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Personal, National, and Cultural Memory: The Treatment of Benjamin Britten's Music in Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom*

Asmeninė, tautinė ir kultūrinė atmintis:

Benjamino Britteno muzika Weso Andersono „Mėnesienos karalystėje“

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Abstract

In this paper, I wish to examine the role of Benjamin Britten's music in Wes Anderson's film *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012). By using *Moonrise Kingdom* as a case study, I will argue that while Benjamin Britten's work is certainly a major backdrop and inspiration for Anderson, the most significant impact on the film is not to be found in the direct application of the music's formal rules and theory but the ideological, socio-cultural, and semiotic connotations that encapsulate Britten's work and life overall. I will demonstrate how Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde* (1958) provides a useful framework through which Anderson can realize his narrative, but further analysis reveals that Britten's own works are revived as theatrical devices throughout the film. Whether Anderson achieves this knowingly or not, the treatment of Britten and his music transforms *Moonrise Kingdom* into a homage to personal, national, and cultural memory. Both Britten and Anderson share a child-friendly ethos and employ theatrical processes of renewal to explore the transformation of the self through communal ritual and myth. While many have labelled the director as an auteur, *Moonrise Kingdom* is a self-protective plea for community.

Keywords: film music, community, cultural and national memory, theatrical devices, auteurism, ritual, renewal, Benjamin Britten, Wes Anderson, *Moonrise Kingdom*.

Anotacija

Straipsnyje analizuojamas Benjamino Britteno muzikos vaidmuo Weso Andersono filme „Mėnesienos karalystė“ (*Moonrise Kingdom*, 2012). Pasitelkdama „Mėnesienos karalystė“ kaip atvejo studiją, teigiu, kad, nors Britteno kūryba yra neabejotinai svarbus Andersono filmo fonas ir įkvėpimo šaltinis, didžiausią poveikį filmui daro ne tiesioginis muzikos formaliųjų taisyklių ir teorijos taikymas, o ideologinės, sociokultūrinės ir semiotinės konotacijos, apimančios visą Britteno kūrybą ir gyvenimą. Pademonstruosiu, kaip Britteno „Nojaus laivas“ (*Noye's Fludde*, 1958) Andersonui pasitarnauja kaip pagrindas savo naratyvui realizuoti, o tolesnė analizė atskleidžia, kad Britteno kūriniai filme atgimsta kaip teatrinės priemonės. Nesvarbu, ar Andersonas siekė to sąmoningai, ar ne, per Britteno ir jo muzikos traktuotę „Mėnesienos karalystė“ atiduoda pagarbą asmeninei, tautinei ir kultūrinei atminčiai. Brittenui ir Andersonui būdingas vaikystei palankus etosas, jie pasitelkia teatrinis atnaujinimo procesus, kad iširtų savęs transformaciją per bendruomeninį ritualą ir mitą. Daug kas režisierių linkę vadinti autoriumi; jo „Mėnesienos karalystė“ – savisaugos diktuojamas kvietimas bendrystei.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: kino muzika, bendruomenė, kultūrinė ir tautinė atmintis, teatrinės priemonės, autorystė, ritualas, atnaujinimas, Benjaminas Brittenas, Wesas Andersonas, „Mėnesienos karalystė“.

Introduction: A Note on Auterism

In her influential essay *Auteur Music* (2007), Claudia Gorbman employs the term *auteur mélomane* to describe contemporary directors who have a true passion for music (from Ancient Greek μέλος [mélōs, “song, melody”] and the French suffix *mane* [to indicate “a mania for”]). She classifies this kind of director as inhabiting their own, individual musical “worldview” and having authorial control over the soundtrack of their works, more so than the music supervisor or the composer. Gorbman explains the phenomenon of auteur music as a cultural byproduct

of technological advances in digital music technology and storage, which provides directors with more control and accessibility over the soundtrack of the film. In this way, their personal musical taste is imprinted within the film, creating an authorial signature; she erects a pantheon of auteur mélomanes, most notably Quentin Tarantino, Stanley Kubrick and Jean-Luc Godard. However, Gorbman has not exhausted the definitions or origins of her neologism. She places auteurism in the center of a continuous debate within film studies: at once criticized as merely a simulacrum of outmoded nineteenth-century romantic ideals and yet still employed as an evaluative criterion to determine the worth

of directors and consider their work. Although Gorbman recognizes the auteur as an “ideological construct” that is “increasingly commodified and reified” (2007: 149), she does nothing less but re-invest in this concept and elongate its effect by extending it to musical practices in film. Gorbman’s essay on auteur music is admittedly brief, but if the concept of the auteur is to resonate as relevant, its adversaries will need to pursue the importance of new audiovisual practices, such as the impact of the music video (Ashby 2013: 17). Furthermore, Gorbman seems to privilege the creative praxis of the director at the cost of the sociocultural contexts that encapsulate the appropriated music. As Arved Ashby suggests in *Popular Music and The New Auteur*, “the preexistence of songs, their pre-cinematic lives as co-opted and manipulated by the filmmaker need to be considered.” (2013: 18) Gorbman’s treatment of songs as entities that bear no historical reference is all too reminiscent of Lydia Goehr’s work-concept. In *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (2013), Lydia Goehr argues that the work-concept constructs certain works of music as timeless and universal, an enduring object whose ontology is more similar to that of a static work of art, like a sculpture or a painting, than a process unfolding in time. However, albeit that Goehr’s work concept is most substantial in the Western art music tradition, the historical contingency of her study is not fully realized. Georgina Born observes that Goehr is reluctant “to pursue the significance of technologies of music production and reproduction for the shifting ontology of contemporary music” (2005:10). Technological mediation is a significant vehicle in all constitutional aspects of contemporary musical experience: “creation, performance and reception” (Born 2005:11).

Wes Anderson is an American filmmaker whose films are distinguished by their eccentric characters, colorful and symmetrical visual aesthetic, unique narrative style, and frequent use of ensemble casts. His work often explores themes of nostalgia, loss, innocence, and dysfunctional families. There is an abundance of scholarship valorizing Anderson as a contemporary auteur. Lara Hryjac (2013), for example, goes to great lengths to establish him as an important and indispensable auteur melomane in Gorbman’s pantheon. Indeed, Anderson’s directorial style is highly stylized and instantly recognizable, while his authorial signature is established through both visual and sonic design. However, the persistent presumption of Anderson as the sole responsible creative power remains problematic, as it perpetuates Wordsworth’s romantic ideal of the artist while discriminating the considerable force of the collaborators who populate both Anderson’s film sets and cinematic worlds reference. Anderson, like every artist, is derivative and collaborative, and his distinct style is drawn from his ability to create something new from the wealth of sources he employs and the multiple associates with whom

he has he has ongoing personal and professional relationships, both onscreen and behind the camera. Criticism of all directors, including Anderson, needs to more carefully consider the role of partnerships and collectives in the production of what is an inherently collaborative art form. The closer we examine Hollywood as a historical site of affairs, the less sensible it seems to evaluate films in terms of the individual director. The concept of auteurism can be read as a conspiracy in everybody’s interest and particularly the industry; a large proportion of modern culture revolves around the idea of the carefully curated self-image. Within Western modernity, individual achievement is a desired goal, and thus the money-making image of the auteur is in par with the secularized competitiveness in capitalism that has replaced spiritual fulfillment. However, while we might argue that auteur theory fails because it attributes the work of a group to the result of a single artistic intelligence, thus disregarding the team effort of Hollywood production, we might also suggest it succeeds in a different level of historical resonance for precisely reflecting this failing. As Jeffe Menne argues:

