Review Article
Elgar Studies

In 'Mysterious Circumstances', a wry and macabre article published in the *New Yorker*, David Gann investigates the unusual career and curious death of Richard Lancelyn Green, described as the 'world's foremost expert on Sherlock Holmes'. Along the way, Gann illuminates the insular world of those enthusiasts who research the life and works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his famous fictional detective. To those readers whose interest in Sherlock Holmes since adolescence has been intermittent at best, it comes as a surprise to learn that not only is there a Sherlock Holmes Society, but that within it a group of hard-core fans, known as 'Sherlockians', prefer to believe that Holmes enjoyed an ontological career, so to speak, as a real sleuth prowling the dank alleys of Victorian London. Gann notes that the more sober and orthodox scholars of Conan Doyle, referred to as 'Doyleans', prefer to distance themselves from the unfettered 'Sherlockians'. And who can blame them? Especially since members of the Sherlock Holmes Society have attended functions dressed 'in period costumes – in high-waisted trousers and top hats'.[1]

The members of the Elgar Society, a dignified and effective organization devoted to the propagation of Elgar's music, have never to my knowledge attended meetings decked out in plus-fours, bustles or gaiters.[2] There is, however, a subgroup of authors who write obsessively about Elgar in a manner that is uncomfortably reminiscent of the zeal evinced by the 'Sherlockians' – with one crucial difference: while the 'Sherlockians' treat a fictional character as if he were real, the tendency of 'Elgarians' is to treat a real person as a fiction. As a result, the music and life of a great composer – an emotionally volatile autodidact who for 20 years wrought a series of imperishable scores – has become so encrusted with legend, evasion and wild speculation that it can be difficult for disinterested musicologists to distinguish fact from conjecture. The Elgarians – used from henceforth without ironic quotation marks and with exasperated affection – have, for all their quibbles over biographical details, through an unspoken but general consensus created a reductive cultural construct that they call 'Edward Elgar', whose behaviour is only tangentially related to that of any actual person.

With the possible exceptions of Britten and Stravinsky, few composers have had their lives as exhaustingly documented as Elgar. Indeed, in the volumes under review here, one finds extensive articles on such subjects as Elgar's objections to the design of Elisabeth Scott's design for the Memorial Theatre in Stratford; Elgar's short acquaintance with the baritone Charles Mott; and Elgar's indignation over being asked to contribute a subscription to Queen Mary's elaborate doll house. Such was the composer's charisma that people rushed to report his actions in letters, in diaries and in the press. And indeed, not even

[1] David Gann, 'Mysterious Circumstances', *The New Yorker* 80/39 (13 Dec. 2004): 61–2.

[2] In the spirit of 'full disclosure', I must mention that I currently hold membership in the Elgar Society.

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Cosima Wagner was more devoted to recording her husband's every mood than was Alice Elgar.

Many Elgarians have heavily relied, at times uncritically, upon the diaries kept by Lady Elgar, who was scarcely an objective observer. Her observations, written down in what Americans call an appointment calendar, are often surprisingly detailed, given the lack of space. Certain of her entries are terse and inexplicable, however, embedded in a personal context now irrecoverable. While quick to scour the diaries for evidence to support their theories, the Elgarians have uniformly soft-pedalled uncomfortable aspects of Lady Elgar's daily reports, including her husband's invariably moody, sometimes selfish and often tiresome behaviour: how often she notes that her dear 'Edu' was 'cross'.[3] Elgar knew that his wife kept a diary, and even made notations in the volumes himself. Certain of his wife's entries must have made for melancholy reading if the composer dipped into the diaries after her death in 1920. And, yet, given the opportunity to destroy this often inadvertently unflattering portrayal of his domestic behaviour, Elgar allowed these diaries to survive virtually intact – there are very few excisions, and it is not clear who may have removed the pages. (After Lady Elgar's passing, the family tradition of diary-keeping was upheld by her daughter Carice, whose dry record of daily events usually centres on animal husbandry – her spouse was, after all, a farmer – and rarely mentions her father.)

