

Hon-Lun Yang

European versus American: Programmatic-formal Treatments in American Symphonic Poems

As Carl Dahlhaus has pointed out, when Liszt coined the term "*symphonic poem*" to identify his *Tasso* in 1854, he not only legitimated his formally relaxed overtures, but also found an expressive outlet for his literary aspirations and for his rhapsodic and experimental musical language. Most importantly, Liszt gave the world an alternative to the symphony, a genre thought to be shackled by the symphonic tradition.¹ In 1876, more than twenty years after Liszt first coined the term "*symphonic poem*," the American composer John Knowles Paine composed the first such work in America. The subject was Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.²

The symphonic poem as a new genre in America emerged only gradually. Paine's *Shakespeare's Tempest* was a bold gesture. After all, the symphonic poem was not well received in America. There was a belief that the symphonic poem, music of the progressive school of Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner, was sensational music with no eternal value, regardless of its ingenious musical techniques and fantastic orchestral sound. In a review of Liszt's *Tasso*, for instance, the well-known Boston critic John Sullivan Dwight stated that the piece had no right to exist in a public concert because it lacked the beauty and restraint of the classical masters.³ It is thus not surprising that American composers were slow to take an interest in the genre. It was only in the 1890's that the genre began to gain popularity, reaching a peak during the first two decades of this century, when it was already losing steam in Europe.

In this paper, I will focus on the poems of the composers of the Second New England School, namely John Paine (1839-1906), Arthur Foote (1853-1937), George W. Chadwick (1854-1931), Edward MacDowell (1860-1908), and Horatio Parker (1863-1919).⁴ [See Appendix.] These American composers were regarded as a school because of their connections to the New England area, their shared educational backgrounds, like views on American music, and similar compositional styles, and they were friends and rivals who interacted both professionally and personally.

This repertoire of fourteen symphonic poems reveals a wide range of compositional choices and extra-musical aspirations. The subject matter is varied. Parker's *A Northern Ballad* (1899) drew on the spirit of the North. Paine's *Tempest* (1876) and

¹ Carl Dahlhaus: *Nineteenth-Century Music*, trans. Bradford Robinson, Berkeley 1989, p. 238.

² For more information, see Chapter 3 of the dissertation: *A Study of the Overtures and Symphonic Poems of the Composers of the Second New England School* by the author (Ph. D. diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 1998), and John Schmidt's: *The Life and Works of John Knowles Paine*, Ann Arbor 1980.

³ Dwight's *Journal of Music* 31 (1872), p. 183.

⁴ The term "*Second New England School*" was first introduced by Willey Hitchcock: *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction*, New Jersey 1969, p. 130.

MacDowell's *Hamlet* and *Ophelia* (1884-85) were based on Shakespeare's plays. Romantic poetry of Keats and Tennyson found its way into MacDowell's *Lamia* (1887) and *Lancelot and Elaine* (1886) respectively. The Scottish poet Robert Burns's folk ballad is represented in Chadwick's *Tam O'Shanter* (1914-15). Parker's *Vathek* (1903) was inspired by William Beckford's novel. Foote's *Francesca da Rimini* (1890) is reminiscent of Dante. The Praxitelean marble head of Aphrodite at the Boston Museum of Art inspired Chadwick's *Aphrodite* (1910-1911), and the two pastels by John Appleton Brown were the source of Paine's *An Island Fantasy* (1888). The tomb relief by Daniel Chester French provided Chadwick with the impetus for his *The Angel of Death* (1917-18). Many of these poems are strikingly imaginative, drawing on unprecedented formal principles. While six of the poems are cast in sonata form, the rest are unprecedented, each featuring a unique formal treatment and suggesting that the representative composers perhaps sought formal inspiration outside autonomous musical principles.

