# Horatio Parker's Oratorios

## A Measure of the Changing *Genre* at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

William Kearns

HORATIO PARKER'S OBITUARIES, published in various newspapers and periodicals throughout the country following his death December 18, 1919, at the age of 56, profile a composite musical personality—that of a leading music educator, church musician, and a somewhat recondite but high-minded composer who had left an indelible imprint upon American music.[1] However, such are the vagaries of fashion that few musicians today have heard more than the name of Parker and the fact that he taught Charles Ives. Some few know his early oratorio *Hora Novissima* (1893) and, perhaps, his *Northern Ballad*, a few anthems, songs, and piano pieces. Hardly any American music historians see Parker as contributing to American music *per se*. Instead they blame him for fostering a Germanic style that impeded the growth of an indigenous national music.[2] As an exception, Joseph Mussulmann does regard Parker as proponent of a cosmopolitan nationalism: "a temperate nationalism balanced by an objective, discriminating cosmopolitanism."[3] A temperate approach to musical nationalism may be what Parker had in mind when, at the premiere of *Fairyland* in Los Angeles July 1, 1915, the composer commented that his opera was as "cheerful, buoyant, and confident as the American character."[4]

Even so, Parker's true achievement as the foremost American choral composer of his generation was better understood by the writer for *The Christian Science Monitor* who considered his oratorios worthy of comparison with those of Handel and Mendelssohn.[5] Echoing this opinion, Robert Stevenson gave a more realistic appraisal in his discussion of Parker's oratorios in the final chapter of his *Protestant Church Music in America*.[6] Here Stevenson treated Parker both as important in his own right and as *the* pivotal composer between the older, nineteenth-century generation (Dudley Buck and J. C. D. Parker) and the twentieth-century group (Charles Ives, David Stanley Smith, Roger Sessions) who were Parker's students. Stevenson appears to be the only major American music historian who has looked with any degree of care at the oratorios of Horatio Parker beyond *Hora Novissima*. He concluded: "Parts of [*The Legend of Saint Christopher*, 1898, and *Morven and the Grail*, 1915] equal the best in *Hora Novissima*."[7] These three oratorios are the capstones of Parker's career and are the three largest choral works he wrote. The first and last are separated by a period of 22 years, and each marks a different phase, not only in the composer's own stylistic development, but also that of oratorio itself as a medium.

*Hora Novissima* was Parker's sovereign achievement as a young organist-choirmaster-composer in New York City from 1885 to 1893. Its text, based on a section of a poem of some 3000 lines, *De Contemptu Mundi*, written about 1140 by Bernard de Morlaix, is contemplative. One of Parker's models may have been Antonin Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*,

[1] The Music Library at Yale University houses a file of over fifty obituaries (Adrienne Nesnow, *Horatio Parker Papers*, Yale University Music Library Archival Collection, 1981, IV C).

[2] Joseph Machlis, typically voicing this theme in his *Introduction to Contemporary Music* (New York: Norton, 1961; 2nd edition, 1979), holds Parker responsible for the "German influence" at Yale (1st ed., 512). Parker is listed among the "Boston or New England group" who "were German colonists. . . . Their music, weakened by their genteel outlook on art and life, bore no vital relationship to their milieu" (2nd ed., 330).

[3] *Music in the Cultured Generation* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 32.

[4] Clipping from *Los Angeles Daily Times*, July 1, 1915, *Horatio Parker Papers*, IV E.

[5] Clipping dated December 30, 1919, *Horatio Parker Papers*, IV C.

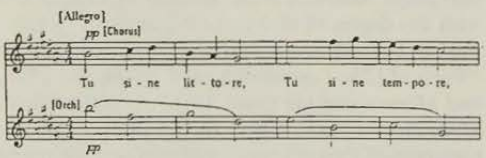
[6] (New York: Norton, 1966), 115–120.

[7] *Ibid.*, 117.

composed in 1876–1877—a work that was popular at the English choral festivals during the 1880's and is similar to *Hora Novissima* not only in its symphonic style but also in its arrangement of self-contained solos, quartets, and choruses.[8] Dvořák's fondness for motivic development is paralleled in Parker's *Hora Novissima*; and indeed one observer of the time called the latter a "choral symphony."[9] Such a description can be justified on several grounds. The placement of the larger choral sections, the interspersing of the vocal solos and quartet, and the integration of the entire work by cyclic treatment of thematic material do give the impression of symphonic organization.[10]

In addition, *Hora Novissima* is a remarkably unified work. A rhythmic pattern, consisting of short notes flanked by those of longer value and marked by either a stressed or agogic accent at midpoint, characterizes most of its themes; and descending, sometimes ascending, fourths, shape many of their contours. Example 1 illustrates the recurring rhythmic pattern (choral theme of the closing chorus in Part I) and the preference for fourths (descending line of the orchestra and in the ascending sequence of the chorus). These rhythmic and intervallic patterns pervade all eleven movements of the work.[11]

Example 1. "Tu sine littore," *Hora Novissima*, p. 57, mm. 7–10.