In return for her devotion, Lady Elgar has become the psychological dumping ground for those of the Elgarians who, seeking to absolve their hero of such patently undesirable traits as snobbishness and social climbing, displace them entirely onto his wife. In fact, she may well have had a restraining influence on her husband in this regard, for Elgar's narcissistic need to accumulate honours burned with a far more embarrassing brightness after her death than before. That Alice Elgar could be precious and maddeningly conventional stands without question, but she also had the courage and unbending resolve to endure the daily cruelties of an unstable husband as she helped him to realize his staggering potential.

Furthermore, curious lacunae have persisted in Elgar studies around important figures in the composer's circle whose lives do not fit an accepted pattern. Frank Schuster has barely been investigated by Elgarians, despite Siegfried Sassoon's apt observation that Schuster's 'hero-worship of Elgar was (justifiably) the most important achievement of his career, because he really did help Elgar toward success and recognition'.[4] Schuster's status as a denizen of the salons of both Paris and London, as well as his remarkably open homosexuality, has made him virtually radioactive to the Elgarian camp. In his singularly unenlightening biography of Alice Elgar, Percy Young even made the wholly unsubstantiated claim that Lady Elgar disliked Schuster, when ample evidence from a variety of primary sources affirms that the reverse was true. In his latest biography of Elgar, the usually even-handed Michael Kennedy goes to great lengths to downplay Schuster's crucial role in Elgar's career. Also absent from the researches of Elgarians is the name of Trevor Osmond Williams, the handsome bachelor executive dispatched by the canny Fred Gaisburg of the Gramophone

[3] A cursory glace at Alice Elgar's diaries renders the testimony of Mrs Richard Powell ('Dorabella' of the 'Enigma' Variations) that 'no mention was ever made in a diary of anything disagreeable or vexing' as patently absurd. See Mrs Richard Powell, *Edward Elgar: Memories of a Variation*, 3rd ed. (London: Methuen, 1949): 64.

[4] Siegfried Sassoon, *Diaries 1920–1922*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Faber and Faber, 1981): 293.

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Company to deal with the elderly Elgar's querulous demands. A close friendship developed between Elgar and Osmond Williams, whose sudden death caused the composer acute grief. Only cursory coverage is offered by Michael De-La-Noy in his revisionist biography of 1983.

Unlike the sharp division between 'Sherlockians' and 'Doyleans', clear lines of demarcation between enthusiastic speculating hero worshippers and trained research scholars have, until recently, been unfortunately blurred. In other words, for every insightful and disciplined scholar who has written about Elgar – such as Jerrold Northrop Moore, Julian Rushton or Diana McVeagh – there have been virtually tenfold sleuths hunting down clues to the solution to the 'Enigma' Variations (as if there were one) and, more recently, writing monographs about the Elgars' Bavarian holidays and brief infrequent concert tours to America. To be sure, these amateur historians turn up fascinating data, and it would be unwise to dismiss their energy and resourcefulness out of hand; what they rarely manage, however, is to place their discoveries in a searching and appropriate context. Furthermore, blinded by their love of Elgar, they tend to lose themselves in a miasma of adulation. The amateurs are scarcely alone in this regard, however, for even such level-headed professionals as Brian Trowell have been lured from the realm of scholarly research into the weaving of seductive scenarios that rely on dubious premises.

One of the most respected researchers in the Elgarian camp is Robert Anderson, one rarely prone to flights of fancy. Anderson's biography of the composer, published in The Master Musicians Series, is a fine accomplishment, and all serious scholars of Elgar's music are indebted to Anderson for his superbly detailed monograph *Elgar in Manuscript*. Sad to say, Anderson's most recent volume about the composer, *Elgar and Chivalry*, is unfortunately neither as well conceived nor as well executed as its two predecessors. Part of the problem may lie in its publication venue, Elgar Editions, the house organ of the Elgar Society, where Anderson is revered: the text in its present form appears innocent of even the most rudimentary editorial intervention. As it now stands, this book recalls the garrulous clergyman in P.G. Wodehouse's story 'The Great Sermon Handicap', who asks if his extended sermon on the topic of Brotherly Love might be shorn of the 'rather exhaustive excursus into the family life of the early Assyrians'. Clearly nobody at Elgar Editions summoned the temerity to suggest a bit of a trim.