While utilizing various elements of the form for programmatic representation, the poems in sonata form are characterized by sonata deformation. Parker's *A Northern Ballad* (1899) and Foote's *Francesca da Rimini* (1890) are the two exceptions; both are in straightforward sonata form and somewhat ambiguous in their genre designation.⁵ All of the expositions are expanded to encompass multiple themes and tonalities so as to accommodate the unfolding of the programmatic events, as in MacDowell's *Lancelot and Elaine*, Parker's *Vathek* (1903), and Chadwick's *Cleopatra* (1904). Developmental space is created by using non-developmental passages and episodes based on new materials. The development of MacDowell's *Hamlet*, for instance, states the second theme in full, in a flat-submediant key; Chadwick's *Cleopatra* features a lengthy new section. Recapitulation is problematic as the need to establish musical symmetry is at odds with the linear movement of the programmatic events. To capture a sense of dramatic continuity, all the recapitulations are deformed, truncated, or reshaped. For example, the second theme in MacDowell's *Hamlet* is completely omitted in the recapitulation. In his *Lamia*, the recapitulation is absent, and its function is somewhat fulfilled by some of the restatements in the development. Chadwick's *Cleopatra* features a recapitulation with two new episodes yet without the first theme.

One striking feature of this repertoire of symphonic poems is the composers' interest in unprecedented formal treatments.⁶ For instance, MacDowell's preference for paired movements is noteworthy. In both his *Hamlet* and *Ophelia*, and in *The Sara-*

⁵ For the concept of sonata deformation, see Hepokoski: *Structure and Program in "Macbeth": A Proposed Reading of Strauss's First Symphonic Poem*, in: Richard Strauss and His World, New Jersey 1992; the same: *Fiery-Pulsed Libertine or Domestic Hero? Strauss's "Don Juan" Reinvestigated*, in: Richard Strauss: New Perspective on the Composer and His Work, ed. Bryan Gilliam, Durham, N. C. 1992; and chapter 1 of Sibelius: Symphony No. 5, Cambridge 1996.

⁶ When compared to their overtures, the form of these composers' poems is much more relaxed. Clearly, overtures and symphonic poems were viewed as two separate genres in America. The former was regarded as "program music pure and simple," attempting not to tell a story but to embody in music only the ethos of the program. The latter was viewed as music of the modern school, thus not bound by the genre expectations of the overture.

zens (1886-1890), he gives the female characters as important a role as their male counterparts, depicting them not only with the second theme of the sonata form, as is the case in many European symphonic poems, but also in a separate movement.⁷ Even though Ophelia's and Alda's melodic types adhere to the nineteenth-century stereotype of the female as a form of lack, passive, intimate, tender, sweet, and stable,⁸ each does have her own voice in her own movement.

Paine's *An Island Fantasy* is an example of novel form resulting from an extra-musical inspiration. The impetus came from two pastels by Paine's friend John Appleton Brown, one depicting a calm sea, the other a stormy ocean off the Isles of Shoals in coastal Maine. The piece consists of two recurring materials, the rondo main theme and the storm music. The work is best understood as consisting of four sections and a coda. [See Figure 1.] With the exception of the third section, which is a long episode, the other three sections are parallel in structure, each with two thematic materials, the so-called rondo theme or main theme and the storm music, and each is followed by a transition based on new materials that winds down the stormy music.

	Main theme	Storm music	Transition
Section 1 (mm. 1-98) (Key)	5-15, 16-39 B, E,	40-64 E, C, a, ?B	64-97 B
Section 2 (mm. 98-154)	Main theme 106-129, 130-139 A-flat A-flat	Storm music 140-152 C-flat --	Transition 153-154 A-flat
Section 3 (mm. 155-205)	Episode 155-159, 160-171, intro A-flat - B	172-205 B - E-flat, A-flat	
Section 4 (mm. 206-291)	Main theme 212-237, 238-253 A-flat B	Storm music 254-276 B	Transition 277-291 A-flat
Coda	Main theme 292-313 A-flat		

Figure 1: Formal analysis of John Paine's *An Island Fantasy*.

The other interesting feature of this repertoire is the composers' preference for suite-like treatment – that is the stringing together of a series of episodes. Paine's *Shakespeare's Tempest*, the first poem in America, evinces this treatment. It is suggested in the score that the poem is structured in four connected movements,⁹ but a

⁷ For a discussion of MacDowell's poems, see my dissertation and Dolores Pesce's: *New Light on the Programmatic Aesthetic of MacDowell's Symphonic Poems*, in: *American Music* 4/3 (1986), p. 369-389.

⁸ Lawrence Kramer's: *Liszt, Goethe, and the Discourse of Gender*, in: *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800-1900*, Berkeley 1990, p. 102-134.