[8] Alec Robertson (*Dvořák* [New York: Collier Books, 1962]) mentions London performances of Dvořák's *Stabat Mater* in 1883 (p. 60) and 1884 (p. 62). He also notes performances at Worcester, 1885 (p. 64), and Cambridge, 1891 (p. 71).

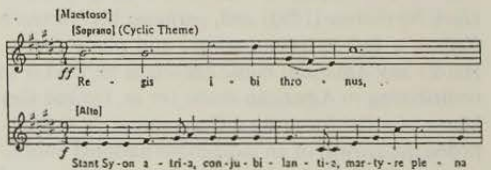
[9] Clipping from the *Concert-Goer*, n. d., "Horatio Parker," clipping file, Music Division, New York Public Library.

[10] Three elaborate choruses (I, IV, VI) serve as an over-arching exposition, development, and recapitulation for Part I. Two other complex choral movements constitute a scherzo (VIII) and finale (XI), and the unaccompanied chorus (X) is a slow movement—thus providing an analog for the organization of a typically romantic symphony. The solos, one for each member of the quartet, are evenly distributed—those for bass and soprano occur in Part I, and for tenor and alto, in Part II. The quartet (II) and the unaccompanied chorus (X) are restrained and in chiastic fashion balance each other (second and penultimate movements of the oratorio).

[11] References are to the vocal score of *Hora Novissima* (London and New York: Novello, Ewer, and Co., 1893). The sole commercial recording available in 1988 was made by the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, William Strickland, conductor (American Recording Society, ARS335 [1953]; reissued on Desto, D ST6413 [1965]).

Parker's gift for building intricate and exciting choral movements greatly impressed his contemporaries in both England and America. Although not the largest of the six choruses in *Hora Novissima*, the eight-part chorus "Stant Syon atria" (VIII) can serve as a model of Parker's choral writing—which nearly always tends toward ever grander and more intricate motivic treatment as his choruses unfold. Only four minutes long, it comes late in the oratorio between the harmonically sumptuous tenor aria "Urbs Syon aurea" and the penultimate, more austere unaccompanied chorus "Urbs Syon unica." The ternary meter and rapid tempo (Allegro molto) caused critic Philip Hale to describe the chorus as "waltzing in the holy city,"[12] and the brief orchestral introduction reminds one of curtain-raising music during which participants scurry to their places. A variant of the scherzo-like principal motive in the alto voice and one of the oratorio's most important cyclic themes in the soprano voice can be seen in Example 2.

Example 2. "Stant Syon Atria," *Hora Novissima*, p. 95, mm. 1–2.




The movement divides into two slightly unequal halves: the longer first half (2'20") concludes with the scherzo motive counterpointed by the cyclic theme (Example 2); the second half (1'40") ends with these two themes sounding simultaneously, now in a very expansive 12/4 meter. Each theme affirms E major as the principal key. Preceding each concluding section, the principal motive, its variants, and its countermotives weave a complex fabric. During all the modulating polyphony and antiphony, the essential rhythmic pattern of the scherzo motive is never absent. The structure of this movement can be seen in the following outline (with the Latin text is given its paraphrase by Parker's mother, Isabella

[12] Clipping from *Boston Journal*, n.d., Allen A. Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

Jennings Parker; transient modulations are enclosed in parentheses):

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Stant syon atria | There stand those halls on high, |
| 2. con jubilantia, | There sound the songs of joy |
| 3. Martyre plena | In noblest measure. |
| 4. Cive micantia, | There are the martyrs bright |
| 5. Principe stantia, | In heaven's o'erflowing light— |
| 6. Luce serena; | The Lord's own treasure. |
| 7. Est ibi pascua | In pastures fresh and green |
| 8. Mitibus afflua, | The white-robed saints are seen, |
| 9. Praestita sanctis; | Forever resting; |
| 10. Regis ibi thronus, | The kingly throne is near, |
| 11. Agminis et sonus | And joyful shouts we hear, |
| 12. Est epulantis. | Of many feasting. |

