B. Britten—Correlation Between the Realizations of H. Purcell's *Orpheus Britannicus* and the Vocal Cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61

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Henry Purcell (1659-1695) and Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) are the main figures in English musical culture. Britten was particularly inspired by Purcell's illustrative approach to putting together music and text, thus creating fascinating connections between different historical and musical contexts. This paper will analyse and show the correlation between Britten's realizations of Purcell's setting of songs *Orpheus Britannicus* and the input in the original Britten's vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61. The harmonious language of the songs and different thematic motives and their relationship will be considered. It will demonstrate that Britten's songs were very much shaped by thematic structure, intervals like could be found in Purcell's vocal music and they show the parallels between Britten's realizations of Purcell's songs and the input in the original Britten's vocal music.

The article presents the results of the analysis of a song cycle using the method of musical analysis of Rudolph Réti based on his understanding of a "thematic process" in music. The paper will use the case of Britten's vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 (1958) to explain how this cycle is structured. The song cycle will be analysed from the perspective of cyclicity based on Réti's theory of microtopicality explaining an organic cohesion between architectonics of composition and the parts of a vocalist and a pianist. It is argued that the cyclicity in the song cycle is created through the cross-links between the textual and musical dramaturgic lines and could be said about the realizations of Purcell's *Six Songs* from *Orpheus Britannicus* (1943-45).

First, the structure of the thematic motives (prime cells) in the setting of Britten's realizations of Purcell's *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs* will be analysed and the deep connection in cyclicity will be considered. Second, the thematic motives (prime cells) in the realizations that are cross-linked with the original Britten's vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 will be uncovered. Third, the correlation between the scheme of tonality and the other linkages of the setting of realizations and the vocal cycle will be considered.

Keywords: B. Britten, H. Purcell, realizations, vocal cycle, R. Réti, microtopicality, prime cell

Introduction

According to Joseph N. Straus (1990) "Music composed in the first half of the twentieth century is permeated by the music of the past" (Straus, 1990, p. 1). The renaissance of the past music ideas was felt in Postwar England too. Postwar interest in Purcell went well beyond British composers.¹ Composer Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) and the others were inspired by English baroque music. He brought the personality of Henry Purcell (1659-1695) and his wonderful vocal-instrumental music back to life. Britten composed not only original compositions, but also arrangements of English, Irish and French folk songs (with piano, harpsichord, guitar) and realizations of Purcell's songs. In that experimental field Britten inspired and adopted some musical ideas from Purcell songs. Britten composed the realizations of Purcell's songs, took and adopted some composing ideas in his subjective way. He started to realize² a few songs by Purcell in 1939 and returned to Purcell again with more attention and intensity in 1943 to 1948. "Britten's Purcell realizations are idiosyncratic rather than historically accurate, and make the music seem like the work of one man, Britten-Purcell" (Carpenter, 1992, p. 229). To realize the composer has chosen different songs from different theatrical pieces, semi-operas, solo and duets.

In the Baroque period the composers used affects to raise and render the feelings of the listeners. They illustrated sounds from reality, used the rhetorical figures with the specific meaning, special tonalities, etc. It is interesting that Britten adopted the idea about musical illustrativity from Purcell too. In the example we see the illustrativity: in Baroque epocha rhetorical figures, illustrativity were very common to express the music clearer and deeper. Britten borrows this idea in the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61.

Britten's music is itself a kind of wordless language—a characteristic way of presenting and shaping the interplay of essentially musical ideas (themes, rhythms, motives, or keys) within an unfolding discourse. The sounds of music (...) themselves have properties usually ascribed to speech—expression, eloquence, a rhetorical force. (Rupprecht, 2001, p. 1)

Connection Through Musical Ideas

Purcell has written many secular and extended songs, most of them for the theater. There are, however, nearly 90 that were not; and while the songs were produced mainly in the last six years of Purcell's life these independent songs spanned the whole of his career and provided a useful medium for experimentation (Laurie, 1984). The phonetics, intonation of the native language in the vocal music made an impact to Purcell's music character, as well as the use of texts in an expressive and free manner really helped to understand the music. There were many unexpected harmonic and rhythmic changes in the compositions. The composer used expressive melismas, inspired by the freedom of Italian composers, figurations to express the feelings, ideas or even realistic sounds or pictures. In Purcell's keyboard temperament most of the chords in such remote keys would have sounded distinctly out of tune, and this is clearly a calculated part of the effect (Laurie, 1984). In Purcell's vocal music the intonations of the language, phonetics made an impact to the music character; the use of texts in an expressive and free manner made a specificity in the music understanding. In the compositions there are many unexpected harmonic and rhythmic changes. Purcell regarded melody as the most important element in music.

Britten had an idea to revitalize English music and literature, to show the beauty, freedom and vividness of

¹ Britten together with tenor P. Pears were performing lots of Purcell songs in their recycles.

² Realize—to give full artistic life to music left by the composer in the contemporary style, to fill out the continuo bass line of a 17th- or 18th-century composition (Kennedy, 1996, p. 595).

the English language. He was one of the few twentieth-century English composers who regarded melody as the most important element in music. The identified patterns will be used to explain the linkages between the musical and the poetic text in Britten's realizations of several Purcell's songs, which were expressive and free, more like improvisations, filled with strong notes diatonically and chromatically.