Auteur theory might describe an aporia in the ideology of liberalism tout court, in which it’s somehow suspected, on a rather broad scale, that the individual is no longer the basic unit of market or political agency [...]. Thus, the discourses of various strata of Western societies began to reimagine the dynamic between the individual and institution, and whether the former is subsumed or wholly determined by the latter. (Menne 2008: 4)

The dynamic between the individual and the system has been explored time and time again in film. Whether the result is triumphant or disastrous, the experience for the viewer can be either cathartic or devastating. This thematic exploration of the individual against authority and the system reflects an indirect commentary on the relationship between the auteur and the collective, or the Hollywood System. After the demise of the studio system and the rise of television, the commercial success of cinema was declining. The desperation felt by studios led to innovation and greater risk-taking, allowing more control to individual directors and producers. Thus, the cinema of the American New Wave is defined by a host of young filmmakers who were allowed key authorial control over the studio; this “New Hollywood” phase, although admittedly brief, was a period of revival for cinema. Wes Anderson, heavily influenced by such movements including the French New Wave, employs many filmmaking techniques that adhere to that era.¹ The friction between the individual and the institution, whether that institution is marriage, family, or society overall, is a recurrent theme in his filmography, and *Moonrise Kingdom* is no exception; Benjamin Britten’s music as utilized within the film further saturates and expands this tension.

Childhood, Community, and Re-enchantment

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) wished to involve the English musical public by creating more engaging work and thus increasing audiences; he composed theatrical works that renewed, rather than simply reused, historical structures and religious gestures. This process of renewal enabled the composer to engage both amateur performers and the general public, as well as children. I suggest that Britten's practice in forming his work displays a process of theatrical and musical re-enchantment, recovering spiritual and aesthetic resonance to culturally significant sites of heritage. His stage works demonstrate an extraordinary sympathy for the human predicament, expressed in readily accessible but deeply felt music, while experimenting with modern styles and new theatrical environments. Daniel Felsenfeld writes:

Britten's body of work is demure but terrifying, technically bulletproof but emotionally jarring, childlike but erotic. That chiaroscuro duality sets the twee against the profoundly dark, the easy and entertaining against the too horrible to contemplate. (Felsenfeld [no date])

In a similar manner, Anderson places the vitality of community in the center of his narrative. His overall cinematic style juxtaposes innocence and darkness, unveiling the frailty and despair of the human condition, through childlike subjectivity and naivete. Like a living canvas, his films make painterly use of vibrant-colored palettes that soak and wash objects, textures, fabrics, buildings, and environments. Symmetrical shots and miniature settings present the viewer with a childlike perspective on emotionally complex and mature themes: dysfunctional families, lost glory, socially unacceptable relationships, communication, forbidden love, parenthood, death, loss, nostalgia, childhood, and the struggle of growing up. His carefully constructed and highly stylized cinematic worlds stand in stark contrast to the speed and fluidity of late capitalism. They illustrate an ongoing obsession not simply with nostalgic periods, objects, and styles, but with understanding the multifold ways nostalgia creates in us a profound yet foggy relationship to the past. The past he retreats to is flawed and damaged but ultimately where hope and transformation lie. By evoking the memory of childhood and enabling communal modes of cultural nostalgia, Wes Anderson's films become absurdist meditations on modern life. As Sean Redmond and Craig Batty suggest:

What Anderson creates visually in his films is a magical realist world in which adult characters are in part rendered youthful or juvenile simply by the childlike brushstrokes that better paint their arrested lives. (Redmond and Batty 2014)

Both artists have been described as a man-child (Acevedo 2017); their fixation on youthfulness and childhood

functions both as narrative content and stylistic feature, while both share the desire to find in childhood something remarkably powerful. Anderson's films, regardless of how exotically they might be conceived, are always in one form or another a homage to his own analog childhood while also a subtle revolt against the digital age. *Moonrise Kingdom* for example, brings together many of the director's personal memories. As Anderson himself has stated, "it's a memory of a fantasy...the autobiography of something that didn't happen":

I was fixating on a particular experience – there was a girl in my class who was occupying my thoughts – I didn't get to know her. So I dreamed up this scenario of two kids who are very bold and so unhappy in their own circumstances that they actually go to those lengths. (Anderson in Waxman 2012)

Furthermore, halfway through the film Suzy discovers on top of the kitchen's fridge a self-help book with the title *Coping with the Very Troubled Child*; whether her parents have consulted it or not is not clear, but it demonstrates their view of their daughter. Wes Anderson has confessed on multiple occasions that when he was a young boy himself, he found a pamphlet with the same title on the fridge:

I wasn't the only child in the house, but I knew which one was the very troubled child. If my brothers had found it, they would not have looked at themselves. (Anderson in Higgins 2012)

More importantly, Anderson encountered Britten's music, *Noye's Fludde* specifically, when he himself was, as a child, a part of its amateur cast. He comments, regarding *Moonrise Kingdom*:

The play of *Noye's Fludde* that is performed in it – my older brother and I were actually in a production of that when I was ten or eleven, and that music is something I've always remembered, and made a very strong impression on me. (Anderson in Burton-Hill 2014)

Anderson's employment of Britten's music in *Moonrise Kingdom* manifests far beyond the established uses of a "soundtrack." As the New Yorker music critic and composer Russell Platt suggests, "it is not a throwaway detail; it is a burst of life-affirming imagination" (Platt 2012).

Similarly, Britten drew consistently from his personal memory of childhood and early compositions. He was a prolific child prodigy and composed an unusually large number of works during his juvenilia, estimated between 400–700 (Walker 2008: 641). Britten's relationship with his early works informs his later composition in a manner that few composers illustrate, or even admit to, and thus reveals a more complex attachment to his childhood than mere nostalgia (Walker 2008: 645). For example, themes of several early pieces he composed as a child are recycled

into his Simple Symphony, whose Playful Pizzicato features prominently in *Moonrise Kingdom*. He was even happy for some of his juvenile works to be published, unlike most composers, who dismiss their earlier works as unreflective of their eventual ability. Indeed, Britten's compositional timeline seems to be in flux: rather than demonstrating a linear progress from childhood immaturity to fully grown compositional greatness, Britten travelled back and forth to the early works he composed as a child, often to ease the development of the ones he wrote as an adult.

The development between childhood and maturity is also disturbed in *Moonrise Kingdom*. Anderson portrays the relationship between 12-year-old Sam and Suzy as the healthiest, most sincere, and selfless in the film, while the adults around them commit adultery, lie, and are generally unhappy with themselves and others. By presenting children with a grown-up maturity and articulateness, Anderson reveals that the false binary that keeps children at a distance is illusory and self-serving. In the world of *Moonrise Kingdom*, nobody ever matures completely, signaled by Captain Sharp's Island Police cap and boy shorts, Scoutmaster Ward's small Khaki Scout uniform, and Suzy's father's general demeanor. This is not necessarily because growing up is presented as difficult to do, but because it suggests an artificial sense of progress, where childhood and adulthood are wholly distinctive and separate periods of human existence. Anderson exposes what Nick Pinkerton refers to as "a sense in the film [...] of a lost paradise- something that can't be recaptured" (Pinkerton 2012: 17). *Moonrise Kingdom* sheds light on the tension that adulthood is internally corrupted by that which is always childish or adolescent, while adolescence is beleaguered by dark conflicts and emotional burden. The resolution is that of re-enchantment: Anderson blurs the line between adulthood and adolescence, fantasy and reality, to sustain an illusory optimism and sentimentality post-disenchantment; by delving deep into the negative dialectic he reaffirms the value of sentimentality in a modern society that has quickly emptied notions of hope and sanguinity.

