimes, must die.

The plot of *Albert Herring* involves no actual death, but rather Albert is presumed dead throughout the singing of the Act 3 threnody. However, it soon transpires that Albert is very much alive: comically, he returns and regales his experiences throughout the night of his absence. Thus, whilst the opera somewhat anticipates the cultural logic of euthanasia, it does not entirely reproduce it. One interpretation of Albert's return is that it represents the curing of aspects of his non-normative characterisation. Albert's death, under this logic, is ultimately only avoided because his experiences on the town appear to have something of a normalizing function. A live question then is whether *Albert Herring* completely repudiates the cultural logic of euthanasia or whether it reproduces the cure element of the kill/cure paradigm, but perpetuates the cultural logic nonetheless.

Britten scholarship and the materiality of metaphor

Britten scholarship has hitherto tended to overlook the representation of disability Britten's stage works. Scholars have tended to interpret the portrayal of disability in the repertoire as a metaphor for some apparently nobler or grander interpretation. For instance, there is a significant body of scholarship surrounding Britten's stage works that offer queer interpretations of the repertoire. Many of the representations of disability I have highlighted above, especially those concerning the protagonists of *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *Albert Herring*, *Owen Wingrave*, and *Death in Venice* (Gustav von Aschenbach), have been interpreted as allusions to queerness. Another strand of the scholarship interprets Britten's music in spiritual terms: such instances, I suggest, take representations of disability within the repertoire to be mere metaphors for spiritual purity and divine innocence. Indeed, in some senses, it seems to me that this metaphorical use of disability resonates with the longstanding trope of the holy fool. Other strands of the scholarship emphasise the ways in which Britten's conscientious objection to war, his pacifism and a sense of innocence betrayed by evil are all alluded to throughout many of his stage works. Once again, in order for such interpretations to be possible, it is necessary to accede the deployment of disability as mere metaphor. Thus, my claim throughout this thesis is that much of the scholarship surrounding Britten's stage works relies strategically upon the representation of disability to stake its interpretative claims. I have articulated this idea in reference to the critical disability concepts of materiality

of metaphor, and narrative prosthesis However, as a result, the contexts and textures of those disability representations in themselves become somewhat obscured.

Intersections of queerness and disability

Above, I highlighted the ways in which certain strands of the scholarship overlook the representation of disability in Britten's stage works, understanding them merely as a metaphor for queerness. Thus, from a disability studies perspective, such readings could usefully be resisted (at least in the first instance). Thus, in this thesis I have at times urged for greater direct attention to be given to disability representation. However, as I have highlighted throughout this thesis, there are nonetheless deep connections between queerness and disability. For instance, both share a pathologized past: homosexuality was only relatively recently removed from the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, in 1973; and pathological (medical) models of disability continue to be the dominant way in which disability is conceptualised in contemporary discourse, in spite of the traction that socio-cultural and political conceptions of disability have gained over the past 50 years.

The portrayal of disability in Britten's stage works, then, relates to the representation of queerness not merely through its deployment as metaphor, but rather because queerness and disability, especially throughout the 20th century, thoroughly intersect. Moreover, throughout my thesis I have emphasised the mutual subversive and radical potential of both queerness and disability to interrogate social, ethical, political, and even economic norms of our late capitalist, neoliberal times. I have expanded upon this idea in close relation to queer theory and crip theory.

Analysis of Peter Grimes

The centrepiece of my thesis is my analysis, discussion and interpretation of *Peter Grimes.* I have suggested that, although (cognitive) disability is a pervasive aspect of the discourse surrounding the opera, it is nevertheless largely an unspoken and unacknowledged one. By this, I am referring to the way in which Grimes is often interpreted in psychopathological terms and in relation to cognitive and behavioural norms, but that rarely is this articulated with reference to disability. In addition, I have also suggested that an important strand of the

Grimes' scholarship outlines the ways in which Grimes is excluded from and marginalised by his wider Borough community. I have suggested that, from a disability studies perspective, the psychopathological language surrounding Grimes points towards impairment, and that the social interpretations of his marginalisation attend to the social category of disability (or disablement). My claim is that *Peter Grimes* and the scholarship surrounding it dramatize the tension between impairment and disability, a tension which has been a pervasive point of negotiation in the fields of disability studies and critical disability for at least the past two decades.

I have suggested that the Act 3, Scene 2 mad-scene is almost unanimously described as evidence of Grimes' non-normative behaviour, and I have outlined the musical means by which Britten depicts this disability at the opera's denouement. Certain readings of Britten's opera emphasise Grimes' innocence with regards to the deaths of his apprentices. Such interpretations accordingly stress the arbitrariness and the injustice of the Borough's accusations against him and draw out the tragic consequences of rumour and insinuation. Whilst I am largely in agreement with such an interpretation of *Peter Grimes*, there is an element of it that, from a critical disability studies perspective, I find problematic. That Grimes' tragedy should be elaborated in terms of the experience of mad delusions is perhaps to stigmatise forms of cognitive non-normativity and neurodivergence as inherently tragic. Whilst, of course, for many people, the experience of delusions can be highly distressing and those affected by them might describe such experiences in terms of suffering, it is nonetheless unhelpful to describe them as tragedy. I have also suggested that, throughout earlier moments of the opera, there is musical evidence to support a reading of Grimes' as neurodivergent. The injustice of Grimes' mistreatment, on the basis of his cognitive non-normativity, that is, is thus placed in sharp relief. Scholars have frequently attended to Grimes' so-called visionary nature (as exemplified by his Act 1 aria, "Now the Great Bear and the Pleiades"): my argument is that the concept of neurodivergence helps us to think through these moments of the opera in relation to disability.

