

Forging Masks Through Perceptions of the Maskless in Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*

A Thesis Submitted to the Committee of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts
in the Faculty of Arts and Science

TRENT UNIVERSITY
Peterborough, Ontario, Canada
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English (Public Texts) M.A. Graduate Program
September 2021

Abstract

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This thesis proposes that Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* leads its audience toward actively constructing an attitude toward its maskless protagonist. Grimes's tragedy results from the social construction of his character from ambiguous and unseen actions. Utilizing the theories of Hannah Arendt and Carl Jung, this thesis proposes that Grimes may have resisted tragedy by constructing a public persona for himself. This thesis analyses the opera's music and narrative according to the difference between Grimes's lack of a public persona and the Borough-members' construction of a mask for him. A central contention of the thesis is that as another element of Britten's persona, *Peter Grimes* permitted the composer's entrance into the public sphere, despite his private inclinations and illegal sexuality. Like the opera's drama, the opera's "Sea Interludes" reveals the tragedy resulting from the failure to construct an attitude toward the public world. These "Sea Interludes" work alongside the opera's drama to induce the audience into a common perception of the opera's whole. Through ironic relation to the opera's musical and narrative parts, Benjamin Britten induces his audience's construction of personae, thereby bringing himself and them into a shared public realm.

Keywords: Benjamin Britten, Opera, English, George Crabbe, Montagu Slater, E. M. Forster, W. H. Auden, Philip Brett, Peter Grimes, Grimes, Modernism, Realism, English Opera, Peter Pears, Persona, Sea Interludes, Four Sea Interludes

Acknowledgements

Most principally, I want to thank my extraordinary graduate supervisor, Dr. Rita Bode. By her wisdom, grace, and patience, I have completed this thesis and set my path. Another extraordinary force behind this document has been my second reader, Dr. Suzanne Bailey. Her revisions, kind ear, and incredible support have been central to my success. Dr. Darryl Edwards, my external reader, provided me with judicial commentary, along with envious insights into Benjamin Britten and Jon Vickers's inner circles. Furthermore, Prof. Gordon Johnston's knowledge and inspiration were essential for my beginning with this project. Ms. Catherine O'Brien's familial work in the administrative office has further made my time in Trent University's English M.A. (Public Texts) program remarkable.

I also want to thank my family for having supported me faultlessly throughout my musical and academic journey. Mom, Dad, Hannah, and Noah: Thank you.

Bestowed with their favour:

I have set to sea,

an interpretive eye for the stars.

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Glossary of Musical Terms

Applied Chord: A chord which has a dominant relationship to the subsequently sounding non-tonic chord. The application of this chord evokes a secondary dominant relation to the tonic.

Aria: “A long accompanied song for a solo voice, typically one in an opera or oratorio” (Oxford Dictionary).

Arioso: “Vocal Music that is more melodic than recitative but less formal than an aria” (Oxford Dictionary).

Arpeggio: “The notes of a chord played in rapid succession, either ascending or descending” (Oxford Dictionary).

Basic Idea: “An initiating function consisting of a 2-m. idea that usually contains several melodic or rhythmic motives constituting the primary material of a theme” (Caplin 703).

Cadence: “[T]he ending of a phrase, perceived as a rhythmic or melodic articulation or a harmonic change or all of these; in a larger sense, a cadence may be a demarcation of a half-phrase, of a section of music, or of an entire movement” (Britannica, “Cadence”).

Cell: (set class theory:) Name given to the segmentation of a musical texture according to its set class (Kostka 3494/7073).

Chromatic: “[R]elating to or using notes not belonging to the diatonic scale of the key in which a passage is written. [Also:] ascending or descending by semitones” (Oxford Dictionary).

Countersubject: A second subject related to the dominant iteration of the original subject. In a fugue, the subject is followed by a dominant iteration which is often called the answer. A

counterpoint usually accompanies this answer in another voice. If this counterpoint continues throughout the fugue, it is called a countersubject.

Development: “A medial section function standing between an exposition and a recapitulation.

It creates the loosest formal expression in the movement, and it may contain a pre-core, one or more cores (or core substitutes), and a retransition” (Caplin 706).

Dominant (+ note/chord/musical object): In this thesis, I will use this term to principally

denote: “[H]aving power and influence over others” (Oxford Dictionary). In traditional western theories of musical analysis, the “Dominant” is the “...fifth tone or degree of a diatonic scale [...], or the triad built upon this degree” (Britannica, “Dominant”).

However, this musical term may be ascribed to any note, chord, or musical device which has power and influence over other musical elements.

Evaded Cadence: “The failure of an implied authentic cadence to reach its goal harmony. The

event appearing in place of the final tonic groups with the subsequent unit and (usually) represents the beginning of a repetition of a prior continuation or cadential passage”

(Caplin 707).

Figure: “Short elements consisting ordinarily of two to four notes. But whereas the motive is

usually characterized by a striking interval or rhythmic arrangement, the figure consists of entirely conventional elements (a scale segment, notes of a chord, etc.)” (Britannica,

“Musical Form”). William Drabkin explains that a motive thought of in melodic terms

“...is connoted by the term ‘figure’” (Drabkin, “Motif”).

Free Time: A form of anti-meter, where a piece of music has no ascribed metrical indication.

Generative Cell: (set class theory) A cell defined according to its prime arrangement of set

classes. Subsequent cells are defined according to their variations of the set classes provided in this prime arrangement.

Grace note: “[A]n extra note added as an embellishment and not essential to the harmony or melody” (Oxford Dictionary).

Ground(ed) bass: “[A] short, recurring melodic pattern in the bass part of a composition that serves as the principal structural element” (Britannica, “Ground bass”).

Half Cadence: “The half cadence ends the phrase on a dominant chord, which in tonal music does not sound final; that is, the phrase ends with unresolved harmonic tension. Thus a half cadence typically implies that another phrase will follow, ending with an authentic cadence” (Britannica, “Cadence”).

Harmonic Progression: “A Series of chord changes forming the underlying harmony of a piece of music” (Oxford Dictionary).

Implied Time Signature: When without an explicit written indication, the listener may infer a time signature from the difference between that which they hear and the division of time which they may imagine it to fit.

Key: “A group of notes based on a particular note and comprising a scale, regarded as forming the tonal basis of a piece of music” (Oxford Dictionary).

Leitmotif: “[A] recurrent theme throughout a musical or literary composition, associated with a particular person, idea, or situation” (Oxford Dictionary).

Measure: A grouping, “...typically of equal time value, into which a piece of music is divided, shown on a score by vertical lines across the staff” (Oxford Dictionary, “Bar”).

Mode: “[A] set of musical notes forming a scale and from which melodies and harmonies are

constructed. The modes of plainsong and later Western music (including the usual major and minor scales) correspond to the diatonic scales played on the white notes of a piano. They are named arbitrarily after ancient Greek modes: Ionian (or major), Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian, and Locrian” (Oxford Dictionary).

Modulation: “The process of changing tonal focus such that a new tonic, confirmed as such by cadential function, is perceived to displace the previous tonic” (Caplin 710).

Motive: William E. Caplin defines motive as, “A collection of several notes constituting the smallest meaningful melodic or rhythmic configuration” (Caplin 710). As meaning is ascribed to music entirely by its listener, the definition of musical motive is entirely defined by the scope of the listener’s imagination.

Nonfunctional chords: Implies “...that the chords do not ‘progress’ in any of the ways commonly found in diatonic tonal harmony” (Kostka 344/7073).

Ornamental changes: “In a restatement of any kind, alterations of the melody, durational values, texture, dynamics, and the like of the original unit while retaining its basic tonal, harmonic, and phrase-structural organization” (Caplin 710).

Period: “A simple theme type consisting of a 4-m. antecedent phrase and a 4-m. consequent phrase” (Caplin 710).

Polychord: “[C]ombines two or more chords into a more complex sonority, but it is crucial that the listener be able to perceive that separate harmonic entities are being juxtaposed if the result is to be a true polychord” (Kostka 1181/7073).

Predominant (+note/chord): In this thesis, I will use this term to principally denote: “[P]resent as the strongest or main element” (Oxford Dictionary). In traditional western theories of musical analysis, the “Predominant” is the fourth tone or degree of a diatonic scale, or the

triad built upon this degree. However, this musical term may be ascribed to any note, chord, or musical device which functions as the strongest or main element of a musical line. In western classical music, predominant chords expand away from the tonic and pass toward the dominant. Thus, the strongest and main element of music is its *movement* from root (tonic) toward discernable dominant object(s). The tonic is analogous to the subject of a sentence, predominant to the verb, and dominant to the object.

Recitative: “[S]tyle of monody (accompanied solo song) that emphasized and indeed imitates the rhythms and accents of spoken language, rather than melody or musical motives. Modeled on oratory, recitative developed in the late 1500s in opposition to the polyphonic, or many-voiced, style of 16th-century choral music” (Britannica, “Recitative”).

Rhythm: “[T]he organic process of music in time; it is music’s direction in time” (Britannica, “Rhythm”).

Rondo: “Any one of a number of full-movement forms in which a single refrain alternates with two or more couplets” (Caplin 712).

Root: “[T]he fundamental note of a chord” (Oxford Dictionary).

Secondary Dominant: The dominant relation evoked by an Applied Chord. A dominant relation to the following non-tonic chord, and a secondary dominant relation to the tonic.

Sentence: “A simple theme type consisting of a 4-m. presentation phrase and a 4-m. continuation (or continuation => cadential) phrase” (Caplin 713).

Sequence: “[A] repetition of a phrase or melody at a higher or lower pitch” (Oxford Dictionary).

Strophic: “A term applied to songs in which all stanzas of the text are sung to the same music, in

contrast to those that are Through-composed and have new music for each stanza”
(Tilmouth, “Strophic”).

Subject: The main melodic idea contained within the exposition of a fugue.

Tenuto: “[A] note or chord held for its full time value or slightly more” (Oxford Dictionary).

Time Signature: “An indication of rhythm following a clef, generally expressed as a fraction with the denominator defining the beat as a division of a semibreve and the numerator giving the number of beats in each bar” (Oxford Dictionary).

Tonality: “The character of a piece of music as determined by the key in which it is played or the relations between the notes of a scale or key” (Oxford Dictionary).

Tonic: “[T]he first note in a scale which, in conventional harmony, provides the keynote of a piece of music” (Oxford Dictionary).

Tonicization: “A process of emphasizing a scale degree (besides the tonic) such that it is perceived as a local tonic. A tonicized region does not receive cadential confirmation” (Caplin 714).

Vocal Timbre: The sound of a singer’s voice, resulting from the unique frequency spectrum and envelope. This set of frequencies (including overtones and undertones), while partially owing to the genetic predisposition of the performer (size and shape of bodily organs), can also be altered slightly through changes made to the vocal tract and bodily resonating chambers. Vocal timbre is how we identify the difference between voice types: soprano, mezzo-soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, and base. Vocal timbre also allows us to identify vocal fachs (sub-categories) within each voice type (i.e. lyric tenor v. dramatic tenor) and the individual voices within.

Plot Summary

Peter Grimes is an opera about a man suspected of having committed a crime, driven to presumable suicide by his failure to redeem his character against the Borough's gossiping about him.

In the opera's Prologue, Grimes is brought before members of the Borough to bear witness at their Inquest into his apprentice's death at sea. Though members of this Borough accuse Grimes of having abused and murdered his young apprentice, the lack of substantiating evidence leads to the Inquest's pronouncement that the boy died from 'accidental circumstances.' Though Grimes is not formally charged, he pleads with the court to issue a formal verdict rather than allow the 'case to go on in people's minds.' The court dismisses this plea, and Grimes is left to the consolation of his friend, Ellen Orford, with whom he plans to work toward his character's redemption in the eyes of the Borough.

The opera's first Act begins with a worker's chorus, sung by the opera's chorus, who portrays the Borough's wider community. In this chorus, the audience also meets the character, Balstrode, who, as a neutral party throughout the opera's narrative, acts as a mediatory agent for the audience—connecting them with the opposing worlds of the Borough and Peter Grimes. Having announced an approaching storm, the opera turns its attention to Grimes's calls for help from the Borough in porting his boat in the tempestuous weather. Finding no help from the wider community, Grimes eventually receives assistance from Balstrode and the Borough's apothecary, Ned Keene. Grimes explains that he needs a new apprentice, just like all of the other Borough's fishermen, to continue his labour without the continued and unwilling help of the Borough. Convincing the Borough's Carter, Hobson, to fetch Grimes's new apprentice—acquired from a

local workhouse by Ned Keene—Ellen Orford offers a moralistic aria deriding the Borough for judging Grimes's supposed faults when they, themselves, are not faultless. Following the Borough's dispersion from the opera's stage, Grimes and Balstrode sing about Grimes's plans to redeem his character by fishing the sea dry, becoming a wealthy merchant, and marrying Ellen Orford. Telling Grimes that he should ask for Ellen's hand now, and urging Grimes not to make his character's redemption dependent upon future success, Balstrode leaves Peter in the storm and makes his way toward the public house, 'The Boar,' which is run by the character, Auntie. The Borough is gathered in the pub as they drink, sing, and flirt with the pub's nymphs, referred to as the 'Two Nieces.' When Peter Grimes eventually arrives at the pub, he is met with the Borough's suspicion. Furthermore, he is derided by the drunken Methodist lay minister Bob Boles and the aged amateur detective Mrs. Sedley. Eventually, the audience meets Grimes's new apprentice, John, delivered to the pub by Hobson. Once Peter Grimes has met this young boy, he takes him back to his hut on the seashore.

Act Two begins on Sunday morning with Ellen Orford knitting a sweater for Grimes's apprentice while singing to him. Finding a bruise upon John's neck, she questions Grimes about its cause. Peter Grimes strikes Ellen under the pretext that she has abandoned their shared mission to redeem his character in the eyes of the Borough. Running from Ellen and the arriving Borough, Peter takes John toward his hut. At this moment, the Borough questions Ellen about the preceding events. The Borough then marches upon Peter Grimes hut, hoping to find substantive evidence toward their suspicion of his abuse of John. Grimes and John attempt to flee through the hut's backdoor, which overlooks a cliff. John leaves this door, seemingly pushed by the arriving force of the Borough, and though warned of the route's dangers by Grimes, he falls to

his death. When the Borough finally arrives at Grimes's hut, they find neither him nor John and find nothing but a well-kept home.

The opera's third and final Act begins with Ellen Orford, who has seemingly resigned herself to John's death, having found the sweater she knit for him on the seashore. Mrs. Sedley, having seen Grimes's boat on the seashore, and having spied on Ellen in the preceding scene, alerts the Borough to her theory that Grimes has murdered his second apprentice. After some socializing, Mrs. Sedley turns the entire Borough toward the seashore in the hopes of finding Grimes, who is yet to be seen. The audience is brought into view of Grimes, who, alone on the seashore, has been seemingly driven mad by the death of his second apprentice. Ellen Orford and Balstrode locate Peter Grimes, and with the Borough calling for him throughout the scene, Balstrode gives Grimes the advice to take his ship out to sea and sink it. Grimes seemingly obliges Balstrode as he sets to sea, never to be seen again. The following day, the Borough is witnessed about their seemingly typical morning activities as news arrives that a ship sunk the night before. Mrs. Sedley dismisses this news as a rumour, and the Borough returns to their work as though the opera's prior events had never occurred.

Introduction

For Benjamin Britten to establish an artistic persona to ensure his legacy, he needed to compose an opera that related directly to the dominant English culture of which he was part. Despite the oppositional relationship between the individual and society displayed in his *Peter Grimes*, the opera's compositional history illustrates the necessary precedence of one's own culture for future growth. By composing *Peter Grimes* within this cultural sphere, Britten was able to further his national culture in a way that ensured not only his place in it but also the place of those who witnessed his composition as listeners and audience. While the opera's inspiration was first found while Britten was living in America, this inspiration spurred the composer to reassert his belonging to England by returning home and subsequently composing *Peter Grimes*. The inspiration of English culture and the inspiration of Britten's hometown are found in the opera's adaptation of its source-text's subject matter. By rooting himself in his English culture, Britten laid the groundwork for the growth of British opera. Furthermore, by becoming rooted in his hometown of Aldeburgh, Britten furthered the growth of this town's cultural life. In this thesis, by comparing the relationship between the individual and society within *Peter Grimes* with this opera's role in the composer's relationship to his society, I hope to disrupt the objectification of Britten's unseen private life. In the process, I hope to encourage future work connecting Britten's operas to other works within the contemporary British cultural lexicon.

Britten read E. M. Forster's "George Crabbe: The Poet and the Man" in 1941 while he was living in America. In both interviews and his written Introduction to *Peter Grimes*, Britten references his reading of Forster's article, suggesting its profound influence on his reassertion of English cultural identity. Forster's article described the English poet as "unusual, ... sincere, and ... entirely of this country," and offered Britten a glimpse into the world of George Crabbe's *The*

Borough published in 1810 (7). It not only spurred his interest in the poet and the poem, but also re-ignited his strong feelings for England and its culture, specifically for his native Suffolk.

Britten recounts that “I did not know any of the poems of Crabbe at that time, but reading about him gave me such a feeling of nostalgia for Suffolk, where I had always lived, that I searched for a copy of his works, and made a beginning with ‘The Borough’” (“Introduction” 148). Forster’s “excellent account of this ‘entirely English poet’ evoked,” as Britten later described, “a longing for the realities of that grim and exciting seacoast around Aldeburgh” (“Introduction” 148).

Despite the pressures awaiting him as a pacifist in a nation at war, Britten returned to England from California, shortly after his reading of Forster’s article on Crabbe. This suggests the profound inspiration that these texts had upon him. The composer described his native roots, stating, “I am firmly rooted in this glorious county. And I proved this to myself when I once tried to live somewhere else” (quoted in Brett, “Britten and Grimes” 180). Britten’s adaptation of Crabbe’s *The Borough* into an essentially English opera was part of his reaffirmation of the precedence of his English cultural identity. As this text was not only the inspiration and source-text to *Peter Grimes*, but also made Britten realize the importance of cultural and native rooting within his life, his return to England and composition of *Peter Grimes* may also be viewed as an articulation of the precedence of his native locale.

Peter Grimes’s success amounted to the success of both English culture, and Britten’s canonization within that culture. Britten positioned this opera within the English cultural landscape through the opera’s setting in Aldeburgh, in its adaptation of Crabbe’s *The Borough* characters, and through his attempted restoration of the English language’s musical setting. Arguing that English text setting had become subservient to “logical speech-rhythms” rather than to the emotional impetus of the text, Britten described his compositional aims, writing, “One of

my chief aims is to try and restore to the musical setting of the English language a brilliance, freedom, and vitality that have been curiously rare since the death of Purcell” (“Introduction” 149). Rooting himself and his opera’s subject matter in England, while aiming to reassert the precedence of emotional impetus in the musical setting of the English language, Britten both furthered and subverted the English language’s use in Western Art Music. Through his music’s simultaneous connection and subversion of prior English text-settings, Britten connected himself to his cultural landscape and individuated himself from it, becoming an English composer who introduced new elements to an existing idiom. Desmond Shawe-Taylor foreshadowed Britten’s later cultural canonization after observing the opera’s 1945 premiere, stating, “After hearing several performances of *Peter Grimes* one can scarcely avoid seeing in Benjamin Britten a fresh hope, not only for English, but for European opera” (155). As Shawe-Taylor foreshadowed, Britten would afford a legacy for himself and his art by both connecting and differentiating himself from others who were commonly grounded in their shared musical idiom and English culture.

Britten’s resettlement within Aldeburgh, initially inspired by his reading of Forster’s article on George Crabbe in *The Listener*, was brought to its fruition through the success of *Peter Grimes*. Following the renown afforded to Britten by *Peter Grimes*’s success, the composer “moved from the Old Mill at Snape to Crag House in the centre of the small fishing town where *Peter Grimes* had been set” in the Borough of Aldeburgh (Oliver 134). Moving to the town wherein his opera was set, Britten became a local hero, establishing the Aldeburgh Festival with the association of the Arts Council of Great Britain and the English Opera Group. In 1976, while attending a performance of *Paul Bunyan* at the Aldeburgh Festival, Britten was gifted with a peerage, becoming the Baron Britten of Aldeburgh (Matthews, “Britten” 149). By connecting

himself to Aldeburgh through the composition of *Peter Grimes*, the purchase of a home, and the creation of a local music festival, Britten's national and international renown—including his peerage—became interdependently linked with the town. While Britten rose to prominence over Aldeburgh, his positive effect upon the locale can be witnessed today as his estate, festival, and economic impact remains present.

The opera's success also brought it early scholarly attention. Many early essays and reviews analyzed Britten's opera according to the differences between it and its source-text. Early analyses consider the differences between Peter Grimes's characterizations in Britten's opera and in Crabbe's poem as a means of establishing the differing relationships between Grimes and his society. In his essay, "George Crabbe and Peter Grimes," E. M. Forster illustrates the difference between Crabbe and Britten's accounts of Grimes:

You remember the words in which Crabbe describes his hero. He is hard and dull, flinty, impervious to sensations, and it was a problem to Crabbe to make such a character suffer. ... Whereas Grimes in the opera is sensitive, touched by pity, stung by remorse, and corrected by shame[,] ... [w]e leave him with the knowledge that it is society who sinned, and with compassion.

The community is to blame. (20)

The perceived differences between these two Grimes, along with the implication of a causal relationship between the community's sin and his fate, invoke an oppositional relationship between Grimes and the Borough in Britten's opera, which does not exist within Crabbe's poem. Desmond Shawe-Taylor's review of the opera's first performance similarly draws attention to "an adolescent conception of man and society which is in sober truth indefensible" (154-155). He writes that this relationship between man and society is evoked by the opera's presentation of

Grimes as “an outcast: romantic, Byronic and misunderstood” (154-155), in difference to Crabbe’s Grimes who is presented as “a mere brute, guilty of the manslaughter (if not murder) of his father and of no less than three poor workhouse boys whom he has bought as his apprentices with the deliberate intention of ill-treating them” (154). By detailing the differences between Britten’s opera and Crabbe’s poem, these early analyses established the contradictory relationship between Grimes and his community resulting from the composer and librettist’s altered characterization of him.

Subsequent work on *Peter Grimes* associated the opera’s musical and dramatic devices with the oppositional relationship between Grimes and the Borough. In correlating the musical and literary aspects of the opera, Peter Garvie writes, “The characters are detailed for us by text and music as credible human beings; blind and responsive, touching and comic, commonplace and unusual. The central situation—an individual and a community at odds—may have a tragic development, or a comic one” (10). Garvie infers that the contradictions within *Peter Grimes* are embedded within the opera’s musical and dramatic parts. As a result, the conflict between Grimes and the Borough may be defined through the opera’s dramatic and musical elements. Anthony Payne indicates one of the musical contradictions affiliated with the difference between Grimes and the Borough. He writes that the opera’s musical “poles of A and E flat, keys at opposite ends of the tonal spectrum, ... symbolize the impossibility of coexistence for Grimes and the Borough” (22). Drawing another affiliation between the opera’s music, text, and its presentations of characters, Arved Ashby notes that the musical “‘difference’ of text setting” between Grimes and the Borough resembles a “*Grimesian* ‘paradox’” (63). By affiliating the opera’s differing text settings and the opera’s oppositional tonal centres to the difference

between Grimes and the Borough, scholars such as Ashby and Payne began construction of the opera's structural relationship between Grimes and the Borough.

Some contemporary work on *Peter Grimes* has begun to establish the opera's articulation of the necessary relationship between a subject and his objective reality by connecting stylistic features of the opera with Modernist artistic movements. Christopher Chowrimootoo writes that realist tropes used within *Peter Grimes* were "designed to obscure as much as they reveal" (32). Exploring the difference created by realism, Chowrimootoo compares the opera's social realism and realistic staging with the "'sentimental' aspects that they struggled to erase: its idealized image of love; its melodramatic staging of good and evil; its evocation of sympathy; and its musical lyricism" (32). Through the difference between Realism and Sentimentalism, Chowrimootoo emphasizes that the Modernist styles that were utilized in *Peter Grimes* are a means of establishing the relationship between the subjective reality of Peter Grimes and the objective reality of the Borough. Alan Bewell similarly iterates the opera's articulation of the necessary relationship between subject and object by pointing to the difference between the opera's 'Romanticism' and its source-text's 'Naturalism.' Drawing upon this difference, Bewell writes that "*Peter Grimes* is very much an opera about the place of the artist in society" (646). Bewell and Chowrimootoo further prior critical articulations of the opera's structure by comparing the difference between Grimes and the Borough with Britten's contradictory stylistic evocations.

As the literature regarding *Peter Grimes* developed, scholarship turned to considerations of the opera based on perceptions of the composer's private life. Philip Brett's body of work on Britten and his operas correlates speculation on Benjamin Britten's private life with a sexualized reading of *Peter Grimes*. Brett utilizes parallels between a presumed archetypal homosexual

experience, his reading of Britten's biographical texts, and his reading of *Peter Grimes's* title character to conclude that "it was *Peter Grimes*, representing the ultimate fantasy of persecution and suicide, that played a crucial role in his [Britten's] coming to terms with himself and the society which he both distrusted and yet wished to serve as a musician. ... Having made his choice, *Grimes* served as a catharsis, purging his agony and terror" ("Britten and Grimes" 23-24). Brett claims that his paper's ultimate concern is "the social experience of oppression and its effects in the writing of *Peter Grimes*, not Britten's sexual preference" ("Britten and Grimes" 26). However, this statement contradicts the definition of sexual preference which Brett's paper affords to Britten. By stating his conclusion, and in the process linking Britten's biography with a sexualized reading of *Peter Grimes*, Brett implies that the definition of Britten's sexuality is something with which he needed to come to terms, and something requiring catharsis—he characterizes Britten according to the reduction of his opera to private sexual conditions imagined by others. While this characterization of Britten cannot be proven true or false as a result of the lack of empirical evidence, the prospect of defining his private life merely according to that which can be imagined about it, disrespects both the composer's subjectivity and personal agency. Because of the private nature of Britten's personal sexuality, in all critical circumstances, his sexuality is imagined. As a result of Brett's imprinting of imagined conditions upon Britten's unknown private life, Britten is characterized in a comparably tragic fashion as is the title character in *Peter Grimes*—by that which he is rumored to be.