This is a pity, as Anderson's initial idea seems so promising: to use the ways in which Elgar engaged with chivalric tropes in order to place him within an historical context as well discuss his interest in Ruskin, Morris, Arnold and George Bernard Shaw. At some stage, however, Anderson's considerable erudition hijacks the volume, with Elgar making what amounts to cameo appearances in certain chapters. At times it seems that the author suddenly recalls that the composer is his nominal subject, and wrenches the reader quite brusquely back to the domestic life and travels of the Elgar family. And while Anderson spares his readers an excursus into the family life of the early Assyrians, there *is* a very long excursus into the Boer War – from which the word 'apartheid' is conspicuously absent.

Moreover, while presenting a great deal of information, Anderson sometimes declines to provide the crucial detail that would have made the enlightening connection between his extensive research and Elgar's life. Anderson discusses Ruskin in great detail, for example, and mentions Effie Grey, Ruskin's unhappy young bride who escaped from her dithering husband by eloping with the painter John Everett Millais. Anderson further notes that Effie Grey was the

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mother of Alice Stuart-Wortley, who partially inspired Elgar's Violin Concerto and whom Anderson unfortunately dubs the composer's 'Egeria'.[5] What Anderson omits, however, is that Ruskin failed to consummate his marriage to poor Effie due to his belated discovery that women possess pubic hair and experience menstruation. Anderson further neglects to note that Effie's desertion of her husband, after years of pleading with Ruskin to consummate their marriage so that she might have a child, was one of the great scandals of the Victorian era. Raised under the lingering cloud of this scandal, Alice Stuart-Wortley may have been reluctant to undertake an affair with a moody and indiscreet composer, even if, as is far from certain, Elgar sought a closer relationship with the graceful woman he nicknamed 'Windflower'. Omitting such a sordid detail about Ruskin may be a function of Anderson's tact, but it deprives his readers of necessary facts in the history of Alice Stuart-Wortley that may have affected her friendship with Elgar.

In his chapter in *Oh, My Horses!: Elgar and the Great War*, edited by the indefatigable Lewis Foreman, Bernard Porter also touches upon Elgar's interest in chivalric themes. Porter's observations on chivalry come in the context of a lively discussion of the imperialist ideology that was a feature of the latter part of Victoria's long reign. (Neither Porter nor Anderson alludes to the New Chivalry, a vaguely misogynist offshoot of the Decadent movement that flourished in England and France during the *fin de siècle*.) Porter's discussion suffers from a literalness that precludes wider understanding of the ways in which an ideology such as imperialism can pervade a society so that it affects the most detached of artists. Even so, Porter's contention is intriguing: that Alice Elgar, the daughter of a general knighted for his service to the Raj, was largely responsible for her husband's eventual espousal of imperialist rhetoric, both in his opinions and his music.[6] Elgar was shaped by the countryside and by the provincial towns of the west and north of England. Elgar's patriotism seems to have been grounded in civic rituals – such as the bestowal of the 'Freedom of the City' upon famous local sons, as happened to the composer in his native Worcester – rather than by the grandiose and frankly imperialistic displays of London. But this hardly would have precluded a reflexively imperialistic world-view, even if Elgar preferred to remain virtually silent on the Boer War.

Whether one agrees with his premises or not, Porter's essay is thought-provoking, as is Jeremy Dibble's admirable investigation of the amazing extent to which English musical life was peopled with Teutonic musicians in the decades that preceded the World War One. Not everything in *Oh, My Horses!* is of equal value, however, and several chapters suffer in a way that suggests too much editorial clemency. Of course the contents of any collection vary in weight and interest, but the quality of the essays found in *Oh, My Horses!* fluctuates wildly. The very title of this volume, drawn from one of Elgar's most absurd and self-pitying letters, posted to Frank Schuster in the first month of World War One, blaming God and deploring the slaughter of horses over that of men and women, is ill-advised, to put it mildly.[7]

[5] Robert Anderson, *Elgar and Chivalry* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2002): 189–90.

[6] Bernard Porter, 'Elgar and Empire', in *O My Horses!: Elgar and the Great War*, ed. Lewis Foreman (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001): 141.