Perhaps nowhere else is this more evident than in Britten's own self and life. His self-identification as a "working composer" (Hutcheon 2016) defined his work ethic and musical ethos. Going against much of the fiercely modernist elite and compositional trends that defined the twentieth century, upon receiving the first Aspen award in 1964, Britten commented: "I want my music to be of use to people, to please them, to enhance their lives." Being a composer for the community was one of the two narratives that structured and gave meaning to his life and sense of self. While Britten retained this narrative to the very end, the other form of self-identification, which was far from unproblematic, had to be abandoned: that of being ever youthful. Britten's desire to be around children, and his delight in the company of

young boys, was the topic of much gossip at the time; his friendships with young children would not have been tolerated today. However, his ever-growing affinity for children is seen as rooted in his own nostalgia for the innocence and spontaneity of youth. As one of his biographers put it:

Despite a long and happy relationship with the tenor Peter Pears, he found another happiness in the company of boys. (Oliver 2018: 12)

Indeed, it is evident from his own letters and journals that Britten always enjoyed being around children and held a dear fondness for childhood, especially his own. Even as an adult, Britten himself evoked a sense of childishness; many of his friends and biographers commented on his school-boyish tastes, sense of humor, and general demeanor. In 1937, one of Britten's close friends writes:

He really hates growing up and away from a very happy childhood that ended only with his Mother's death last Christmas. (Humphrey 1993:114–115)

This sense of prolonged nostalgia for the spontaneity and innocence of childhood and his youth manifested in various ways throughout his adult life; from choosing nursery food to excitement with "childish" games and a constant sense of competitive sportiness, Britten is documented as a modern-day Peter Pan,² wishing to stay a child forever. Even his desire to live in England's east coast suggests a desire to remain close to his childhood home.

In their influential accounts of Western Modernity, Nietzsche and Weber describe it as a "progressive disenchantment of the world," beginning with the "death of God" (Landy and Saler 2009: 5). Indeed, religion and mystery are dissolving further and further from the Western world, replaced by secular institutions and rational thought. However, there is a vital counter-tendency in modern culture, a strong desire to fill the vacuum left by the departed convictions. Even where such an urge is acknowledged, historians tend to speak merely of old customs re-emerging like suppressed contents in new spaces. Enchantment is, to a large extent, still understood as quasi-mystical, the anti-rational, a source of imaginative artifice and affective indulgence. Modern efforts to re-enchant the world are often framed by loss.³ Wendy must return from Neverland, and subsequently grows up into an adult. Alice comes back from Wonderland to many more lazy afternoons. Anderson too, evokes the fading of enchantment. The action of the film occurs at the onset of autumn, and Suzy's family home is at Summer's End. When Sam and Suzy are first captured and separated, we hear Benjamin Britten's "Cuckoo" song from *Friday Afternoons* (1934), a collection of songs composed for children. The song is a reiteration of the summer's-end motif – the cuckoo, born in spring, enjoys the summer but must eventually fly. However, at the very end of the film,

Britten's "Cuckoo" song reappears: as Sam is exiting Suzy's room through her window and via a ladder, Anderson's camera slides to reveal the picture that Sam has been painting. Sam has recreated, in the way of modern fairy tales, something that is gone: the beach inlet that Sam and Suzy had set camp during their escape, which was later destroyed by the storm. As if in sympathy with Sam's gesture, the film's closing shot dissolves the artwork into a photographic moving image of the inlet, with their yellow tent now pitched as the credits roll in. Unlike other modern explorations of fairy tales, Anderson allows Sam and Suzy to wake up into a world approximating their dream life (Thompson and Bordwell 2014). Sam escapes the Dickensian orphanage and potential shock therapy as he is now adopted by Captain Sharp, which allows him to stay with Suzy. Of course, it is a meta-exercise, since Anderson and his viewers are consciously employing fairy-tale conventions. But as Sam's paintings, Suzy's fantasy books, and Anderson's film demonstrate, enjoyment of artifice is central to art.

The Young Person's Guide to their Place in the World

Anderson's fictional characters, not unlike modern portrayals of Benjamin Britten, are often constructed as adults entrapped in arrested development, struggling to let go of the enchantment of childhood and realise their responsibilities. Consider, for example, the patriarch in *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2002), who fakes stomach cancer to get attention from his family, or Steve Zissou in *The Life Aquatic* (2005), who wants to take revenge on a shark. Anderson's narratives feature disheartened parental figures and children who are as gifted as they are troubled; where the adults behave like stubborn children, the children display an adult-like sensibility and sincerity, exemplifying Anderson's trademark structural irony. Sam and Suzy pursue their escape plan with grown-up solemnity while the adult figures around them collapse with crippling anxiety and disappointment. While *Moonrise Kingdom* exhibits Anderson's highly artificial directorial style, the emotional content he elicits is not; Sam and Suzy's dynamic is not particularly deep, but it is sincere and genuine. Their elopement signals the importance of community through alternative familial structures while critiquing various institutions like marriage and family. Anderson treats their love with mock gravity, but there is moral weight in the way they embrace each other's eccentricities.

Wes Anderson's children are usually self-possessed and serious, perceptive, and inherently wise, while the girls, in particular, feel the burden of a developed mind. In *Moonrise Kingdom*, this is further evidenced by Suzy's constant use of binoculars to observe the world around her and her frequent visits to the top of the lighthouse; both habits enhance her

vision and offer her a greater insight, thus fueling her wisdom and ability to perceive. In addition, Suzy's view through her binoculars reverses the "male gaze" of cinema that Laura Mulvey theorizes in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1999), one of the most influential film texts dealing with gender. Mulvey suggests that the camera assumes a male subject position for the viewer, "through the ego-gratifying identification with the male hero" (Mulvey 1999: 37) and the libidinal portrayal of women. She discusses scopophilia and the pleasure that is derived from it, in forms of entertainment and objectification. The audience is aligned with certain characters in a film and is awarded a gaze into another world, where it is acceptable to stare and tolerable to consume. The object, Mulvey argues, is the unsuspecting female, and the bearer of the look is almost always a male. Suzy demonstrates a radical reversal of this gaze as well as an epistemological privilege to sight at the expense of hearing; her binoculars stand in stark contrast to her mother's use of a bullhorn to communicate with her family. To say "I see," after all, is to suggest that we understand and accept, whereas "I hear you" implies a less agreeable comprehension. The use of binoculars to keep adults under surveillance is a recurrent theme in Anderson's films, while the comic insanity of authority figures is highlighted through absurd actions. Consider, for example, Suzy's father throwing a shoe at Scoutmaster Ward, or his attempt at establishing male dominance when Suzy disappears: "I'll be out back, I am going to find a tree to chop down." Anderson has an idiosyncratic vision of what childhood looks like while adolescence is presented as treacherous territory, signaled by the rough terrain that Sam and Suzy travel through in order to reach their destination. However, Sam and Suzy have learned to share their lives with one another, which is one of the most valuable lessons an adult can learn.

The child-centered sincerity of the film is strengthened through the camerawork. As Anderson comments in an *Indiewire* interview, during intimate scenes the director limited the crew to three people only, while using smaller cameras to not intimidate the young actors:

If you hand hold a camera, a normal 35-millimeter movie camera, you're just practically overwhelming a child. But with these you could hold them down at their level, so they were actually ideal for us. (Anderson in Lyttelton 2012)

This child-friendly ethos is also reflected in Britten's working relationship with children. In his book *Britten's Children* (2007), Bridcut employs the term "paedocratic" to describe these relationships and explain that Britten liked children to be in charge; he never talked down to them, and as is reflected in his compositions for children, he never underestimated their capabilities by over-simplifying his musical writing. Anderson's homage to Britten begins with the design of Suzy Bishop's family home as a nod to Britten's



Figure 1. Britten's childhood home (Britten House 2023).

own childhood home, while the interior is reminiscent of Britten's later home he shared with his lifelong partner and collaborator, tenor Peter Pears, replete with books and record collections.