The tendency to define Benjamin Britten's private life by reducing his operatic portrait to an archetypal sexual character is similarly exemplified by Claire Seymour. *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion*, published in 2004, was the first text to utilize the division between public and private spheres as a means of examining, what she terms, "the ways

in which the operas of Benjamin Britten may illustrate his search for ‘a more interesting idiom’, a search which was driven by his desire for an appropriate public ‘voice’ which might embody, communicate, and perhaps resolve, his private concerns and anxieties” (1). While Seymour’s analysis of *Peter Grimes* is particularly extensive, her reliance upon a superimposed biographical account of the composer’s private life to “examine the presence of a homosexual dynamic in both the verbal and musical texts” results in a notable confirmation bias (1). As the accounts utilized for the superimposition of Britten’s private life were selected according to their concern for his perceived private sexuality, it is not surprising that Seymour concludes that “The librettos and scores of Britten’s operas pulse with a ‘queer’ energy” (323). Furthermore, Seymour’s second-hand perception of Britten’s sexuality induces a characterization of the composer based on imagined motives and psychological conditions. By correlating an imagined homosexual figure to both Britten and his work, Seymour imposes a foreign image upon Britten’s unknown private reality.

Lucas Crawford’s queer reading of *Peter Grimes*, similar to that of Brett and Seymour, defines Britten’s private life by correlating him with a pedophilic reading of his opera. While Crawford’s analysis of the opera is largely independent of the composer, he yet defines Britten’s private sexuality:

[I]t is useful to note that the violence of this demand to speak for oneself, to clarify one’s practices, and to defend behaviours that one may not find shameful could not have been unfamiliar to the composer. ... [S]exual crime permeated the creation of this work. There is no reason to turn Britten into a non-threatening composer who ‘happened to be gay,’ when his own lifestyle was threatening enough so as to be illegal. (42)

By correlating his perception of pedophilia to Britten, Crawford imposes an invented sense of ‘shame’ and ‘demand to defend one’s practices and behaviours’ upon Britten’s unknown private psychology. While Britten’s aesthetic work may be indefinitely defined and imprinted with whatever reading Crawford may so desire, the imposition of a homosexual straw man upon Britten’s work, when correlated to the composer, strips him of agency and thus disrespects his person. By imagining Britten’s private character, Lucas Crawford is, just like Philip Brett and Claire Seymour, tragically removing Britten’s subjectivity and imposing a foreign objective characterization upon his private subjective being.

Despite analyses of the opera’s structure and relationship with artistic movements, there is a tendency toward reducing *Peter Grimes* to Britten’s imagined sexual conditions. While early scholarship was concerned with the difference between Peter Grimes and the Borough, and subsequent scholarship detailed the opera’s structural correlation to Modernist movements, as the literature has developed, Britten’s private sexuality has become increasingly defined by its correlation to sexualized readings of the opera’s narrative. This has created an ironic problem: scholars characterized Britten’s unknown subjective being according to the presumed interpretation of his private reality just as, in the opera, the Borough imagines Grimes’s private reality. By correlating their sexualized readings of the opera to Benjamin Britten, scholars have begun the reduction of both the composer and his opera into an archetypal image of one of the most basic human conditions. As Britten devoted his life to his work’s creation and public performance, he need not be characterized as something other than our perceptions of his public actions. My intent is not to dissuade future queer readings of *Peter Grimes* but rather divorce these readings from Benjamin Britten’s private life. Suppose these readings engage with the opera as a public object reflective of its culture’s perceptions. In that case, they may not reduce

the opera into a singular image, but rather permit its continuous evolution. By respecting the sanctity of the unseen, and the preeminence of agency, I hope to inspire future engaged analyses of the structural parallels between *Peter Grimes* and other modern British literary and theatrical works.

In this thesis, I argue that *Peter Grimes* acts as an impetus for the construction of the audience's personae to connect the private lives that separate them with the opera's public presentation which unites them. Grimes's actions are falsely inferred from the Borough's imposition of character upon his private and unseen being. As the opera's tragedy is perceived along the lines of public (seen) and private (unseen) worlds, I propose that Grimes could have resisted the Borough's tragic characterization of his ambiguous private life by constructing a persona for himself. Rather than falling victim to his community's characterization of his private life—his life at sea and the mysterious circumstances surrounding his apprentice's death—had Peter Grimes taken an attitude toward his community and connected to them rather than running from them, he may have resisted his characterization according to things unwitnessed. Instead of being characterized according to what is rumoured to exist within his private life, Peter might have forged a persona and become characterized according to his public interactions. In *Peter Grimes*, Britten's musical text setting evokes the difference between the Borough-member's personae and Grimes's lack of persona. In contrast to Grimes's failure to construct a public persona, Britten's composition of *Peter Grimes* was exemplary of a persona constructed for the public sphere while protecting the composer's private life. Similarly, the opera's Interludes teach the audience to construct an attitude toward the opera which both unites them in common relation to known parts and separates them in difference to the private realities which precede these attitudes. Britten's opera asks the audience to become actively involved in its process,

leading them to construct attitudes toward it, and resulting in the formation of personae. Therefore, through the structure of the opera, Britten accomplishes the formation of his audience's personae.

In Chapter 1, I define the opera's tragic structure as the interpretation of ambiguity. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, writing about Wagner's tragic opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, Nietzsche posits a tragic formulation upon the dialectical difference between the constructed world of Apollo and the contradictory world of Dionysus. The publicly-constructed objective world—the Apollonian state—is defined by innumerable public perceptions of a singular object. As the Borough and audience construct Grimes's character, they induce the Apollonian state. As Grimes is characterized by what he is rumoured but never witnessed to have done, the Dionysian state is implied by the difference between two realities presented to the audience. These realities are the empirical world witnessed on stage and the constructed world within our minds as the audience. Within the opera, the moment we construct an Apollonian state by objectifying Peter Grimes's unwitnessed actions is the moment that he ceases to be a character separate from ourselves. Peter Grimes's narrative occurs along these lines, with his death at sea and disappearance from the opera's stage occurring once he can no longer escape the Borough's characterizations of him according to unwitnessed actions—and in turn, our interpretation of these characterizations. As we attempt to interpret the ambiguity surrounding Grimes's unseen life at sea, we project our prior knowledge upon him. Thus, I propose the dialectical relationship between the Apollonian and Dionysian states as a way of understanding *Peter Grimes's* tragedy. Peter Garvie writes, "It is the interpretation of that fact [the first apprentice's unknown cause of death], and the distortion of it into suspicion, that initiates the conflict" (10). While here, Garvie connects the differential between Grimes and his community to a single unknown event, I trace the ambiguous actions

which underly the opera's narrative, and the Borough's interpretation of these ambiguities, as a means of analyzing the opera's tragedy.

The constructed realm—or the Apollonian state—is a world evoked by the presumption of interpretation, and the projection of imagination upon forms that are otherwise ambiguous.

Nietzsche defines the Apollonian state with the god from which its word is derived:

Apollo, as the god of all plastic energies[,] is at the same time the god of prophecy. He ... [is] the deity of light, [and] is also master of the beautiful appearance of the inner world of the imagination[,] [t]he higher truth, the perfection of these states in contrast to the only partial comprehensibility of everyday reality... (21)

The 'plastic energies' and 'imagination' of which this state is comprised describe a human world constructed from the interpretation of everyday reality. This is a realm which, in the opera, exists within the imaginations of the Borough-public and audience, as they construct a character for Peter Grimes from actions which they have imagined him to commit.

The opera's ambiguous world—the Dionysian state—is both antecedent and is subsequently related to the Apollonian realm of interpretation according to the infinite variability of these interpretations. This ambiguous and contradictory realm fails either to necessarily substantiate or refute the Borough's constructed reality. Nietzsche defines this Dionysian state, writing,

Under the spell of the Dionysian it is not only the bond between man and man which is re-established: nature in its estranged, hostile, or subjugated forms also celebrates its reconciliation with its prodigal son, man. The earth voluntarily gives up its spoils while the predators of cliffs and desert approach meekly. ... If one were to allow one's imagination free rein in transforming Beethoven's 'Hymn to Joy' into a painting,

particularly the moment when the multitudes kneel down awestruck in the dust: then one might come close to an idea of the Dionysian. (22)

Nietzsche's Dionysian state is an ambiguous state, according to the contradictions within and of its definition—we must recall that Dionysus is the god of eternal contradiction. While Nietzsche writes that within the Dionysian state, subjects are united within a single object (man and man, elements of nature, etc.), the very definition of the subjects named contradicts their unification. If a spoil is defined by the forcible removal of an object from a subject, then how might this definition exist when the subject voluntarily surrenders the “spoils”? If a predator is defined according to its exploitative behaviour toward its prey, then if this subject is meekly related toward its countersubject, how might it be defined as a predator? Nietzsche asks us to allow our imaginations free reign when he simultaneously instructs us to paint a very particular evocation derived from Beethoven's ‘Hymn to Joy.’ In each of these situations, the Dionysian state—the ambiguity—is evoked as a result of the difference between a subject's definitions. Likewise, in *Peter Grimes*, the title character's ambiguity is evoked as a result of the difference between the objects the Borough imagines him to relate to, and the lack of physically substantiating or refuting evidence for these claims. When the Borough accuses Grimes of being a murderer, we gain sight of the ambiguous state, having no evidence of him ever having participated in murder. Through this Nietzschean evocation of the information paradox, a discrepancy forms between the opera's constructed realm and its ambiguous realm, just as the ambiguity implied by the existence of a black hole—wherein many physical states devolve into the same state—postulates the arbitrary nature of all known physics. It follows that so long as something may be certainly constructed within the Apollonian state, there also exists something that is unconstructed.

I describe Grimes's tragic fate as embodied within the term, *dis*-memberment. This term arises from Dionysus' archetypal tragic fate, described by Nietzsche as "that god experiencing in himself the agonies of individuation, the god of whom marvellous myths speak, telling the story of how he as a boy was dismembered by the Titans and is now worshipped in that state as Zagreus" (59). In this story, the Titan's physical dismemberment of the child results from their characterization of him—the individuation he experienced. By projecting certain characterizations onto Dionysus, fearing his ascent to the Olympian throne, the Titans induced a differentiation between their interpretation of his future being and his present self. Upon the difference between these two states, the Titans dismembered the child's physical body as they attempted to destroy his being. In the institutional use of the term 'dismemberment,' a member of a political body is likewise objectified through characterizations projected upon his form by others until he may no longer remain a 'member' to this body. The Medieval act of quartering, wherein a criminal was dismembered, and their body parts scattered throughout the country, occurred under the pretext of both executing the individual while simultaneously utilizing their remnants to warn the populace against the abstraction of their criminal act. Therefore, we may understand the term *dis*-memberment as the meaning derived from the crossing-over between the Apollonian and Dionysian states. In the particular case of *Peter Grimes*, his *dis*-memberment results from the eventual divorce between his empirical state presented before the audience and his socially constructed state. When Peter Grimes ceases to appear before us, but his name and character live with us, he has been dismembered.

In *Peter Grimes*, when the Borough induces a discrepancy between ambiguity and its interpretation by characterizing Grimes according to imagined actions, they induce a differentiation between Apollonian and Dionysian states. This leads to Grimes's *dis*-

memberment when he fails to appear before them as anything more than what they interpreted him to be. The Borough imagines that Grimes has murdered his apprentices, lives a rough and hard life at sea, and is furthermore ‘unknown’ to them, thereby defining him according to imagined conditions that exclude him from their membership. Like the event horizon of a black hole wherein the infinite ambiguity and certain interpretation meet, Peter Grimes’s *dis-*memberment is the moment within his tragic narrative when his being and his character become entirely divorced from each other—a narrative boundary between the known and unknown. At this moment, Grimes is simultaneously totally subjectivized and objectivized until he no longer appears as a whole. Rather, parts of him live on within the hearts and minds of his audience. In the opera, when Grimes is dismembered, he no longer appears on this stage. In *Peter Grimes*, the Nietzschean tragic structure relying on the Apollonian/Dionysian differential between interpretation and ambiguity invokes the difference between that which is publicly seen and unseen to which Hannah Arendt’s distinction between the public and private sphere is particularly helpful as I outline in Chapter 2.

I propose an understanding of *Peter Grimes*, which distinguishes between public and private spheres, as defined by Hannah Arendt, in order to analyze the difference between the opera’s socially constructed and empirically witnessed realms. Through the parapet of the opera’s theatre, the audience may differentiate between what is public (seen) and private (unseen). Furthermore, for the purpose of building tension through dramatic irony through Grimes’s relationship with the Borough, the audience may differentiate between when he appears in sight of the Borough (in public), and when he appears out of sight of the Borough (in private). This public and private definition is further utilized along the lines of subjectivity and objectivity, thereby relegating Grimes’s emotions to the private sphere, to be imagined by others.

As the opera's tragic process is predicated upon what the Borough publicly imagines Grimes to have done outside of their sight, Britten embeds the tragic differential between interpretation and ambiguity within these respective spheres. When members of the Borough proclaim Peter's brutal ways, his lost soul, and lonely ways, elements that are never physically witnessed by the audience, they evoke the difference between interpretation and ambiguity.

Given that *Peter Grimes*'s tragedy results from the imposition of the Borough-public's imagined image of the title character's private life, and this character's retreat toward further privacy, I argue that the construction of a persona would have permitted Grimes to resist his tragic fate. Had Grimes worn the mask of his own construction, he might have written his own story. However, as he fails to act within public sight, he has a story written for him as the public sphere imposes a tragic mask of their construction upon his face.

The last three chapters of this thesis apply the framework constructed within the first two chapters to Britten's relationship with the opera, and the audience's attitude toward the opera's music. In the third chapter, I explore the difference between the musical personas which the Borough-members utilize to interact within the public sphere, and Grimes's relegation to the private sphere as a result of his absent musical persona. In the fourth chapter, I argue that the division between public and private spheres was necessary for Britten due to known and publicly articulated social factors. Given these factors, I contend that the formation of a persona was necessary for Britten's interaction with the public world. *Peter Grimes*, as a public work, may be understood to be an articulation of this persona. In my fifth chapter, I explore the musical structure of the opera's "Sea Interludes," exploring how their musical structure unites the audience in a shared perception of the opera's drama. In this music, Britten permits the construction of his audience's heterogeneous public sphere through both his audience's shared

perceptions of the drama, and through the persuasive argument embedded within the Interlude's structure.

Chapter 1: Tragically Interpreting Ambiguity

The *dis*-memberment that Peter Grimes experiences on the part of the Borough-public is predicated upon his ambiguities. The opera's tragic narrative develops as the audience and Borough construct Grimes's character from his falsely inferred actions. As the opera fails to present any physically witnessable evidence for these claims, a tragic differential is created between the reality the Borough has induced and its ambiguous relation to Grimes as a subject. Thereby, the more the Borough characterizes Grimes by falsely inferring his unseen actions, the more he is *dis*-membered from these characterizations. Grimes's being moves into the Dionysian state while his character becomes divorced from this being.

This chapter explores the evocation of the tragic difference between ambiguity and its interpretations by exploring the induction of Grimes's character from actions falsely inferred by the Borough and the audience's subsequent interpretation of these assumptions and his character. The opera presents its audience with a choice between the belief or disbelief in the Borough's characterizations of Grimes. This choice leads the audience to induce Grimes's characterization based on beliefs that they do not know to be necessarily true. These resulting characterizations are examples of the tragic process both within the opera's narrative and within the audience's perception of the opera. The process of the opera's adaptation from George Crabbe's *The Borough* further indicates that *Peter Grimes*'s tragedy is driven by both the Borough and audience's invention of Grimes's character from falsely inferred actions. By eliminating physical evidence for the Borough's invention of Grimes's character, Britten evokes the difference between the Borough and audience's presumed interpretations of ambiguity. Therefore, when the audience watches Britten's opera, they are left to define Grimes according to the difference

between the character the Borough claims him to be and the lack of witnessable evidence for this character.

Reviews of the opera, dating back to its initial premiere, exemplify the tragic interpretation of ambiguity by characterizing Peter Grimes according to imagined actions. Fermccio Bonavia's review in the *Daily Telegraph* alters Grimes's interactions with his apprentice, John, in the opera's second act. Bonavia takes action which is dubiously implied, and describes it as a concrete occurrence: "But he does not and is not meant to engage very deeply our sympathies. He is first introduced as standing trial for the murder at sea of his apprentice: he is then seen treating brutally the boy who has taken the place of the first apprentice. We see him finally, a raving lunatic, putting out to sea to seek death in drowning" (quoted in Mitchell & Reed 11979/16698). Bonavia connects events in the opera's narrative to imply that Grimes's characterization is directly dependent upon actions that we do not know occurred. If Bonavia's characterization of the opera's protagonist results from Grimes's insistence upon John's work on Sunday, it implies a degree of brutality by Grimes which is never physically portrayed within the opera. Furthermore, Bonavia claims Grimes to be standing trial for the murder of his first apprentice when the opera's narrative is necessarily dependent upon both the apprentice's unknown cause of death and the Borough's refusal to bring forth the charge of murder. To be clear: Grimes does not stand trial—rather, he is a witness within a court of inquest.

Frank Howes's review of the opera in *The Times* indicates an intriguing division between the characterization of an actor and the characterization of their role. Howes writes, "Mr Peter Pears, as Peter Grimes, commanded all the vocal resources required for a great and exacting part, though he was not completely convincing as a sadist" (quoted in Mitchell & Reed 11937/16698). However, within the opera, Britten's protagonist is never witnessed inflicting pain upon others.

This critique thereby imagines a character from falsely inferred action, evoking the opera's tragedy. As Howes assesses Pears's performance by implying Grimes's character, he induces discrepancies between the opera's socially constructed reality, empirically presented reality, and the intertextual reality of an actor's portrayal of a role. Howes, thereby, aids in the *dis*-memberment of Peter Grimes by creating a discrepancy between constructed states, casting Grimes being into the Dionysian state while maintaining his projected characterization.

Unlike Bonavia, who characterizes Grimes by inventing his actions, or Howes, who defines Grimes's character according to a measure other than the actor's performance, J. W. Garbutt attempts to read the actor's state-of-mind:

What was Peter's intention? The audience is understandably bewildered, and its bewilderment is never resolved. ... [B]ut[,] those who have followed Peter's progress so far may run through the possibilities. Accident pure and simple? Permitted accident? Encouraged accident? Contrived accident? Impulsive murder? Deliberate murder? Reluctantly one comes to the conclusion that it was either a permitted accident, arising from Peter's blank, amoral, isolated state of mind, or that it was an impulsive murder, a retaliation upon the boy for allegedly 'talking' and being 'the cause of everything'...

(335-6)

Does a permitted accident necessitate a 'blank, amoral, isolated state of mind?' When Grimes's apprentice, John, descends the cliff-side path, to Grimes's calls for caution, there is a chance that an accident may occur. There is no reason why John's descent from this path necessarily resulted in his death, as the probability of this path's danger cannot be entirely isolated. Certainly, every action 'permits accident.' Garbutt's characterization of Grimes as amoral and affected with an 'isolated state of mind' is dependent upon the characterization of actions which we cannot see.

Likewise, as Garbutt supposes Grimes's murderous motive, he ignores the opera's explicit indications to the contrary. Not only is the pair on their way to the sea, where John's labour is necessary, but Grimes also explicitly warns the boy to take care in his descent to the seashore (Britten 367). As Grimes is not physically with John during his offstage death, it becomes impossible to substantiate the accusation of the apprentice's murder. Therefore, by attempting to discern Grimes's intention, Garbutt further evokes the opera's tragedy as he invents actions apart from what appears before him to characterize a role which resists characterization. As these invented actions and characterizations can neither be substantiated nor refuted, Garbutt evokes tragedy by interpreting ambiguity.

By proclaiming the existence of Grimes's character and actions through false inference, Bonavia evokes tragedy by imagining something that can neither be substantiated nor refuted. When Frank Howes measures Peter Pears's portrayal of Peter Grimes according to a 'sadistic' characterization, he too evokes tragedy by inventing a character not substantiated by Grimes's witnessed actions. Garbutt's reading of Grimes's intention similarly induces a tragic discrepancy between certain interpretation of ambiguity by attempting to ascertain Grimes's character from dubiously implied actions. Thereby, as critics attempt to ascertain Grimes's character from the action (and lack of action) presented on-stage, they construct his character from imagined elements.

The 'gossiping' from other Borough-members about Grimes's guilt and character throughout the opera can provide the audience with an ambiguous chain of causality as they are driven toward what David Hume regarded as the problem of induction.¹ Classical tragedy offers a precedent for this tragic act with the Watchman from *The Oresteia*. As Michael Naas states about the Watchman's tragic role: "[T]he presumption of interpretation is the beginning of

tragedy. Indeed the codes operating on the human plane can never be wholly separated from the codes of the gods, and interpretation, no matter how sophisticated, is always preceded by a fundamental ambivalence” (280). Just as the Watchman’s presumption of interpretation is the beginning of Agamemnon’s tragedy, Boles, Sedley, and Orford’s presumed interpretations of unwitnessed action induces Peter Grimes’s tragedy.

In Britten’s opera, Mrs. Sedley’s characterizing of Peter Grimes according to her invention functions similarly to evoke tragedy. Mrs. Sedley’s character throughout the opera is witnessed evoking tragedy by characterizing Peter Grimes according to actions of her invention. In Act II, Scene I, Mrs. Sedley accuses Grimes of treating his apprentice poorly, singing, “Maltreating that poor boy again!” (Britten 292). While Grimes’s insistence on John’s work on Sunday may constitute ‘maltreatment,’ by indicating this to be a reoccurring act, Mrs. Sedley asserts the presence of action where none has been witnessed. This imagined action induces a tragic interpretation of ambiguity. Similarly evoking the opera’s tragedy, through the absence of John’s appearance in Act III, Mrs. Sedley claims Grimes to be John’s murderer. She sings, “About Peter Grimes and that boy. Neither of them was seen yesterday. It’s more than suspicion now, it’s fact. The boy’s disappeared. ... Ev’rything points to Peter Grimes: He is the murderer!” (Britten 421-423). However, the absence of Grimes and the boy from Mrs. Sedley’s sight does not equate to Peter Grimes having murdered the boy. Thereby, as Mrs. Sedley interprets John’s absence from her sight, she induces a characterization for Peter Grimes which can neither be substantiated nor refuted by the action witnessed on-stage. In this scene, Mrs. Sedley’s character repeatedly evokes tragedy by interpreting ambiguity—by imagining actions where none have been witnessed.

In the first scene of Act I, Bob Boles evokes tragedy by characterizing both Peter Grimes and the Borough according to falsely inferred actions. Refusing to help Grimes moor his boat, he sings, “This lost soul of a fisherman must be shunned by respectable society!” (Britten 63-6). While Boles asserts that Peter Grimes is a ‘lost soul,’ this characterization depends on the existence of an object—a soul—which is impossible to see. How might Boles know that an object invisible to sight is lost? If Boles is characterizing Grimes as a ‘lost soul,’ he is inducing a characterization for Grimes which can neither be substantiated nor refuted by the audience. As he further associates the Borough’s ‘respectability’ for their action toward Grimes’s invented character, Boles evokes another differential between interpretation and ambiguity. If the Borough did shun Grimes, would they be respectable? If the Borough were not to shun Grimes, could they still be respectable? This would depend on whether Grimes truly is a ‘lost soul.’ However, as a soul is invisible to sight and its ‘lost’ state is also invisible, the question’s answer remains ambiguous.

In the pub scene of Act I, Boles characterizes Grimes according to invented actions, thereby furthering the opera’s tragedy by increasing the degree by which Grimes has been characterized according to unprovable actions. About Grimes, Boles sings, “His exercise is not with men but killing boys!” (Britten 203). Again, there is no substantive proof presented physically before the opera’s audience for Boles’ accusations. From our knowledge of the first apprentice’s death, we know that Grimes’s proselytizing nemesis lacks empirical evidence for the construction of this conclusion. The death occurred at sea, and Boles only came upon the apprentice’s body after Grimes’s boat had returned. However, as Boles pronounces these interpretations in the public sphere, a character begins to be constructed against which Grimes’s

future actions will be measured. Boles' interpretation of ambiguity evokes the opera's tragedy as it causes future action to be interpreted accordingly.

In Act II, Scene I, Ellen discovers a bruise upon John's neck, inferring future action from her presumed interpretation of the bruise's cause. Affiliating this cause to Grimes, Ellen evokes the opera's tragic differential between interpretation and ambiguity. She sings, "A bruise... well it's begun!" (Britten 260). John's bruise could have come from physical abuse by Grimes, but it also could have originated from more natural forces at sea. As Ellen searches for an answer to the bruise's origins, she confronts Grimes, who answers her, singing, "Out of the hurly burly!" (Britten 274). The 'hurly-burly' hardly answers the question of Grimes's involvement. In response to this ambiguous explanation, Ellen comments, "O your ways are hard and rough beyond his days!" (Britten 274). Despite her comment, the audience has not seen a display of Grimes's 'rough and hard ways.' Ellen must either be in possession of knowledge which the audience does not possess, or her conclusions must be grounded upon Mrs. Sedley or Bob Boles' construction of Grimes's character. In either circumstance, Ellen induces a presumed interpretation of John's bruise from her imagined definition of Grimes's 'rough and hard ways.' As the audience has not witnessed such action from Grimes, his characterization is made more ambiguous.