Microtopicality in Realizations *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs*

The analysis of the cyclicity in the settings and cycles fits very well with Rudolph Réti (1885-1957)³ theory of microtopicality. He proposed to analyse musical works as being structured through a unifying thematic kernel which he called a "prime cell". The idea that musical works written with contrasting themes are, in fact, composed by using only one thematic strain has been described in Réti's (1951) seminal work *The Thematic Process in Music*. The author codified the ways in which you can change the thematic material (such as reduced small structures) to a new form. The following approaches have been identified, namely:

- Imitation – the exact repetition of the melody line, also an inversion, a reversion, a counter movement, an interverson;
- Variation—a slight change in the melody line (thematic material is easily identifiable);
- Transformation—adding a new material while maintaining the original content (substance);
- Indirect commonality—building upon independent melody lines with supportive measures;
- The change of tempo, rhythm or emphasis;
- Compression or extension of thematic material;
- The change of thematic kernel (Réti, 1951).

In the realizations Britten was writing idiomatically for the modern piano, or using the voice fully in the freely sung manner of the most standard repertoire, as opposed to the restrained tone that was often used in early music. "Britten fully exploited the lower range of the modern 20th-century piano, which of course Purcell did not have at his disposal (...)" (Hendsbee, 2007, p. 202).

Britten composed 45 realizations. The songs of *Orpheus Britannicus* are dissolved in different settings: *Five Songs*, *Seven Songs*, *Six Songs*, *Six Duets*, *Suite of Songs From Orpheus Britannicus*. The composer had a freedom to realize Purcell's songs and to put them into the settings in the order just he wanted. In such setting we could notice interesting aspects like dominating some intervals or using similar tonalities. It has an intrigue that Britten had a freedom and built the songs in such a order. If we go deeper we can find even more fascinating elements. In that case I will use Réti method of microtopicality and analyse two songs from the setting *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs*.

Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs (1943-45)

The unifying element of the whole cycle is based on the primary cell which is expressed through a thematic kernel (indicated in the analysed examples with the letter "I"), its modification (indicated with the notation "Ia") and two individual intervals, namely—an upward rising fifth and rising down third like prime cells too.

The function of the thematic kernel is performed by the notes B-F. In all *Six Songs* there is a strong thematic

³ Rudolph Réti—a Serbian-born musicologist, pianist and composer, the founder of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM).

kernel B-F and two main intervals which one could identify like prime cells: a fifth and rising down third. This analysing method is based more in reducing process, so we can notice thematic kernel straight in the score or hidden by using parallel tones, also stretched in the different parts of vocal and piano lines like in the example 1 below. It is fascinating that B-F is written not only harmonically based, but also in the other tonalities too. Like in the first song of the setting *Mad Bess*—the tonality of the song is C major:

Example 1. Britten's realization of Purcell's song *Mad Bess* (mm. 1-5), 1945.

In the example 1 one can notice dominating thematic kernel (I), his opposite variant (Ia) and the intervals of fifth and third. In this case the thematic kernel is hidden with filling parallel notes or even stretched from the piano right hand to vocal tone F. In the vocal line (second/third bar) we see the interval fourth (opposite of fifth), fifth. In the shown episode third is rising althou in the example 2 is rising up like dominating destination in all the setting.

Example 2. Britten's realization of Purcell's song *Mad Bess* (mm. 15-22), 1945.

In the example 2 is shown dominating rising down interval third which has a meaning of the prime cell. The thematic kernel (I) is stretched in the both piano parts, modification (Ia) is hidden with the parallel diatonic tones.

The third song in the setting is *If music be the food of love*. Here one can clearly notice rising down third, the thematic kernel I and Ia composed in different ways: horizontal, vertical, filled with other tones, stretched way (examp. 3).

Example 3. Britten's realization of Purcell's song *If music be the food of love* (first version, mm. 1-7), *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs*, 1945.

The example 4 shows the similar case of very important elements—thematic kernel and interval third. The thematic kernel is concentrated in the piano part. The vocal line has repeating rising down thirds.

Example 4. Britten's realization of Purcell's song *If music be the food of love* (first version, mm. 12-14), *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs*, 1945.

In the next examples I would like to compare realizations to original vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61. These settings were composed not at the same time: *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs* in 1943-45 and *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 in 1958. So we can ignore presumption that Britten was inspired in realizing the Purcell songs and original songs at the same period and in that way we find these composing parallels (these settings has more then ten years distance). In that case I will analyse two songs from the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61.

***Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 (1958)**

In selecting short poems and fragments, Britten avoided the virtuosically varied metres and formidably involutioned language that characterize much of Hölderlin's work, but his selection spans from the years of the poet's manurity into those of his madness (Evans, 1979, p. 365).

In the first song *Menschenbeifall* from the vocal cycle (examp. 5) one can find the same thematic kernel like in *Orpheus Britannicus*—the tones B-F. The interval third is straight down or rising up with filling with parallel tones also like in the realizations.