The soundtrack of the film exemplifies the ability to cross narrational borders, freeing the image from strict realism. In the opening sequence to *Moonrise Kingdom*, a young boy picks out a record of Benjamin Britten's *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, played on a phonograph within the diegesis of the film. On the record, which is meant to be an introduction to symphonic music for children, a young male narrator dissects Henry Purcell's

second movement, "Rondeau" of the *Abdelazer Suite*, for the "four different families of the orchestra": woodwind, brass, string, and percussion. The composition was originally composed for a documentary film titled *Instruments of the Orchestra*, which was made for the British Ministry of Education in 1946. In the recording, which is taken from one of Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts, each section of the orchestra plays the theme together first, then separately. In a parallel fashion, the camera pans across Suzy's family home, to show each member of the family one by one occupying their own space, engaging with their own activities. This elaborate tracking shot serves to signify the



Figure 2. The Bishop family home (Anderson 2012).



Figure 3. Britten's and Pear's home, "The Red House" (Visit England 2023)

compartmentalized isolation of the Bishop family members. Thus, by isolating individual sections of the orchestra, the music reflects the disconnection of the family unit while drawing attention to the artifice of how orchestral works are "built." As the narration progresses, we witness members of the Bishop family occupying separate rooms but this time within the same frame, suggesting the layered cooperation and role specificity inherent in the internal functions of a typical symphonic orchestra and metaphorically a typical family. While the work's presentation via a child's record player is reminiscent of the novel intent, the track is manipulated to fluctuate between the grainy, diegetic sound

of the player and a richer, fuller live orchestral sound. Thus, *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* is simultaneously a subject of Anderson's world and an external commentary on it.

Didactical compositions for children are used extensively throughout *Moonrise Kingdom*, such as excerpts from Bernstein's rendition of Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals* and Britten's compositions from his juvenilia, like *Simple Symphony* and songs from *Friday Afternoon*, as well as his later opera *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with its chorus of child fairies. By using "grown-up" music designed for children, Anderson strengthens the



Figure 4. Interior of the Bishop family home (Anderson 2012)

film's child-friendly ethos.⁴ Britten is widely respected in the pantheon of twentieth-century composers; however, the qualities of his music are perhaps too relatively subtle to find enough life outside the concert hall. Britten was influenced in equal measure by English composers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, particularly Purcell, the German masters Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, as well as contemporaries such as Debussy, Schoenberg, and Berg. As a result, his music tends to walk a delicate tightrope between nationalism, tradition, and contemporary modernism. It is perhaps the reason why Britten's music is rarely used in cinema, Hollywood or otherwise, especially to this extent. The surprise with which Anderson's choice of Britten was received is evident in several cultural magazines. As music critic and composer Russel Platt writes in *The New Yorker*:

[...] the composer part of me is still pinching itself that the music of a modern giant, Benjamin Britten, was used so extensively in a major motion picture – Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom*. This sort of thing just isn't supposed to happen, after all. (Platt 2012)

For British pastoral music, directors and music supervisors might turn to Britten's more immediately accessible contemporary, Vaughan-Williams. For distinctly dissonant and violent scores, they might turn to more overtly modernist music like the compositions of Stravinsky. Britten seems to float in the middle of these two extremes, and this in-between state might not easily suit films that need quick extremes and an easy fix.

Perhaps it is precisely this in-betweenness that appeals to the young characters in *Moonrise Kingdom*. Arguably, Sam and Suzy are in-between childhood and adolescence and experience a complex range of emotions and hormonal changes, like dark and destructive bursts of aggressive behavior. Suzy carries a record of Benjamin Britten, among others, in her escapade with Sam, and her younger brothers play the record at home. The children's engagement with the classical compositions of Britten never comes across as imposed by their parents; after all, Suzy carries the record player with her despite having to manage the island's rough and mountainous terrain. Similarly, her younger brothers are enraged to find out that their phonograph has been taken. Britten's didactical compositions might be designed to make orchestral music more accessible to young people, but he does not soften any of the dark material that comes with the music. *The Young Person's Guide to The Orchestra* develops often ominous and tumultuous variations on Purcell's somber minor theme. Just like Anderson's exploration of early adolescence, unpleasant emotions are not simplified for the sake of sentimentality; there is a dark, majestic beauty embedded in Britten's composition. Both

artists created many works about children that nonetheless share the same complexity and sincerity as more ostensibly "grown-up" work, thus emphasizing the emotional capabilities of children, as well as their creative power.

Moonrise Kingdom and *The Young Person's Guide to The Orchestra* centralize the child's own viewpoint and experience rather than that of an adult, who, having forgotten their own childlike aspirations, looks upon the child as a being of less developed sensibilities than themselves – whereas a child receives impressions more directly, unhindered by the clutter of compromise and habit that have blunted our own adult sensibilities. Britten acknowledges this fact and makes no artistic concessions in his writing for children, which might account for the pleasure they experience in listening to his compositions. Thus, while the music is intended to crack open and simplify the adult world of orchestral music to children, it serves to expose children to loaded adult emotions that conflate beauty and melancholy. As is often the case with Britten's music for children, an apparent simplicity on the surface can mask a deeper and more meaningful thematic significance, synthesized and diversified by the composer with characteristic resourcefulness. His proclivity towards absolute music was rare indeed. For Sam and Suzy, Britten's variations are a suitable signifier for their own relationship with their surroundings: their outlook might be simple and naïve, yet their innocence does not weaken their capacity for depression or euphoria. In one of the earliest pieces of critical writing on Anderson, Mark Olsen argues that, unlike many contemporary directors, Anderson "does not view his characters from some distant Olympus of irony. He stands beside them – or rather, just behind them," coining the term "New Sincerity" to describe this approach. (Olsen 1999: 12–17).

In *Moonrise Kingdom*, Anderson smartly adopts the theatricality of stage works to evoke the feeling of a child's interpretation of the world while signifying the artificiality of the spectacle. The narrator of *Moonrise Kingdom* (Bob Balaban) plays an undetermined, mercurial role characterized by an apocalyptic quality. He has the omniscient ability and control to address the camera and thus the audience directly, most obviously when he declares that a storm will hit New Penzance within three days, breaking the fourth wall to share knowledge that is unattainable in the narrative's present. At another point, while addressing the audience, the narrator pauses and proceeds to move from his mark and correct the lighting source before returning to continue his narration. He has control over elements of the mise-en-scène and the ability to move between diegetic and extra-diegetic realms, assuming a God-like figure while drawing attention to the artificiality of the spectacle. The acknowledgement of the cinematic apparatus and the audience observing a

spectacle suggests a “cinema of attractions” that frames the film by an intentional theatricality. This is further reinforced by the pageant theatricality that characterizes *Noye's Fludde*, and the didactic *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, which bookends the narrative of the film like a proscenium containing a play.

In addition, Anderson's visual style is informed by a high degree of formalism, emphasizing colour, line, shape and texture, while the settings look like stage sets: they are carefully staged and arranged, while the periphery of the frame is just as significant as the action in the center. His style is self-reflexive, drawing attention to the very act of looking, through perfectly centered shots and symmetrical compositions. Anderson asks us to look at the edges as much as the center; his thematic obsession with the marginal and the disaffected suggests that that is where real drama, or real life, might be occurring. *Moonrise Kingdom* satirizes the authority we have traditionally given established institutions and systems, such as the theater, family, marriage, school, law, social services, the police, and the church. Even maps, road signs, and painted portraits are presented with the mythic aura we envelope them with as children. These elements combine to highlight what I read as the film's main theme: the rising of the creative individual under the oppressing weight of tradition and history. Similarly, Britten composed numerous works that sought to include amateur singers of younger ages, which are usually left out in most operatic repertory. In this way, both artists support the vision that young people are essential creators and agents of change in the world.