The ambiguity within *Peter Grimes* precipitates the opera's tragedy as it leads to the Borough's false-inferences and construction of Grimes's character. Mrs. Sedley and Bob Boles manifest the opera's tragedy through the publication of their presumed interpretations to which is added Ellen's interpretation of the ambiguous bruise on John's neck in Act II. By interpreting the ambiguities surrounding Peter Grimes, and publicly proclaiming these presumed interpretations, these characters induce a tragic characterization of the opera's title role. Grimes need not

‘necessarily’ be a murderer, an abuser, or a lost soul, for the Borough to embed these accusations within his form. So long as Grimes provides no evidence to either substantiate or refute the Borough’s interpretations, they may continue to *dis*-member him by inventing his character from falsely inferred actions.

As the opera’s narrative is driven according to the interpretation of Peter Grimes by other characters on stage, we realize that the opera’s title role is naturally absent of character derived from his own action. By analyzing the opera’s process of adaptation, we realize what elements utilized for the derivation of the protagonist’s character in Crabbe’s poem were removed within Britten’s opera. As a result of this discrepancy between texts, Britten and Slater place the pressure of the opera’s narrative upon the public sphere—both on stage and off. Resulting from this adaptation, Peter Grimes’s tragic fate is placed solely within the hands of the public sphere by means of their constructed and unsubstantiated characterizations of him.

In Peter Pears’s essay, “Neither a hero nor a villain,” the singer details the difference between Britten’s opera and George Crabbe’s poem as consisting in the adaptation of the character, Peter Grimes:

In the opera, the Borough is very much the same as Crabbe’s Borough. Most of the characters are taken from Crabbe as they stand: Auntie, the landlady of ‘The Boar’, and her two nieces; Ned Keene, the quack; Swallow, the lawyer; the Rector, and so on. Peter Grimes himself, on the other hand, is a more complicated character and considerably removed from the desperado of the poem. (150)

As Grimes was adapted for the opera’s libretto, his tragic mask remained the same, but the process of his tragic dismemberment was altered. Unlike Crabbe’s poem, where actions drive

Grimes's fate, Britten's protagonist's narrative is driven solely, as I have been discussing, by the Borough's invention of his character from falsely inferred actions.

The adaptation of Crabbe's *The Borough* into Britten's *Peter Grimes* differs slightly from the typical pattern of text-to-stage adaptation detailed by Linda Hutcheon. In *A Theory of Adaptation*, Hutcheon describes a formal difference between literature and stage, as found in the audience's interaction with the text:

[I]n narrative literature ... our engagement begins in the realm of imagination, which is simultaneously controlled by the selected, directing words of the text and liberated—that is, unconstrained by the limits of the visual or aural. ... But with the move to the mode of showing, ... we are caught in an unrelenting, forwarddriving story. And we have moved from the imagination to the realm of direct perception—with its mix of both detail and broad focus. (49/302)

Just as narrative literature controls the realm of the reader's imagination through directing words that are not limited to their physical reality, so too does the Borough's rhetoric depict a narrative that fails to exist physically before the opera's spectator. Thus, as objective elements of the poem's narrative disappear into the mere interpretations of Grimes's character, a discrepancy appears in the opera's form between the realm of direct perception and the realm of rhetorical creation. In contrast to Crabbe's poem, Britten's Grimes appears on stage without a father to embody his inherited circumstances, without visible ghosts to haunt him into madness, and without a death to be witnessed.

In *The Borough*, Grimes's father bestows him with the inheritance of his necessary circumstances. Just as the opera's exposition presents the audience with a form of inheritance for

the following narrative, so too does the poem begin with an exposition of Old Peter's bearing upon his son's desperado:

Old *Peter Grimes* made Fishing his Employ,
 His Wife he cabin'd with him and his Boy,
 And seem'd that Life laborious to enjoy:
 To Town came quiet *Peter* with his Fish,
 And had of all a civil word and wish.
 He left his Trade upon the Sabbath-Day,
 And took young *Peter* in his hand to pray:
 But soon the stubborn Boy from Care broke loose,
 At first refus'd, then added his Abuse:
 His Father's Love he scorn's, his Power defied,
 But being drunk, wept sorely when he died. (Crabbe 159)

.....

"My Father's Spirit - he who always tried
 "To give me trouble, when he liv'd and died—
 "When he was gone, he could not be content
 "To see my Days in painful labour spent,
 "But would appoint his Meetings, and he made
 "Me watch at these, and so neglect my Trade. (Crabbe 171)

We know that Grimes scorns and abuses his father, and we know that this same figure's looming spectre later haunts him. However, as a result of his physical presence, Old Peter's figure need not be characterized as something other than his physical form. He is principally Grimes's father and not some amorphous abstraction of piety, labour, or fatherhood itself. The story can be told without needing to know what Grimes's father might represent, and the poem can develop with the reader only knowing that Grimes's refutation of his father may become his tragic reckoning.

However, in Britten's opera, Peter Grimes's looming inheritance is embodied by the Borough-public and audience. While Pears's early sketches of the opera's narrative include Old Peter's presence in the opera's earlier scenes (Seymour 54), Montague Slater's final libretto eliminates this character. The spectator, who is the chorus and audience combined, now cannot merely characterize Peter Grimes as his father's son, with his father's definition acting as a measure for his character. The spectator can no longer define Grimes as being defiant of his father's power, scornful of his father's love, or hating his father's piety. Instead, the spectator imprints his or her invented characterizations upon Peter Grimes due to the ambiguity surrounding the protagonist's inherited circumstances. Now, the audience must choose to believe or disbelieve the Borough's falsely inferred characterizations of Grimes, thereby characterizing him according to their preeminent beliefs. Without a physical representation of Grimes's father on-stage, the Borough-public and audience become metaphorical fathers to their constructed character on-stage, and they become the spectre looming ambivalently above their character's tragic narrative.

In Crabbe's poem, Grimes witnesses his deceased father and apprentices' ghosts as he succumbs to madness:

Now, from that day, whenever I began

To dip my Net, there stood the hard Old Man—
 He and those Boys: I humbled me and pray'd
 They would be gone; — they heeded not, but stay'd
 Nor could I turn, nor would the Boat go by,
 But gazing on the Spirits, there was I;
 They bade me leap to death, but I was loth to die:
 And every day, as sure as day arose,
 Would these three Spirits meet me ere the close;
 To hear and mark them daily was my doom,
 And 'Come,' they said, with weak, sad voices, 'come.'
 To row away with all my strength I try'd,
 But there were they, hard by me in the Tide,
 The three unbodied Forms—and 'Come,' still 'come,' they cried. (Crabbe 172)

Within Crabbe's text, the ghosts of Grimes's past call out to him. As Grimes's past sins haunt his future, the unity of his narrative becomes inescapable. Grimes's flight from his father's inheritance and his abuses and murders of his apprentices manifest causal forces that make his continued life within the Borough impossible.

Likewise, in Britten's opera, the spectre of the first apprentice is said to appear as Grimes begins to realize that it may not be possible to escape his character as constructed by the Borough-public. However, unlike Crabbe's ghosts, who serve as reminders of Grimes's known actions against their previous human forms, the opera's ghost is neither visibly present nor embedded with the spectator's knowledge of prior actions:

Peter: I hear those voices that will not be drowned

Calling, there is no stone
 In earth's thickness to make a home,
 That you can build with and remain alone.
 Sometimes I see that boy here in this hut.
 He's there now—I can see him—he is there!
 His eyes are on me as they were that evil day.
 Stop moaning boy! Water?
 There's no more water...
 You had the last yesterday.
 You'll soon be home! (Britten 378-380)

While the apparitions in Crabbe's poem are described as calling Grimes toward his death, the ghost mentioned by Britten's Grimes cannot be heard by the spectator. Rather, Britten's Grimes recites dialogue from the fateful events preceding the opera's narrative, demonstrating an interaction which fails to confirm or deny the Borough's accusations of this apprentice's murder. By not presenting the audience with a physical representation of the looming spectres of Grimes's past, Britten and Slater obscure the nature of Grimes's past from public view. The audience is left interpreting Grimes's relationship with his first apprentice according to the looming presence of their own prior characterizations and their perceptions of Boles, Mrs. Sedley and Ellen's accusations toward Grimes. The ghost's lack of appearance permits its substantiation of any character of the public's previous construction.

Britten's opera and Crabbe's poem further deviate with regard to the depiction of Peter Grimes's relationships with his apprentices. In the poem, unlike the opera, Grimes is described as explicitly abusive toward his apprentices:

He wanted some obedient Boy to stand
 And bear the Blow of his outrageous Hand;
 And hop'd to find in some propitious hour
 A feeling Creature subject to his Power. (Crabbe 161)

When the spectres of Grimes's former apprentices appear to him and call him toward death, there is sufficient evidence to infer that these spectres are representative of Grimes's abuse. Grimes is not only haunted by the physical presence of his former apprentices but the looming spectre of his action toward them. In contrast, despite the accusations of abuse by Borough-members, the opera presents its audience with no confirmed knowledge of Peter Grimes's abuse of his apprentices. Thus, we cannot knowingly conclude if Grimes is abusive toward his apprentices. The ghost of the first apprentice cannot be deductively reasoned to infer abuse toward him. Only if the spectator mistakes speech for fact and arbitrarily constructs Grimes's character according to Borough-member's accusations toward him, can they falsely infer Grimes's abuse of this first apprentice. Unlike Crabbe's poem, in this operatic world of heightened ambiguity, the spectator is more explicitly active in Grimes's tragedy through false inferences and characterization of him.

While in Crabbe's poem, Peter Grimes dies mad and in the company of the Borough's women, in the opera, Grimes's death is presented off-stage. Following Grimes's second apprentice's death, Balstrode advises the opera's protagonist to go to sea and sink his ship. The audience may only imply Grimes's death according to his proceeding absence in the opera's narrative. Forster describes this vanishing, writing, "his fate is to drift out in his boat, a private Viking, and to perish unnoticed while work-a-day life is resumed" ("George Crabbe and Peter Grimes" 20). Thus, even in death, Peter Grimes's narrative relies more upon the interpretation of

his absence than it does upon the witness of his presence. As a result of the narrative's adaptation, *Peter Grimes* becomes a tragedy manifested by the public's construction of the protagonist's character.

As *Peter Grimes* underwent adaptation from *The Borough*, the nature of the opera's protagonist—outside of the projected characterizations by his community—became pale compared to the self-distinct character of Crabbe's poem. The opera's Peter Grimes is not fathered by a character on-stage as he is in Crabbe's poem. The opera's audience never witnesses the ghost that haunts Grimes as they do from the Crabbe poem's omnipotent narrative. The spectator does not witness the protagonist abusing his apprentices, as he does in Crabbe's poem. Furthermore, the opera's Peter Grimes does not appear in death as he does in Crabbe's narrative. From the lack of Grimes's witnessable distinction, the discrepancy between his being and his characterization becomes increasingly *dis*-membered in Nietzschean terms. Therefore, the adaptation's removal of concrete elements is essential for providing the protagonist's ambiguities of character.

Linda Hutcheon notes that unlike the world of text such as George Crabbe's *The Borough*, the world of theatre possesses a dimension which permits the actor the ability to display an element of their character through live performance:

The text of a play does not necessarily tell an actor about such matters as the gestures, expressions, and tones of voice to use in converting words on a page into a convincing performance (J. Miller 1986: 48); it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby in a sense adapting it for the stage. (39/274)

In opera, the actor's portrayal of Peter Grimes includes their vocal timbre, affectations, and physical attributes. It is, therefore, possible for Peter Grimes to appear to the audience as a

slightly different character depending upon the actor who embodies the role. However, while there is an inevitable variance in the spectator's characterization of Grimes provided by the actor cast into the role of the protagonist, the opera's tragic process necessitates that this character be constructed by the spectator and Borough, alone. As the opera's process is dependent upon the discrepancy between the public's construction of Grimes's character, and the lack of substantiating evidence for these characterizations, only performances which do not alter the scope of Grimes's ambiguous character can result in the theophany—an actor's most possibly convincing embodiment of a role—of Grimes into the actor's form.

The opera's composer voiced concern over casting an actor who had an overtly characterized vocal timbre. While vocal training may permit a singer to achieve a number of resonance patterns—owing to manipulation of the vocal tract and supporting musculature—individual voices may develop or be physically limited to distinctly characterized sounds. These characterized sounds may be defined as vocal timbre. For example, the light-lyric tenor of Dr. Ian Bostridge is often associated with Britten's more sentimental (*Midsummer's Night Dream*) or ironically devilish characters (*Turn of the Screw*), owing to his voice's purity and agility. Peter Pears, whose early voice was light and lyrical, attempted to 'grow' into a dramatic voice for the role of Grimes, sounding strained in his recorded performance of *Peter Grimes*. Contemporary performers of *Peter Grimes*'s title character, Ben Heppner and Jon Vickers, possessed much larger voices than their aforementioned peers. However, despite the natural weight of their dramatic voices, both of these singers maintained a bright and lyrical line. After hearing a CBC broadcast in Toronto with William Morton as Grimes, Britten wrote, "This young singer has a voice of just the right timbre. It was not too heavy, which makes the character simply a sadist, nor was it too lyric, which makes it a boring opera about a sentimental poet-manqué; but it had,

as it should, the elements of both” (quoted in Brett, “Breaking the ice for British opera” 104).

While Britten articulates concern over the protagonist’s unwanted elements of character resulting from an overly heavy or lyrical voice, the importance of a balanced portrayal of Peter Grimes’s vocal line is not so that the actor may appear as *something* to the spectator, but rather so that the actor does not overtly appear as either a mere sadist or sentimentalist. Resisting the possibility of sounding like a sadist through their heavy voices, the brightness and lyricism of Vickers and Heppner’s voices were essential in ensuring the ambiguity of Grimes’s vocal character. As the narrative of the opera is dependent upon the protagonist’s innate ambiguities, Grimes cannot become a theatrical caricature resultant from the actor’s own purposeful characterization, or colourful vocal personality.

Andrew Porter’s *The New Yorker* article states, “there have been moments when I’ve wondered whether I was watching and hearing Jon Vickers as Peter Grimes or Peter Grimes as Jon Vickers” (quoted in Brett, “Breaking the ice for British opera” 104). Footage of Vickers’ performance of *Peter Grimes* indicates that his vocal qualities, while quite heavy, do not provide substantive evidence toward the self-evident characterization which Britten had previously feared.² Grimes’s ambiguous characterization may be achieved through the actor’s emotional relationship with the role that they’re embodying rather than through the appropriation of physical characteristics. If the actor achieves Grimes’s ambiguous character through emotional identification, he may avoid performative indications, which would provide physically substantiating evidence for the audience’s characterization of Grimes.

The importance of emotional identification with a role for its successful embodiment was theorized by Konstantin Stanislavski while he was teaching in the Opera Section of the Bolshoi Theatre. He stressed the achievement of character through embodied emotional experience that

would be brought to fruition from imagined biographical details and affective memories. Stanislavsky and other practitioners of his method acting agree that the actor cannot experience a fictional reality but should rather recall an applicable emotive reality through sensory induction of prior personal experience. Uta Hagen later echoed these sentiments, saying, “[R]eal characters ‘live’ in their world; they do not ‘show’ feelings and ‘perform’ a series of invented activities. Good acting means to experience scenic circumstances truthfully, to find the inner core of their characters and behave” (Gordon 25). As Stanislavsky’s Method stresses the actor’s inability to embody an emotional world separate from their own, the character perceived by the audience is falsely inferred from the actor’s appearance, unconsciously resulting from their preeminent emotional reality. The opera’s tragic process of the Borough’s interpretation of Grimes’s ambiguities and resultant construction of character is therefore equally present as the audience attempts to read the minds of the embodied protagonist through the voice and body of the actor.

The process of the opera’s adaptation not only informs us of the technical process by which Britten and Slater alter the construction of their protagonist’s character, but it also alerts us to the problem of ‘reading the mind’ of an actor on-stage. In casting an actor without a character-voice, and an actor without obvious externalizations of their interpreted character, the production team might help create a character on-stage who is essentially ambiguous—neither a sadist nor a sentimentalist, but rather something intangible. When the audience chooses to believe or disbelieve the Borough’s accusations directed toward Grimes, they are provided with no certain evidence for his characterization by the actor. If the audience reduces this character to anything other than what physically appears before them, by presuming the certainty of their interpretation, they may aid in the opera’s tragic process. Peter Grimes is therefore *dis-*

membered by the audience when owing to the difference between the character constructed for him and that which he is empirically witnessed to do, his being is made ambiguous and divorced from his audience's certain projection of character upon him.

In conclusion, the tragedy of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* is born from the interpretation of ambiguity. As the Borough and audience induce an Apollonian state by socially constructing Grimes's character when his physically witnessed actions neither substantiate nor refute this characterization, they invoke the Dionysian state of ambiguity and contradiction, thereby leading toward the dismemberment of Grimes's being from his character. The invention of Grimes's character from actions falsely inferred by Mrs. Sedley, Boles, and Ellen creates a tragic discrepancy between their constructed reality and the opera's physically portrayed reality. This same process is witnessed by members of the critical public, who, after watching the opera, similarly invent actions to characterize the opera's protagonist. The adaptation of Crabbe's *The Borough* in Britten's *Peter Grimes* further indicates that the opera's tragedy is driven by what might be termed a tragic differential between Grimes's imagined character and the lack of physically substantiating evidence to his guilt witnessed by the audience. As the audience is led to characterize Grimes by comparing what is said about him with what he is physically witnessed to do, the actor's lack of performative character leads them to construct his character from that which they already know. The audience may choose to believe the Borough, they may choose to believe their own eyes, or they may choose to do as I have done and characterize him according to his role within the opera's narrative structure. Nonetheless, the audience must project something of themselves upon the opera for its narrative to appear to them—if they are to witness Grimes's tragedy, they must be part of it in some way.

Chapter 2: Persona: Negotiating Between Private and Public Realms

As the Borough-public's members interpret Grimes's ambiguities, they exemplify the tragic differential between their definition of Grimes's actions and presumed character and the lack of substantiating evidence witnessed that would enforce this definition. As Grimes's few actions increasingly occur outside the scope of public perception—in the privacy of his hut, the beach, and his boat—the opera presents a dialectic whereby the public's world is inversely related to their constructed image of the title character's private reality.

Following Hannah Arendt's definitions of public and private, I suggest that in the opera, Britten and Slater construct an antithetical relationship between the Borough's public sphere and Peter Grimes's private life. As the Borough-public defines its antithesis, they imagine Grimes's private life from the conditions necessary for his existence within the Borough. As the Borough-public defines Grimes's private reality, they push the opera's protagonist away from the public theatre into the margins between sea and society—eventually removing him from the theatre's stage, entirely.

As outlined in the Introduction, Peter Grimes is a character who, following the Borough's Inquest, fails to construct a persona—a mask—to stand between his private and public spheres. Within the opera, he runs from his public definition as he attempts to articulate his subjective experience to a community that can only understand the objective world. He tries to prove his 'true' character by retreating into his labour's privacy, thereby permitting the public's construction of his private realm's image. As Grimes's labour at sea is never witnessed on stage, and as he is witnessed retreating into this private world, he permits the Borough and audience to imagine the nature of this laborious sea-faring life. Therefore, owing to Peter Grimes's lack of

public image, the opera realizes its tragedy through the public imposition of sight upon the protagonist's private sphere.

Hannah Arendt details the public sphere as a common world constituted upon the shared perception of common objects. She writes that the public is

the reality rising out of the sum total of aspects presented by one object to a multitude of spectators. Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, ... can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.

Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the 'common nature' of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, ... everybody is always concerned with the same object. (58)

Within *Peter Grimes*, the public sphere is the Borough's chorus and members who are related to each other through their common invention of Peter Grimes's character, along with their common song, dance, and relation to each other—they always appear in multiples. For example, the Borough's characters are witnessed together at church, in the pub, at town hall, and in their collective march against Grimes's hut. The Borough-public defines themselves according to their common relation to these objects.

In *Peter Grimes*, the protagonist is denied entrance into the public sphere according to his lack of known actions toward objects common to him and the public. Rather than relating to the Borough through the church, their public house drinking and revelry, and their collective song, Peter Grimes remains alone. His story begins from a place of differentiation, and he fails to become a member of his community's whole through his attitudes toward their dominant cultural objects. While a person may enter into the public theatre by interacting with other subjects

through actions and speech related to objective content, if this person only acts toward objects known privately to him, he fails to move into the public sphere and, as a result, relinquishes agency over his definition. Grimes's subjective and unwitnessed relationships with his apprentices, the pain of his labour alone at sea, and his emotional reality, cannot connect him to the Borough. The Borough does not possess the lexicon required to connect to Grimes through his private reality, so they must construct one themselves by *dis*-membering him from their imagined characterization of this reality. Arendt describes an actor's relation to the public sphere, writing:

Action and speech go on between men, as they are directed toward them, and they retain their agent-revealing capacity even if their content is exclusively 'objective,' concerned with the matters of the world of things in which men move, which physically lies between them and out of which arise their specific, objective, worldly interests. ... [M]ost words and deeds are *about* some worldly objective reality in addition to being a disclosure of the acting and speaking agent. (182)

If a person acts toward an object common to both himself and his public, then he would become a member of this public, while simultaneously becoming defined according to the common objects toward which he acts. However, in *Peter Grimes*, the figure in the title role does not construct or realize his character through public action. Grimes is deprived of "objective" relationships to others and of a reality guaranteed through them" (Arendt 59). Instead of relating himself as subject to other subjects through an active relationship toward common objects, Peter Grimes becomes defined by the public's construction of his character from actions imagined having occurred within his private life. Thus, rather than donning a mask, Grimes has a mask placed upon him by the public sphere.

Grimes's ambiguous character, as detailed in Chapter 1, reflects the difference between the Borough's public realm and Grimes's private life which the Borough's public rhetoric distorts through a set of presumptions, namely, that the private sphere is a realm of loneliness, dangerous potential, and emotionality. In Act III, Scene I, these presumptions are echoed as the Two Nieces sing a duet which articulates a manifesto for the public sphere:

Two Nieces: Together we are safe
 As any wedded wife
 For safety in number lies.
 A man is always lighter,
 His conversation's brighter,
 Provided that the tête-à-tête's in threes.

Save us from lonely men,
 They're like a broody hen,
 With habits but with no ideas.
 But in their choice of pleasures
 They show their coloured feathers,
 Provided that the tête-à-tête's in threes.

O pairing's all to blame
 For awkwardness and shame
 And all the manly sighs and tears,
 Which wouldn't be expended

If people condescended

Always to have their tête-à-tête's in threes! (Britten 408-415)

As these nieces find safety within the sphere of public perception, they illustrate its ideal image, posited against a fictional 'lonely' man. The Two Nieces imagine that in private, men are habitual, broody, and emotional, and they imagine that the realm of public sight is antithetical to these traits. A differentiation is created between the Nieces' characterizations of the public and private spheres—a differentiation which is applied directly to the Borough-public's constructed relationship with their image of Peter Grimes's private reality. As the Nieces publicly project negative elements of their character upon Grimes, they further the Borough-public's construction of Grimes's character and its *dis*-memberment from his being.

In the following Act II, Scene I quotation, a similar process is observed as the Borough creates a differentiation between the safety provided by its public sight and the innate dangers which are claimed to exist within Grimes's private reality. When Ellen abandons her intent to help Grimes enter the public sphere, and fails to ensure a kind home for John, her initial positive intentions are critiqued by the Borough:

The Rector: You plann'd to be worldly wise but your souls were dark

Mrs. Sedley: O little care you for the prentice or his welfare!

Boles: Call it danger, call it hardship, or plain murder!

Keene: But thanks to flinty hearts e'en quacks can make a profit!

Swallow: You plann'd to heal sick souls with bodily care!

Two Nieces: Perhaps his clothes you mended but you work his bones bare!

Auntie: You meant just to be kind, and avert fear.

Balstrode: You interfering gossips this is not your business.

Hobson: Pity the boy!

Chorus: Who lets us down must take the rap,

The Borough keeps its standards up... (Britten 317-325)

The Rector, Swallow, the Two Nieces, and Auntie create a difference between Ellen's positive aspirations and Grimes's cruel reality. Swallow states that Grimes's soul is sick, the Rector states their souls are dark, and Auntie implies that fear is innate to their world. Likewise, the condemnation of John's treatment by Mrs. Sedley, Hobson, Boles and the Chorus presents the boy's imagined abuse as something antithetical to their conception of themselves and their community. In this quotation, the Borough infers Grimes's negative character by positing their positive selves against Ellen's apparent failure to aid Grimes and John's entrance into their realm.

As public rhetoric continues to mount against Peter Grimes, the Borough localizes the apprentice system within Grimes's character. This unfolds as follows: In Chapter I, we detailed Bob Boles' construction of the apprentice system from the ambivalence outside the theatre's parapet. As this system is brought into the public's perception, its image is seen to inhere within Peter Grimes's character. In Act II, Scene I, Bob Boles proselytizes against the apprentice system's evil ways to the Borough-public. "This prentice system's uncivilized, uncivilised and unchristian. ... Where's the Parson in his black? Is he here or is he not? to guide a sinful, straying flock" (Britten 306-309). As Boles publicly proclaims his ideological convictions within the scope of the Borough's definition of Peter Grimes, he localizes his ideological presumptions in Grimes's figure. The chorus responds, "The Borough keeps its standards up" (Britten 307-8), positing its own publicity as an antidote to private necessity. Accordingly, the Borough-public

becomes defined by its opposition to the apprentice system upon which Grimes's labour is dependent.