⁹ The four-movement interpretation does not take into account 1) the open-endedness of the first movement, which dwells on figures chosen for their representational purpose; 2) Ariel's episode which plays as important a role structurally as the other sections; and 3) the startling tonal relation-

close examination would interpret the music as unfolding in a series of episodes: 1) storm music, 2) Prospero's cell, 3) Ariel, 4) Prospero's tale, 5) the happy love of Ferdinand and Miranda which has certain sonata features, 6) Caliban's episode, 7) Ariel, and 8) Prospero's triumph which is the coda. [See Figure 2.]

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|---|-----------------|
| I. Allegro furioso. The storm | d – e |
| II. Adagio tranquillo. Calm and happy scene before Prospero's cell | E |
| Ariel's episode | B-flat – g |
| III. Allegro moderato e maestoso. Prospero's Tale | C – D, |
| IV. Allegro non troppo. The happy love of Ferdinand and Miranda (exposition) | D, B, |
| Caliban's episode | g |
| Ariel | |
| (recapitulation) | G, D, |
| Triumph of Prospero's "potent art" | Coda. E-flat, D |

Bold faced types are descriptions given at the beginning of the score prefaced by the following: "In four connected movements."

Figure 2: Key and formal analysis of Paine's *Shakespeare's Tempest*.

Two other poems, *Aphrodite* and *Tam O'Shanter* (1914-1915) by Paine's contemporary and friend George W. Chadwick, also exploit such a suite-like treatment. *Aphrodite* was inspired by the fourth-century B. C. Praxitelean marble head at the Boston Museum of Art. In the program book of the premiere, Chadwick described the music as containing a series of scenes witnessed by the Goddess. These scenes are Moonlight on the Sea, Storm, Requiem, The Lovers, Children Playing, Approach of a Great Army and Hymn to Aphrodite, Moonlight Scene Partly Repeated, Finale. (See Figure 3.) Each of the scenes, as Chadwick asserted, is complete in itself. Each is marked by a musical idea, figuration, and tonality, meant specifically to portray the intended programmatic idea. To ensure that each scene is distinct and complete, and stands meaningfully on its own yet fits neatly into the whole, the composer pits a well-planned architectonic tonal structure against a stream of continuously unfolding melodic materials.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| Introduction | C |
| Moonlight on the Sea – <i>Andante con moto</i> | F-sharp, B, A, F-sharp |
| Transition to the Storm – <i>Un poco più mosso</i> | C, c |
| Storm – <i>Allegro con fuoco</i> | d, f, g, f, d |
| Requiem – <i>Andante lamentabile</i> | c, A, F |
| The Lovers – <i>Andante amoroso e tranquillamente</i> | D-flat, F, D-flat |
| Children playing – <i>Allegretto semplice</i> | A |
| Approach of a great Army and Hymn to Aphrodite – <i>Moderato alla Marcia, Maestoso, alla Marcia</i> | c, C, c |
| Moonlight Scene partly repeated – <i>Andante con moto</i> | F |
| Finale – <i>Molto maestoso, L'istesso Tempo</i> | F |

Figure 3: Key relationships in Chadwick's *Aphrodite*.

ships between movements. For instance, D minor of the first movement is juxtaposed to E major of the second movement, C major of the third movement to D major of the fourth movement. But if the piece is viewed as a single-movement piece, and all the "inter-movement" tonal relationships are considered internal, the moving from one key to another, despite the remoteness of the relationships, is smooth.

In *Tam O'Shanter*, Chadwick plans the music to unfold in seven episodes, all based on scenes in Robert Burns's poem: 1) the storm; 2) Tam's theme; 3) Tam's homeward journey with Meggie in the storm; 4) Kirk-Alloway, the haunted church; 5) the witches' orgy; 6) the witches' chasing of Tam; and 7) Tam O'Shanter's mare. The piece is full of vivid musical pictures. One vivid example is the description of Tam's homeward journey when he passed by the haunted church, Kirk-Alloway, which is represented by the old Scottish tune "Martyrs." The soft opening and the gradual crescendo are Chadwick's portrayal of Tam's approach to the haunted church, first from afar, then getting nearer and nearer. An animated version of the tune (in *stringendo*) brings both Tam and the listener closer to Kirk-Alloway. The ensuing measures of buzzing strings, wind blasts, strong dissonance, and roars of the timpani and gong, reveal what awaits Tam – the witches' orgy. Then, the section closes with a statement of Tam's theme on the strings, reminding the listener that it is Tam who experiences all this.