Sam and Suzy's budding relationship is the birth of an Andersonian alternative family unit, like the Max Fischer Players in *Rushmore* or Team Zissou in *The Life Aquatic*. Furthermore, Sam's peers in the Khaki Scouts drastically transform into a surrogate family for the pair. When Sam and Suzy first run away, his fellow scouts are deputized to catch the fugitive and proceed to do so in a vigilante-like fashion, armed with hatches, bludgeons, axes, and other vicious weaponry. These scene sheds light on the internal conflict between the individual and the mob: throughout his adventure into the wild with Suzy, Sam demonstrates an impressive set of survival skills and proves his merit as a Khaki Scout. He is self-sufficient and an excellent guide, arguably virtues that he developed through membership of the Khaki Scouts. But it is also the Khaki Scouts that cannot accept his elopement and eccentric departure from the camp, especially for the love and companionship of a young girl. However, after the duo is captured and separated by the authorities, the Khaki scouts attempt to correct their earlier behavior in a collective effort to re-unite the lovers and provide shelter and support. They become Sam and Suzy's loyal accomplices; their brave and tactical improvisation

leads Sam and Suzy to the non-denominational tent of Cousin Ben, a self-appointed chaplain who unites the pair in a ritual. Sam and Suzy's elopement, relationship and ultimately their union represents “a desire to actively create alternative formations of collectivity that might heal past pain” (Rybin 2014: 77).

The theme of the individual and the mob was central to Britten's life and work, particularly his opera *Peter Grimes*. His own contemporary summation of the work concludes:

A subject very close to my heart – the struggle of the individual against the masses. The more vicious the society, the more vicious the individual. (Britten 1948)

While Britten and his music are well documented on disc and in print, often performed, and hugely respected, particularly by those in the world of opera, he is often stranded outside of the meta-musicological narrative. It is commonly agreed, even by those who view Britten as retrogressive, that he had an extraordinary ability to create a massive-scale work out of the smallest material.⁵ His music speaks to an essential British sensibility; he does not rely exclusively on folk tunes and pastorals, but he does not shy away from them either, borrowing from a variety of British sources to mould them into his own musical design. In his music, the grace of classical influences lies with modernist experiments in tonality through a baroque conception of the English countryside. As Felsenfeld suggests:

He need not pluck one style of music and ask you to be impressed by its displacement; Britten's music is itself a displaced style. (Felsenfeld [no date])

While Britten's ability to spin much out of little is what makes his music often strike as overwhelming, his insight into all aspects of the human nature and condition, from light to dark, is what makes it last. His music is a music of conflicts, from the pen of a man of conflicts. Leonard Bernstein put it best, at the introduction of Tony Palmer's documentary on *Benjamin Britten: A Time There Was* (1979):

Ben Britten was a man at odds with the world [...]. It's strange, because on the surface Britten's music would seem to be decorative, positive, charming – and it is so much more than that. When you hear Britten's music, if you really hear it, not just listen to it superficially, you become aware of something very dark – there are gears that are grinding and not quite meshing and they make a great pain. It was a difficult and lonely time [...]. Yes, he was a man at odds with the world. (Bernstein in Palmer, 1979)

Perhaps then, the world with which Britten was at odds with was not simply the world at large – the world was not entirely sympathetic to a homosexual artist who was both timely and ahistorical – but the black-and-white cultural conscience that believed in a single way to make one's art.

Technology, Communication, and Identity

During his time in the United States, Britten published an article in the journal *Modern Music*, titled “England and the Folk-Art Problem” (1941: 71–75). The article lamented the idea of a national English music rooted in folk material; it is important to note, however, that Britten did not bemoan the possibility of useful folk music but merely challenged the preconceived notions of its authenticity. Writing in 1941, in an unexpected turn at the end, Britten suggests:

The attempt to create a national music is only one symptom of a serious and universal malaise of our time- the refusal to accept the destruction of ‘community’ by the machine. (Britten 1941: 75)

The destruction of community by the machine is subtly but poignantly presented in *Moonrise Kingdom*. Except for *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Anderson’s films are exceptional for the distinct absence of any markers of modernity, cultural signifiers, or historical specificity. It seems peculiar, then, that *Moonrise Kingdom* is grounded within a very specific temporal period, from 3 to 5 September 1965, with flashbacks to 1964 when Sam and Suzy first met. The specificity of temporality that Anderson cues through precise action and happenings is reminiscent of specific moments in American history that marked the trajectory of the nation, through great events and small ones. One of these events would change the world forever: the launch of the first commercial communications satellite known as “Early Bird” in April 1965. The film is riddled with references to birds: when Sam, whose scout designation is “Pigeon,” first encounters Suzy, dressed as a raven for the performance of *Noye’s Fludde*, he asks her, “What kind of bird are you?” Also, Scout Master Ward, upon seeing that Sam has escaped from the camp, exclaims “Jiminy cricket, he flew the coop!” By staging the collapse of communication within the community, Anderson aptly illustrates how America (and the world) reached out into space to enhance communication with those across the far side of the Earth while unable to communicate with those living in the same house.

To demonstrate, Suzy’s mother Mrs. Bishop uses a bull horn to communicate with her husband and kids at home, calling them to dinner, even if as Mr. Bishop says, they are “right here.” Indeed, the use of communications technology as such features prominently throughout the film. Captain Sharp uses a walkie-talkie to reach out to Sam when he is climbing the church steeple, while the social services lady appears in split screen through person-to-person connected calls. Scout Master Ward records his everyday log of Camp Ivanhoe on a tape recorder as well as his thoughts and personal notes. The disparity between the high-technology gadgets we use today and the quaint communications technology displayed in *Moonrise Kingdom* begs the

question: is technology a means of aiding communication or impeding it? The film’s own tragicomic example occurs when Scout Master Ward informs Sam that his status as an orphan was not recorded in the register, and therefore he did not know about it. Scout Master Ward did not engage in personal conversation with Sam about his parents because he depended on his daily recorded register. Because Ward has made a habit of recording his thoughts and emotions on the tape machine, he does not seek out personal human relationships that would have better enabled him to help Sam; this is further evident by his status as a single and lonely bachelor. Regardless, it is by using the walkie-talkie that Sam is able to accept Captain Sharp’s proposition for adoption and thus escapes the juvenile refuge and shock therapy that social services was determined to place him in.

Anderson reminds us that the bonds and habits we form with technology are not easily overcome or broken. Just like Scout Master Ward, Suzy carries her brother’s record player around both times they escape, even if it is inconvenient. The record player is a form of entertainment that Suzy thoroughly enjoys but is also part of her “baggage” of self-identity because the records she chooses to play express for her what she cannot yet put into words (is that what art does for us all?). Thus, by enlarging and staging Britten’s concern about the destruction of community by the machine, Anderson provides a wise commentary on technology that seems to suggest that the machine’s status is neither “good” nor “bad,” but it is determined by how we use it, for what end and why. As a director who meticulously structures mise en scène with familiar objects of the recent past, his films have spoken to the generation forced to negotiate between the pervasiveness of digital information and the flourishing nostalgic value of the analogue. The phonograph, record collections, and the hard-bound library are recurring objects in Anderson’s films; “their fetish value increases as they provide ever greater respite from the growing tyranny of the digital audio file and the computer tablet” (Palmer 2014). Anderson’s emphasis on older technologies like record players, tape recorders, and so on is indicative of what Nathan Jurgenson refers to our “current obsession with the analog, the vintage, and the retro,” that is, the “fetishization of the offline” (Jurgenson 2012).