Despite the Borough's localization of this child-labour in the form of Peter Grimes, this system is necessary for the labour of all fishermen within the Borough. In the Prologue, in response to Swallow's advice that he not take on another apprentice, Grimes sings, "Like ev'ry other fisherman I have to hire an apprentice" (Britten 19). Furthermore, even Grimes's acquisition of his second apprentice—John—is observed to have been arranged by Ned Keene, thus, broadening the scope of Borough-members visibly involved in the trade in workhouse children. We see that the localization of the workhouse system in Grimes's form—regardless of moral principles—is a narrative which ignores the darkness that pervades the entirety of the Borough.

Just as the necessity of the apprentice system is imagined and localized within Grimes's private character, so too is Grimes's emotionality reduced to a mere fiction of public sight, as Arendt would argue: "even the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, derivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance" (50). The Borough appears not to comprehend Grimes's pathos, as articulated within his aria, "Now the Great Bear and Pleiades," and instead invents a shallow fictional representation of his emotionality:³

Chorus: He's mad or drunk!

Why's that man here?

His temper's up.

O chuck him out!

He looks as if he's nearly drowned. (Britten 198-201)

Throughout the delivery of these lines, the chorus against Grimes grows in volume from pianissimo mutterings to fortissimo demands for Grimes's removal. The recitation of these lines by each choral section is offset from the other, creating a cycle of public opinion around the common object of Peter Grimes. This spiraling effect evokes a sound evocative of public opinion as a number of lines—choral and solo—find themselves starting from numerous points of rhythmic difference and eventually merging into a synchronized cacophony of judgment. The reality of Grimes's being becomes reduced to the Borough's false presumption of his drunkenness, as they ask why such subjective speech should even be permitted within the pub's walls. As Arendt details, as the experience of emotionality is necessarily constrained to the private sphere, any public sight of emotional expression is reduced to the public's lowest common denominator: the Borough dismembers the private being of Peter Grimes by imposing its reductive interpretation of his private emotionality.

As the Borough-public constructs a fictional image of Grimes's private reality, they construct an objective character to ward themselves against. Greek drama again provides a suggestive parallel. Just as Aeschylus details the Erinyes' guardianship of Athens against the potential threat of outsiders, so too does the public's imposition of objectivity upon Grimes's subjectivity guard against the potential for his privacy's threat against their common world.⁴ Ben Pestell writes, "The terrible sublime presence of the Erinyes is the irrational heart of the city's [Athens] order" (319), later citing that "the Erinyes' role expresses tragedy's balance 'between internal and external cause.... Evil is both in us and outside us'" (321). We may understand that this irrational heart of order is expressed in *Peter Grimes* as the Borough constructs a character for Grimes to purge themselves of the darkness that already exists within their hearts and minds. If Grimes's character is projected upon him by his spectator, becoming dismembered from his

being, then it is not his being that is a threat, but rather the character's elements that truly only exist within the spectator's mind. The Borough-public's *dis*-memberment of their characterization of Grimes's private life is witnessed in Act III. Here, the Borough-public coalesces around Peter Grimes, advancing upon his marginal position upon the seashore with the supposed conclusion that he has murdered his second apprentice:

Chorus: Who holds himself apart

Lets his pride rise.

Him who despises us

We'll destroy.

And cruelty becomes

His enterprise.

Him who despises us

We'll destroy.

(With two nieces, Mrs. Sedley, Boles, Keene, Swallow and Hobson.)

Our curse shall fall upon his evil day.

We shall Tame his arrogance.

We'll make the murderer pay for his crime.

Peter Grimes! Grimes! (Britten 458-477)

Here, the chorus is explicitly predicated upon Grimes's differentiation from them. As the Borough has constructed an image of Grimes's life, predicated upon the localization of labour, the apprentice system, and an underlying mistrust of the indecency of his emotions, they have permitted the characterizations drawn by Mrs. Sedley, Bob Boles, and Ellen Orford to become imaginable. This constructed image of Grimes's private life becomes the weapon utilized by the

public against Grimes as they march toward him in the opera's final act; Grimes is the Borough's enemy not because he has committed a crime, but because his privacy and lack of constructed image permits the Borough to accuse him of a crime. They seemingly believe that if they imagine the worst of themselves to exist within the private sphere, the public sphere may remain safe. If they imagine their violence, loneliness, and labour to exist within Grimes's private life, then perhaps they might *dis*-member themselves from this private image. They wish to create a completely public world. While the tragic process of *Peter Grimes* is driven by the public sphere's imposition upon Grimes's private reality, the opera's protagonist fails to construct a persona to guard against the Borough's further imposition.

Carl Jung's explanation of persona provides insight into Grimes's situation. Jung defines persona as the mask resulting from an individual's attitude toward the objective world, thus describing a mask which separates a person's public and private self. Morgan Stebbins cites Jung's comment that: "This mask, i.e., the ad hoc adopted attitude, I have called the persona, which was the name for the masks worn by actors in antiquity," and then goes on to explain that "by using the image of the mask, Jung implies here that this mask or attitude is collective, numinous, and (at its best) somewhat flexible. It is directed at the object world: "The persona is exclusively concerned with the relation to objects" (93). By allowing a conscious control over public image through a choice in attitude toward and resultant interaction with the objective world, the notion of the persona permits an actor to separate and protect their private subjectivity from sight and objectification within the public sphere. However, as Peter Grimes fails to interact with the Borough's publicly objective world, he is without this mask, and is therefore characterized by the Borough's imagined sight and interpretation of his private physical and emotional reality.

Grimes's failure to construct a persona to prevent the public's imposition upon his private reality is witnessed as he turns away from immediate interaction with the Borough-public's objective world, toward the private realization of wealth and success that he believes to be advantageous to the acquisition of a future persona. In the opera's prologue, Grimes is given the opportunity to realize a persona through public action with his friend, Ellen. Grimes and Ellen sing a love duet which, when compared to the preceding Inquest scene, appears to be indicative of the possibility of Grimes's reconstruction of a public image. While the pair express their friendship, Ellen's kindness and love presents a promise for the renewal of Grimes's public reputation:

Peter: The truth — the pity — and the truth.

Ellen: Peter, Peter, come away!

Peter: Where the walls themselves

Gossip of inquest.

Ellen: But we'll gossip, too,

And talk and rest.

Peter: While Peeping Toms

Nod as you go.

You'll share the name

Of outlaw, too.

Ellen: Peter, we shall restore your name.

Warmed by the new esteem

That you will find.

Peter: Until the Borough hate

Poisons your mind.

Ellen: There'll be new shoals to catch:

Life will be kind.

Peter: Ay! only of drowning ghosts:

Time will not forget:

The dead are witness

And fate is blind.

Ellen: Unclouded,

The hot sun

Will spread his rays around.

Both: My voice out of the pain,

Is like a hand

That I can feel and know:

Here is a friend. (Britten 25-6)

Following the Borough's inquest into the death of the First Apprentice, Ellen's promise of friendship and companionship offers Grimes a chance for the renewal of his reputation.

Alongside Ellen—a woman whose morally good character is constructed on account of her actions and affirmed by the Borough public throughout the opera—Grimes may find kindlier entry into this sphere. Beside Ellen, Grimes's emotional pains might quell, and he might become part of the Borough through correlation to her: Grimes might take on the public image of 'Ellen's friend.' However, along with the presence of Grimes and Ellen's relationship emerges the possibility for discord. Within sight of Ellen, Grimes has a friend with whom he can gossip, talk, and rest. However, outside of her sight, his time at sea remains mysterious and private, inviting

‘the walls, themselves, to gossip with inquest.’ As the opera progresses from this duet, Grimes’s narrative is marked by his failure to disguise his private life at sea so that discord may not develop between the reality of his private life and Ellen’s interpretations of this life.

Grimes’s attempted acquisition rather than realization of his persona is observed in Act I, wherein he not only expresses his wish to marry Ellen, but also iterates his plan to gain the Borough’s respect through the acquisition of wealth. As these two dreams become connected—with Ellen’s friendship legally necessary for Grimes’s acquisition and use of a second apprentice, and Grimes’s labour and success at sea necessary for his and Ellen’s future marriage—the possibility of discord within this relationship to Ellen threatens to undermine Grimes’s dreams:

Peter: They listen to money
 these Borough gossips
 I have my visions, fiery visions,
 They call me a dreamer,
 they scoff at my dreams and my ambition.
 But I know a way,
 to answer the Borough
 I’ll win them over.
 We’ll sail together,
 These Borough gossips listen to money, only money,
 I’ll fish the sea dry,
 Sell the good catches.
 That wealthy merchant
 Grimes, will set up household and shop, you will all see it!

I'll marry Ellen, I'll marry Ellen, I'll marry Ellen! (Britten 119-20)

Here, Grimes identifies a series of private actions which he believes will grant him membership within the public sphere. In order to appear before the Borough in a public fashion—through wealth, becoming a merchant, and establishing a household with Ellen as his wife—Grimes expresses the wish to acquire a public image for himself which he believes would earn him respect. However, to achieve this result, Grimes must retreat into the privacy of his labour as he takes an attitude toward something which is not publicly objectifiable but rather privately imagined. Despite Balstrode's advice to marry her now, Grimes refuses until he has acquired the wealth which he believes to be necessary for public acceptance. As Grimes retreats into the privacy of his lonesome labour and invests his future within the hope of an eventual marriage with Ellen Orford, he not only fails to prevent the public's continued imposition of sight upon this private reality, but he also leaves room for Ellen's imposition of sight upon this same private reality. Grimes seems to believe that if he moves entirely into the private sphere in the present, he may possess a more desirable public image in the future. However, the moment that Grimes fails to, in some form, appear in public is the moment that he permits the public's constructed image of his private life. Thus, Grimes's attempt to escape into temporary privacy in order to construct a future public image is tragically fated. During his complete privacy, his being may become *dis*-membered from the public's characterization of his private life. As Ellen is a member of the Borough's public sphere, she too is afforded the ability to *dis*-member Grimes's being from his character.

In Act II, Scene I, as discussed in Chapter 1, the lack of a persona to mediate between Grimes's public and private life permits Ellen Orford to imagine his labour's rough and hard ways. As Ellen questions his ambitions at sea, Grimes discloses that he had constructed a

narrative for himself, in which without Ellen's assistance and his labour, he would not realize public acceptance:

Peter: My only hope depends on you,
if you—take it away—what's left?

.....

Wrong to plan!

Wrong to try!

Wrong to live!

Right to die!

Wrong to struggle!

Wrong to hope!

Then the Borough's right again! (Britten 273-8)

As Grimes reacts adversely to Ellen's characterization of his rough and hard ways at sea and her questioning of his ambition, this text indicates that he had reduced Ellen to a static object required for a causally constructed future. Grimes thus reduces Ellen to an object which he might acquire on his quest for public membership rather than an agent with whom he must interact. Accordingly, Grimes exemplifies his lack of present persona. Carl Jung describes such individuals as "dreaded Cassandras because of their tactlessness[.] ... They do not see the world; they only dream it" (216). As in Greek myth, Cassandra was blinded to communication by her foresight, so too does Grimes fail to recognize Ellen's present agency and interacts with her accordingly. In this scene, Grimes fails to simply talk to Ellen about his time at sea and afford

her an image of his private life. Had Grimes iterated his relationship with John to Ellen, he would potentially have prevented her inferences about this private realm. Grimes fails to understand that he may enter the public sphere only by mediating between his private life and public image, even within the scope of his relationship with Ellen. Had he revealed an image of his private life to Ellen by communicating with her, he may have been able to enter into the wider public sphere by making his relationship with Ellen public.

In his essay referred to earlier, “On the Margin of Sea and Society: *Peter Grimes* and Romantic Naturalism,” Bewell compares Grimes with Pip from Charles Dicken’s *Great Expectations*. He argues that both characters’ lives are “destroyed by trying to live the middle-class dreams of others” (644). However, while for Peter Grimes, the construction of a publicly acceptable mask is necessary, the mode by which he attempts to achieve this mask aids in the manifestation of his tragedy. By making his realization of public acceptance dependent upon his dreams of commercial success and his dreams of marriage to Ellen, Grimes creates discord which further permits the public’s construction of his private life’s image. Grimes is not actually ‘living’ the middle-class dreams of others and becoming defined according to his own actions. Instead, he constructs a hypothetical reality in private that he never publicly realizes, thereby allowing the Borough and audience to invent his character. Grimes goes without masking his private reality, expecting the future acquisition of material wealth to reverse the Borough’s perceptions of him. Therefore, it is not Grimes’s attempt to ‘live the middle-class dreams of others’ which is his problem, but rather his attempts to forgo current public membership and its resultant mask, in exchange for a future image which he dreams to be publicly acceptable.

Grimes’s failure to construct a public persona to mask his private reality from public view is witnessed in his apparent inability to interact with the publicly objective world. His

inability to join the objective narrative of labour described in the Borough's drinking song provides the public sphere with sight of his difference from them. The character's inability to demonstrate an objective image of his relationship with the apprentice John to this Borough, his lack of communion within the Borough's church on Sunday, and his constant retreat from public sight, further demonstrates his lack of public persona. While Grimes eventually realizes that his lack of persona is to blame for his tragic fate, he takes no action to stave-off this fate—he fails to manifest an attitude toward anything within the objective world, and he fails to act accordingly.

Act I, Scene II, when Grimes sings “Now the Great Bear and Pleiades,” he exemplifies his inability both to transcend his subjective concern with ensuing fate and adopt certain attitudes toward the objective public world:

Who can decipher

In storm or starlight

The written character

Of a friendly fate

As the sky turns, the world for us to change?

But if the horoscope's bewildering

Like a flashing turmoil of a shoal of herring

Who can turn skies back and begin again? (Britten 196-198)

By describing his difficulty characterizing a friendly fate, Grimes iterates his inability to make his subconscious desires conscious, and to adopt an attitude toward the objective world. This attitude is not prescriptive but rather open to Grimes's desire. For example, he need not replicate the Borough's attitudes toward labour, church, and communal song. Still, he does need to take an attitude toward these dominant cultural objects and communicate his attitude through the

Borough's lexicon—he must act in a way that they can see. Describing Grimes's condition, Peter Garvie writes,

Peter's prison is not the Borough but his own skull. ... It is characteristic of his incapacity to tell experience from fact—the obverse of the Borough's will to reduce feeling to fact—that his beliefs are magical: he will decipher the stars, he will turn the fish into silver. He is a man of imagination, but it is not redemptive. His bad dreams do not change the past, the ghosts, the system. (13)

As Grimes remains blind to the world of interpersonal relationships and present relationships toward common public objects, he fails to escape his concern for the imagined future—like Cassandra of Greek myth, as suggested above, he is blinded from human communication by prophecy. As he 'magically' believes that he will manifest a future within his mind's private world, he fails to act in public, toward common objects and toward other Borough-members. He fails to become the agent of his own story. The aria, "Now the Great Bear and Pleiades" describes Grimes's inability to consciously adopt an attitude toward his public world and is therefore indicative of his inability to construct a persona.

Peter Grimes further fails to demonstrate the construction of a persona in Act I while he is in view of the Borough. Although Grimes is publicly present within the Borough's pub, he fails to transcend his subjectivity, as we see when Grimes subjectivizes the Borough's drinking song, creating lyrical and harmonic discord. While the Borough sings a drinking song about their labour, Grimes subjectivizes these lyrics in an antithetical key, thereby failing to present a persona to differentiate between his private and public realities. Grimes fails to stop the Borough-public from observing and objectifying his private being, thereby aiding in his own tragic *dis*-memberment:

Chorus: Old Joe has gone fishing and
 Young Joe has gone fishing and
 You Know has gone fishing and found them a shoal.
 Pull them in the han'fuls and in canfuls and in panfuls.
 Bring them in sweetly,
 Gut them completely,
 Pack them up neatly.
 Sell them discreetly. (Britten 205-215)

Peter: When I had gone fishing,
 When He had gone fishing,
 When You Know'd gone fishing,
 We found us Davy Jones!
 Bring him in with horror!
 Bring him in with terror!
 And bring him in with sorrow!
 O haul away! (Britten 216-224)

The narrative of the Borough's drinking song—the narrative within which two men named Joe fish and make profit—underpins the normalcy posited by the Borough-public as antithesis to the pains of Grimes's private reality. Whereas the Borough understands Grimes's labour to have resulted in his first apprentice's death and his second apprentice's abuse, its drinking song makes no mention of these dangers at sea. This drinking song describes an entirely fictional reality—never witnessed by the opera's spectator—whereby fishing's process is 'sweet, neat, and

discreet.’ As a counterpoint, Grimes’s lyrics offer a subjectivized iteration of the Borough’s song, thereby offering a narrative which is specific to his previous private experience. In his iterated experience, fishing was neither sweet, neat, nor discreet. Rather, horror, terror, sorrow, and public ridicule are all that his labour has seemingly led toward. Therefore, the spectator witnesses the differentiation between the Borough’s normative and objective view of labour, posited against Grimes’s subjective iteration, and they witness the Borough’s ensuing objectification of Grimes’s subjective being. Peter Grimes needn’t have created this differentiation and dismemberment of his private reality had he simply partaken in the Borough’s song of objective labour.

This differentiation between the Borough-public’s objective world and Peter Grimes’s subjective private reality is reinforced through Britten’s use of oppositional tonalities. These tonalities are traditional musical schemas of note-relations that are analogous to an artist’s palate. While the Borough-public’s impersonal lyrical world continues to repeat in round beneath Grimes’s personalized lyrics, the tonal stability of the Borough’s world is threatened. Anthony Payne articulates this tonal conflict, stating:

[F]or the opera’s dramatic movement is generated by tonal progressions which swing back and forth between two great poles of A and E flat, keys at opposite ends of the tonal spectrum, to symbolise the impossibility of coexistence for Grimes and the Borough. ... In Act I for instance the A minor of Grimes’s longing is overwhelmed by the Eb minor of the storm, and his upsetting entry into the E flat round “Old Joe has gone fishing” nearly establishes A until the other singers recover themselves. (22-3)

In “Old Joe has gone fishing,” Grimes’s subjective and private realm sounds to threaten the shallow fiction of the Borough-public’s song. Peter Grimes’s brash melodic line, sung above the

cyclical repetitions of the Borough's song, creates an auditory differentiation between these two musical forces. His contradictory tonal world further offers the audience evidence of his antithetical relationship with the Borough-public's objective lyrical world. By further differentiating himself from the Borough, Grimes fails to construct a public persona apparent to others, one representative of the Borough's mean—to negate the Borough's perceptions of his private reality.

Claire Seymour details Grimes's quest for distinction, stating that the difference between his longing for social acceptance and his visionary aspirations are "contradictory desires [which] might be considered to be manifestations of his conscious and subconscious ambitions, aspirations which are ultimately irreconcilable" (42). However, if we understand that Grimes needs first to construct a public image to ensure the space for a private sphere within which he may realize his subconscious ambitions, in addition to space within the public sphere within which he may realize his conscious desires, then we can conceive of these conscious and subconscious desires as being reconcilable. Had Grimes merely acted toward any public common-object, and remained within their public sight, then perhaps he would have permitted further space for his private life; perhaps, under these conditions, he might continue his private quest toward the acquisition of wealth and respect. Rather, Grimes presents no purposefully objective image of himself to his community, making it impossible for him to find space within his private life for the realization of his subconscious ambitions.

While the Borough's imposition of sight pushes Grimes to the margins between sea and society, their force is only met with his further retreat into privacy. In Act II, Scene II, the Borough-public sing while they march upon Peter Grimes's hut:

Now is gossip put on trial,

Now the rumours either fail,
 Or are shouted in the wind,
 Sweeping furious thro' the land.
 Now the liars shiver for
 Now if they've cheated we shall know!
 We shall strike and strike to kill,
 at the slander or the sin!
 Now the whisperers stand out,
 Now confronted by the fact,
 Bring the branding iron and knife,
 What's done now is done for life. (Britten 334-40)

As this posse descends upon Grimes's hut, they not only impose their sight upon Grimes's private reality to find out what crimes he may have committed, but they also attempt to grapple with the validity of Mrs. Sedley and Bob Boles' accusations. Had Grimes remained firmly planted within his hut, ready to present a public image to the Borough, he might have dismissed the Borough's rumors. However, Grimes's inability to act before his community ensures the lack of evidence necessary for the Borough to prove him guilty or innocent of his accused crimes.

Within the opera's Third Act, when the Borough's posse is searching for Grimes upon the seashore, it is, again, his retreat into privacy in the face of public perception which leads to the realization of his final tragic dismemberment. Within Act III, Scene II, Balstrode instructs Grimes to take his boat outside of sight of 'Moot Hall'—the site of Borough publicity—and sink it. With no hesitation, and only little resistance from Ellen, Grimes silently retreats into his ship, his voice and form never to be seen again. It is uncertain whether Peter Grimes sinks his ship or

sails toward a new horizon as he becomes an entirely private spectre—his physical reality divorced from the public’s induced character. The protagonist’s tragic failing results from his inability to construct any public image for himself: He is a man who stands for nothing—he does not elect to wear a mask, and therefore is nothing more than the character constructed for him by his public.

Only when it is too late for his redemption does Grimes realize that public membership cannot be achieved through private means. In Act II, Scene II, Grimes sings:

Peter: But dreaming builds what dreaming can disown.

Dead fingers stretch themselves to tear it down

I hear those voices that will not be drowned

Calling there is no stone in earth’s thickness to make a home,

That you can build with and remain alone. (Britten 378-9)

Here, Grimes iterates his realization that a worldview based upon dreams—a life dependent upon the expectation of future success, rather than a life dependent upon the necessity of present life—is a way of life that is tragically fated. As Grimes turns toward his private life as a means of escaping the harsh light of public perception, he reduces the public’s perception of his character to the totality of their negative view of his private necessities. Grimes may only maintain a private reality so long as he can also appear in public. Without a common public lexicon formed from the public’s characterization of former narratives and actions, private action may find itself stripped of any meaning other than the totality of self-image. Yet, without a private realm to birth our differences, there would be no stories to tell and no life to define. For Grimes to escape into *his* private life, he must first be known for what he has publicly done, or else he may be *dis-*membered from his character, never having lived. The Borough-public reduces Peter Grimes to

the localization of indecent labour, the apprentice system, and his emotionality because Grimes fails to present any other image to them. For Grimes to redeem his character, he needs to be seen by his public; he needs to construct a persona; he needs to become a member of this public sphere.

By understanding that Grimes fails to prevent the Borough's imposition of public sight upon his private reality through the construction of a public persona, the opera's tragedy results from an imbalance between Grimes's public and private realities. Arendt describes the condition from which Peter Grimes appears to suffer, stating:

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of ... the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an "objective" relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself. (58)

The construction of a persona might have offered Grimes public membership while protecting his private reality. However, as Grimes attempts to privately manifest a future public image, he fails to immediately adopt an attitude toward the objective world of public perception. Grimes's promising friendship with Ellen—the friendship which might have provided him with easier public admittance—is undermined by his failure to present a persona to her. As being precedes essence, as he fails to act before her, he fails to reveal himself. As a result, Ellen's interpretation of Grimes's private ambiguities permits her to invent his character. Furthermore, as Peter Grimes presents himself to the Borough within the public space of the pub, he further differentiates himself from them by revealing his private subjective self to them. As he struggles to adopt an attitude toward the objective world, Grimes's perceptions and interactions with this world

become subjectivized. This is witnessed as Grimes permits the Borough to *dis*-member his being from their construction of his private reality, as he sings his subjective iteration of labour in a discordant key, in response to the Borough's song, "Old Joe has Gone Fishing." Grimes's further inability to stand against the Borough's continued rewriting of his private realm leads him away from the public sphere and into the absolute privacy of his final departure to sea. If the public continues to impose its sight upon the privacy of Peter Grimes, eventually there will be nothing of him left to be dismembered by their objectification. But this is not freedom as Grimes leaves the opera's stage having failed to leave something of himself with us. Instead, the Borough and audience's *dis*-memberment of him only leaves them with an image of what they already were.

Therefore, as Grimes's lack of persona permits the tragic imposition of public sight upon his private reality, the opera's tragedy is driven by the public's invention of this private realm. As the Borough differentiates public from private, preferring the perceived decency of their common realm over the unknown ambiguity of his private life, they begin to imagine Grimes's private life. Grimes becomes reduced to his labour, emotionality, and utilization of the apprentice system. The reduction of him to these necessary conditions for life as a fisherman permits Mrs. Sedley, Bob Boles, and Ellen Orford's interpretation of his private realities to become believable by the Borough. If Grimes is understood to be both emotional and trapped within a life of indecent labour, then perhaps he did abuse his apprentices at sea. While there may be no visible evidence to substantiate these claims, Grimes's privacy offers no evidence to refute these same claims. As the Borough constructs an idea of Grimes's potential actions at sea, they construct a character for him from their publicized interpretation of his private ambiguities.

Chapter 3: Hearing the Masked and the Maskless

The development of the opera's narrative shows the difference between Grimes's private reality and the Borough's publicly constructed reality, for which the opera provides no physical evidence witnessed on stage. As already discussed, this differential drives Peter Grimes's tragedy as he fails to construct a persona to relate himself to the publicly objective world. This difference between the Borough's constructed world and Peter Grimes's lack of a persona is also musically illustrated in *Peter Grimes* through each character's vocal lines. Through the musical differences that Benjamin Britten creates between Grimes and the Borough-member's vocal lines, the opera's tragedy is musically shown to depend on Grimes's failure to construct a musical persona.⁵ Thus, the opera's music, text, and narrative work together to illustrate Peter Grimes's tragic failing to develop a persona to prevent his dismemberment from the Borough.