Example 5. Britten's song *Menschenbeifall* from the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 (mm. 1-9), 1958.

In the further example we notice the hidden Ia. In this episode one can see repeating interval third: rising up and rising down in clear interval or filled with the other tones (examp. 6).

Example 6. Britten's song *Menschenbeifall* from the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 (mm. 33-38), 1958.

In the example 7 composer hides interval third even more with upper tones (examp. 7) like in the fifth bar of the song *Die Heimat* in vocal line or piano right hand part (bar 4-5). The thematic kernel is stretched from vocal line tone B to piano right hand part tone F.

Example 7. Britten's song *Die Heimat* from the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 (mm. 4-6), 1958.

The example 8 shows the repeating of thematic kernel I, in three bars it is concentrated three times in stretching way or concentrated in the vertical line.

Example 8. Britten's song *Die Heimat* from the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 (mm. 10-12), 1958.

Comparing realizations with the vocal cycle one can see important aspect that connects Britten to Purcell is the use of the same thematic kernel and interval third.

Tonality of the Realizations *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs*

The scheme of the *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs* shows the model of tonality building in the setting.

<i>Mad Bess</i>	<i>If music be the food of love Ist versijon</i>	<i>There's not a swain of the plain</i>	<i>Not all my torments</i>	<i>Man is for the woman made</i>	<i>Sweeter than roses</i>
C major	g minor	e minor	c minor	C major	g minor—C major

Example 9. Tonality scheme in the realizations *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs*.

In the example 9 one can clearly notice the arch in the first and the last songs (C major).

In the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 (exempl. 10) one can notice similar way of tonality building in the vocal cycle like in the setting *Orpheus Britannicus*: the first song and the last one makes an arch in major tonality. It is interesting that the last song is in minor and major as well like in *Orpheus Britannicus*. So it is identical building in these examples.

<i>Menschbeifall</i>	<i>Die Heimat</i>	<i>Sokrates und Alcibiades</i>	<i>Die Jugend</i>	<i>Hälfte des Lebens</i>	<i>Linien des Lebens</i>
F major	A major	D major	G major	B major/b minor	e flat minor/E flat major

Example 10. The tonality scheme of the cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61.

The example 11 demonstrates the comparison of realizations and the original songs. We already noticed the tonality arches. Now I would like to show more correlations: *If music be the food of love* is written in minor flat tonality (g minor), the same flat minor tonality is in the fifth song in the song cycle *Hälfte des Lebens* with the small modification (B major/b minor). The third realization *There's not a swain of the plain* is composed in e minor and the fourth song *Die Jugend* is in G major, the parallel tonality (exempl. 11).

<i>Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs</i>	<i>Sechs Hölderlin – Fragmente op. 61</i>
C major	F major (flat tonality)
g minor (flat tonality)	A major (sharp tonality)
e minor (sharp tonality)	D major (sharp tonality)
c minor (flat tonality)	G major (sharp tonality)
C major	B major/b minor (flat tonality)
g minor/C major (flat tonality)	E flat minor/E flat major (flat tonality)

Example 11. The comparison of the realizations of Purcell's *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs* with the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente op. 61*.

In the examples 11 and 12 I would like to compare third realization in the setting *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs* with the second song in the vocal cycle.

Example 12. Britten's realization of Purcell's song *If music be the food of love* (first version, mm. 1-3), *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs*, 1945.

Example 13. Britten's song *Die Heimat* from the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente op. 61* (mm. 30-31), 1958.

When comparing realization *If music be the food of love* with the original song *Die Heimat* (exempl. 12 and 13), one can clearly see the use of similar melody line. The song *If music be the food of love* starts with the stronger tone and then the melody goes diatonically five notes down. The same melody building one can see in the song *Die Heimat*: strong note and the line goes down with the small modification (permatution). This melody is not in the begining so in the say it is marginalization case (intertextuality).

Conclusion

In realizing Purcell's songs since 1939 Britten approached it historically. Purcell's music was not known much in the twentieth-century. In that experimental fields of realizing Purcell's songs Britten inspired and adopted some musical ideas from Purcell's songs.

The influence of Purcell's music could be traced in the aspects which makes parallels between B. Britten and

H. Purcell songs:

1. Melody—one of the most important structure element in music;
2. Music form;
3. Music speech;
4. Accompaniment;
5. Vocal line;
6. Intervals;
7. The underlying tonal patterns of the cycle and a symmetry of tonality and metre of the songs.

The analysis of the realizations *Orpheus Britannicus Six Songs* and the vocal cycle *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61 in the method of microtopicality has shown up two main connections:

1. The identity of thematic motive (prime cell) and thematic kernel ;
2. The tonality scheme in both settings.

The correlation between the scheme of tonality and the other linkages of the setting of realizations and the vocal cycle was considered. Not only the tonality makes parallels between these two settings, also the same number of the songs—Britten has chosen to build the setting *Orpheus Britannicus* and *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente* op. 61. with the same number of songs—six. Britten was inspired by Purcell's use of music and his illustrative approach to putting together music and text, thus creating fascinating linkages across different historical and musical contexts.

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