Anderson playfully blurs film musicology’s traditionally held distinction between non-diegetic and diegetic modes. While he foregrounds the sound design by anchoring the music visually through close-up shots of record players, tape machines, and radios, the music fluidly moves between localized, grainy sound within the diegesis to a much fuller, meta-diegetic quality. Rick Altman proposes that such audio dissolve signals a transition from the real to the ideal realm, where the diegetic sound source acts as a “bridge between time-bound narrative and the timeless transcendence of supra-diegetic music; [it] exists only to be

silenced, suppressed and left behind" (Altman 1987: 67). Anderson frequently combines this audio manipulation in combination with his trademark slow-motion sequences. In this way, he evokes a sense of dream-like quality, where the music functions like a Greek chorus, commenting on a narrative temporarily frozen into spectacle.

Cultural Memory and Renewal

To examine the theatrical processes of renewal that both Anderson and Britten engage with, an analysis of *Noye's Fludde* outside the cinematic world of the film is due. *Noye's Fludde* is based on the fifteenth-century Chester "mystery" or "miracle" play that conveys the Old Testament myth of Noah's Ark. It is a pageant that was composed primarily with child performers in mind, and balanced collective ritual of renewal with modernist elements in tonal and instrumental writing. By closely weaving Anglican hymnody into the work, Britten composed *Noye's Fludde* as a singularly local work that consciously integrated familiar melodies to allow for active audience participation. This ethos of inclusion and accessibility is further strengthened by a musical and dramatic aesthetic that enables sophisticated amateur performance without however resorting to instructional modes of communication. Britten repurposed and re-appropriated familiar spaces and bodies, like the church, the sounds of everyday objects, and theatrical frameworks to cultivate an atmosphere of ritual. This process of renewal further enabled the composer to engage both amateur performers and the general public as well as children. *Noye's Fludde* is distinguished by its sheer tightness of construction (clearly anticipating the Church Parables), flexible scoring, and cunning distribution of musical content for the professional forces; the straightforward but far from unsophisticated material for amateurs and children ensures a remarkably democratic aesthetic as well as an inbuilt guarantee of successful effect in performance.

In this way, *Noye's Fludde* is a conscious attempt to provide greater opportunities for amateur performers and young participants as well as cultivate sonically and thematically inclusive sound worlds. While it carries listeners through a narrative of peril and destruction, the outcome is renewal, and with it, the promise of continuity, peace, and community. The first performance at Orford Church, as part of the 1958 Aldeburgh Festival, did not merely repeat this narrative. As Heather Wiebe suggests:

[...] it called on ritual, childhood, the past, the everyday, and the local in a compelling performance of community and regeneration. (Wiebe 2012: 151)

Britten specified that the production should be staged in churches or large halls but not in a theater, highlighting

the democratic nature of his work. Along with Britten's efforts to engage with the English musical past blossomed a commitment to the concept of an English musical culture, one that related to common audiences, founded in ideals of community and traditional practices, integrated with everyday life; thus, the church or a large hall seemed more appropriate than the more exclusive spaces of theater. The work was composed as a means to revive the musical past and familiar theatrical frameworks while immersing the Aldeburgh Festival community in active musical performance through Anglican hymn singing assigned to the "congregation," as Britten referred to the audience. The genre-bending nature of *Noye's Fludde* includes various musical and theatrical gestures to the past and a reaction to the post-war revivalist atmosphere as well as expressions of Britten's own ethics and frustrations. As well as considering the narrative significance of structuring the film around Britten's music, I wish to contemplate the extent to which Anderson is engaging in similar processes of theatrical renewal. By reproducing *Noye's Fludde* as a play within a film, Anderson stages a performative ritual of spiritual and artistic redemption. By cultivating myth and cultural heritage, both Anderson and Britten express similar creative outlooks on children, childhood, and the community. For Anderson, *Noye's Fludde* becomes a repurposed cultural artifact itself, just like the Chester miracle play provides Britten with the means to his own theatrical church parable.

In the 1958 published score for *Noye's Fludde*, Britten includes extensive performance directions specifying the type of space used, the list of performers, notes on dramaturgy, and a section on instrumentation devoted primarily to the unique arrangement of percussion included in the score. Britten writes that while some of the instruments should be expertly made (such as the wind machine and whip), others, like "the slung mugs and sandpaper, can be concocted at home" (Britten 1958). He goes on to explain how these object-instruments can be easily put together at home by the performers, using cheap and readily available materials. It is evident that Britten is speaking from experience, as he had invented the slung mugs himself at home, prior to the work's debut. Though this sense of economy, Britten democratizes his work and makes a genuine attempt to involve the community in every step of the creative process, from preparation to execution. In a similar fashion, Anderson wished to re-create the animal costumes for *Noye's Fludde* with the same cheap, felt material from the production in his childhood. It is believed, however, that the costume designers declined.

Britten designed *Noye's Fludde* around three hymns that subdivide the work into even sections. Sung both by the performers and the congregation, the hymns act as a bridged structure to establish an exchange between

the two groups, thus encouraging a relationship through unified religious gesture. Similarly, the panic that Sam and Suzy cause by escaping acts to animate the adults of the community to establish a better communication and relationship with their younger cohabitants. If the flood story was one of survival and renewal, it was also one of danger and rupture. Both *Moonrise Kingdom* and *Noye's Fludde* take on this tension, asking how struggling traditions or generations can be given new life and purpose in the present. Britten's imaginative integration of the hymns into this work is not simply a revival but a renewal, a way of fusing heritage with progress by making the familiar new. For Britten, this process of renewal was not merely a way to engage with a broader audience for the arts or of a nostalgia for some long lost, romantic concept of art as part of public discourse. Instead, he drew on an even further past, and particularly on the practices of an Anglican Christian tradition, to construct a participatory cultural life, integrated with the everyday as a means to enrich daily life and practices; "through music, this shared past could live in the present" (Wiebe 2012: 20).

Britten's experiences as the organizer of the Aldeburgh Festival were pivotal in his eventual conception of *Noye's Fludde* as a communal, intergenerational work. His desire to compose for children, however, began to take root long before. During his years in the United States, Britten appealed to American composers to write more educational music for schools. With his return to Britain, he was motivated to create his own contributions, like *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* (1945). *Noye's Fludde*, however, was more transgressive than Britten's earlier creations. While *The Young Person's Guide* is an explicit introduction and dissection of art music tradition, *Noye's Fludde* is completely committed to amateur performers, children, professionals, and everyone in between and invites direct and active audience participation. Furthermore, the explicitly didactic nature of *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* is replaced in *Noye's Fludde* by amalgamating educational themes with processes of ritual and renewal. As Heather Wiebe puts it, the original production by Britten and director Colin Graham was a type of "trans-historical collapse, a magical superimposition of medieval faith and the imposed simplicity of modern Suffolk schoolchildren" (Wiebe 2006: 88). Thus, a central strategy of theirs was not to replicate the medieval world but to endow remnants of the past with the resonances of the present. The production's ark was quite literally a reproduction of a medieval carving from a nearby church, animating a distinctly local artefact. But if the production gave new life to past relics, its methods were plainly revealed to the audience, with the stylized ark built in full view and all stage machinery clearly exposed.⁶ Similarly, Graham suggested that the children wear everyday dress with only a mask or headdress symbolizing an animal,

literally staging temporal and theatrical duality upon the performers themselves. This intentional transparency is further reflected in the music, which manufactures the sounds of the flood and storm from the toy-like instruments of the slung mugs, sandpaper, and so on.