In the 'Mad Scene,' Grimes realizes his tragedy, musically, as his prior music is replaced with his quotation of the lines that other characters had previously sung about him. This culminates in his final recapitulation of "What Harbour Shelters Peace," wherein the audience may totally define Grimes according to all that he is not, and all that he has failed to become. Just as the opera's tragic narrative is driven by Grimes's failure to construct a persona to protect his private life from the imposition of public sight, so too does the opera's music detail a protagonist, who by failing to construct a musical persona, has a pathetic mask placed upon him by his audience. Britten, therefore, presents a character whose musical tragedy is realized through his recapitulation of the Borough's musical attitudes toward him.

Peter Grimes's musical difference from the Borough members is evident from the first. In the opera's Prologue, Peter Grimes is first differentiated from Swallow when he is asked to

repeat Swallow's recitation of the court's oath. Unlike Swallow, whose recitation is defined by his distinct rhythmic articulations, Peter Grimes's responsive motif is markedly sustained:

Figure 1: (Britten 4)

The musical score is set in 4/4 time. It features three systems of staves. The first system has a vocal line for Peter (treble clef) and a vocal line for Swallow (bass clef). Peter's line begins with a rest, followed by a sustained motif of quarter notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5. Swallow's line begins with a rhythmic motif of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, followed by a rest. The second system continues Peter's sustained motif and Swallow's rhythmic motif. The third system has a vocal line for Tenor (T., treble clef) and a vocal line for Bass (B., bass clef). The Tenor line begins with a triplet of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, followed by a rest, then a sustained motif of quarter notes: C5, D5, E5, F5, G5. The Bass line begins with a rhythmic motif of eighth notes: G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, followed by a rest.

Peter *p sostenuto*
I swear by Al-migh - ty

Swallow *f con forza*
I swear by Al-migh-ty God! that the

T.
God that the e - vi - dence I shall give

B.
e - vi - dence I shall give

Swallow's line can be understood to follow his position of authority within this scene. He is singing to question Peter Grimes about his unknown and private life at sea, and his recitation of this oath is necessary for this inquisition. Therefore, we can understand that his sixteenth-note articulation of text follows his need to address legal procedure. Unlike Swallow, Grimes's expansive and sustained response does not indicate his own necessary interaction with the objective world. Grimes is made to swear an oath which serves the Inquest's needs, and not his own. Thus, Grimes's quiet and sustained response exemplifies his failure to construct a persona to protect his private subjective being from public sight.

Following the recitation of the Inquest's oath, Britten exemplifies Swallow's musical persona through his distinctive musical motif. In a letter that the composer had written to Peter Pears during his composition of the Prologue, he stated, "It is also difficult to keep it going fast & yet paint moods & characters abit [*sic*]. I can't wait to show it to you. Actually ... it is mostly for Swallow, who is turning out quite an amusing, pompous old thing!" (quoted in Mitchell &

Reed 10628/16698). This pompous characterization can be observed through Swallow's distinctive line which accentuates nonaccented syllables:

Figure 2: (Britten 5)



The accentuation of the determiner and the second syllable of ‘story’ is nontypical in vocal writing which often attempts to mirror the sound of the spoken language. Had Britten’s music followed the spoken pattern of Swallow’s line, ‘court’ and the first syllable of ‘story’ would have been accentuated with a heightened pitch. Furthermore, as Swallow’s text and melody is lacking any obvious emotional impetus, this musical line is not dependent upon its text. As the Borough’s lawyer, Swallow is entrusted with the role of leading the inquisition against Grimes’s private life at sea; the unnecessary embellishment of his musical lines suggests Britten’s ‘pompous’ musical characterization of Swallow’s authority. Thereby, Swallow dons a mask by presenting a musically objectifiable image of himself to the audience.

Unlike Swallow’s pompous musical persona, Grimes’s musical line is governed by a compositional commitment to the emotional expression of his text. Beginning in the opera’s Prologue, and continuing throughout, Peter Grimes’s vocal line is modelled upon “a scansion of the text” (Ashby 72). Ashby describes Grimes’s vocal lines, stating: “Grimes himself is distant from the dance and from tunefulness, more at home in recitative and a declamatory approach to words, especially when singing alone” (72). This is heard in response to Swallow’s requested description of the events at sea. Here, Grimes sings:

Figure 3: (Britten 6)

Figure 3 shows a musical score for two parts: Peter (top) and T. (bottom). The Peter part is in 4/4 time, starting with a *p* dynamic. The lyrics are: "The wind turned a-against us Blew us off our course". The T. part is in 4/4 time, starting with a *3* (triple) marking. The lyrics are: "We ran out of drink - ing - wa - ter".

With each word in this line set upon a different note, the text’s rhythm aligned with its music’s rhythm, and the musical phrases mirroring the text’s emotional impetus, Grimes’s musical line fundamentally serves his text. However, as Grimes’s lyrics and inferred emotions—the affect to which his music serves—point toward a private event never witnessed by the audience, and toward a private emotional reality contained within Grimes’s mind, as he fails to interact with the objective world. So long as Grimes’s music serves his text, and his text merely serves his private reality, Grimes cannot form a musical persona to present to his audience.

In the aria, “Now the Great Bear and Pleiades,” the composer further exemplifies the reduction of Grimes’s musical line to his text’s declamation:

Figure 4: (Britten 196-197)

Figure 4 shows a musical score for two parts: Peter (top) and T. (bottom). The Peter part is in 4/4 time, starting with a *pp sostenuto* dynamic and a tempo marking of *Adagio* ($\text{♩} = 33$). The lyrics are: "Now ___ the Great Bear and Plei a - des. where earth moves Are drawing up". The T. part is in 4/4 time, starting with a *4* marking and a *espress.* dynamic. The lyrics are: "___ the clouds of human grief ___ Breathing so-lem-ni-ty ___ in the deep ___ night." The score includes performance instructions such as *poco cresc.* and *(tenebroso)*.

As Grimes sings much of his aria upon the intoned pitch of E, his melody is not defined by its movement, but rather, by its lack of movement. Without movement, Grimes’s musical line “does even more to “reduce” the aria from melody to text declamation, and to separate Peter and his soliloquy from the other characters” (Ashby 72-3). Therefore, as the audience attempts to

interpret Grimes's poetic text, this text is all that stands in the way of Grimes's private reality. If the audience attempts to invent the face of Grimes's private reality to objectify his relationship with this text, they will join with the Borough in driving his private reality further away from their public world of constructed reality.

Grimes's aria utilizes symbolic figures as a means of communicating the protagonist's pathos. However, as these poetic forms are not physically witnessed within the theatre's parapet, Grimes is not interacting with a common objective world in terms of either the spectator or Borough. While the audience might infer Grimes's meaning through his allusions to mythologically named constellations, the audience, Grimes, and the Borough do not share a common objective image of these symbols. Through his poetry, the audience does not come to understand Grimes's objective relationship to these forms, but rather infers his subjective relationship to them. Therefore, without Grimes's formation of a prior persona, the audience is left to infer his private reality.

Indicating the essential difference between Grimes and the other Borough members, William Glock characterizes the opera's protagonist as a romanticized figure:

Grimes is romanticized in various ways, by giving him a string accompaniment while the others have only woodwind and brass; by spreading his words out twice the length of the magistrate's when he repeats the oath, and by introducing an almost Beethovenian pathos when Grimes asks the accuser to be brought into the hall so that 'the case won't go on in people's minds'. (quoted in Mitchell & Reed 12028/16698)

By correlating Grimes's string accompaniment, sustained lines, and evident pathos to a romanticized character, Glock exemplifies the private subjectivity within which Grimes's character remains trapped. A romantic hero, as, for example, Parsifal would have left the public

world of the Borough in search of a relic which he could later use to present a greater image of himself to this same public world. However, as Grimes remains trapped within his subjectivity and is unable to manifest an objective image of himself to the Borough, his subjectivity becomes the thing which the public dismembers and characterizes. Benjamin Britten's musical characterization of a pathetic Grimes is therefore indicative of the character's failure to construct a persona for himself to mediate between public sight and his private reality.

The normative melodic and rhythmic world of the Borough-public, established within the Borough's Act I 'Work song,' exemplifies their objectifiable musical reality. This danceable rhythm can be observed to exist as part of each character's musical persona, aside from Peter Grimes. Ashby states that the opera's music "would suggest dance rhythm as the space for normative movement, indeed for normalcy" (72). Ashby further explores the correlation between the normative public world and danceable rhythm, writing, "the dance [is] an expressive form undertaken by people in cooperation who are able to coordinate themselves to an exterior impulse" (72). Many of the opera's numbers which exist within this normative rhythmic world are numbers which Chowrimootoo describes as "set pieces [which] had a long history in nineteenth-century opera," noted to include "the workers' choruses and drinking rounds; the Church *scena*, based on an actual hymn; [and] the tavern dance" (51). Through these numbers, Britten provides his audience with common musical objects by which they might set their compass.

The 'worker's chorus' referenced by Chowrimootoo can be heard within the First Scene of the opera's First Act. Here, the audience hears the Borough-chorus sing a line which presents their normative musical persona to the audience:

Figure 5: (Britten 35-38)

SOPRANO *p semplice*
Oh, hang at o-pen doors the net, the cork, While

ALTO *p semplice*

TENOR *p semplice*
Oh, hang at o-pen doors the net, the cork, While

BASS *p semplice*

6
S. *(p)* *p sost.*
squa-lid sea-dames at their mend-ing work. Wel-come the

A. *(p)* *p sost.*

T. *(p)* *p sost.*
squa-lid sea-dames at their mend-ing work. Wel-come the

B. *(p)* *p sost.*

2

12 *cresc.*

S. hour when fish - ing through the tide The

A. *cresc.*

T. *cresc.* hour when fish - ing through the tide The

B. *cresc.*

14 *f* *p*

S. wea - ry hus - band throws his freight a - side.

A. *f* *p*

T. *f* *p*

B. *f* *p*

The chorus' heroic couplets and strophic structure further exemplify their musical persona as one “mostly in straightforward meters and rhythms, denoting a narrow and hostile normative” (Ashby 76). As the choral whole is heard first, then divided into male and female stanzas, before reuniting for the recapitulation, we not only hear the regular and repeating musical elements within each phrase, but also within the larger piece. The chorus is known to the audience because it defines itself by revealing its tuneful musical parts to them. We can, therefore, understand that

to interact with the public world, the actor need only objectify their publicized musical persona, and interact with it accordingly.

Balstrode's character straddles both the world of Grimes and the world of the Borough, by interacting with both worlds objectively. His musical persona presents the audience and chorus with a musical line to which they might jointly relate. Balstrode's private reality remains hidden behind his musical persona defined only by its mere attitude toward the objective world. Since Balstrode's musical persona is the result of his interaction with the objective world, never inferring the face of another's private reality, he can be heard to not only successfully interact with the Borough, but also with Grimes. As Balstrode does not invent a reality for Grimes, he does not drive the lonesome fisherman into further seclusion. His persona is indicative of the persona Grimes would need to adopt to obvert the Borough's tragic imposition of public sight upon his private reality.

Balstrode's attitude toward the objective world is expressed through his musical line in "Look the Storm Cone!" prior to the Act I pub-scene where he musically constructs a set of objective parameters for safe public membership. Here, as Balstrode announces the approaching storm, his attitude can be heard reflected within the Borough's noted consternation, and their proceeding musical response:

Figure 6: (Britten 86)

The musical score is for a bass line in 2/2 time, marked *Allegro molto* with a tempo of 92. The key signature has one flat. The score is divided into three sections: 1) 'Look, the storm cone!...' with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a slur over the first two notes; 2) a rest for the first two measures; 3) 'The wind veers in from the sea at gale force!...' with an *energico* marking and slurs over the final two notes. The lyrics are: 'Look, the storm cone!...' followed by a line, then 'The wind veers in from the sea' followed by a line, and finally 'at gale force!...' followed by a line.

Figure 7: (Britten 87) [Keene and Bass II lines have been removed in final bar.]

32

Balstrode *f largamente*
Now the flood tide and sea - hor - ses

Tenor *marc. mf*
Look, the storm cone!

Bass *mf marc. mf*
marc. Look out for squalls. It's veer-ing in from sea! The wind veers in at

2

5

Balstrode
Will gal - lop o - ver the e - ro - ded coast.

T. *mf*
It's veer-ing in from sea! Make your boat fast!

B. *mf f*
gale force! Look out for squalls. Make your boat fast!

While Balstrode is announcing the existence of a storm that does not physically appear to the spectator, his pronouncement of the ‘storm cone’ evokes an abstract object to which all members of the Borough bear witness to a shared common musical relationship. We can hear this common relationship as the male chorus’ commenting lines are built from Balstrode’s melodic and lyrical framework. Unlike Grimes, Balstrode publicly interacts with other Borough members, and his private reality is therefore nonessential to the Borough’s perception of him; Balstrode’s private reality remains hidden behind his publicized attitude toward the objective world.

As indicated above, Balstrode’s musical persona directed toward the Borough is also directed toward Peter Grimes. Unlike Mrs. Sedley or the Borough’s inquisition, Balstrode does not invent the face of Grimes’s private reality. Rather, he induces an attitude toward Peter Grimes, as he interacts with him according to tangible indicators:

Figure 8: (Britten 105-106)

Quasi recitativo
ma in tempo

37

Peter

sost.

I live a - lone the ha-bit grows.

Bal.

marc.

p *leggiero*

And do you pre-fer the storm to Aun-tie's par lour and the rum?

Though Balstrode's text is set within a recitative passage, Ashby notes that the consistent rhythm and emphatic meter permit the audience to "hear these four bars as melody-like" (70). Despite the strong differentiation between vocal characters, Balstrode's line can be understood to be directly related to his attitude toward the objective world. He is not in pursuit of Grimes's private subjectivity but is rather interacting with Grimes as an objective being. Following Grimes's monotone and unrevealing line, "I live alone the habit grows," Balstrode proposes action which Grimes might pursue to evade the Borough's imposition. He sings, "Why not try the wider sea, with merchantman, or privateer?" (Britten 107). Therefore, as Balstrode turns his attention to action that Grimes might pursue, rather than the feelings that might lie within the shadow of his being, he avoids the tragic imposition of public sight upon Grimes's private life. His attitude is toward Grimes's objectifiable circumstances and possible actions, rather than toward Grimes's evasive private reality. This can be musically witnessed within the pair's recitative, as Balstrode's musical persona does not interfere with Grimes's line. The pair exists as separate musical entities, which interact with one another, without pushing Peter Grimes away into further privacy. Balstrode's ability to straddle the public world of the Borough and the private world of Peter Grimes is due to his objectivity. His musical attitude can be heard to be targeted toward the objective musical and lyrical worlds of other characters, despite their differing private realities.

Balstrode's musical persona can be witnessed as the basis of the Borough's public constitution in Act I, Scene II. To Balstrode's tuneful melody and normative rhythmic musical line, the Borough's members join his song as they iterate a set of objective parameters upon which their constitution should depend:

Figure 9: (Britten 187-188)

The musical score is set in 3/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked *Allegro molto (come sopra)* with a metronome marking of $\text{♩} = 120$. The score is divided into two systems.

System 1 (Measures 1-7):

- Balstrode:** Solo line in bass clef. Lyrics: "We live__ and let live, and look_____ We keep our hands to our - selves." The melody is marked *pp* and features a danceable, rhythmic line with slurs and ties.
- Sop. & Alto:** Rests in measures 1-6, then enters in measure 7 with the word "We". Marked *unis. pp sotto voce*.
- Tenor:** Rests in measures 1-6, then enters in measure 7 with the word "We". Marked *pp sotto voce*.
- Bass:** Rests in measures 1-6, then enters in measure 7 with the word "We". Marked *pp sotto voce*.

System 2 (Measures 8-11):

- Bar. (Baritone):** Rests in measures 8-11.
- S. (Soprano):** Enters in measure 8 with the lyrics "live__ and let live and look_____ We keep our hands to our - selves!".
- T. (Tenor):** Enters in measure 8 with the lyrics "live__ and let live and look_____ We keep our hands to our - selves!".
- B. (Bass):** Enters in measure 8 with the lyrics "live__ and let live and look_____ We keep our hands to our - selves!".

Balstrode's phrase, with its danceable rhythm and tuneful melody, is demonstrative of the Borough's lyrical structure heard within the opera's opening 'Worker's chorus.' Not only does Balstrode demonstrate his attitude toward the objective world through his lyrical iteration of objective imperatives for public membership, but he presents a musical persona which directly

intersects with the Borough's own normative musical world. Through his mere attitude toward the objective world, Balstrode invokes a set of rules within the pub's public space, thereby disregarding the conflicting private desires of Bob Boles and the Two Nieces. The potentially ensuing fight between Boles and the other members of the Borough is thereby stopped through Balstrode's musical persona, and his invocation of objective rules. As Balstrode's attitude toward the objective world—without the falsely inferred presence of other's private realities—mediates conflict within the public sphere, we might understand that if only Grimes had learned to act in this manner of leaving his private reality behind him and adopting an attitude toward the public world, like Balstrode, he would have prevented his tragic fate. Grimes's freedom to define his own life is only possible so long as he conforms to the publicly objective world, subsequently realizing freedom through his discernable attitudes toward this world.

In her musical line, Ellen Orford presents another bridging figure. Ashby notes that she musically straddles the tuneful musical style of the Borough, and the declamatory style observed in Peter Grimes's vocal lines (78). Ellen's singing in "Let her among you" provides the audience with a musical and lyrical persona that characterizes her self-publicized morality. Therefore, the spectator may characterize Ellen according to her known relationship toward the objective world. Her private emotional reality, moreover, is mediated through the musical, physical, and lyrical image of her embroidery that adorned John's sweater which is found on the beach when John has gone missing. Unlike Peter Grimes's declamatory singing, whose lines are merely dependent upon his inferred private reality, Ellen Orford's own declamatory lines, in correlation to her text, provide the spectator with a relationship between herself and the objective world.

In the opera's First Act, when Carter Hobson refuses to fetch Grimes's new apprentice, Ellen Orford sings the arioso which, through the relationship between music and text, establishes her character's persona of moral dignity:⁶

Figure 10: (Britten 78-79)

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for Ellen, marked *f largamente*. The melody is in a descending line, starting on a high note and moving down through several intervals, ending with a half cadence. The lyrics are "Let her a - mong you with - out fault cast the first stone". The bottom staff is for the Soprano (S.), marked *f*. The melody is also in a descending line, starting on a high note and moving down, ending with a half cadence. The lyrics are "And let the Phar - i - sees and Sa - du - cees Give way to none." Both staves show a modulation into C Major.

As Ellen recites these Biblical parables to her fellow members of the Borough's public sphere, she can be musically observed to be condescending to them, teaching them, as it were, to adhere to her Christian ways. Therefore, as Ellen's musical line follows her character's purposefully publicized convictions, her line follows her character's constructed attitude toward the public sphere; Ellen is exemplifying her character's persona through her descending musical line. Furthermore, as the soprano concludes each of these descending lines with a reoccurring modulation into C Major, the audience hears what Hans Keller describes as her character's dignity (Keller 108). The half cadence which occurs during this modulation, leads Ellen from her descending line, through C Major predominant chords, and toward the dominant chord of G Major. Therefore, Ellen's dignity is heard through her line's reoccurring movement toward the dominant. Ellen Orford's musical persona is therefore established through her line's portrayal of moral dignity.

Ellen's relationship to Peter Grimes is predicated upon her character's musical persona. This is observed through the difference between Ellen and Grimes's lines within their duet in the opera's Prologue:

Figure 11: (Britten 26)

The musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is for Ellen, which is mostly empty. The second staff is for Peter, starting with a forte (*f*) and agitated (*[agitato]*) dynamic. It features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with triplets. The lyrics are: "While Pee-ping Toms nod as you go You'll share the name of outlaw... too!". The third staff is for the Soprano (S.), marked *sempre tranquillo*. It features a more melodic line with triplets and a long note. The lyrics are: "Pe-ter we shall re-store your name warmed by the new es-teem that you will find...". The bottom staff is for the Tenor (T.), which is mostly empty.

While Britten notates this passage in free time, his indicated measures establish a differentiation between Ellen and Grimes's implied time signatures. Grimes creates the impression of 4/4 time, while the first two measures of Ellen's response imply a $\frac{3}{4}$ time signature, before reverting to Grimes's 4/4 time. Thus, Ellen's rhythmic impression reminds us of the dignified $\frac{3}{4}$ half-cadences which are found reoccurring within her delivery of "Let her among you without fault." Ellen's melody develops harmonically from the I through to an implied authentic cadence into the musical evocation of a classically ordered vocal line. As Ellen's danceable rhythm and tuneful melody differ from Grimes's declamatory style, the audience perceives the difference between a character with, and a character without, a musical persona.

Grimes's lack of persona is expressed through his line within the Prologue's duet as his character becomes defined according to his difference from Ellen's interaction with the public world of tuneful melody, and danceable rhythm.⁷ Peter Grimes merely repeats his basic musical idea with minor variances. He is evidently not interacting with the objective world as his basic and agitated worries are neither rhetorically substantiated nor musically developed. He remains trapped within a basic musical idea which merely acts to illustrate the agitation noted by Britten to be present within his mind. Therefore, unlike Ellen, whose musical persona is exemplified

throughout this duet, Peter Grimes remains musically trapped within his own private subjectivity as he fails to move beyond his agitation, and toward a publicly objectifiable image.

Grimes and Ellen's differing musical reactions to the tragedy of John's death further illustrate Grimes's unique lack of persona. Unlike Grimes's reaction to John's death, Ellen presents the audience with an image of her embroidery, an object that enables them to infer the existence of her private emotional reality; the audience's shared private relationship to the public and objective image of Ellen's embroidery permits them to construct their own relationship to this object—thereby becoming unified with Ellen as a common subject in relation to this common object. Through her song, which expresses her attitude toward the object of this embroidery, the audience and Ellen may share a common relationship toward the objective world, thereby aligning their private realities behind this image:

Figure 12: (Britten 439-440)

Andante con moto tranquillo
pp *cresc.*

Ellen

Em - broi - de-ry in child - hood was a lu - xu-ry of

5 i - dle-ness A coil of sil - ken thread giv-ing dreams of a

8 *espress.* silk, of a silk and sa-tin life.

The basic idea of Ellen's aria, present within the first four bars of her melody, can be heard to weave around the third degree of the b minor key signature, while a descending pattern can be heard within the root of her line, driving her from the tonic to predominant. This idea evokes the sound of a musical thread embroidering space and time's musical fabric—perhaps even

backstitching this fabric with each repetition of the D-C# pattern. This weaving pattern can be heard to reverse itself within the contrasting idea heard within the fifth and sixth measures of the quoted line. As this line so clearly evokes the sound of the embroidery which Ellen is describing, Ellen's pathos is hidden behind her musical persona. This embroidery-like sound, its correlating lyrics, and physical representation upon John's sweater connects the audience and soprano in a shared attitude toward the object discovered upon the beach. Therefore, the spectator may privately experience an emotional reaction toward John's sweater's public discovery and may publicly relate this experience to Ellen's inferred pathos, through the object of her embroidery.

Unlike Ellen's pathos, which remains hidden behind the mediating image of her embroidery-like musical persona, Peter Grimes's own reaction to John's death can only be observed by the spectator through the guise of his madness. In the 'Mad Scene,' of Act III, Scene II, Grimes realizes his tragedy, musically, as his prior music is replaced with his quotation of the lines that other characters had previously sung about him. Grimes sings musical fragments from numerous points throughout the opera, as he appears to internalize the Borough's objectifications of him. This culminates in his final recapitulation of "What Harbour Shelters Peace," wherein the spectator may totally define Grimes according to all that he is not, and all that he has failed to become. The audience hears Grimes failing to take on an attitude toward the objective world, and rather becoming lost within a realm of ever-retreating privacy. As Grimes has no persona to mediate between his private and public realities, his private reality is the total negative image of the Borough's characterizations of him. Just as the opera's tragic narrative is driven by Grimes's failure to construct a persona to protect his private life from the imposition of public sight, so too does the opera's music detail a protagonist, who by failing to construct a musical persona, has a pathetic mask placed upon him by his audience. Britten, therefore, presents us with a character

whose musical tragedy is realized through his recapitulation of the Borough's musical attitudes toward him.

Following Grimes's self-consciousness toward his deceased apprentices, the audience hears him quote Swallow's line from the opera's Prologue, thereby, relaying the understanding that through hindsight, Grimes is relating himself to the proclamations uttered by other Borough-characters toward him:

Figure 13: (Britten 489)

Figure 13 shows a musical score for Peter's vocal line, measures 1 through 6. The score is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat. It includes dynamic markings (*più f*, *p*, *pp*, *espr.*, *ten.*), articulations (3, *ten.*), and performance directions (*rall.*, *poco animato*, *pomposo*). The lyrics are: "Stea-dy There you are! Near-ly home! The first one died, just died (rall.) The o-therslipped and died and the third will... "Ac-ci-dental cir-cum-stan-ces." Wa-ter will drink his sor-rows mysor-rows dry, and the tide will turn,"

In the measures leading up to Grimes's musical quotation of "Accidental circumstances," the audience hears his line chromatically descending, his dynamic lowering, and his intention becoming more animated during his tenuto articulations. Therefore, as Grimes recites the fates that have befallen his previous two apprentices, and the fate which he believes will likely befall his next apprentice, his musical line evokes his turn toward fatalism. His descent and decrescendo mirror his private reality's continued retreat, whereas his common tenuto articulations over the subjects of this fate indicate his realization that the differences between subjects are irrelevant to the repetition of their fates. During this line, wherein Grimes realizes the irrelevance of his apprentices' difference in relation to their fate, he invokes Swallow's earlier judgement from the opera's prologue: the judgement that his first apprentice died of

“accidental circumstances.” This judgement’s commonality, found between each of his apprentices’ deaths, leads Peter Grimes to not only implicate himself in the death of his apprentices, but also define himself according to Swallow’s prior judgement. Grimes does not defy Swallow’s prior judgement through public action, but rather resigns himself from future action according to his internalization of this judgement.