[7] Letter of 25 August 1914. One can only wonder what Schuster, who, while an ardent admirer of Elgar's music had no illusions as to his hero's foibles, made of sentiments such as these: 'I walk round & round this room cursing God for allowing dumb brutes to be

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The most exasperating essay in *Oh, My Horses!* must be Brian Trowell's historical fantasia entitled 'The Road to Brinkwells: The Late Chamber Music'. Trowell, an erudite musicologist who, at his best, can be an astute commentator on Elgar's music, expands upon his already dubious hypothesis, concocted from the flimsiest circumstantial evidence, that Elgar carried a life-long torch for Helen Weaver. Miss Weaver was a sickly young woman from a prosperous family of chapel-going Protestants in Worcester – a family that would have hardly welcomed a match between their daughter and a penurious young Roman Catholic musician from a not entirely reputable local family. (The only music that Elgar composed that is even tenuously associated with Helen Weaver, a bland example of his early Shed pieces for winds, scarcely represents an outpouring of thwarted emotion.)

Consider this series of deductions, wildly predicated on a single phrase from another of Elgar's self-pitying letters, this time to the long-suffering Alice Stuart-Wortley:

> So far as we can tell from Elgar's own utterances, this was the very nadir of his despair. It is odd that, in publishing this letter, both Dr Moore and Michael Kennedy pass over without comment the phrase 'fifty years ago', which does not make sense. Elgar cannot make sense. Elgar cannot have been referring to his condition when he was nine years old, and 1876 seems almost as unlikely. He must surely have meant 'thirty years ago', in 1886, or more precisely the year between October 1885, when his former fiancée, the violinist Helen Jessie Weaver, emigrated to New Zealand, and October 1886, when he gave Alice Roberts her first violin lesson.[8]

A dispassionate reader must watch while the author throws probity to the winds and joins the ranks of the 'Sherlockians'. According to this fantastic theory, Elgar must have kept in touch with the Weavers over the year (though no correspondence is extent); ergo, he learned of Helen Weaver's son, born in New Zealand; ergo, he discovered that her son had died in combat from the New Zealand soldiers who were the compatriots of Anzy Wylde, Frank Schuster's final non-Platonic 'nephew'; and, ergo, Elgar was inspired to write a series of his wartime works for this poor boy *in memoriam*, Q.E.D. (Note Trowell's pre-emptive use of 'we' in the first sentence quoted above, as well as his repeated use of the word 'must', as in 'he must surely have meant'.) But Elgar's confession to Stuart-Wortley – 'I have the happiness of my friends to console me as I had fifty years ago', might just as plausibly refer to the death of his younger brother Joseph from consumption, which occurred in 1866, when the composer was, indeed, nine years old.[9] This death was surely a more searing and traumatic event, experienced in childhood, no less, than the death of the unmet son of an early and patently implausible infatuation – even if, as is far from certain, Elgar was aware of this specific death among the millions of such tragedies of the war engulfing him. Michael Kennedy, who has repeatedly indulged in extended musings upon

tortured – let Him kill his human beings but how CAN HE? Oh, my horses'. Schuster did take the trouble to preserve this embarrassing epistle, however, presumably for posterity: correspondent's revenge? For the most convincing short commentary on this sorry epistle, see Michael Kennedy, *Portrait of Elgar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968): 219.

[8] Brian Trowell, 'The Road to Brinkwells: the Late Chamber Music', in *Oh, My Horses!*, ed. Lewis Foreman: 353.

[9] Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993): 4. Julian Ruston is surely mistaken to have interpreted Elgar's indifference as reticence in order to accept Trowell's unconvincing theories about Helen Weaver.

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the nature of Elgar's relationships with his women friends, is properly cautious when he reviews the elaborated claims made by Trowell and others about Helen Weaver.[10] Sadly, 'The Road to Brinkwells', from a distinguished musicologist, is an example of Elgarian scholarship at its most self-indulgent.