Mirroring this intentional transparency and artificial aesthetic are Anderson's cinematic toy worlds. The audience cannot infiltrate the constructed world of the film created by Anderson, nor are the purely cinematic characters able to transcend their specific representations. Anderson's signature use of a concluding slow-motion sequence draws attention to the film construct: it signals the end of the narrative and the characters within it. While the audience may have been moved by the narrative and characters, the closing credits ensure that both are irretrievably complete. The performative nature of the cinematic medium is recognized by Anderson in the recurring use of theater, film, and literature, both diegetically and formally. However, his film worlds are more than affectation or pure aestheticism: their artifice performs both narrative and thematic functions. These film worlds mobilize irony and artificiality to mediate sincere emotional and psychological concerns. All film worlds – those filmed on location and those filmed on a set – are artificial constructions.

[In the mainstream Hollywood tradition], the constructed nature of film worlds are consciously and rigorously effaced – conventions of style and structure prescribe the presentation of film worlds to be believable or coherent locations in which immersive or affecting narratives play out. (Wilkins 2016: 59)

Anderson's film worlds, on the other hand, often signal their own artifice. In his introduction to *The Wes Anderson Collection*, Michael Chabon likens Anderson's constructed worlds to Joseph Cornell's boxes. He states that "the cinematic frame becomes a Cornelian gesture, a box drawn around the world of the film" (Chabon 2013) – that is, Anderson's film worlds are assembled and contained collages of various specifically chosen referents and existing artifacts. While *Moonrise Kingdom* might unfold during a specific three-day period, it is defined by familiar but completely fictional places. Both in terms of narrative content and visual form, Anderson's films seem to be in constant dialogue with the "real" world. New Penzance might be a fictitious island, but the setting is easily translatable into a real life equivalent; the look and feel of the island is reminiscent of coastal New England. Regardless, it is a completely fictional island with no reference to real places. The friction between the fictional setting of the film and the familiarity with the world outside constantly urges the audience to engage and reckon with this tension. Furthermore, regardless of the specificity of temporality in which the story occurs, New Penzance seems unaffected by real time and can even be read as existing outside of time, as nothing of what was happening

during that period in the rest of the world seems to intrude upon it. Suzy's fantasy and adventure books remind us that this, too, is "a memory of a fantasy" (Anderson in Waxman 2012). The landscapes themselves have a childish defiance of gravity, evident at the strangely tall poles at the tidal canals and when the Scouts build their tree house impossibly high. The visual structure of the film follows Anderson's ultra-stylized archness: intricately realized storybook settings, deadpan dialogue that obscures melancholy and comedy, life-size dollhouses, and use of particular color palettes reminds us that artifice is central to the enjoyment of art. *Moonrise Kingdom*, as well as *Noye's Fludde*, confronts us with the question of where and how we draw or unwittingly run up against these boundaries between our fictions, our significantly fictive selves, and forms of social life, and the material and nonhuman worlds against and through which they unfold. Wielding the familiar and unfamiliar together, both works achieve theatrical re-enchantment through an expansion of community across temporal, musical, and cultural boundaries.

Myth, Ritual, and the Transformation of the Self

Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde* is the anchoring musical work of the film; it is the occasion of Sam and Suzy's first meeting and the climactic finale of the film. The pageant⁷ utilizes the theatrical framework of the historical myth of Noah's Ark with amateur performance and participation to engage community in a theatrical passage of catharsis. Britten uses three strands of memory to weave together a communal ritual of self-rediscovery. He evokes childhood through the playful staging and accessible instrumentation, national memory through Anglican hymn singing, and cultural memory through the framework of the archetypal flood. Similarly, the parabolic narrative of *Moonrise Kingdom* is replete with religious symbolism; Sam and Suzy employ ritual and myth to create knowledge and as a catalyst for self-transformation. Suzy is an avid reader of mythical fantasy books, while Sam constructs his everyday life around the rituals of Scout life. Through these means, they recreate their place in the world; they interpret and understand their reality, of self and world, and engage with community to form new identities and thus new communities.

Like the community that Britten was composing for, the fundamental values and cultural assumptions of a community in its quest for the sacred come into play. As Sam and Suzy forge their path as a pair, they escape the society that condemns them while surviving the historic storm, which leaves them with a new understanding of their own place in the world. Sam and Suzy eventually set up camp alongside a lagoon-like body of water, where they swim, dance, kiss, and cook dinner. The life they lead there is idyllic, away

from the controlling influence of parents and scoutmasters, and their conversations reveal articulate, sensitive people. At the beach, Sam and Suzy jump together into the water from a small cliff; this is not only a symbolic baptism but also an act of communion and ritual, where water offers purification, signaling Sam and Suzy's renewal of self. Wilfrid Mellers suggests that the opening hymn to *Noye's Fludde*, "Lord Jesus, think on me," functions as a genesis where the mercy of Jesus is prayed for so that purity and innocence may be restored through the flood. Although the flood is in one sense destructive force, it is in another sense (as it was in biblical myth) a necessary return to the unconscious waters. (Mellers 1984: 54)

Myth functions as a passage to the sacred, as a bridge for humans to connect to what is spiritually meaningful to them. It offers individuals a way to understand the world and their place in it; "the primary functions of myths are to make meaning, make memories, and make communities." (Plate 2017: 24–25). Across Anderson's filmography, the construction of a unified community, whether traditional or alternative, is vital to narrative development and themes. As Noah's Ark passes from destruction to creation through the flood, the most prevalent rituals in *Moonrise Kingdom* are rites of passage. The cultural significance of the myth of Noah's Ark has immense value for religious communities and beyond. Plate notes:

Myths may be fictions, but they are believed to be true in a deeper sense than historical investigations can provide because they tell something that the facts alone cannot—they are embodied, performed, and memorable. (Plate 2017: 26)

In his groundbreaking work *The Rites of Passage* (1961), Van Gennep categorizes rites of passage into three distinct phases: rites of separation, transition, and incorporation, otherwise defined as the pre-liminal, the liminal, and the post-liminal stage. In their pilgrimage of escape, Sam and Suzy experience all three stages of passage, but the middle stage, the liminal phase of transition, is the most prevalent in the film's narrative. Upon entering the first rite of separation, Sam and Suzy leave behind their home, family, and status while transitioning into the liminal state. Liminality is characterized by ambiguity, where the individual is no longer identified by their previous state but not yet fully transformed into a new identity or state of being. The in-between state of liminality is populated by those deemed on the margins or society, or like Sam and Suzy, alienated by their peer groups and traditional family units. However, like a caterpillar in a cocoon waiting for metamorphosis, it is in this state of being that creativity manifests, the possibility of rebirth as a new identity awaits. Perhaps one could extend the stage of liminality to describe Britten's musical style. Robin Holloway has observed that there is an inherent "two-sidedness" in Britten's musical language:

[...] it is rather the natural extension of tendencies implicit in his brilliantly wayward mastery of traditional harmony, which, when pressed, can run quite counter to it though still alongside. (Holloway in Allen, 2011: 279)

One possible explanation may be described as the simultaneous co-existence of traditional notions of progress and regress in his musical aesthetic, which fluctuated between folk traditions and modernism. Britten himself can be thought as being “stuck” in this phase of liminality, as at the age of 39, he remarked to Imogen Holst that he was “still thirteen” (Birdcut 2007: 36) in his heart – his own child’s mind was not left behind in childhood. Through the lens of liminality, ordinary rules are suspended and a utopian ideal is invoked instead; “this returns us to the idea that rituals connect the world of “reality” (how things are) with “ideality” (how things ought to be).” (Lyden 2003: 101)