Grimes’s continued musical quotations of other Borough characters indicate that he is losing his private reality to the public’s characterizations of him. As Grimes recites the Borough’s melodies which previously drew them physically closer to him, he taunts them by calling them to find him in the present, to come toward him, and to ‘land him:’

Figure 14: (Britten 489-490)

Peter *f*
Pe - ter Grimes!.....

2 *vivace*
Here you are! Here I am! hur ry, hur ry, hur ry, hur ry, hur ry!

3 *f*
Now is gos-sip put on trial... Bring the branding iron and knife for

5 *ff*
what's done now is done for life! Come on! Land me!

As the Borough’s chorus calls Grimes’s name, he repeats this motif before quoting their earlier passage heard during their march upon his hut in Act II. Grimes’s direct quotation of the chorus’ D-Eb-F# call of his name indicates his internalization of the Borough’s public perception of his private reality. Following this quotation, the accented ‘here,’ heard atop its phrase, musically pinpoints the place in which Grimes lies. Again, however, Grimes reverts to a musical quotation previously sung by the chorus in Act II. He invokes this melody, which was sung as the Borough

marched upon his hut, as they search to objectify Grimes's private subjectivity. Through the combination of musical quotations of other Borough characters, and new responsive writing, the audience hears Peter Grimes lose his private definition of self to the Borough's public perception of his private being.

We similarly hear Grimes quote the sound of the Borough's mob, as he calls himself by the name others call him. By addressing himself in the third person, Grimes moves toward an internalized view of his total self through the guise of the Borough-public:

Figure 15: (Britten 492)

The musical score consists of three staves. The first staff is for the Tenor, marked *agitato ff*, with lyrics "Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!". The second staff is marked *poco a poco dim.* and *pp lento*, with lyrics "Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Grimes! Grimes! Grimes! Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!". The third staff is marked *rall.* and *ppp*, with lyrics "Grimes! Pe - ter Grimes!".

Britten characterizes Grimes with melismatic lines, set upon the mere recitation of the protagonist's own name. If we are to consider this a musical persona, it would be a persona born from his internalization of the public's previously invented character for him. He is not taking on an attitude toward the objective world, but rather adopting the objective world's attitude toward him. Thereby, unlike Ellen's expression of her emotionality through her physical and musical embroidery, Grimes fails to construct an object to stand in the way of his adoption of the Borough's objectification of his private reality.

Grimes's reiteration of his Act I aria "What harbour shelter's peace" in the opera's Act III 'Mad Scene,' presents the audience with the opera's motif which is most indicative of Grimes's absent persona. Auden had stated that "music is in essence dynamic, an expression of

will and self-affirmation[.] ... [A]n actor who sings ... is an uncommon man, more a master of his fate” (quoted in Chowrimootoo 57). Therefore, as Grimes reiterates this aria directly before turning mute for his remaining time on stage, he turns away from the self-affirmation of his song, toward the silence that results from his internalization of the Borough’s objectification of his private reality. Grimes’s capitulation to his objectification by the Borough leads him to realize that in public, he possesses no voice of his own:

Figure 16: (Britten 494)

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system includes a Fog-horn part (mostly silent), Peter's vocal line, and the Choir's accompaniment. Peter's lyrics are: "Her breast is harbour too Where night is turned". The Choir's accompaniment includes the word "Grimes!" and a chorus of "Pe-ter!". The second system continues the vocal and accompaniment parts, with Peter's lyrics: "to day, to day." and the Choir's accompaniment including "Grimes!" and "Pe-ter!". The third system shows the continuation of the vocal and accompaniment parts, with Peter's lyrics: "to day, to day." and the Choir's accompaniment including "Grimes!" and "Pe-ter!".

The trajectory of Grimes’s melody is aimed toward his tonal capitulation to both the Borough’s calling chorus and the “‘objective’ sounds of the distant foghorn” (Chowrimootoo 58). During

this process, the Borough's harmonic structure repetitively resolves toward the E flat chord while Grimes resists this resolution. This musically illustrates the differentiation between the public's objectification of Grimes's form, and his fleeting subjectivity. As Grimes's final unification with the fog-horn's E flat is the final note sung by him within the opera, we are presented with the sound of Grimes's final capitulation toward the internalization of other's objectifications of his private reality. Lyrically, by returning to his subjective desires to find the safe harbour with Ellen Orford, Grimes reminds the spectator of his prior failure to manifest a public persona through someone else's form. His character has therefore provided the spectator with their final objectification of his private reality by revealing his failure to manifest a persona. Peter Grimes, having failed to take-on an attitude toward the objective world presented in the theatre, returns both musically and physically to the ambiguous realm from whence he emerged.

As Peter Grimes fails to construct an attitude toward the public world, and as the public world is the basis of objective reality, Britten's musical illustration of Grimes's psychopathology is the method by which he accomplished the composition of a 'Realist opera.' W. H. Auden had claimed that "operatic realism" was a "contradiction in terms," owing to the conflict between the subjectivity of music and opera, and the "impersonal necessity' and mechanical objectivity" of documentary realism (quoted in Chowrimootoo 57). As the public musical world of the Borough is presented to the audience through the sound of their musical personas, Britten accomplished the evocation of public reality through the Borough's shared musical and lyrical interactions with the objective world. While Swallow's private reality may be inferred to exist, it is unnecessary to the audience's perception of his character's vocal line. He is not heard groveling about his private emotions, or private existence, but is rather musically identified through his relation to the theatre's objective world. Like Swallow, Balstrode's musical persona can be heard to be

related to his character's own mere attitude toward the objective world. By interacting with the Borough through the evocation of common object, Balstrode can be heard to join the Borough's tuneful and rhythmically normative world. By engaging with Peter Grimes objectively, and by not attempting to invent the face of his private reality, Balstrode is further able to exemplify his character's mere attitude toward the objective world. Furthermore, as even in suffering, Ellen iterates her character's pathos through the mediating object of her embroidery, this publicly objective reality is not incapable of translating emotions, but rather requires the common sight of an object toward which a character may express their attitude. Britten's musical Realism, therefore, is the result of the Borough-character's common attitudes toward the publicly objective world.

Claire Seymour, noting the opera's emphasis on Grimes's psychological conflicts, claims that "the central focus of the opera was diverted from Crabbe's realistic representation of eighteenth-century society and turned ever more intensely upon the psychology of Peter Grimes, himself, isolating him from his social and human environments" (42). While Peter Grimes's character is at the center of the opera, his tragedy being the one realized by the Borough's imposition of public sight upon his private life, his own lack of persona is only musically accomplished in its antithetical relationship to the Borough's publicly objective reality. Therefore, as Grimes fails to construct a persona to protect his private life from public sight, he fails to overcome his romanticized subjectivity in order to enter into the public world of common objects. Grimes's musical line illustrates this lack of persona as he constantly attempts to express his private reality through his iteration of private experiences. He musically differentiates himself from the tuneful world of the Borough, by reducing himself to declamatory and intoned lines, which serve only his text—text which, itself, only iterates his private experiences. Grimes

fails to present a publicly acceptable image of himself to the Borough, by failing to objectify them, and to interact with them accordingly. In doing so, Grimes's inwardness leads him to internalize the Borough's own musical proclamations toward him, not taking on an attitude toward the objective world, but rather taking on the objective world's attitude toward him. By musically and narratively positing Grimes's private realm against the Borough's public realm, Britten does not turn away from Realism, as Seymour suggests, but rather creates a Realist opera by displaying a protagonist who fails to enter into the publicly objectifiable world of the Borough-public.

Chapter 4: The Mask's Dangerous Beauty

The biographical associations that have been drawn between the opera and its composer suggest that *Peter Grimes* is an object which mediates between Britten's private life and his public image. In other words, the opera forms an element of Benjamin Britten's persona. The composer's necessarily private sexuality was protected beneath the public image of *Peter Grimes*'s form. Likewise, the opera's objective image was a means of overcoming the difference created between Britten's pacifism and the British public's war in Europe. Britten's return to England and the composition of *Peter Grimes* was a means of rejoining the British public by creating an object to which he and others could find a common relation. Knowing that Britten considered beauty to be found within the danger of relationships, and Auden considered beauty to be found in the balance between bohemianism and bourgeois convention, the beauty of *Peter Grimes* is found in its embodiment of the relationship between Britten's private realities and the public world.

The opera's lack of overt sexuality and Britten's casting of his partner Peter Pears as Peter Grimes permitted the existence of Britten's private reality behind the opera's antithetical public image. While faced with the threat of public characterization of their homosexuality, Britten and Pears's construction and performance of *Peter Grimes* presented an image of their relationship which protected the privacy of their romantic lives. Recall that the opera's tragic narrative is driven by the public's imposition of sight upon Grimes's private life. As such, the opera's representation of Britten's public image warns against the further imposition of public sight upon the composer's private life. *Peter Grimes* is emblematic of a persona protecting Benjamin Britten's private life from public sight.

Benjamin Britten was confined to the closet by the danger posed by the criminality of his sexuality. The criminality of homosexuality in Britain dates back to King Henry VIII and the Buggery Acts of 1533, whereby sodomy was proclaimed to be punishable by death. In 1885, the Labouchere Amendment provided further legal grounds for the prosecution of homosexuals for acts of “gross indecency.” While prosecuting a man for infringing upon the Buggery Acts was difficult, prosecuting a man for acts of “gross indecency” proved to be a more effective means of policing homosexual behavior. The utilization of the Labouchere Amendment was significantly augmented in the 1950s, when Scotland Yard increased its arrests of men for gross indecency by five times the number recorded in 1938 (Brett, “*Britten’s Dream*” 122). This inquisition was directly experienced by Britten in 1954, when he was interviewed by police about matters pertaining to his sexuality (Matthews 43). While this period of increased anti-homosexual policing postdated the composition of *Peter Grimes* by a decade, the criminal code which permitted these arrests remained unchanged between then and Britten’s composition of *Peter Grimes*. We must, therefore, understand that Benjamin Britten would have faced certain criminal charges had he publicly presented an image which accorded with his private sexuality.

Britten’s later acknowledgment of his sexuality and his limited number of sexual relations illustrate a sexuality which is nearly absent of publicly known expression aside from his relationship with Peter Pears. After his twenty-second birthday in 1935, Britten met W.H. Auden while working for the General Post Office’s film unit. The poet was responsible for incorporating the young composer into what David Matthews refers to as his ‘gang’ of artists (33). Soon, Britten became a member of this social circle of notable twentieth century artists: Auden, Spencer and Cecil Day Lewis, Christopher Isherwood, and William Coldstream. Joining this community of artists who Matthews notes were largely homosexual or bisexual, Britten was

led by Auden toward acknowledging his own sexuality (34). Although Auden wrote two poems to Britten during this time in an effort to drive the young composer toward a more liberal lifestyle, this seems to have been met with few substantive lifestyle changes. Instead, it was not until after his mother had passed away in 1937 that Britten is presumed to have experienced the physical aspects of his sexuality. Michael Oliver states that it was following the urging letters of Lennox Berkeley and Auden that Britten “almost certainly” had his first sexual experience with a man whom he had met at the ISCM Festival in Florence (63-4). However, following the dissolution of this relationship, Britten would quickly consummate his life-long partnership with the tenor, Peter Pears. Mrs. Enid Slater, when interviewed by Donald Mitchell, explained Britten’s relationship, stating, “Until Peter arrived on the scene ... he didn’t want to get involved. His work came before everything, and he felt that it would be detrimental if he got too involved with one sex or the other” (“Montagu Slater” 32).

While Britten’s private life with Pears largely remains shrouded in mystery, it is publicly known that they spent their years preceding the premiere of *Peter Grimes* living together, returning to Britain from the USA together, and working on the opera together. *Peter Grimes* is the persona that incorporates Britten and Pears’s relationship within a publicly objectifiable image. Rather than retreating into privacy, Britten and Pears took on an attitude toward the public world as they acted within its sight, and it is through their attitudes toward us that we see them.

Britten and Pears’s own relationship was greater than its mere private and sexual components. Rather, their relationship was publicly present through their musical collaborations. In the interview with Mitchell, Enid Slater notes that despite Britten’s prior private and discreet relationships, his relationship with Peter Pears was quite different:

DM: Were there patterns of behaviour that particularly brought Britten's homosexuality to your attention?

ES: Oh no, no. He was very discreet about all his relationships, very. Again, until Peter arrived, and then it was different.

DM: Because they fell in love?

ES: Oh yes, definitely, quite definitely. ("Montagu Slater" 34)

The difference in discretion noted by Slater is indicative of their relationship's 'open secret.' While Slater notes that Britten was not discreet about his relationship with Peter Pears, the publicly acceptable aspects of their relationship obscured the public's sight of their private sexual experiences. Drawing upon D. A. Miller's theories of the 'open secret,' which stated that by placing homosexuals on Broadway stages, their sexuality was kept private through its diffusion through other subjects and objects, Phillip Brett writes:

D. A. Miller's formulation functions "not to conceal knowledge, so much as to conceal the knowledge of the knowledge"; it reinforces the dominant culture by confining homosexuality to the private sphere while making it obscurely present in public discourse as an unthinkable alternative. ("*Britten's Dream*" 108)

Since Britten and Pears spent their public lives creating and performing art, the public sphere did not need to reduce the couple's relationship to its private sexuality. As Brett suggests, it would be publicly 'unthinkable' that these two male colleagues and musicians were also lovers.

Therefore, the lack of discretion surrounding Britten and Pears's relationship is indicative of their adopted attitude toward the public sphere, exercised through the persona of their work and art.

The lack of public knowledge surrounding Britten and Pears's private reality is similarly expressed within *Peter Grimes*'s narrative. Here, the elimination of sexuality from Grimes's private reality leaves the audience with a character who, by lacking public action, has no mask by which to be identified. Peter Pears wrote a letter to Britten during the composition, stating, "The more I hear of it, the more I feel the queerness is unimportant and doesn't really exist in the music (or at any rate obtrude) so it mustn't do so in words. P.G. is an introspective, an artist, a neurotic, his real problem is expression, self-expression" (Conlon 454). Pears's identification of the queerness in the opera's early drafts as 'unimportant' suggests that *Peter Grimes* is not necessarily a story about the protagonist's private life but rather more about his absent public life, owing to his failure manifesting a persona. Unlike Britten and Pears, who disguised their private sexuality behind the public persona of their art, Peter Grimes failed to create a public persona that would deflect the public's sight from their attempted unveiling of his essentially invisible private life.

Unlike Grimes, who fails to construct a public image for himself to transcend his private and subjective reality, Pears's portrayal of Grimes within the opera provides him with a persona, connecting him with the public world. For both Britten and Pears, the narrative of *Peter Grimes* served as an ironic image of their own relationship. Whereby Peter Grimes is driven toward a tragic fate according to the public's encroachment upon his private realm, Britten and Pears's composition and performance of *Peter Grimes* presented an image within the public sphere which obscured their private lives from public sight.

Peter Grimes is further correlated with the difference between Britten's need for public membership and his status as a conscientious objector. Britten addressed the ironic correlation

between his own relationship between public and private spheres, and the tragic process of the opera, in 1963 when interviewed by the Canadian composer, R. Murray Schafer:

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, rather than the villain he was in *Crabbe*. (116-17)

These 'ironic overtones' indicate that the narrative of *Peter Grimes* follows the tragic imposition of public sight in a way that Britten subverted through his composition of this work. Accordingly, Britten's composition and performance of *Peter Grimes* was a public act which prevented his dismemberment from the British public according to his pacifist convictions.

Britten's retreat from the British public in 1939 exemplified a pattern whereby the composer's pacifist convictions were inversely related to his public membership. Following Britten's abandonment of his country on the eve of war, Oliver notes that the Treasurer of the Royal Philharmonic Society wrote a letter to the *Sunday Times* whereby he lamented the continued coverage of Britten's music while the composer refused to take part in the war effort (90). Following this letter, Britten was barred from employment by both the Royal Philharmonic Society and the BBC (Oliver 91). Britten's publishers further feared that growing resentment toward the composer might threaten a public boycott of his works (Oliver 91). Therefore, just as Peter Grimes meets his tragic fate as a result of his retreat from the public sphere, so too did Britten's retreat from the British public threaten a similar tragic fate. Had Britten failed to reemerge into British public life with a conscious attitude toward the objective world, his public

image may have been reduced to a negative character defined by his absence, rather than the presence of a public persona.

When Britten returned to England to compose *Peter Grimes* during the midst of the Second World War, he consciously moved to rejoin the public world which he had previously fled. Kildea describes the composer's solution to the dilemma of the war, stating:

By returning to England in wartime, to face a Conscientious Objectors' Tribunal, Britten unequivocally rejoined the society he had rebelled against for much of the 1930s. There was an important role in society for the artist. 'Otherness' remained a theme of so much of his work, but it was presented in a gentler, less polemical manner. (53)

As Kildea notes, Britten adopted the role of an artist in the society against which he had previously rebelled. Britten would adopt a persona to mediate between his private convictions and his public membership by composing music. Britten's return to England, the articulation of his conscientious objections to violence, and his composition of *Peter Grimes* exemplify his artistic attitude toward the objective public world.

At Britten's tribunal for conscientious objector status, he directly posited his art as an alternative means for public service, thereby rendering his composition of *Peter Grimes* as mediator between his public and private realities. The transcript of Britten's argument reads:

I believe sincerely that I can help my fellow human beings best, by continuing the work I am most qualified to do by the nature of my gifts and training, i.e. the creation or propagation of music. I have possibilities of writing music for M.O.I. films, and for B.B.C. productions, and am offering my services to the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and Art. I am however prepared, but feel completely unsuited

by nature & training, to undertake other constructive civilian work provided that it is not connected with any of the armed forces. (quoted in Mitchell & Reed 8090/16698)

Unlike Grimes, who could not transcend his subjective articulation of his time at sea prior to his first apprentice's death, Britten's testimony presented a positive image to the tribunal. Despite his plea for conscientious objector status, Britten articulates his willingness to interact with and serve the British public through the creation of objectifiable work. To become visible to the world of the British public, Britten needed to mediate between his private convictions and his need for public service.

Through *Peter Grimes*, Britten managed to achieve praise from the public from which he had previously fled. Thereby, Britten's musical persona—his attitude toward the objective world—may be understood as paramount to both his professional success and private life. Eric Walter White describes the opera's first production, stating:

[T]he impact of the work was so powerful that when the final chorus reached its climax and the curtain began to fall slowly, ... all who were present realized that *Peter Grimes*, as well as being a masterpiece of its kind, marked the beginning of an operatic career of great promise and perhaps also the dawn of a new period when English opera would flourish in its own right. (quoted in Brett, "Breaking the ice for British opera" 90)

White's claim that *Peter Grimes* marked both the beginning of a promising operatic career, and the dawn of English opera illustrates the mediatory position which the opera played for Britten. By composing *Peter Grimes*, Britten's individual creative powers provided the British public with an object with which they could both consume and with which they could identify. Thereby, Britten's private life may have been publicly unacceptable during this time, but it was his resultant public persona which created this new age of English opera.

Britten's private feeling of belonging within England may be understood to be antecedent to his later public connections to English opera. As mentioned in the introduction, it was while Britten and Pears were living and working in Los Angeles that they came across a copy of E. M. Forster's article on George Crabbe in *The Observer*, spurring them toward the construction of the opera, *Peter Grimes*. In a 1965 BBC Radio broadcast, Britten described his encounter with *The Borough*, stating, "in a flash I realized two things: that I must write an opera, and where I belonged" (Matthews 61). While Benjamin Britten would later become publicly characterized as having "effectively invented English opera and re-invented English song" (Oliver 7), despite this future public image, he and *Peter Grimes* were privately rooted in his sense of belonging to England.

The difference between public and private spheres contained both within and outside of the object of *Peter Grimes* is indicative of the opera's aesthetic beauty. This beauty originates from the danger implied by the difference between private and public elements of a relationship. A letter which W. H. Auden had written Britten prior to *Peter Grimes*'s composition, expressed that the 'perfect balance,' and therefore the suspended difference between incomprehensible fragments and objectifiable forms, is the origin of beauty. As the private realities of the composer both surround and imbue the object of *Peter Grimes*, their potential public sight is evocative of the dangerous beauty described by Britten. To understand *Peter Grimes* as a persona that encapsulates this difference is to understand the mask's dangerous beauty.

Regarding their own relationship, Pears stated that Britten was "more interested in the beauty, and therefore the danger, that existed in any relationship between human beings—man and woman, man and man; the sex didn't really matter" (Brett, "*Britten's Dream*" 122). By generalizing this danger to an element found within all relationships, he draws attention to the

conflict between public and private sight which is similarly found to be present within the relationship between the characters of Ellen Orford and Peter Grimes.

Within Britten's opera, this danger is witnessed through Ellen's betrayal of Grimes's private reality for the Borough's publicly constructed world. Within Act I, Scene I, Ellen's interpretation of Grimes's ambiguities announces her entrance into the Borough's public world as she joins in their construction of his objective character. An element of the danger within a relationship is that of a lover's departure from the subjective reality shared within the private realm to the common objective reality of the public world. In Act II, Scene I, as the Borough objectifies Grimes's relationship with Ellen, they utilize this gleaned image to justify their march upon his private residence. Here, the danger posed by the public's perceptions of Grimes's private relationship is analogous to the danger posed by public sight toward Britten and Pears's relationship—regardless of their sexuality. As Britten describes the danger posited by a relationship to have been beautiful, then *Peter Grimes* is indicative of this beautiful danger due to its embodiment of the difference between public and private spheres.

Britten's relationship with *Peter Grimes* embodied a similar form of dangerous beauty as is described within the opera's narrative. In August of 1938, following Britten's performance of his Piano Concerto at the Proms, the composer received numerous critical reviews. *The Times* accused the Piano Concerto's finale of 'angry blatancy,' and the *Musical Times* stated that "Mr. Britten's cleverness, of which he has often been told, has got the better of him and led him into all sorts of errors, the worst of which are errors of taste" (quoted in Oliver 70-71). This musical blatancy mentioned by *The Times*, along with the errors mentioned by the *Musical Times* can be understood to exemplify a tragic discrepancy between Britten's private reality and his public image. If *The Times* believed Britten's music to be too blatant, then they must have believed

themselves to have witnessed an excessive degree of his private intent. Likewise, the *Musical Times* presumes that the errors found within Britten's public work and performance to have been resultant from an excess of cleverness. How this critic might truly know the composer's private psychological state during the composition of this work, we will never know. As these articles criticize the composer's work, they posit a danger toward the integrity of his private life, just as Ellen's discord with Grimes threatens and further leads the Borough toward further public imposition over Grimes's private life.⁸ Therefore, as Britten composed and performed *Peter Grimes* before the British public, this new mask embodied a comparable danger to his prior *Piano Concerto*.

Despite *Peter Grimes's* remarkable success, a degree of this dangerous beauty is found within the tarnish upon the opera by the Sadler Wells chorus' objections to the presentation of the work of a conscientious objector. Eric Crozier described this squabble, stating:

[T]hey complained bitterly because the composer, leading tenor and producer of *Grimes* were conscientious objectors: they declared that it was a waste of time and money to stage such "a piece of cacophony" as the new work: and they stated that it was only being produced because Joan Cross wanted to sing a leading part in it.

(quoted in Brett, "Breaking the ice for British opera" 90)

As the chorus characterized the opera based upon their characterizations of the composer's private reality, they articulated the beautifully dangerous relationship between the private composer and his public art. As this public sphere imagined the composer and producer's private realities in an effort to characterize the opera's ambiguities, the integrity of Britten's mask was compromised. As the opera's form lies between the public and private realms, had it become totally public or totally private, it would have been destroyed. The dangerous beauty of *Peter*

Grimes is the potential for the public's conflation of it with their invention of the composer's private reality.

The beauty of *Peter Grimes* is similarly threatened by scholarly attempts to reduce the opera into a quantifiable understanding of Britten's private life. This seeming obsession with the 'unveiling' of the composer's private life is articulated by Jonathan Manton in his bold claim that "to truly understand the person, including inherent flaws, is to truly understand the work" (2-3). While, as a derivative of himself, Britten's private and public realities are inherently correlated to *Peter Grimes*, the idea that the opera's ambiguities may be neatly sorted according to a public understanding of the composer's private life, supposes that a 'true' understanding of the work is dependent upon knowledge which is private and unknown. As the opera's narrative is entirely dependent upon Peter Grimes's inherently unknown private reality, and as the opera's beauty is resultant from the dangerous balance between that which is seen and that which is unseen, the reduction of *Peter Grimes* to a totally publicly objective image of Britten's life would both fail to unveil 'truth' and destroy the opera's beauty. Furthermore, to suppose that Britten's private life may be understood from letters and gossip indicates a belief that the private sphere can be accurately transmuted into an objective form without losing its prior qualities. *Peter Grimes* offers an example of this impossible transmutation, as when the Borough invaded the privacy of Grimes's hut, they could truly find nothing there. Likewise, as the Borough attempts to uncover a public image of Grimes's private life at sea and his private life with his apprentices, they do not unveil truth, but rather dismember the opera's protagonist's private reality until he can no longer exist within their public sight. Therefore, the dangerous beauty of *Peter Grimes* may find further threat within the scholarly public which seeks to dismember its form.