*First part:*

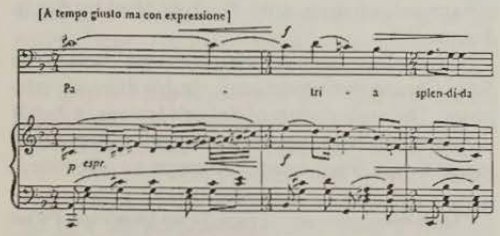
| | | |
|---|---|---|
| principal motive | lines 1–6 | E major-(C♯ minor)-V of E major |
| | lines 7–9 | E major-(C♯ minor)-V of F♯ minor |
| | lines 1–3, 7–9 | (F♯ minor)-modulatory-V of C♯ minor |
| + cyclic theme | lines 1–3, 9–12 | E major |

*Second part:*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| principal motive | lines 9–12 | (C major)-modulatory |
| | lines 1–3 | V of E major |
| + cyclic theme | lines 9–12 | E major |

The meter of the text inspired Parker to construct themes with matching rhythmic structure. Mercifully, however, he never falls victim to the monotonous phrasing that the lines imply. To expand phrases he resorts to sequences, repeats, and fugal inserts in the choruses. The arias parlay even more flexible treatment. In the middle section of the bass aria "Spe modo vivitur" Parker imaginatively expands what would have been normal two-measure phrase patterns in triple meter (3/4) into seven-beat phrases (alternating 4/4 and 3/4) and concludes the first half of the middle section with an eleven-beat phrase (Example 3). At the end of the middle section

Example 3. Excerpt from bass aria, *Hora Novissima*, p. 31, mm. 9–11.




he enlarges this eleven-beat phrase even further to eighteen beats in three 3/2 measures.

Example 3 also illustrates Parker's melodic and harmonic parries at this early point in his career. The bass solo debouches on F in the F-major middle section (the flanking sections of the aria are in D minor). The vocal line is embellished by the rising, chromatically inflected orchestral line in D major in the first measure, which doubles the vocal line in the second measure but continues its embellishment with the addition of appoggiaturas and escaped tones. Throughout his career Parker resolutely sought to avoid harmonic clichés. For another example, in the chorus "Stant syon atria" outlined above, he prefaced cyclic theme and return to E major with a sizable area on the dominant of C-sharp minor.

When *Hora Novissima*, with is monumental yet reverent choruses and its arias—some warm and enticing, others spirited and martial—reached England in 1899, it caused a minor sensation. Following its performance at the Three Choirs Festival in Worcester, English critic Vernon Blackborn enthused:

> [*Hora Novissima*] has the best originality in the world, that of being alive in itself, of possessing liberality, freedom, extraordinary openness of sentiment. I do not know where else to look in quite recent music for these qualities.[13]

For his next oratorio, Parker turned from a contemplative subject treated sectionally to one that he saw as dramatic, pictorial, and therefore demanding an entirely different approach. *The Legend of Saint Christopher*—commissioned by the Oratorio Society of New York—was premiered under the direction of Parker's friend, Frank Damrosch, in Carnegie Hall on April 15, 1898 (nearly five years after the premiere of *Hora Novissima*). By then, Parker had settled into the professorship to which Yale had appointed him in the spring of 1894, and now ranked as one of the country's leading composers and music educators. The Saint Christopher of legend was a third-century giant who earned his name, meaning "Christ-bearer," after bearing the Christ child across a swollen river. The subject therefore offered Parker the opportunity to compose a dramatic oratorio—a type that was even more popular in the nineteenth century than an oratorio setting a meditative text.[14] In 1889 Parker's teacher at the

[13] Clipping from *Pall Mall Gazette*, *ca.* Sept. 1899, Allen A. Brown Collection, Boston Public Library.

[14] Although Schütz and Bach (with their poignant settings of the Passion) and Kuhnau and Handel (with their panoramic treatment of the Old Testament) had provided models for later settings of Biblical stories, Mendelssohn and Liszt set the stage for the late nineteenth-century phase of the oratorio centered in England and the United States.

Hochschule für Musik in Munich, Joseph Rheinberger (1839–1901), had written a legend *Christophorus*, Op. 120, for soli, chorus, and orchestra on the same subject. To meet this challenge, Parker had his mother, Isabella Jennings Parker, provide him with a libretto varying from dialogue to both strict and free verse that was far larger and more colorful than the one set by Rheinberger.