Chadwick's *The Angel of Death* is the most unique in its formal treatment. It was inspired by Daniel Chester French's relief "*The Angel of Death Staying the Hand of the Young Sculptor*" wrought for Martin Milmore's tomb at Boston's Forest Hill Cemetery. The sculpture represents a winged angel and a young sculptor – the face of the angel is shadowed by her own wings, and her hand is touching the sculptor who stands in front of his almost finished piece – the Sphinx. Structurally, the piece is loosely divided into two parts intersected by an intermediate section. The first part of 144 measures is fast-paced and energetic, containing primarily animated music. It is unified by a recurring yet developing motive that appears five times. The second part of 151 measures, however, is slow in tempo, and its music is lyrical and uplifting. To connect the two contrasting parts, there is an intermediate section from mm. 119-188, which begins with the principal theme of the first part and ends with the dynamics, atmosphere, and tempo of the second part, creating a gradual transfer from one realm to the other. [See Figure 4.]

Part I (mm. 1-144)

m. 1	Y motive	F
m. 10	Y	F
m. 37	Y	C
m. 57	noble horn theme	D
m. 91	Y	F
m. 120	Y	E-flat
new materials leading into m. 137		
m. 137	<i>Piu Lento</i> (8 measures)	E-flat

Intersection

Part II (mm. 145-295)

m. 145	<i>Largamente</i> (20 measures)	E-flat
m. 165	temporary flashing back with an animated passage	E-flat
m. 183	<i>Lento</i>	E-flat --
m. 189	<i>Molto con dolce</i>	D-flat
m. 272	Apotheosis	D-flat

Figure 4: Formal analysis of Chadwick's *The Angel of Death*.

While the music of this repertoire is relatively unknown, its reception in American historiography has not been positive. Decades of negative evaluations have denigrated both the composers' names and their music. Expressions such as "*full of clichés and imitations of German models*" have deterred serious studies of this repertoire. Indeed, it may seem hard for many to reckon with this repertoire's seemingly lack of "*Americanness*." But when one takes into account the cultural context, a fresh perspective is at hand. It is true that none of the pieces in this repertoire is ultra-national or patriotic, but let us not forget that quite a few were inspired by the composers' local experiences. Paine's *An Island Fantasy* was based on his friend's pastels, though when it was published, it assumed the title *Poseidon and Amphitrite*. Chadwick's *Aphrodite* was inspired by a sculpture at the Boston Art Museum, and his *Angel of Death* by a tomb relief sculpted by fellow American sculptor Daniel Chester French.

More importantly, most of these works were written amid the rising call for musical nationalism in America. These pieces were answers to the plea for "home" music, of which Dvořák's call to American composers to build a school based on Negro melodies played a part. As a matter of fact, deliberate efforts were made by some of the composers to cultivate an "American" style. Parker, for instance, turned to modality in his *A Northern Ballad* to create a folk-like melody. In his *Vathek*, he explored a language tinted by oriental color and modern harmony. In *Aphrodite*, Chadwick also cultivated passages that are folk-flavored. In *Tam O'Shanter*, he even used the original Scottish tune "Martyrs."

But from today's perspective, attempts to invoke "Americanness," like Parker's turn to the folk-like music of the "North" and Chadwick's using Scottish folk tunes, may seem naive and illogical as both seemingly had nothing to do with "America." But when we take into account the composers' European origins and America's lack of a common cultural identity, the absence of folklore and legends, and the German dominance at that time,¹⁰ it is understandable why nineteenth-century American composers turned to "Europe" to find their "Americanness." Let us not overlook the "na-