In another collection published by Elgar Editions the quality of the essays is suitably consistent: *Cockaigne: Essays on Elgar 'In London Town'* edited by Kevin D. Mitchell. This book marks a decided advance in production values over the *Elgar and Chivalry*, for Mitchell's collection boasts clear musical examples, well-reproduced photographs and solid editing. The finest essay in this collection is David Bury's 'Elgar, the Eton Housemaster and the Coronation Ode'. Like many other Elgarians, Bury is an amateur researcher, but he is a professional historian in a sense, for he taught history in grammar schools in Leeds and Surrey. One envies the tuition he offered his students given the lucidity of Bury's prose here and its apt organization. Bury provides an unblinking but sympathetic portrait of A.C. Benson, the diarist and poetaster who wrote the text for 'Land of Hope and Glory', famously part of the Coronation Ode that Elgar composed to celebrate the crowning of Victoria's feckless son, Edward. Bury refers to Benson's homosexuality with refreshing candour, and relates the poet's unsettled family background – son of an Archbishop of Canterbury and a mother who left her husband to live in a lesbian relationship (in Canterbury itself, no less) – with an admirable nonchalance. Bury tells of the writing and premiere of the Coronation Ode in an engrossing manner that reveals Elgar's casually ruthless treatment of his literary collaborations as well as Benson's almost pathetic need to please. Other informative essays include Michael Holroyd's exegesis of Elgar's friendship with G.B. Shaw, and Michael Kennedy's droll chapter on Elgar, Strauss and their wives.

Far more ambitious in scope is *The Best of Me: A Gerontius Centenary Companion*, compiled by Geoffrey Hodgkins during his editorship of the *Elgar Society Journal* (1991 to 2002). This volume brings together essays on Elgar's oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius*, press comment, eyewitness accounts of the work's fraught premiere in 1900, and in addition such valuable source material as Cardinal Newman's entire text with the markings made by General Gordon, the 'martyr' of Khartoum, and with italics indicating the passages that Elgar took for his redaction of the poem. Of the informative articles, the finest is incontestably the essay by the American musicologist who discusses with model lucidity the discrepancies between Newman's original text and the libretto that Elgar fashioned for his own purposes.

Unfortunately, *The Best of Me* suffers from the same erratic standard of production that mars *Elgar and Chivalry* and from editorial indulgence like that in *O My Horses*. In general, illustrations in *The Best of Me* are poorly reproduced.[11] In addition, the overall tone of this useful collection is occasionally compromised by

[10] Michael Kennedy, *The Life of Elgar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 25–7.

[11] The happy exceptions to the poor illustrations that pervade *The Best of Me* are the droll cartoons, attributed to T. Martin Jones, that are adequately reproduced between pages 268 and 274. These drawings take for their captions lines drawn from Newman's poem as set by Elgar, including both literary and musical quotations. The most amusing of these cartoons depicts a suffragette – who bears a marked resemblance to Dame Ethyl Smyth – being transported to jail by two jolly bobbies; the caption underneath reads: 'a uniform and gentle pressure tells me that I am not self-moving, but bourne forward on my way.'

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descents into unnecessary special pleading. Finally, one can only regret that an inordinate amount of pages towards the end are allotted to ephemera such as amateurish critiques of recent performances, while no one has seen fit to compile the extensive bibliography that is surely a *sine qua non* for such a comprehensive undertaking.

A far more consistent performance by Hodgkins is his unexpectedly touching and insightful description of the creation of the Morecambe Music Festival, entitled, after a relevant phrase from a letter Elgar wrote about the festival, *Somewhere Further North*, and clearly published by Poneke Press. The main focus of this history is less on Elgar than on a remarkable clergyman, Canon C.V. Gorton, who was the beneficent organizing force behind this annual event, which celebrated its centenary in 2004. When Elgar does appear in this book, he is at his most admirable: exuberant, populist and, within the context of Morecambe, loyal to his own provincial roots. Hodgkins' account of the singers, many drawn from the working class, is deeply moving. By illuminating the musical aspirations of these singers and instrumentalists, Hodgkins has provided an invaluable glimpse into the musical life of Lancashire in the decades preceding World War One.

Canon Gorton was very much a figure of his time, and a Marxist historian might well rebuke him nowadays for supporting an oppressive status quo by ensuring that the energy of workers was channelled into such socially accepted activities as participating in competition festivals. While this observation may contain a grain of truth, it is hard to fault Canon Gorton and other earnest Edwardian clergy, such as Percy Dearmer, for their efforts at bringing art and 'uplift' to their communities.