Parker would need flexibility of poetic meter—for much of *Saint Christopher* is radically different in musical structure from that of *Hora Novissima*. Although the composer retained in some places the architectonic designs which had been so admired in his earlier oratorio,[15] he now enthusiastically embraced a more flowing dramatic style, intensified his chromatic harmony, and incorporated leading motives. He also relied more on the orchestra, incorporating motivic material in the numerous instrumental interludes.

Although Stevenson noted that Parker may have had some misgivings about the direction in which he was turning when calling each of the sections of *Saint Christopher* "Acts," the composer was undoubtedly pleased with the work as a whole.[16] During the composition of *Saint Christopher*, he wrote to conductor Theodore Thomas:

> I have finished about two-fifths of my new score and am anxious to have you look at it if you will. The last part is much the best. . . . I feel sure that it will interest you as it is more sophisticated and more skillfully made than *Hora Novissima*, besides being much broader in scope and execution.[17]

Among innovative features of *Saint Christopher*, the chief is certainly the presence of leading motives. Although Parker had used recurring themes in his earlier cantatas, and *Hora Novissima* is unified by cyclic themes, nothing in his earlier works suggests the skill and, in places, pervasiveness with which leitmotivs were now introduced. The principals all have characteristic motives, and some have more than one. For example, Offerus is served mainly by three motives: "fanfare," from his association in Act I with the King; "search," a chromatically inflected descending sequence indicative of his search for the most powerful master to serve; and "obeisance," an upward jump of a seventh or an octave followed by a poignant, descending line associated with his conversion.[18]

Example 4 shows how Parker used all three Offerus motives to underlay the scene in Act II in which Offerus breaks away from Satan to search for the Lord.[19] The scene opens quietly, with the orchestra playing the search theme. The opening in C minor is well disguised with augmented triads as well as diminished intervals, all treated as appoggiatura chords. The orchestra closes the section quietly on the dominant of G, in preparation for Offerus's first entry. Mention of "Him, the Highest" is supported by the fanfare motive and a move to B♭ major, but the orchestra then pushes on to a plagal cadence in F major before modulating back to G major for Offerus's second entry. We now hear the obeisance motive, every other note of the descending scale an exquisite appoggiatura as Offerus sings glowingly of his search for the Lord. The first phrase veers to A minor, the second makes a striking dip into A♭ major, and the remainder of the passage is a leisurely return to G major. Next, the orchestra interjects a radiant version of the fanfare motive, carrying it from G to B major, after which the obeisance motive is added as a counterpoint. Although the section is basically G major, the pervasive chromatic harmony and the numerous transient modulations make it fittingly express Offerus's restless search.

Not all Parker's critics were ready to endorse what they considered to be his capitulation to post-Wagnerian modernity. Louis Charles Elson, who from 1888 had been critic for the Boston *Daily Advertiser*, even went so far as to call Parker's new style overbearing, noting "sections where modulations pursue each other into a tonal jungle, where enharmonic changes grow thick as blackberries in August."[20]

Nonetheless, even the self-contained choruses in *Saint Christopher* served recognizable dramatic purposes. The male chorus of Satan's legions in Act II is continually interrupted by women's voices uttering, at first, a fragmentary "Asperges me, Domine,"

[15] Parker kept a continuous musical flow from one chorus or aria to the next. However, more traditional sectional divisions are found in the processional scene of Act I (which is divided into men's, maidens', and soldiers' choruses) and the Queen's aria in the same act; also in the Hermit's aria from Act III.

[16] Stevenson, 117–118.