As *Peter Grimes* not only relies upon the difference between public and private spheres for its narrative development, but also for its beautiful form, the opera's objective form is a public image which contains a mad jumble of intangible private realities. This difference between publicly objectifiable form and private realities was described by Auden in a letter written to Britten prior to the composer's return to England and the composition of *Peter Grimes*. This letter reads: "Goodness and Beauty are the results of a perfect balance between Order and Chaos, Bohemianism and Bourgeois Convention. Bohemian chaos alone ends in a mad jumble of beautiful scraps; Bourgeois convention alone ends in large unfeeling corpses" (quoted in Seymour 2). The mad jumble of intangible private realities within and around *Peter Grimes*'s objective form is analogous to the bohemian chaos referenced by Auden. Likewise, as Britten's opera was written within the conventional medium of twentieth century western art music, and as this opera was a publicly objectifiable form, *Peter Grimes* is indicative of the Bourgeois convention referenced by Auden. Therefore, as Auden describes the resultantly beautiful dialectic between the singular Bourgeois and the plural Bohemian, the beauty of *Peter Grimes* is not only found within the singular relationships between public and private spheres, but also within the relationship between the opera's singular public form and the multiple—if not infinite—private realities which surround and pervade this form.

The dilemma we face when attempting to ascertain the beauty of *Peter Grimes* is how we learn to see the private realities which surround and permeate the opera's public form. While Britten's homosexuality was necessarily private by nature of its criminality, we cannot truly understand Britten's private experience, no matter what rumors or documents are discovered. Such an objective characterization of Britten's private sexual reality would not only induce a new publicly objective iteration of this private reality, but it would be necessarily correlated to

the same tragic process which is experienced by Peter Grimes in the opera. If the scholar dons the robes of Mrs. Sedley or Bob Boles and begins to interpret the ambiguity of Britten's private life, we will necessarily create a tragic discrepancy between our constructed image, and Britten's reality. Similarly, if we reduce Britten's sexual experience into quantified sociological narratives, we will invariably fail to truly observe his private life, but rather implant a larger public narrative upon this private sphere. Therefore, if we are to observe and understand the beauty of *Peter Grimes* through the perfect balance between order and chaos; bohemianism and bourgeois convention; private and public, we cannot attempt to publicly understand the chaos, bohemian, and private life of its composer.

Instead of attempting to construct an image of Britten's private reality to understand the dangerous beauty of *Peter Grimes*, we should rather turn toward the image presented to us by Britten: we should turn toward Britten's projected attitude toward the public sphere. If we understand that Britten's private sexuality, his private relationship with Peter Pears, and his private conscience necessarily influenced the publicly constructed persona of *Peter Grimes*, then we only need to don the mask of this opera, ourselves, to understand both the opera and the composer. Furthermore, through the balance of our own private life with the opera's objective form, we realize the dangerous beauty of this mask, as through this narrative, we experience the threat of public sight toward our own private reality.

As we understand *Peter Grimes* to have been indicative of Britten's persona, we can conclude that its beautifully dangerous form is resultant from its balance between public and private spheres. Like a mask, the public image of *Peter Grimes* projects a particular attitude toward the objective world while both inferring and hiding the private life that lies behind. As Britten's private homosexual relationship with Peter Pears is now known to have existed beneath

the opera's public image, the opera's public image is reflective of an attitude formed consequentially to his private life. Additionally, the composer's private experience as a conscientious objector may be understood to be antecedent to the composer's necessary formation of a public persona—a persona necessary for the avoidance of the tragedy detailed within the opera's narrative. Therefore, as Britten's apparent conceptions of beauty were dependent upon the discrepancy between public and private realities, the composer's construction of *Peter Grimes*, while necessary for the avoidance of tragedy, also faced the potential for public dismemberment. If public sight were to impose itself upon the private realities within and surrounding the opera's form, then not only would its beauty be destroyed, but its composer may face a similar tragic fate as his protagonist does within *Peter Grimes*.

Therefore, in order to understand *Peter Grimes*, we must turn away from the attempted acquisition of private knowledge, and rather turn toward the objective image presented to us by Benjamin Britten. The spectator must learn to experience Britten's attitude toward the objective world by experiencing the opera in a way which embeds their own private realities within its form. The spectator must realize the danger that public sight poses to their private realities.

Chapter 5: Sea Changes and the Mind: The “Sea Interludes”

Britten’s creation of the “Sea Interludes” for *Peter Grimes* contributes to the audience’s perception of Grimes’s lack of attitude toward the publicly objective world. Desmond Shawe-Taylor describes the Interlude’s role within the narrative of the opera, drawing attention to the differentiation between music dealing with the opera’s pictorial setting, and music dealing with the characters’ psychological conditions:

It looks so simple, that innate pictorialism of Britten’s which we have already admired in the *Serenade*, and now it serves so well the broader need of opera; when the curtain rises we see only what we have already heard. These preludes and interludes, of which there are six in all, form a major item in the musical design; they are about equally divided between the pictorial and the psychological. (quoted in Mitchell & Reed 1211/16698)

In this chapter, I measure the musical evocations of the opera’s characters according to their differing relationships with a mutual pictorial setting. In these Interludes, the audience hears Grimes, failing to take on an attitude toward the pictorial musical world, escape into the private world of his dreams. Conversely, the audience hears the Borough induce musical world in relation to the pictorial musical world, by constructing a public realm predicated upon the shared characterization of common objects.

The Interludes within *Peter Grimes* exemplify the need to act toward publicly defined objects. The first two Interludes of the opera allow the audience to hear that while Peter Grimes is defined according to his relationship toward privately defined objects, the Borough is defined according to its members’ shared relationships toward publicly iterated attitudes. The heart of the opera’s tragedy is revealed in the Second Act, when Britten illustrates that these two subjects can only coexist when the individual subject leaves its privately defined world behind. However, as

the private subject fails to relate to dominant objects of public discourse, it is tragically defined by that which it is not. Thus, through these Interludes, Britten teaches his audience to move toward publicly defined objects such as the opera, itself.

The music of the First and Second Interludes allows the audience to hear that the difference between the opera's primary subjects—Grimes and the Borough—results from their respective attitudes toward an inherently ambiguous musical world. The opera's First Interlude is a pictorial evocation of the opera's setting and illustrates a contradictory musical world whose audience's attitudes toward the difference between its parts induce its musical motive. The opera's Second Interlude is based upon the difference between Grimes and the Borough's differing reactions toward Balstrode's invocation of a storm from the ambiguous setting heard in the First Interlude. Within this Second Interlude, the audience may subsequently discern the Borough and Peter Grimes's differing attitudes toward this induced storm. Therefore, the Interludes heard within the First Act of *Peter Grimes* establish a world constructed from both the audience's and character's attitudes toward its initial ambiguity.

The First Interlude is indicative of the ambiguous sea upon which Grimes and the Borough are dependent. Philip Brett correlates this Interlude's setting to a passage from George Crabbe's *The Borough*, wherein he paints an ambiguous portrait of the natural world on which the Borough's life depends. Crabbe writes:

Turn to the watery world! – but who to thee
 (A wonder yet unview'd) shall paint — the Sea?
 Various and vast, sublime in all its forms,
 When lull'd by zephyrs, or when roused by storms,
 Its colours changing, when from clouds and sun

Shades after shades upon the surface run;
 Embrown'd and horrid now, and now serene,
 In limpid blue, and evanescent green;
 And oft the foggy banks on ocean lie,
 Lift the fair sail, and cheat th'experienced eye.

(quoted in Brett, "Peter Grimes in progress" 54)

Crabbe describes a sea that is ambivalent in temperament (When lull'd by zephyrs, or when roused by storms), ambiguous in appearance (Its colours changing, when from clouds and sun), and ambivalent toward the safety of those who sail upon its surface (And oft the foggy banks on ocean lie, / Lift the fair sail, and cheat th'experienced eye). George Martin's synopsis of the opera's First Interlude similarly describes its evocation of an ambiguous world of the Borough's existence. He writes:

The sea has an equivocal role at The Borough: it supports life, yet with its tides and storms that erode the coast it destroys life. Though at the moment it is calm, the waves lap restlessly on the beach, pulling the shingle back into the sea. This ambiguous motif of peace and menace dominates the first scene, and returns in the opera's final chorus.

(485)

By proclaiming that the sea evoked within this Interlude is equivocal, Martin unifies all action within the scope of the opera behind a common relation to this ambiguity. Similarly, for Desmond Shawe-Taylor the First Interlude of the opera evokes "the grey atmosphere of the hard-bitten little fishing town" (quoted in Mitchell & Reed 12028/16698). Like Martin's description of the sea, his comment allows all the characters within the scope of the opera to be measured according to their relationship to this 'grey' and undefined object. The Interlude's ambiguous

sea—as a setting for the opera—becomes a common object in the narrative pointing to the differences among the characters through their attitudes toward it.

The music of the First Interlude mirrors the critics' view of the narrative's equivocal, ambiguous, and ambivalent sea. In the first motif, ambivalence is created through a discrepancy between ornamental features and the primary musical line's development. In the second motif, Britten presents an arpeggio upon the same scale degree that the first motif's suggested evasion was based. Here, the audience is presented with the ornamental musical world, realizing that it cannot exist without melodic and harmonic development. In the third motif, Britten creates harmonic ambiguity which leads the audience to infer the tonicization of an unheard dominant. Thereby, in this Interlude, Britten presents an inherently ambiguous sonic world, only defined by the audience's attitude toward it.

The definition of motif that I am using is a marriage between its musical and literary senses. While the definition of a musical motif is often correlated to the Wagnerian *leitmotif*—representing stagnant measures for individual characters—in *Peter Grimes*, the musical motifs represent the different and changing attitudes that the opera's characters possess toward objective musical measures. I define the underlying musical motives through a structural analysis of each Interlude's differing motifs. By analyzing the discord between the motifs within each Interlude, we construct our own attitudes toward each Interlude's underlying motivation, thereby defining this motivation as our resultant personae.

The first motif heard within the First Interlude, by presenting the difference between primary and ornamental musical devices, evokes an ambiguous image from which the spectator can take-on an attitude—develop a persona—toward the Interlude's overarching motive:

Figure 17: (Britten 27)

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Flute, Violin I, and Violin II. The tempo is marked "Lento e tranquillo (♩=44)". The Flute part starts with a dynamic of *pp* *dolciss.* and includes a breath mark. The Violin I and Violin II parts are marked *senza sord* and *pp* *dolciss.*. All three parts feature a melodic line with grace notes and principal notes, connected by slurs. The score includes dynamic markings of *pp*, *dim.*, and *pp*, as well as articulation marks and phrasing slurs.

The difference between grace notes and principal notes amplifies the audience’s perception of the movement—and thereby the motive—which sounds to drive the melody of this motif. Britten utilizes the musical mechanism of pictorialism to invoke an image dependent upon the audience’s attitudes toward its ambiguities. By emphasizing the “beauty of subject matter, tonality, and composition rather than... [documenting] ...reality” (Britannica, “Pictorialism”), Britten musically illustrates a world whose depiction of reality is not presented through the music, but rather inferred from its parts. By taking-on an attitude toward the difference between these contradictory musical features, Claire Seymour exemplifies the way that the line’s motive is not inherent to the Interlude, but rather cast upon it by the subject who invokes its character. Seymour states that the difference between the grace notes and primary notes within the Interlude’s first motif “embodies the psychological tension of the opera” (47). As Seymour’s attitude is an articulation of the induced difference between musical elements, it itself is an embodiment of the opera’s psychological tension. Thus, by presenting contradictory musical devices within this Interlude, Britten evokes the setting which George Crabbe pictorially evokes within *The Borough* and asks the audience to take-on an attitude toward its ambiguity.

The second of the Interlude’s three motifs presents the audience with the sound of ornamentation which, in the first motif, was presented alongside a principal line. Britten presents

the audience with an isolated view of one of the two contradictory musical devices, which requires an attitude toward it to establish its relationship to the Interlude's development:

Figure 18: (Britten 27)

The musical score for Figure 18 consists of eight staves. From top to bottom, they are: Flute, Clarinet in Bb, Percussion, Harp, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Viola. The Flute staff has a long melodic line with a slur and a fermata. The Clarinet in Bb staff has a melodic line with dynamics *pp* and *f*. The Percussion staff has a cymbal suspension marked 'Cymb. susp (soft stick)' with a dynamic *p*. The Harp staff has a melodic line with dynamics *pp* and *f*. The Violin I and Violin II staves have long melodic lines with slurs and fermatas. The Viola staff has a melodic line with dynamics *pp* and *f*. The bottom Viola staff has a melodic line with the instruction 'senza sord.'

Unlike the grace-notes heard alongside the first motif's primary line, the ascending arpeggio and the descending sequence presents the audience with the ornamentation of a single VI chord. As the evasive chord of the Interlude's A tonality, this motif does not need to either resolve to the tonic or move toward the dominant. This ornamental motif, alone, is without both harmonic and melodic motive. As such, to take-on an attitude toward the Interlude's development, the audience must take-on an attitude toward this motif, by implying its relationship to the motifs by which it is surrounded.

The third motif of the First Interlude presents the audience with an isolated sound of a harmonic progression. However, by presenting an applied V^7 chord without its subsequent

dominant chord, Britten illustrates that the perception of this harmonic progression requires the audience's induced attitudes toward it:

Figure 19: (Britten 27)

The musical score for Figure 19 is a page from a score for a symphony, likely by Benjamin Britten. It features ten staves of instruments: Bassoon, Contrabassoon, two Horns in F, Trumpet in C, Trombone, Tuba, Timpani, Bass Drum, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The music is in 2/2 time. The score is marked with dynamics such as *ppp* (pianissimo), *sost.* (sostenuto), and *pp* (piano). There are also markings for *a2* (second octave) and a circled number 10. The score shows a complex harmonic progression with many notes tied across measures, suggesting a sustained or slowly moving texture.

Applied chords establish the temporary tonicization of the original dominant chord through the articulation of a secondary dominant. As such, if the audience hears the II^7 chord as a V^7/V , their perception of a secondary dominant implies the existence of both the V chord and its tonicization which never actually sounds within this motif. Thus, by presenting this harmonic motif, Britten further illustrates that the First Interlude's development requires the audience's attitudes toward its ambivalent and ambiguous musical parts.

In the First Interlude, Britten introduces the audience to a world not defined by that which it is, but rather by that which it is proclaimed to be. Within the first motif of this Interlude, Britten allows the audience to imply the melody's motive from the difference between its ornamental and principal notes. Likewise, without iteration of melodic or harmonic development,

the function of the ornamental second motif can only be defined according to its relationship to the motifs by which it is surrounded. In the third motif, by notating an applied chord without a subsequent dominant chord, Britten leads the audience toward defining the motif's harmonic development according to their implication of a tonicized dominant. Thus, by presenting the audience with these ambivalent and ambiguous musical devices, Britten evokes an inherently ambiguous world, whose only definition may arise from the audience's attitudes toward it.

In the Second Interlude, the audience may learn to understand that Grimes's difference from the Borough-public is rooted in his differing relationship toward the ambiguous sea pictorially evoked by the First Interlude. The first section of this Interlude leaves the audience with the impression of a violent storm. As this storm is perceived according to its melodic quotation of Balstrode's line, "Look, the storm cone!", the audience hears this motif through the Borough's attitude toward the ambiguous sea which was pictured in the First Interlude. The Borough's reaction against this perceived storm can be heard in the following motif, which just like the Borough's vocal music, is reflective of a danceable meter and tuneful melody. Here, following the sound of the induced orchestral storm, the Borough can be heard to publicly organize around this common object by acting against it in concert. Illustrating Peter Grimes's essentially different relationship toward the sea and its perceived storm, Britten utilizes two motifs within the Interlude's third section to illustrate Grimes's "dream refuge," wherein Grimes attempts to move toward a world of his own private construction. Britten evokes the psychological differences between Peter Grimes's private reality and the Borough's public world by utilizing the Second Interlude motifs' differing relationship toward the First Interlude's ambiguous pictorial world.

The First section of this Interlude, which is a rearticulation of Balstrode's sung invocation of a storm from the ambiguous sea, evokes stormy sounds through its rhythm, heavy brass, and melodic movement which emphasizes the weaker beats within each measure:

Figure 20: (Britten 139)

The musical score for Figure 20 is a page from a score for Benjamin Britten's opera, showing measures 139-142. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Clarinet in Eb, Bassoon, Contrabassoon, Horn in F (two parts), Trumpet in C (two parts), Tuba, Trombone, Harp, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The music is in 3/4 time and features a prominent melodic motif in the strings and woodwinds, characterized by a quarter rest followed by a three-note passage.

The Violins, Flute and Oboe can be heard to evoke a violent wind as they begin their basic idea a quarter-rest away from the beginning of each measure. The three-note passage, which fills the space of each measure's first half, moves between the tonic and the minor second/major seventh scale degrees. This indicates the "dark Phrygian" mode, whose "colouring is one of the most prominent melodic and harmonic effects in the whole opera" (Walsh 23). As these lines crescendo into discord, and decrescendo away from discord, the audience might feel the unsteady effect of this movement. It sounds as though the violent winds, with each swell,

unsteady our footing, or rock our ship off-balance at sea. Utilizing these musical devices, Britten allows the audience to take-on an attitude toward Balstrode's induced storm, as they may evoke an image of a storm from comparable sounds.

The Borough's reaction to Balstrode's induced storm can be heard in the following section of the Interlude's rondo form. This section is differentiated by its texture, melodic and harmonic difference, and rhythmic articulation:

Figure 21 (Britten 149)

The musical score for Figure 21 (Britten 149) is a full orchestral arrangement. It is divided into two systems. The top system includes Piccolo, Oboe, Clarinet in B \flat , Clarinet in A, Bassoon, Contrabassoon, Horn in F, Horn in C, Trumpet in C, Trumpet in B \flat , Trombone, Tuba, Percussion (S.D., Gong, B.D.), and Harp. The bottom system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The music is marked "molto animato" and features complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed notes and dynamic markings such as "ff" and "con sord.".

This passage indicates that the Borough's musical world is constructed upon a shared relation to danceable rhythm and tuneful melody, and that this public constitution may develop despite the differing musical world of the storm. The bitonality of the quoted passage allows the audience to hear that the tuneful sounds of the woodwinds do not exist in a world without harmonic

dissonance but are rather in constant relation. This section of the Interlude and its contradictory sonic world are noted by Chowrimootoo to signify a “threat of disintegration[,] ... where spiraling sequences erupt into a sonic picture evading ‘musical’ sense: wave-like crashes of brass and percussion, fishlike flailing of woodwinds and contradictory rhythms” (56). However, if we understand that the woodwinds’ danceable and tuneful lines in the key of E flat are indicative of the Borough’s public constitution, and if we understand that the strings’ and brass’ lines in the key of D are indicative of a natural state, then the bitonal worlds might concurrently exist as a result of the Borough’s shared relationship to musical devices which are not member to this alternative tonal world. If we take Chowrimootoo’s metaphor into account, then the flailing of the woodwinds against the contradictory sounds of the brass and percussion is merely indicative of the dualistic relationship which exists between the sea and its life: Fish might flail against the waves of the sea, but they still require this same sea for their life. Therefore, the audience may gain the impression that the Borough need not destroy the dissonance below them, but rather construct a danceable and tuneful line to pass through it.

Unlike the Borough’s response to the violence of the first section of the “Storm Interlude,” the third episode is an “echo of Peter’s dream refuge” (Evans 117). The first part of this section is defined by its harmonic suspense and melodic quotation of Grimes’s line, “What harbour shelters peace:”

Figure 22: (Britten 156)

The musical score for Figure 22, titled "(Britten 156)", depicts a five-measure passage in a "largamente" tempo. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format, with parts for Flute, Piccolo, Oboe, Clarinet in B, Clarinet in E, Bassoon, Horn in F, Trumpet in C, Trombone, Tuba, Percussion, Harp, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Double Bass. The passage is marked "largamente" and "a tempo". The woodwinds and brass play sustained notes, while the strings play a melodic line. The harp plays a D major chord.

Unlike the previous sections of the Second Interlude, this recurring five-measure passage is without metrical indication. There are no patterns to be heard from the snare drum or timpani, no staccato horn shots, and no melodic patterns from the woodwinds which might permit the audience to define the danceable and tuneful regularity which existed within the prior section. Instead, Britten leads the audience toward a harmonic suspense which can only be resolved through the resolution of Grimes's melody played by the violins and viola. Rather than taking-on an attitude, alongside the Borough, to the common-object of the induced storm, this motif exemplifies Grimes's induced attitude toward an object of his own private invention.

The second part of this dream section is representative of Grimes's wish for public membership and his belief that the public sphere is an object to be obtained rather than a membership resultant from relation to objects common to both himself and the Borough. This

motif within the third section of the rondo is based upon Grimes's line, "With her there'll be no quarrels" (played by the horns and strings), and can be heard to straddle the suspended harmonic world heard within the first motif of Grimes's dream refuge and the highly articulated world of the Borough's section of the Interlude:

Figure 23: (Britten 159-160)

The musical score for Figure 23, measures 159-160, is presented in a standard orchestral layout. The top section includes Flute, Piccolo, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Clarinet in B, Bassoon, and Contrabassoon. The middle section includes Horn in F, Horn in Bb, Percussion (Tamb., B.D.), and Harp. The bottom section includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score is marked 'Largamente' and features a prominent melodic motif in the woodwinds and strings. The woodwinds play a two-measure melodic motif that is suspended within a functional tonic harmony. The strings play a similar motif, with the Double Bass part marked 'pp' and the other string parts marked 'p' and 'dolce, espr. e legato'. The Harp part is marked 'D major' and 'pp'. The Percussion part includes a Tambourine and Bells (B.D.).

The regular rhythm heard within the woodwinds allows us to hear that this motif resembles aspects of the Borough's response to the storm section of the Interlude. Despite the resemblance, the woodwinds do not progress through a harmonic sequence as they did in the rondo's B section. Rather, they remain suspended within a two-measure melodic motif, never moving beyond the functional tonic harmony. If the woodwinds are representative of the Borough's public world, and if the harmonic development of the B section of the rondo is indicative of the Borough-public's shared attitude toward the common object of the storm, then the static

harmony heard in this section indicates that Grimes has imagined the public sphere to be a stagnant entity. He is not reacting in concert with the Borough by moving forward through a danceable and tuneful motif. Rather, he is dreaming of an existence within the public world of his own imagination.

When the Second Interlude subsides and the proceeding scene develops, the spectator might already know that the difference between Grimes and the Borough stems from their differing attitudes toward the ambiguous world pictured within the First Interlude. The first motif evokes the sound of the storm invoked by Balstrode's attitude toward the ambiguous sea of the First Interlude. Moving in shared melodic and rhythmic relation from the common object of Balstrode's invoked storm, the second motif can be heard to evoke the sounds of the Borough's public sphere. This public order is defined by its shared relationship toward the storm which it flees, and the danceable and tuneful musical world toward which it develops. Unlike this evocation of a public world, the following section of the Second Interlude evokes Grimes's world of privately defined objects. Without shared movement to the Borough in relation to the storm, Grimes's privately constructed world cannot coexist with the Borough's publicly constructed world. Thus, the Interludes within *Peter Grimes's* First Act articulate the difference between Grimes and the Borough, resulting from their differing attitudes toward the ambiguous world evoked within the First Interlude.

The difference between the opera's Third and Fourth Interludes illustrates that by failing to publicly develop, Peter Grimes can only be publicly defined according to that which he is not. In the Third Interlude, the audience hears that entrance into the public sphere is manifest through public action. This Interlude's first section evokes the public sphere as a result of its cellular structure, wherein numerous evolutions of a generative cell are unified through their shared

metrical relation. In the Third Interlude's second section, Britten illustrates the way that a subject may gain entrance into the public sphere. Here, the subject's development toward its dominant harmony allows it to publicly move in common metrical relation to the first section. Thereby, the audience hears that public membership results from the action toward a dominant object within the public sphere. Whereas the Third Interlude presents development toward the public sphere, the Fourth Interlude presents Grimes's retreat away from the public sphere, and his resulting negative characterization. As the Interlude's subject—its grounded base—creates space between the public sounds of its notes, it moves away from the world of public sound. Arising from the space created from the subject's lack of public sound, the Interlude's counter subject draws the audience's attention toward it, and toward its growing differentiation from the subject. As the grounded base not only turns away from public sound, but away from harmonic development, it becomes defined according to its mere lack of publicity and its lack of development. Therefore, the difference between the Third and Fourth Interludes indicates that public membership results from a subject's discernible movement toward a public object, and that by moving toward private objects, Grimes is merely defined according to that which he is not.

The first section of the Third Interlude evokes the sound of the Borough's heterogeneous public world by presenting a section whose lines, while varied in their relationship toward their common generative cell, are unified according to their shared movement upon a common pulse:

Figure 24: Interlude III Initial iteration of cellular structure (Britten 236)

Figure 24 is a musical score for the initial iteration of cellular structure. It consists of eight staves: Flute, Piccolo, Oboe, Clarinet in A, Clarinet in Eb, Bassoon, Horn in F, and Horn in F. The score is divided into four columns of rhythmic cells: Cell X², Cell Y², Cell Xa², and Cell Yb². The Oboe part is further detailed with sub-cells: Cell X, Cell Y, Cell Xa, and Cell Yb. Dynamics include *f* and *fp*. The Flute and Piccolo parts have a *f* dynamic. The Bassoon part has a *fp* dynamic. The Horn in F parts have a *fp* dynamic.