Hodgkins also touches upon the controversy that raged over the 'invented tradition' of these competitions and festivals, as well as the remarkably class-driven attitudes with which London performers and critics dismissed the musical aspirations of the provinces, especially in the industrial north. Indeed, the contempt with which these Londoners treated the musical aspirations of Lancastrians and others is truly shocking, and provide an interesting historical context for the tensions between south and north that persist in Britain to this day. These passages provide insight into Elgar's own social insecurities as they offer clear evidence that class-based snubs of this sort were not invariably a figment of his imagination.

If Gorton indeed reflexively accepted the class prejudices that pervaded his era, so did most people at the time, including, unfortunately, many of the oppressed workers themselves. However, Gorton was a hardworking man dedicated to his community and determined to assuage the lives of those around him through the study of music and the contemplation of beauty. He was no snob, and cared deeply about the welfare of his parishioners, the singers who competed in the festival, the town of Morecambe and the composer who became his confidante. The history of Canon Gorton's later years, with his decline in health and a mysterious death, makes for poignant reading. That he died a suicide after years of suffering seems entirely plausible,[12] but, typical of his

[12] Is there any statement more touching in such a circumstance than the common declaration 'It would have been completely against his character'? Who, enduring such suffering as did Gorton in his last years, would not have been tempted to end such physical deterioration given an opportune moment and circumstance? If Gorton did indeed drown himself under these circumstances, he can scarcely be censured. Geoffrey Hodgkins, *Somewhere Further North* (Rickmansworth: Poneke Press, 2004): 243–4.

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thoughtfulness, if he did end his life by throwing himself down some stairs into a river swollen by heavy rains, he did so with the utmost consideration for his nurse and his family. Gorton is certainly one of the most disinterested, patient and admirable figures to appear in Elgar's life; furthermore, Gorton's reassuring counsel to Elgar during the fraught creation of the libretto of *The Apostles* may well have enabled the composer to bring his massive design to any fruition at all. Scholars who study Elgar, or, for that matter, British social history in the decades before World War One, owe a debt to Hodgkins for preserving the history of the Morecambe Festival and the memory of its founder, Canon Gorton.

While Hodgkins preserves an admirably restrained tone throughout this well-written history, an intemperate passage from a monograph published by Elgar Editions illustrates all too clearly the problematic nature of so much Elgarian scholarship. This slim volume is a collection of writings by David Bury, whose essay on A.C. Benson so enlivened *Cockaigne: Essays on Elgar 'In London Town'*. Unhappily titled *Elgar and the Awful Female and Other Essays*, this collection contains a jarring but revelatory passage, embedded in an article on *The Music Makers*, 'Elgar and the Reluctant Zoologist'. Bury quotes the opinion of a German undergraduate, Linda Maria Koldau, who opined in the *Elgar Society Journal* that, in regard to the convoluted aesthetic premises of *The Music Makers*, a 'true work of art must have a life of its own, disentangled from its creator's personality'.[13] Fair enough, then, for Bury to rejoin 'with this I do not agree'.[14] But during his peroration, Bury returns to blast Koldau with an impassioned personal attack:

> I have emphasised the personal nature of [*The Music Makers*], with its myriad of self-quotation. It is this which Linda Maria Koldau in the end could not accept, observing 'I am probably one of the "unsympathetic" mentioned by Kennedy'. Well, yes, I think she is! … I have no such reservations. I was not born when Elgar died, but I have heard him speak and seen him move (on film), seen hundreds of photographs and a number of portraits. I have recordings of him conducting his own music. I have read numerous books and articles about him. I have read lots of his letters (and, indeed, possess a few) … I have walked the Malverns and been to so many places associated with him. If Linda Maria Koldau feels that *The Music Makers* can only speak to Elgar himself or his friends, well I am making a claim to membership of the latter category. For those who love Elgar's music and also Edward himself or his friends – and despite all his foibles, perhaps because of them, he was an endlessly fascinating and lovable man – that *The Music Makers* tells us less about O'Shaughnessy's aspirations than about Elgar is no problem at all.[15]

The critic's point of view here is problematic, to say the least. Bury abandons any pretence to objectivity: this is the most naked declaration of 'Sherlockian' devotion that an Elgarian could make in print. The problem posed by this passage is not so much its author's evident psychological projection onto the long-dead composer – if one could only arrange for Bury to travel back in time, one dinner with a grumpy, rude and self-absorbed Elgar might well disabuse him of his conception of the composer's supposedly lovable nature – as its irrationality. None of the living can know the dead, no matter how many letters the living obtain, how often they tramp over the Malverns, and how many

[13] Quoted in David Bury, *Elgar and the Awful Female and Other Essays* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2003): 39.
[14] Ibid.: 39.
[15] Ibid.