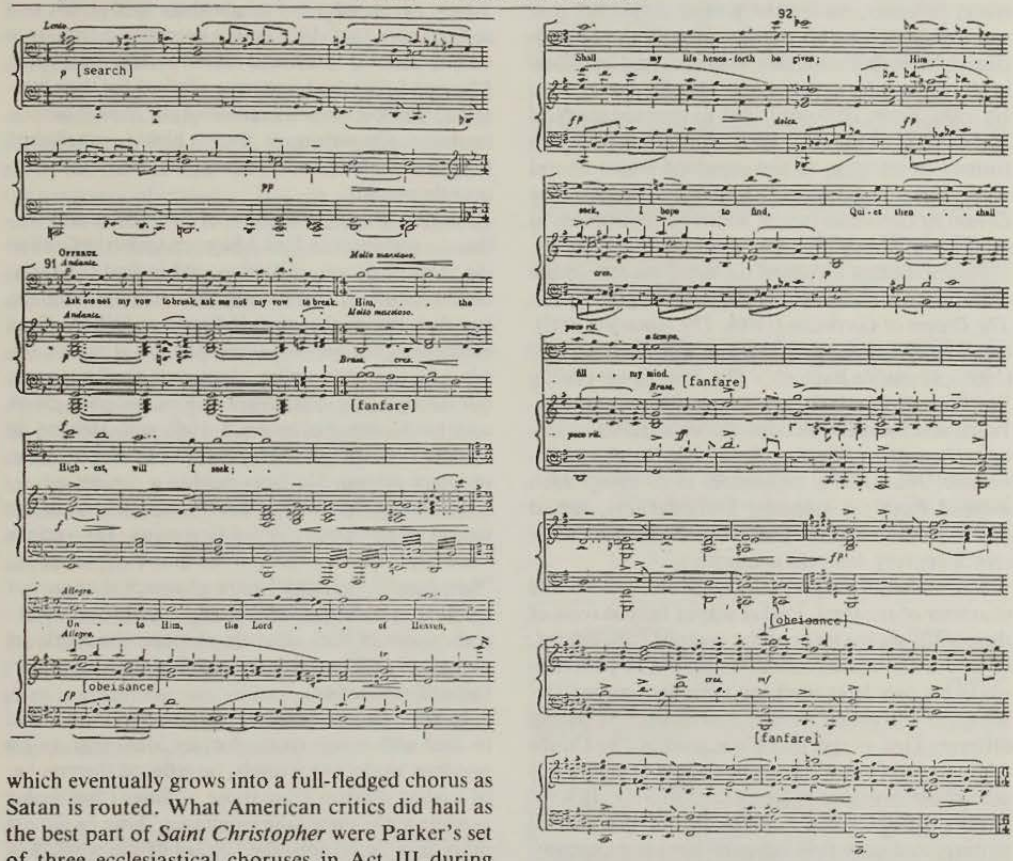
[17] Letter from Horatio Parker to Theodore Thomas, July 25, 1897, Theodore Thomas Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago.

[18] These associations are my own. To my knowledge, Parker made no attempt to equate leading motives with specific ideas or characters in *Saint Christopher*—as he later did for his opera *Mona*.

[19] Horatio Parker, *The Legend of Saint Christopher*, vocal score (London and New York: Novello, Ewer, and Co., 1898).

[20] Unidentified clipping, *Horatio Parker Papers*, IV E 3.

Example 4. Excerpt from Act III, *Saint Christopher*, p. 90, m. 23–p. 92, m. 21.




which eventually grows into a full-fledged chorus as Satan is routed. What American critics did hail as the best part of *Saint Christopher* were Parker's set of three ecclesiastical choruses in Act III during which Offerus receives instruction in the lessons of the church. "Gloria in Excelsis Deo" is festive, employing incisive rhythms and florid orchestration; "Agnus Dei" is placid, with a homophonic choral style; and "Quoniam, Tu solus sanctus" is an imposing fugue. The fugue subject—which was used as the accompaniment figure in the previous "Gloria"—is inverted and augmented with skill reminiscent of the fugal craft displayed in *Hora Novissima*. (It was this fugue that "caught the fancy of the house" at the Carnegie Hall premiere and interrupted the performance of the work long enough for Parker "to bow his acknowledgements from a first tier box."[21])

Although destined never to win the popularity of *Hora Novissima*, *Saint Christopher* is one of Parker's most imaginative compositions. All the more remarkable is its anticipations of certain novel techniques that three years later Edward Elgar was to use in his landmark oratorio, *The Dream of Gerontius* (Birmingham Festival, October 3, 1900).

Following *Saint Christopher*, Parker wrote an unaccompanied, eight-part motet awarded first prize by the New York Musical Art Society, *Adstant Angelorum Chori* (1899). In 1900 he conducted his cantata *A Wanderer's Psalm* at the Hereford Festival. Two years later his rhapsody for chorus, soli, and orchestra that had won the Paderewski Fund award in 1901 was the novelty at the Norwich Festival. In his ballad for chorus and orchestra, *King Gorm the Grim* (1907), he anticipated the style of his $10,000 prize operas: *Mona*, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera March 14, 1912, and *Fairyland*, premiered at Los Angeles July 1, 1915.

[21] *Musical Courier*, XXXVI (April 20, 1898), 12.

The composer's interest in choral music did not wane, however, during the period 1899–1902 that was dominated by his participation in the English choral festivals,[22] and that was climaxed by Cambridge University's award of a Mus.D. degree June 10, 1902. From 1903 until 1913 he directed the New Haven Choral Society, an organization that performed in addition to the standard major choral works his own oratorios and even Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (about which he commented in his diary on March 19, 1908, "good performance"[23]).