Perhaps Grimes' mad-scene is not necessarily inherently tragic. I have argued that Grimes' experiences are a complex interaction of the deleterious effects of societal mistreatment alongside his neurodivergence, many aspects of which can be understood somewhat

neutrally, and in certain senses, even as advantageous. Grimes' tragedy, then, is not that he experiences delusions in the mad-scene, per se. Rather, the tragedy of the opera is that Grimes' distress could have been avoided, under different social arrangements, and that aspects of his non-normative mind could have been celebrated rather than condemned.

Content and form

Throughout my analysis of *Peter Grimes*, I began by discussing the way in which Grimes' madness at the opera's denouement was elaborated musically, in reference to unusual or non-normative musical elements and features: unusually florid, largely unaccompanied melodic utterance and frequent, even obsessive, intratextual quotation, for instance. Subsequently, I broadened my scope to consider aspects of Grimes' non-normative, neurodivergent, essential characterisation throughout the opera, as a whole. In this way, many of the aspects of Grimes' characterisation that have routinely been understood as allegorical, turn out, surprisingly, to be fundamentally about disability. The character of *Peter Grimes*, then, in some senses, confounds distinctions between ablebodiedness and disability. Disability is the content of *Peter Grimes*.

Moreover, I have demonstrated that many of the representations of disability in *Peter Grimes* actually inhere, not at the level of plot or characterisation, but rather at a deeper, formal level. By this, I mean that many of the ways that Britten's music is able to tell its story depend upon the representational potential of disability. We can only understand aspects of the plot of *Peter Grimes*, because we always already understand that music carries meaning, and that that meaning is often bound up with societal assumptions and perceptions surrounding disability. The presence of disability representation, then, does not necessarily depend upon the interpretation of the character of Grimes as disabled. Rather, disability is a fundamental means by which characters and music can come into contact. Disability is the form of *Peter Grimes*.

Potential future research avenues and implications of my work

In the introduction to this thesis, I highlighted that the word "representation" has multiple meanings. In one sense, representation is literary, and is about the presence of a given subjectivity in cultural works. Throughout this thesis, I have largely been interested in matters

of disability representation in this very sense. Further research could use my insights about Britten's protagonists, and the deployment of disability as a formal element of his stage works, in order to explore wider operatic repertoires. A principal focus of my research has been the critical analysis of *Peter Grimes* and, through this, I have demonstrated the ways in which crip theory and critical disability studies approaches can usefully be applied in a musicological setting.

In another sense, representation is political and is about striving for the full participation of marginalised groups in society. I think that these two meanings of representation are inherently linked. The presence of disabled characters, in operas, might call us to consider questions about diversity in casting in the operatic industry, for instance. If Britten's operas (and operas more generally) are replete with portrayals of disability (which they are), questions are raised about who ought to be playing these roles. Alex Lubet (2010) is highly critical of the classical music industry and its (lack of) approach to disability access and accommodation (p. 33), and he describes Western classical music institutions evocatively as "sonic Spartas that eliminate those young who are too weak to effectively wage musical culture war on the side of imperial West" (p. 77). The need for systemic change is profound. Fortunately, though, a number of inclusive arts initiatives are beginning to emerge on the classical music scene. In 2018, Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra's 'BSO Resound' (https://bsolive.com/people/bso-resound-ensemble/) was formed: the world's first disabled-led ensemble to be part of a professional orchestra's central activities. On the operatic stage, also in 2018, an intersectional feminist opera company 'Hera' (https://www.wearehera.co.uk/) was founded with disability inclusion high on the agenda.

In 2017, a friend and colleague of mine, Dr Kerry Firth, and I set out to establish an opera group, which we have called 'Access all Arias' (AAA). Our remit is threefold. Firstly, AAA is a Manchester-based inclusive arts practice that leads by example, producing operatic performances through collaborations between disabled and non-disabled performers, directors, and producers. Diverse casting is therefore at the heart of AAA, with a specific emphasis on creating opportunities for disabled people within the industry and establishing long-term change. Since forming the group, we have informally already put on classical performances and have begun raising our profile locally. Secondly, AAA seeks to have a

consultation element, developing guidelines that arts and cultural institutions can look to for advice on fostering accessibility and equality in their own practices. Thirdly, the initiative aims to engage with the wider community and to share its perspective on accessibility and disability justice, through the pleasure of music making.

Moreover, if we understand, as I have argued throughout this thesis, that representation refers to form as well as content, disability representation in musical works calls us to think about disability representation in the industry, more generally, not merely in terms of diverse casting. This is an exhortation to crip, not just the cast, but the audience, the stage, the auditions, the production, the orchestra, and so on. In other words, the whole thing.

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