¹⁰ The influx of a large number of German conductors, teachers, and players unavoidably Germanized the American musical scene, leaving American composers very little room to develop a style other than that approved by the local musical authorities, orchestral directors, and public. A newspaper clipping from the *Boston Evening Gazette* dated 18 November 1899 entitled "*All Roads Lead to Germany*," is quite indicative of this situation. Some of the lines read: "*What is the merit of Russian music? It is almost German, and by admiring it one escapes the charge of being prejudiced. Through what means did German music become the sole admiration of fashionable culture? By continually calling attention to it, and to no other kind of music. What is American music? German music written in America.*" It was not that the New England composers made no attempt to cultivate "Americanness" in their music. For instance, when Chadwick was a student in Germany, the first large-scale piece that he wrote was an overture *Rip Van Winkle*, based on this quintessential American figure. But after his return to America, Chadwick sought inspiration from the muses. Paine's last poem *Lincoln* was a subject he had wanted to write for forty years, but he had to wait until the very end of his life to do so. As America's musical scene was dominated by Germans, and musical universality was regarded as the route to national music, it becomes clear to us why the New England composers made the compositional choices they did; otherwise, they would have found no forum for their works, let alone making themselves the most eminent American composers of their time.

tional gestures" in their efforts. Indeed, the use of folk songs, modal harmony, folk-inspired rhythm, and the cultivation of colorful orchestration are devices used by national composers such as Dvořák, Grieg, and Sibelius to create a national music in their own countries. In some works, such as Chadwick's *Aphrodite* and *Tam O'Shanter*, there is an American sound, and in many others, the unique programmatic-formal treatments that distinguish this repertoire from their European counterparts.

Abbreviations (Appendix, next page)

Form: ff = free form
sf = sonata form
sf- = stretched sonata form

Publishers: APS = Arthur P. Schmidt, Boston

BH = Breitkopf & Härtel, Leipzig

BMC = Boston Music Co., Boston

GS = G. Schirmer, New York

JH = Julius Hainauer, Breslau

Manuscript location for unpublished score:

BPL = Boston Public Library

DLC = Library of Congress

HH = Harvard Houghton Library

YM = Yale Music Library

Recordings:

CDC = EMI, 1987, London Symphony Orchestra, Kenneth Klein

CHAN = "American Series, Vol. 9," Chandos Records, 1996,

Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Neeme Järvi

MIA = "Music in America," Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage, 1965, The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Karl Krueger

NW = New World Records -- NW-339-2 Albany Symphony Orchestra, Julius Hegyi

OMP = "Our Musical Past, Vol 3" The Library of Congress, The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Karl Krueger

RR = Reference Records, 1995, 1996, Czech State Philharmonic, Jose Serebrier

Appendix A list of American symphonic poems

<u>Year</u>	<u>Composer</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Genre description</u>	<u>Extra-musical source</u>	<u>Form</u>	<u>Publisher</u>	<u>Recording</u>
1876	Paine	The Tempest	sym poem	Shakespeare Joseph Jefferson	free form (ff)	BH	MIA130
1884-85	MacDowell	Hamlet and Ophelia	sym poem	Shakespeare	sf--/ABA	JH/GS	OMP104/MIA130
1886	MacDowell	Lancelot and Elaine	sym poem	Tennyson/Arthurian tale	sf-	JH/GS	OMP104/MIA131
1887	MacDowell	Lamia	sym poem	John Keats	sf-	APS	OMP104/MIA133/ CDC-7 49263 2
1888	Paine	An Island Fantasy	sym poem	pastels of J. Brown/ personal experience	ff	BH	
1886-90	MacDowell	Two Fragments after the Song of Roland	sym poem	Roland legend	ABA	BH	OMP104
1890	Foote	Francesca da Rimini	sym prologue	historical figure/ Dante	sf	APS	MIA134
1899	Parker	A Northern Ballad	sym poem	? Song of the North	sf	* YM	NW339-2/MIA132
1903	Parker	Vathek	sym poem	William Beckford	sf-	* YM	MIA138
1904	Chadwick	Cleopatra	sym poem	Plutarch's Life of Anthony	ff	* DLC	
1904-1906	Paine	Lincoln: A Tragic Tone Poem (incomplete)	tone poem	historical figure	?	* HH	
1910-1911	Chadwick	Aphrodite	sym fantasy	Greek sculpture at B. Art Museum	ff	APS	RR-74CD
1914-15	Chadwick	Tam O Shanter	sym ballad	Robert Burns	ff	BMC	CHAN9439/RR-64CD
1917-18	Chadwick	Angel of Death	sym poem	D.C. French's tomb relief for Milmore	ff	* DLC	