During the first decade of the twentieth century the oratorio itself underwent profound changes. Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900), *The Apostles* (1903), and *The Kingdom* (1906); Delius's *A Mass of Life* (1906); Granville Bantock's *The Time Spirit* (1902), *Sea Wanderers* (1906), and *Omar Khayyám* (1906–1909); and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's Hiawatha trilogy (*Hiawatha's Wedding-Feast*, *The Death of Minnehaha*, *Hiawatha's Departure*, 1898–1900); each escaped from the standard liturgical text, sacred poem, or dramatic Biblical scene favored by nineteenth-century oratorio composers.

The musical drapery changed along with the character of the texts. Parker stayed fully abreast of these shifts during his constant summer trips abroad. (Without attempting slavish imitation, he paid tribute in his own later works to both Strauss and Debussy.[24]) Obviously he was also impressed by the different kind of text that Elgar used in *The Dream of Gerontius* (which Parker had heard as early as its second performance in Düsseldorf in May, 1902[25]). Elgar's use of leading motives, flexibility in choral writing, and colorful orchestration surely encouraged him to continue in the pathways already marked out for himself in *Saint Christopher*.

The most immediate congener for his third and last oratorio, *Morven and the Grail*, was, however, Parker's own opera *Mona*, the librettist for which was Brian Hooker (1880–1946), who collaborated with the composer in nearly all of his late major works. A Yale graduate who had taught there 1905–1909, and at Columbia 1915–1918 before becoming a free-lance writer, Hooker produced librettos for the operas *Mona* and *Fairyland* that were admired for their literary quality but severely criticized for their dramatic inertness. His writing is always highly embellished but, in *Fairyland* and *Morven*, his meaning is frequently opaque.

At first glance, the story of *Morven* recalls Arthurian romance. In Part I Morven seeks the Grail in the pleasure droves of Avalon, and in Part II he continues his quest, first among the heroes of Valhalla and then among the saints in Paradise. Still the Grail eludes him, but Morven eventually sees it in Part III, when he comes to realize "how man shall not cease but through light and darkness, love and pain, death and birth, live on between Hell and Heaven in wonder everlasting."[26] Morven, like Gerontius, is an ordinary person. He faces neither a distinct adversary, such as the Satan of *Saint Christopher*, nor the terrors of purgatory, as did Gerontius. The various "heavens" that he visits in his quest—"pleasure," "heroism," "paradise"—are all accepted as part of the human condition. However, they are inadequate realizations of life's ultimate purpose: the continual process of self-renewal, the striving for a more perfect self-realization.

In *Morven* it is therefore obvious that Parker had to deal with much more abstract ideas than in his previous works. As a result, he reduced the number of leading motives from those of *Saint Christopher* —while at the same time integrating those he did use more completely into the texture of the work. For another difference, sections of *Morven* are more self-contained than those of *Saint Christopher*. Arias such as the "Song of Sigurd" and "Hymn of Saint Cecilia" can stand by themselves. (Even in these, however, can be found tenuous connections, sometimes as small as a single note, to other numbers of the whole work.) Gone are the large fugues and a cappella choruses of the previous oratorios. Instead, the solo quartet, a second quartet group acting as the Angels of the Grail, and the chorus frequently are interspersed with the ariosos of Morven. In trying to capture the philosophical intention of the text, Parker used more flexible forms to create a more sophisticated structure for *Morven* than that of *Saint Christopher*. The interaction of solo, choral, and

[22] For a detailed account of Parker's participation, see my article "Horatio Parker and the English Choral Societies," *American Music*, IV/1 (Spring 1986), 20–33.

[23] *Horatio Parker Papers*, V A.

[24] In his public statements about these composers (see Horatio Parker, "Concerning Contemporary Music," *The North American Review*, 191/4 [April, 1910], 517–526), Parker expressed a preference for Strauss, "the most consummate master of musical expression the world has ever seen," to the music of Debussy, "a definite negation of tonality . . . the continual evasion of the obvious." Nevertheless, Parker used many of Debussy's tonally evasive harmonies in his last decade of composition.

[25] *Horatio Parker Papers*, V A.