Figure 25: Interlude III later evolution of cellular structure (Britten 242)

Figure 25 is a musical score for the later evolution of cellular structure. It consists of 14 staves: Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in A, Clarinet in Eb, Horn in F, Trumpet in C, Trombone, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The score is divided into two columns of rhythmic cells: X rhythm only and Y rhythm only. The Trumpet in C part is labeled with Cell X and Cell Y. The Violin I and II parts are labeled with Cell 2(X-rests) and Cell 2(Y-rests) melodic variant. Dynamics include *f* and *fp*. The Piccolo part has a *f* dynamic. The Flute part has a *fp* dynamic. The Oboe part has a *f* dynamic. The Clarinet in A part has a *f* dynamic. The Clarinet in Eb part has a *f* dynamic. The Horn in F part has a *fp* dynamic. The Trombone part has a *fp* dynamic. The Violoncello part has a *fp* dynamic.

In the Interlude's opening statement, the woodwinds are heard articulating the generative cell. As the woodwinds' articulations of this cell evolve, other instruments such as the trumpet begin their lines upon the generative cell. As more instruments are introduced into this cellular section, simultaneously iterating different evolutions of the original common-subject, they create a heterogeneous sound—unified not through common harmonic or melodic structure, but through common metrical relation. Just as the Borough's public sphere is defined by the public perception of the verbs which connect different subjects to common objects, so too in this Interlude does Britten illustrate a musical section founded upon its instruments' soundings of differing iterations of a cell, in common time. Thus, the Borough-public, just like this section, are unified through their action's common relation to time.

The second section of the Third Interlude presents the audience with a melody which is developed into Ellen's "Glitter of Waves." The correlation between this melody and the arioso's subject matter indicates that this line is an expression of Ellen's attitude toward the common-objective world. In this iteration of the Third Interlude's second motif, Ellen sings:

Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight

Bid us rejoice and lift our hearts on high.

Man alone has a soul to save,

And goes to church to worship on a Sunday. (Britten 246-249)

In these lyrics, Ellen addresses objects of light which have redemptive power for the subjects who are publicly related to each other through it. As Ellen brings the audience into common relation with the evocation of the objects of glittering waves and glittering sunlight, she addresses the unified subject through the pronoun, 'us.' Thereby, a public is created as a result of its members shared relation to these common objects. After unifying herself with the audience

through their shared relation to the common objects of glittering waves and glittering sunlight, Ellen moves to address the subject of man, and his soul which, as inferred, requires the salvation of Sunday worship. As the first sentence of Ellen's arioso addresses the formation of a public through its communal relation to common objects of light, and the second sentence addresses the unified masculine subject in communal relation to Christian worship, then the salvation referred to by Ellen, is that of communion; Through communal relation to Christian worship, the men of the Borough may become unified as a single-subject. Therefore, in this arioso, whose melody is first heard within the Third Interlude, Ellen iterates her attitude toward the objective world, as she both demonstrates the formation of a public around common objects, and iterates that through public membership, men may find redemption for their souls.

Ellen Orford's melody exemplifies the way that her attitude toward the publicly objective world permits her membership within its heterogeneous forum. With this subject firmly related to the objective world, the discordant interjections of the bass, harp, and bassoon fail to destabilize its line:

Figure 26: (Britten 239-240)

The musical score for Figure 26, measures 239-240, features the following parts and dynamics:

- Flute:** Solo, *ff*
- Piccolo:** *mf*, *ff*
- Bassoon:** 1., *poco cresc.*
- Timpani:** *pp*
- Percussion:** Cymb. nat. (*ppp*), Cymb. (*ppp*)
- Harp:** *p*, *poco cresc.*
- Viola:** arco, *pp espr.*, *poco cresc.*
- Violoncello:** *pp espr.*, *poco cresc.*
- Double Bass:** pizz., *pp ma pesante*, *poco cresc.*

The subject played by the violin and violoncello is so firmly rooted to its implied harmonic development that the differing harmonies of the bass, bassoon, and harp fail to influence the perception of this line as an individual unit. Rather, the viola and violin's implied harmonies, in accordance with the harmonic structure of the bass, bassoon, and harp, create a polychordal relation wherein two separate and distinct harmonic structures sound simultaneously, with neither structure gaining precedence over the other.

As the second section of the Third Interlude develops into a recapitulation of the first section, the audience hears the musical subject, which is evocative of Ellen's attitude toward the objective world, enter into the cellular section's evocation of the Borough's public sphere. The audience hears, through the juxtaposition of the Third Interlude's two sections, that a subject can only develop so long as it sets itself in relation to a publicly discernible object.

Unlike the Third Interlude's pictorial evocation of possible entrance into the Borough's publicly objective world, the opera's Fourth Interlude—its Passacaglia—iterates Grimes's retreat away from the objective world. The Passacaglia's subject, borrowed from Grimes's sung line in the preceding scene, illustrates Grimes's failure to publicly develop toward the objective world, and his resultant development toward a world of his own private invention. The Interlude's countersubject, which has been correlated to the voice of the apprentice, musically illustrates Grimes's characterization according to his relationship toward an apprentice who is of common concern to all the Borough. Thereby, the difference between this Interlude's subject⁹ and countersubject¹⁰ allows the audience to hear the way that Grimes is defined according to his growing lack of relation toward the objective world. Through these means, Britten evokes the growing psychological conflict between Grimes's increasing retreat toward privacy, and the Borough's resultant characterization of this privacy.

Britten bases the Fourth Interlude upon Grimes's negative attitude toward the public world. In the scene preceding this Interlude, Grimes is rejected by Ellen as a result of his perceived relationship with John. Resultantly, Grimes abandons his attempted acquisition of public membership through wealth and marriage for a life of increasing privacy. Singing "God have mercy upon me" as he runs from the Borough and toward the privacy of his hut, Grimes directly correlates this phrase to his retreat from the Borough-public. This is the melodic phrase from which the Passacaglia's subject—its grounded bass—is derived.

Britten evokes Grimes's lack of attitude toward the publicly objective world through the subject's restriction to its tonic harmony:

Figure 27: Act II, Scene I (Britten 282)



Figure 28: Interlude IV: Passacaglia (Britten 349)



By not harmonically developing toward the dominant, but rather repeating this consistent musical subject based upon the tonic harmony, the Fourth Interlude presents a subject which, alone, lacks sufficient relation toward musical objects for its development. This is unlike the subject evocative of Ellen Orford in the opera's Third motif, which develops toward the dominant harmony, and in turn toward the secular section's recapitulation. The Fourth Interlude musically mirrors Grimes's physical movement away from the Borough, and toward the privacy of his hut. By moving toward his private hut, Peter Grimes fails to act toward objects common to himself and the Borough. Therefore, Peter Grimes becomes a subject which cannot be publicly defined according to his movement toward objects, but rather by his movement away from them.

Illustrating Grimes's movement toward privacy, the subject's notes become measured according to the empty space between their quiet sound. Whereas Grimes's sung iteration of this line in the antecedent scene is filled with consistent sound projected into the public space of the theatre, the grounded bass iterates this line in short, pizzicato articulations, separated by rests longer than the notes themselves. Rather than a line defined by publicly perceivable sound, the Interlude's subject is definable according to its lack of sound. Further indicating this subject's relation away from the public world, and toward Grimes's private hut, the dynamic indication of this grounded bass is very soft, often barely audible underneath the sounds of the interlude's

countersubject. Thus, utilizing this subject and its difference from the melodic subject in the Third Interlude, Britten allows the audience to take-on a negative attitude toward Peter Grimes.

Just as the Borough characterizes Peter Grimes according to the difference between himself and the apprentice to whom he is related, the Fourth Interlude/Passacaglia's countersubject presents the audience with a public sound, through which the audience may attempt to infer the character of the quiet underlying subject. David Matthews notes that "All commentators have associated the first solo viola statement of the counter-subject with the apprentice" ("Act II, scene 1" 145). As the Interlude develops according to a number of variations upon this counter-subject, Britten evokes the Borough's number of varying public perceptions and iterations of the apprentice's relationship toward Peter Grimes. The subject—Peter Grimes's retreat from the public sphere—becomes characterized by the difference between itself and the perceptions of his apprentice's attitude toward the public sphere.

The countersubject presents a line that, unlike the subject, iterates its movement toward dominant musical objects. Like Ellen's subject in the Third Interlude, this countersubject iterates a line which takes-on an attitude toward the publicly objective world:

Figure 29: Passacaglia countersubject (Britten 349)

The viola's initial iteration of the Interlude's countersubject arises from the empty space between the subject's scattered line, thereby arising from Grimes's very lack of public relation. Thus, public sound, itself, is the first dominant object that this line moves toward. The countersubject

further moves toward louder dynamic indications, at all times remaining more dynamically prominent than the grounded bass. Thereby, publicly discernible intensity is the second object toward which the countersubject develops. Melodically, this countersubject moves from the F that the bass is grounded upon, toward a final E which “acts as a dominant to the A major woodwind chords that open Variation 1” (Matthews, “Act II scene 1” 146). Thereby, it is the countersubject’s movement toward the melodic object of E which permits the proceeding variation to modulate while finding common relation to the dominant object of E. This countersubject, by moving toward public objects, permits the audience to witness its movement toward them, and in turn, allows other voices to iterate their relations toward these common objects.

Britten musically evokes the tragedy that results from Grimes’s lack of persona, from the sounds of harmonic and rhythmic discord which grow between the Fourth Interlude’s grounded-bass and counter-subject. Resulting from the 39 repetitions of the grounded-bass’ irregular eleven beat motif, and the nine harmonically and rhythmically independent variations of the counter-subject, Britten creates an ever-increasing discord between these two parts. Unlike the subject evocative of Ellen in the Third Interlude that moves toward a cellular section unified around a common meter, the grounded bass in the Passacaglia moves away from the countersubject to which it is related. Thereby, the audience can hear the subject retreat further into a world of its own private invention.

By juxtaposing the Third Interlude’s exemplification of a musical subject’s entrance into a common musical world and the Fourth Interlude’s exemplification of a musical subject’s movement away from all common musical objects, Britten sonically predisposes his audience toward a particular view of the opera’s visible action—Britten leads his audience toward the

attitude that tragedy is what befalls a person who lives a life directed toward objects of his own private invention. This is “the centrepiece of [the] drama” and why the Passacaglia “takes us to the heart of Grimes’s tragedy” (Walsh 26).

The Interludes within the First Two Acts of *Peter Grimes* lead the audience toward the formation of a particular attitude toward the drama of the opera. In the opera’s First Act, by evoking the differences between a public world constructed upon the shared relation toward publicly objectifiable attitudes toward the opera’s ambiguous setting, and a private world constructed atop the suspension of public attitudes, Britten evokes the essential difference between the opera’s two primary subjects: Grimes and the Borough. In the opera’s Second Act, by musically exemplifying the way that a subject related to public objects enters into a public world and exemplifying the way that Grimes’s subject moves away from the public world, Britten allows the audience to realize that a private attitude like Grimes’s cannot exist in equal measure with the publicly objective world. These Interludes demonstrate that by failing to take on an attitude toward the public world, Peter Grimes is inevitably viewed by the public as a negative character, defined by that which he is not.

The Interludes in *Peter Grimes*, thereby, musically focus the audience’s attention upon the difference between Grimes and the Borough. Through this sound, Britten unites the audience around a shared attitude toward the action physically presented within the opera’s scenes. Leaving our private differences behind, we join the composer in the public space of the theatre, learning through this work to act toward common objects.

Conclusion

The opera's tragic structure allows us to create a differentiation between the public world which exists within sight of the Borough, and Grimes's private reality which exists outside of their sight (within his hut, at the beach, at sea, and in his mind). As Grimes's tragedy is realized according to his gradual removal from the public stage into his offstage realm of unwitnessed private reality, I suggest that he may have resisted this tragic dismemberment had he constructed a persona. The opera's musical text setting and Interludes illustrate the tragedy resultant from Grimes's failure to enter the public sphere. Without finding relation to any common public object, and by remaining trapped within his private reality, the opera's protagonist musically realizes his dismemberment from the opera—Grimes becomes musically defined according to his negative relation to the music of the public world. As *Peter Grimes*'s composer, Benjamin Britten personally resisted a comparable tragic dismemberment from the public sphere by relating himself to the public world through the opera's articulation of his persona. Through this composition, the composer found public success while protecting his private sexuality from public sight. Britten presented an image of himself to which people could relate, rather than one that was ambiguous to them. Through its narrative, music, and relation to its composer, *Peter Grimes* presents its audience with an image illustrative of the importance of protecting their private realities beneath their persona's relationships toward common objects within the public world.

The First Chapter of this thesis details the tragedy resultant from the interpretation of ambiguity which underlies the opera's narrative. More particularly, the opera's tragedy develops from the difference between the actions which Grimes is claimed to have committed and the lack of physically substantiating evidence for these claims. Many of these actions were inferred by

the Borough and audience's characterizations of Peter Grimes within the opera. The difference between the opera and George Crabbe's *The Borough* indicates that Britten and his librettist systematically eliminated certain aspects of Grimes's character, thereby heightening what he is claimed to be by the Borough and audience. Given the composer's preferences and the acting theories of Uta Hagen, the actor must not trespass upon the necessity of Grimes's ambiguous character for the narrative's development.

The difference between public and private spheres, and the requirement of a persona to negotiate between these spheres, is introduced within this thesis' Second Chapter. Here, by utilizing Hannah Arendt's definition of public and private spheres, along with Carl Jung's definition of the persona, the thesis proposes that Grimes's failing to act toward public common objects directly results in the public sphere's encroachment upon his private sphere. When Grimes fails to move toward the public sphere by means of an attitude toward objects common to them, the public sphere imagines conditions within Grimes's private life in an attempt to define him. My reading of the opera shows that the public sphere's encroachment upon Grimes's private reality may have been resisted if only he had refused to retreat into further privacy, and rather move toward the public sphere. I also contend that through purposeful movement toward common public objects, Grimes's private reality may have remained safe from public sight.

The difference between Grimes's lack of persona—his entirely private being—and the Borough's public world—predicated upon the multiplicity of attitudes toward common objects—is manifest within Britten's musical setting of each character's text. In chapter three, I map the way in which Britten enables the characterization of the Borough-members by setting their text upon music that relates them toward dominant public objects. Swallow's musical persona articulates the pompous and inquisitory nature of his character—as his character is predicated

upon his power as the Borough's lawyer and leader of the inquest into Peter Grimes's involvement in the first apprentice's death. Similarly, Ellen Orford's musical persona evokes her relationship toward objects through which she emotionally relates to both John and Grimes. Her sonic articulation of embroidery allows the audience to characterize Ellen according to her self-publicized relationships toward the objective world. Britten further relates each Borough-member to a common musical world through common tuneful melodies and danceable rhythmic movement. Here, the audience might relate each member of the Borough to each other through the common dominance of these tuneful and danceable musical devices. Unlike these Borough members, who through distinct musical personae, relate themselves to the common public world of tuneful melody and danceable rhythm, Peter Grimes's lack of a musical persona is articulated through his line's declamatory style. Grimes's declamatory text-setting relates his music entirely to the emotional impetus behind his text, thereby failing to relate him to the objective world. Instead, this character musically remains trapped within his private subjective reality, as he attempts to communicate his uncommunicable subjectivity. Grimes and the Borough's differing text settings illustrate the need for a subject to relate themselves to a dominant public object to become member to the public theatre. Without a musical persona, which permits a subject to define itself through its relationship toward dominant objects, individuals like Peter Grimes become defined according to their difference from others—Grimes becomes dismembered from the public sphere.

The fourth chapter of this thesis argues the opera is an articulation of Benjamin Britten's persona, created to negotiate between his private and public life. As an 'open secret,' Britten's relationship with Peter Pears might have remained present within the public sphere only so long as their relationship was engaged toward the public object of the opera. Here, as long as the pair

appeared to be working toward common-public objects, Britten's homosexuality may have remained private by means of its 'unthinkability.' Britten's status as a conscientious objector and the social exile he experienced as a result, further indicates a political reality which Britten needed to overcome through the construction of *Peter Grimes*. Despite his convictions, which he later relegated to the private sphere, Britten constructed an attitude toward the British public world through *Peter Grimes*, which enabled his membership within this potentially hostile world while maintaining his political difference from them. Unlike the protagonist of his opera, Benjamin Britten entered the British public sphere through the construction of a persona, which consequently ensured the sanctity of his private life. The opera not only affords an image of tragedy resultant from the lack of persona, but through its relationship to Benjamin Britten, affords an image of the tragedy avoided by the development of such a persona.

Within the Interludes, which separate each of the opera's scenes, Benjamin Britten sonically illustrates that the opera's narrative and structure are dependent upon the attitudes which the audience and characters take toward an essentially ambiguous world. Britten juxtaposes a public musical world, comprised of motifs evocative of Borough-character's attitudes toward an essentially ambiguous and ambivalent musical world, with Grimes's private musical world, which does not act toward this public world. As the opera's Interludes develop this juxtaposition, the audience may hear that Grimes's private reality is tragically fated within the public sphere, as without self-motivated development toward a dominant public object, it becomes musically dismembered from the opera's Interludes. Britten thereby musically illustrates that a subject that fails to take an attitude toward common public objects is destined for tragedy. Furthermore, as the opera's Interludes require their audience's attitudes toward them for their relationship with the opera's drama, Britten musically induces personae for his audience

members, as they are led to join the opera's public world through their attitudes toward the attitudes of the opera's characters; Because this is music, the Interludes cannot appear to the audience until they are made to appear by them.

By focusing my attention upon the structure of the opera's tragic narrative and this narrative's ironic relationship toward the audience and composer, I hope to free *Peter Grimes* from its relegation to a mere object. By understanding that Grimes's tragic lack of a persona is the means toward the audience and composer's construction of their personae, the opera may be understood by the audience to be both the object of common sight and subject to the construction of people's objectifiable attitudes. Under this interactive mode of understanding, *Peter Grimes* needn't be reduced to a mere objective articulation of larger cultural forces or the presumed nature of Britten's private sexuality. Instead, the audience may understand Britten's opera to be an articulation of Britten's attitude toward the objective world, to which members of the public may develop their attitudes. Therefore, the opera induces the audience's attitudes toward the objective world while simultaneously becoming reflective of its audience's prior attitudes toward the objective world. I hope that this introduction of a new way of understanding *Peter Grimes* will force its critical audience to acknowledge that no person can speak for the speechless or mask the maskless without imposing their imagined conditions upon this subject's private reality. By this, I hope that future study toward *Peter Grimes* considers the difference between the public and private realms, which appears both within the opera's narrative and within the opera's relationship toward the audience.

Utilizing this new way of understanding *Peter Grimes*, I propose future study of the "Peter Grimes Archetype." This archetype is the radically lonely character whose failure to construct a public persona leads to their dismemberment from the public sphere as a result of

their inability to either physically substantiate or refute that which is said about them. This is a character, whose private reality, like Peter Grimes, is suspect to the darkness which is projected upon it by members of the public sphere.

This Peter Grimes Archetype can be witnessed within Season 1: Episode 4, “The Girl in the Water,” and Season 2: Episode 3, “The Tale of Nant Gwrtheyrn” of the BBC show, *Hinterland*. In “The Girl in the Water,” the prime murder suspect, Dyfan Richard, is a social outcast, who remains within his home in the train station—building model worlds all alone. Just like the title character of Britten’s *Peter Grimes*, Dyfan Richard is not a member of the small coastal-community’s public sphere. Rather, he watches them, and takes solace in his privately constructed representation of this community. Unlike Britten’s Grimes, Dyfan Richard’s private reality is presented to the audience, and it is presented as a comparable image to the fears of an entirely private individual articulated by Britten’s Borough-public. Likewise, in “The Tale of Nant Gwrtheyrn,” a young boy, Daniel Protheroe becomes publicly suspected of killing a local barrister. Like in *Peter Grimes*, there is no substantive evidence that this character was involved in murder, and the law does not pursue him as a suspect. Like Grimes, Daniel is an entirely private character, rarely physically appearing before members of the public, and always running from them. Also similar to Grimes are Daniel’s lack of certain parentage—we know that he revered the ‘mother’ he had, but she is dead, and that he has been living a shadowy life ever since. Within this episode, evoking a comparable tragic process to *Peter Grimes*, Daniel is suspected by the public sphere of having committed a crime, purely because his entirely private reality fails to illustrate otherwise. The public, in similar tragic fashion to *Peter Grimes*, moves toward Daniel in an attempt to lynch him and rid themselves of the crime they have imaged him

to commit. Both of these *Hinterland* characters exemplify the Peter Grimes archetype, exemplifying the tragedy resultant from an entirely private character's lack of public persona.

The Peter Grimes archetype is also found within the first season of the BBC show, *Broadchurch*. Here, upon finding a young boy from the coastal village, lying dead on the cliffside beach, the local inquiry leads members of the Borough to suspect each other of having committed this murder. Throughout the show, the audience and Borough are led toward falsely inferring each suspect's character from the conditions imagined within their private lives. The character Jack Marshall becomes an articulation of the Peter Grimes archetype, when the media's public narrativization of his past private life leads the Borough-public to march toward his sea-side hut. This hut alludes to *Peter Grimes* through both its comparable sea-side placement, and the old boat standing upright on the property. Having unearthed Jack's prior arrest record for a relationship with a minor, the media and public begin to falsely infer Jack's character by inventing his private life—believing him to be a pedophile interested in young boys. The scope of the public's falsely inferred characterization of Jack through their imagined sight of his private life leads the shopkeeper to—on a foggy night—jump from the same cliff which distinguishes the margin between sea and society. Like Peter Grimes, Jack Marshall is suspected of having murdered the boy because of the private time they spent together, and because of the privacy surrounding his prior charge. Similarly, like Peter Grimes, as the Borough further invents Jack Marshall's character and actions, they dismember him from their body until he can no longer exist as part of them.

Other narratives which parallel the tragic narrative of Peter Grimes, and perhaps utilize the Peter Grimes Archetype are Harlen Coben's *The Stranger*, and Clint Eastwood's adaptation of the true story of *Richard Jewell*. Texts which predate Britten's *Peter Grimes*, but detail a

comparable tragedy include Anton Berg's operatic adaptation of Georg Büchner's unfinished work, *Wozzeck*, and Albert Camus' novel, *L'Étranger* [The Stranger]. I propose utilizing the tragic structure outlined in this thesis as the basis of the Peter Grimes Archetype which might be used to analyse each of these comparable works. I would expect to find that each of these narratives are governed by concern for what Hannah Arendt claims to be the "mass phenomenon of loneliness", where the deprivation of "'objective' relationship[s] to others and of a reality guaranteed through them ... has assumed its most extreme and most antihuman form" (59).

Arendt suggests that this phenomenon is caused through a similar mechanism as that outlined in this thesis, writing,

The reason for this extremity is that mass society ... deprives men not only of their place in the world but of their private home, where they once felt sheltered against the world and where, at any rate, even those excluded from the world could find a substitute in the warmth of the hearth and the limited reality of family life. (59)

If this radical loneliness is at the heart of the tragedy of Peter Grimes and other comparable narratives, then through the development of attitudes toward the artform, we forge for ourselves a persona, guaranteeing our place in the public world while defending our private lives from public invention. Perhaps we, like Britten, might forge our masks through our perception of his maskless protagonist.

Endnotes

¹ David Hume defines the problem of induction, writing, “When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin’d by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination” (quoted in Henderson, “The Problem of Induction”).

² There have been contentions to which extent Vickers’ performance of Grimes varied from Britten’s intended character. Jeannie Williams writes: “Privately, Britten was ‘absolutely incensed’ about Vickers’s portrayal when he saw it in the 1975 Royal Opera House production[.] ... Although Britten felt that Vickers’s fisherman was ‘too mad’ for too much of the piece, so that the character lacked development, it was the musical changes that chiefly upset the composer. A lot of those alterations can be heard on a BBC broadcast tape” (148). Williams yet suggests that Vickers satisfied the essential ambiguity of character required for the performance of Grimes: “Grimes is a creature as private and conflicted as Vickers himself. Vickers as the Parsifal-like innocent fool for his art saw himself as persecuted by the mob of commerce in the opera world, as continually misunderstood as to his motives as poor Grimes” (143).

³ Arendt claims that human emotions such as pain and suffering lose their meaning when made public: “For instance, love, in distinction from friendship, is killed, or rather extinguished, the moment it is displayed in public” (51).

⁴ Ben Pestell notes that the Erinyes (Furies) are guardians of the mind and soul and are preconsciously internalized (321).

⁵ Peter Grimes’s absent musical persona is illustrated in Figures 1, 3, 4, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 16.

⁶ Hans Keller claims that this line exemplifies “simultaneous ardour and dignity” (108).

⁷ “Similar questions of rhythmic presentation can clarify the characters in *Peter Grimes*. Grimes himself is distant from the dance and from tunefulness, more at home in recitative and a declamatory approach to words, especially when singing alone. The everyday life of the Borough characters, by contrast, is largely melodious, metric, and repetitive. This would suggest dance rhythm as the space for normative movement, indeed for normalcy: the dance as an expressive form undertaken by people in cooperation who are able to coordinate themselves to an exterior impulse, individuals who feel no compulsion, as the saying goes, to march to a different drummer” (Ashby 72).

⁸ Despite the comparable danger, unlike Grimes, who retreats toward the private sphere, Britten continued composing and presenting a public image. Public tragedy is only realized when the actor stops acting.

⁹ A musical ‘subject’ is the main melodic idea contained within the exposition of a fugue.

¹⁰ A musical 'countersubject' is a second subject related to the dominant iteration of the original subject. In a fugue, the subject is followed by a dominant iteration which is often called the answer. A counterpoint usually accompanies this answer in another voice. If this counterpoint continues throughout the fugue, it is called a countersubject.

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