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compact discs they collect. To imagine that one can know any of the illustrious departed in the way one knows a living friend, much less a major composer who died in 1934, is an illusion that has no place in scholarship, and is psychologically unsound. Bury's declaration of his credo is particularly raw in its immediacy, but assumptions such as his, expressed less directly but held as firmly, have been the quiet ground bass over which all too much Elgarian scholarship, both amateur and professional, has unfolded.

Musicology is predicated in part on informed speculation, and it is common for even the most self-aware of scholars to identify with their subjects to some degree. The cultivation of intellectual discipline – keeping a measured distance from one's area of study – is of crucial importance: musicologists are not required, or expected, to love personally the composers that they study, however much they admire the music. To do so is to fall headlong into the Serbonian bog of the biographical fallacy that conflates, and thus confuses, the creator with creation. Few musicologists today would welcome a return to the austere positivist discipline of yesteryear, with its almost total exclusion of the subjective, but a healthy balance must be reached between personal reaction and objective examination.

Had Bury been a musicologist rather than a 'Sherlockian', he might have crafted a refutation of Koldau's opinion through musical analysis, for example, and have explained in musical terms why *The Music Makers* represents a unified and successful work of art. He might have entered used cultural studies to explicate the elements of Decadent aesthetics that pervade *The Music Makers* and thus explain how Elgar's aesthetic premises, expressed by his introverted music, are in an agonistic relationship to those of O'Shaughnessy's extroverted poem. Instead, he cries: 'Hands off! This is the music of my friend Edward, and you can never, ever understand'. Needless to say, this is not scholarship, even of the best amateur variety: it is a polemic spiced with a dollop of xenophobia. (At one point, Bury refers condescendingly to his victim as 'Fraulein Koldau'.[16])

Bury has the excuse of being an amateur in music research, but such xenophobia can be found on occasion in the writings of British scholars who are otherwise highly professional. Michael Kennedy, for whose writings on British music all serious scholars are grateful, has lashed out at the opinions of foreigners with as much truculence as expressed by Bury, but with greater finesse.[17] Such attitudes have taken a toll on the international prestige of British music, and especially Elgar, whose name appears not at all in Richard Taruskin's massive *Oxford History of Music*.

While it would be churlish to deprive well-meaning musical sleuths of a useful and harmless hobby, scholarship concerning Elgar must move even further into the realm of musicology and embrace new standards and procedures. Such a shift in emphasis is already underway as a new generation of musicologists of international provenance is viewing Elgar from a fresh perspective, examining his achievement from innovative cultural and analytical viewpoints while building upon the admirable foundation laid by such senior scholars as Julian Rushton, Jerrold Northrop Moore, James A. Hepokoski, Robert Anderson and

[16] Bury, *Awful Female*: 40.

[17] Consider, for example, Kennedy's bitter riposte to Copland's critique of Vaughan Williams's *Benedicite*. Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980): 226. For Kennedy's resentment of an American caught poaching upon Elgarian preserves, see *The Life of Elgar*: 93–4.

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Diana McVeagh. The resistance of the old guard of Elgarians to these new developments has been at times vehement. However, if the true stature of this extraordinary composer is to be revealed fully, and if Elgar is to be established permanently as the peer of Mahler, Sibelius, Strauss and Fauré, then the stature of his music must be illumed by elegant, decisive research and cogent analysis, and not merely preached as gospel to the converted.

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Volumes Reviewed

Anderson, Robert. *Elgar and Chivalry* (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2002). 480 pp.

Bury, David. *Elgar and the Awful Female and Other Essays*. Elgar Monographs No. 2 (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2003). 96 pp.

Foreman, Lewis, ed. *Oh, My Horses!: Elgar in the Great War*. (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2001). 512 pp.

Greaves, Peter. *In the Bavarian Highlands: Edward Elgar's German Holidays in the 1890s*. Elgar Monographs No. 1 (Rickmansworth: Elgar Editions, 2000). 96 pp.

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