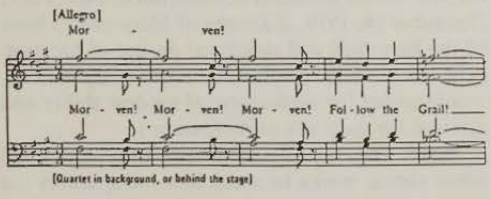
[26] *Morven and the Grail*, vocal score (New York: G. Schirmer, 1915), vii. The references which follow are to this score.

orchestral material found in *Morven* shows not only that Parker kept abreast of contemporaneous choral techniques but also that he had profited from essaying grand opera.

In *Morven*, Parker's consistant growth as a master of twentieth-century harmony reveals itself in the melodies generated from it. As early as *Hora Novissima*, Parker had asserted his belief in harmony as the generator of melody: "It is not enough that harmony be good. . . . It must be beautiful. When to this is added broad melody—appealing while neither eccentric nor monotonous—success is sure."[27] From the chromatically embellished but sometimes conventional harmony of *Hora Novissima*, Parker had moved to increasingly frequent and unexpected modulations in *Saint Christopher*. The harmony of *Morven*, however, gets very close to that of *Mona*, his most progressive major work. In these two last-named works are found the chromatic lines, nebulous tonal areas, modality, juxtaposition of chords unrelated in the usual tonal sense, and even moments of bi-tonality that are characteristic of Parker's most advanced work.

Consider Example 5, the motive of the Grail, which is sung throughout the oratorio and serves to draw Morven away from various distractions. The F♯ minor tonality of the opening three measures is given a wrenching twist to B♭ in the fourth measure.

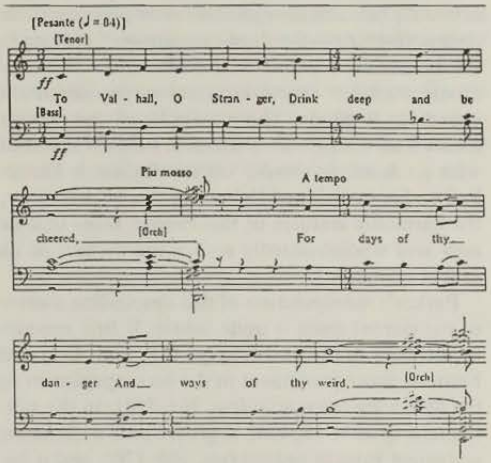
Example 5. Grail Motive, *Morven*, p. 12, mm. 1–5.




Example 6, "Heroes in Valhalla," is a robust male chorus not unlike many written by Parker throughout his career. Its newness, however, is apparent, not so much in its metrical flexibility as in bitonal orchestral interjections at the end of each phrase. The opening phrase wanders from C major to the submediant triad; but the D major orchestral cadence which punctuates the phrase belongs to another tonal realm. The second phrase modulates from C to G, but the orchestra interjects a cadence in E major.

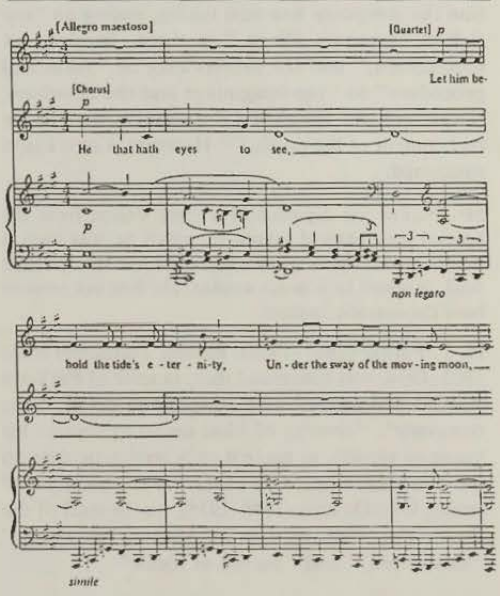
[27] Unidentified clipping (*ca.* 1893), *Horatio Parker Papers*.

Example 6. Excerpt, "Heroes in Valhalla," *Morven*, p. 69, m. 13–p. 70, m. 6.




In Example 7—an excerpt taken from the final chorus, "On Earth"—the motive of the eternal quest (the subject which ends the oratorio) shows

Example 7. Excerpt, "On Earth," *Morven*, p. 181, m. 8–p. 182, m. 5.




Parker in his most advanced phase of harmonic-melodic writing. After A major, the C♯ seventh chord emerges in the second measure through a cloud of intense appoggiatura activity in the inner lines and suggests a transient modulation to F♯. The

bass does move to F♯; however, the melody drops not to C♯ but to D instead. The inner parts continue their active role in the third measure and, moving in thirds, outline a whole tone scale on C. This harmonic complex serves as a substitute dominant chord for B minor. The remainder of the excerpt shows a tenuous B minor tonality, modally inflected with an A minor seventh chord. Although Parker had earlier questioned Debussy's "new" harmony, the harmonic features of this excerpt show that he now was wholeheartedly embracing certain of its salient novelties.

Parker's manipulation of this descending motive of the eternal quest is quite subtle. It first appears incidentally in the alto solo (p. 158, mm. 1–2) and becomes more prominent in the accompaniment to the following tenor solo (pp. 161–162). In the subsequent quartet section, it grows into a climactic statement sung in unison (pp. 169–170), and it becomes the underlying structure of the final chorus (beginning p. 181). Indeed, this motive, like "a ripple arose and ran Spreading eternally."[28]

Among the critics of Parker's day, only Philip Hale (1854–1934) fully sympathized with the direction the composer was now taking, noting an "enriched harmonic idiom," a "new freedom of modulation," and the subservience of "form and procedure" to "the imaginings and the emotions, the picture, the vision and the impulse that are the real content of the music."[29] However, Louis Elson cautioned:

> Mr. Parker has departed in a great degree from the learned ecclesiastical school of which he was such a master, and is entering more and more into the dramatic field, in which he is much weaker. He does not seem to have the operatic instinct.

H. T. Parker (1867–1934), Boston *Transcript* critic 1905–1934, was concerned that, in spite of Parker's "artful procedure" and "ingenious detail," the composer's "severity of ideal seems to deprive his music of vitality, to make it only semi-articulate on the emotional side." One of the newer generation of critics, Olin Downes (1886–1935), on the staff of the Boston *Post* 1906–1924, called *Morven* "mawkish," "uninspired," and "barren of ideas."

This diversity of critical opinion about Parker's music can be found throughout his career, for although he often appeared to conform to the expectations of his day, he apparently chafed at being labelled the country's "ecclesiastical" composer. Perhaps his opera *Fairyland* reconciled most completely his divergent interests in choral music on one hand and dramatic music on the other. Given an elaborate production at Los Angeles in July, 1915, only a few months after the premiere of *Morven*, *Fairyland* can truly be called a choral opera—containing as it does no fewer than fifteen choruses varying from peasant ensembles to religious processions. Amy Beach's enthusiasm for the work is evident in her comment to the press following the opening night performance: "I know of no opera wherein this semi-religious, semi-dramatic and always entrancingly beautiful choral style is maintained for so long a period and kept on so high a level."[30]

Parker wrote but one more extended choral work, *The Dream of Mary*, a commission from the Litchfield Country Choral Union of Norfolk, Connecticut, for its 1918 festival. Called a "morality," the work was staged as a series of tableaux depicting the dream in which the Virgin Mother foresees the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Parker used a variety of musical resources: congregational hymns, solos, ensembles, choral sections, melodramatic recitations, and orchestral interludes. Written the year before his death at Cedarhurst, New York, December 18, 1919, *A Dream of Mary* vaunts none of the harmonic and structural daring of *Morven*. (The work, unlike most of his major compositions, was intended for performers of modest ability and allowed for audience participation.)

Parker wrote a sufficient number of oratorios and other choral works to make him indisputably the chief American writer of choral music in his time. Stevenson's treatment of him as the principal transitional figure in American church music between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is certainly correct, for Parker drew on the styles of each era as his career unfolded.

Why is his music neglected today? Several reasons can be given. The first is musical: although Parker's compositional style evolved continuously, the path he chose, however interesting in itself, became a

[28] Libretto, *Morven and the Grail*, vi.

[29] This and following quotations from critics concerning the Handel and Haydn Society performance of *Morven*, April 13, 1915, are taken from Boston newspaper clippings, *Horatio Parker Papers*, IV E 4.

[30] Clipping from the *Los Angeles Daily Times*, July 2, 1915, *Horatio Parker Papers*, IV E 4.

byway in twentieth-century musical history. The second reason is cultural, for the kind of American musical activity he best represented was church-oriented and choral-dominated, and after World War I, no composer could sustain a major career on that base alone. For still another important reason, his oratorios (and operas) are now prohibitively expensive to produce in a truly professional manner. Nevertheless, Parker's oratorios may yet arise Phoenix-like from the dust in an age as eclectic as ours. With many of our composers and listeners showing a stronger interest in musical styles and cultural ideas of the past, conductors of Robert Shaw's genius may be able to obtain the necessary performance subsidies to mount such gems as Parker's works and Elgar's three major oratorios.