Imitating a structured rite of passage, the narrative of *Moonrise Kingdom* unfolds through three distinct stages. Similarly, Britten constructed *Noye’s Fludde* around three hymns that evenly divide the work. The film starts and ends in Suzy’s family home. However, the reality they experience at the start is entirely different from the reality at the end. Additionally, while the diegesis of the film unfolds over a specific three-day period, the audience is presented with narrative flashbacks of early performances of *Noye’s Fludde*, which provide the site of Sam and Suzy’s first meeting. In a similar fashion, scenes later in the narrative are also performance centered and inform the audience of the cancelled production. The viewer is offered knowledge through these performances, like the functions of myth in the lives of the characters. To consider the importance of myth within the community, to make sense of the world and as a bridge to the sacred, the performances of *Noye’s Fludde* must be examined. Sam and Suzy first meet backstage where the yearly production of Britten’s church parable takes place. A year later, the same production has been cancelled due to the severity of a storm that has hit the island. The church, just like Noah’s Ark, has become a vessel of passage and refuge through the storm. Rachel Joseph illuminates:

The flood, in one rush, brings them together both as a community and as love itself. The floodwater purifies each character and leaves them ready to establish new or refreshed relationships with one another. What began in miniature on the stage is mirrored and magnified in the climactic big storm, scenes where each character’s mettle and connection to one another are tested. (Joseph 2014: 61)

In the historic myth of the Genesis flood, God spares Noah, his family, and a pair of all the world’s animals through the vessel of an ark that endures the world-engulfing flood. As found across various cultures and religions, this myth represents a binary symbolism that is both destruction and creation. Britten’s *Noye’s Fludde* acts as a metaphor for

the literal “storm of the century” that engulfs the island and the transition that Sam and Suzy experience throughout the film. The finale occurs as the destruction brought upon the storm’s flooding waters, in the myth and in their lives, is shown not to be completely negative; the water purifies the past, offering Sam and Suzy a new beginning in a community that has now grown as a result of the plight it had to suffer. When the storm subsides, the characters reveal a new sense of self: Suzy’s mother cuts off the affair with police Captain Sharp and finds renewed purpose as a better mother and wife. Captain Sharp, in turn, adopts Sam and is moved by his predicament as an orphan to challenge the jurisdiction of social services as an institution for child welfare. Scoutmaster Ward rededicates his efforts to stronger leadership of the Khaki Scouts, who start working together as a “family.” The film’s characters, in their journey toward the self, realize their interdependence upon each other, “... their need for communion – and discover the Self in communion with the Other.” (Hancock 2005: 4)

Similarly, the storm transformed not only the people but the physical geography of the island, signifying destruction as a form of creation. As the film’s narrator Bob Balaban says:

The coastal areas of New Penzance were battered and changed forever. But harvest yields the following autumn far exceeded any previously recorded, and the quality of the crops was said to be extraordinary. (Anderson 2012)

Conclusion

Benjamin Britten weaved together communal singing, the theatricality of pageants, and the relationship of musical sounds to physical happenings, gestures, and common objects to revive the past of cultural traditions, make the sacred tangible, and integrate the community by restoring a sense of wonder and enchantment in everyday life. Similarly, Anderson employs Britten’s works, *Noye’s Fludde* especially, with renewed dramatic agency and emotional resonance. Like Britten’s theatrical processes of renewal, Anderson deconstructs these cultural relics to make them new and manipulates the boundaries of the very world he is constructing. Both artists employ the biblical myth of the flood as a catalyst for creative and spiritual catharsis, while the treatment of Britten and his music transforms *Moonrise Kingdom* into a homage to personal, national, and cultural memory. Both Britten and Anderson share a child-friendly ethos and employ theatrical processes of renewal to explore the transformation of the self through communal ritual and myth.

The centrality of community in Anderson’s film reflects the significance of his filmic crew, which functions as another form of community through which Anderson can realize his personhood and thus his authorial vision.

Anderson and Britten recognize that finding our authentic selves is dependent on the communities and relationships we form. This resonates both with the characters of *Moonrise Kingdom* and for those who work with Anderson on the screenplay, film set, and beyond. Just like Noah in the myth of the historical flood, Sam and Suzy remain faithful to the struggle. Though a devastating storm tears through the island that holds the community, a weather forecast heavy with emotional weight and religious symbolism, all the characters are home by the closing curtain, safe and whole. Art can manage this, and we turn ourselves and children to it, partly to help us and them weather history and partly to understand our own place in the world.

Endnotes

- 1 See Devin Orgeron's article "La Camera-Crayola: Authorship Comes of Age in the Cinema of Wes Anderson" (in: *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 2007, p. 40–65).
- 2 It is interesting to note that while *Moonrise Kingdom* does not make any explicit references to Peter Pan, there are many moments that play homage to the much beloved story of Neverland and the lost boys. Just like Wendy, Suzy is the oldest of three younger brothers and runs away with an orphaned boy. The Khaki Scouts, just like the lost boys and Wendy, gather close to Suzy at night time, where she reads them stories around a campfire. At the end of the film, Sam leaves Suzy's home through her bedroom window, in a typical Peter Pan fashion, while the Scouts' camp Ivanhoe and general characteristics indulge in a Native-American aesthetic, just like the camp, rituals, and clothing of the lost boys.
- 3 There is a stimulating movement in recent conceptualizations of Western modernity that suggests the re-enchantment of a disenchanting world, compatible with secular rationality; see particularly Durning's *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Harvard, 2002), and Jane Bennett's *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Crossings, Attachments, and Ethics* (Princeton, 2002).
- 4 Carrying this approach even further, Anderson designs his closing credits so that Sam's voiceover can anatomize Alexandre Desplat's original score, instrument by instrument. For relationships between existing musical works and newly written music by Alexandre Desplat in *Moonrise Kingdom*, see: Kate McQuiston, "Some Assembly Required: Hybrid Scores in *Moonrise Kingdom* and *The Grand Budapest Hotel*" (in: Miguel Mera, Ronald Sadoff and Ben Winters (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Screen Music and Sound*, New York: Routledge, 2017).
- 5 See, for example, the opening of *Peter Grimes*, where he oscillates between simple melodic cells to create immense dramatic tension, or *The Turn of The Screw*, which is an entire opera built on a single theme.
- 6 Heather Wiebe suggests that there is something paradoxically mechanical, artificial and exposed, that renders a disenchanting quality to the processes of restoration: If this work approaches renewal through a restoration of historical and spiritual presence, it also plays with the relics of receding pasts: childhood, medieval culture, and perhaps faith itself. (Wiebe 2012: 152)

- 7 While many sources employ the term "opera" to describe this work, I contend its use due to the sophisticated connotations of exclusivity and high art that it carries, which conflicts with Britten's intentions and artistic vision.

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Supplement

Moonrise Kingdom (2012) Synopsis

Moonrise Kingdom follows the story of two troubled 12-year old children in a quixotic attempt to escape the suffocating hegemony of the adult society that surrounds them. The narrative unfolds on the fictional island of New Penzance in 1965. Sam Shakushky (Jared Gilman) is an orphan unable to integrate with the foster families he has been passed around to, while Suzy Bishop (Kara Hayward) is desperate to break free from her own family. Sam and Suzy meet for the first time at a production of Benjamin Britten's intergenerational pageant *Noye's Fludde*, staged at the local church. The climax of the film occurs a year later, when a performance in the same church is interrupted by a Noah-worthy flood that hits the island in the form of a devastating storm, foreshadowing the looming moral crisis of the characters. After a frequent exchange of letters, the two children decide to escape their families and alienated lives. Neither of the two fare well in social situations and have been isolated by their classmates and peers. The various adults of the community dart around in panic after Sam and Suzy run away together into the wild, while Sam's scout peers try

to hunt them down. Bill Murray and Frances McDormand are cast as Suzy's feuding lawyer parents, Bruce Willis as a dim-witted policeman who has an affair with Suzy's mother, Tilda Swinton as the character known only as "Social Services" and Edward Norton as Sam's slightly incompetent but virtuous Scoutmaster Ward. As the two children are captured and separated, Sam's scout peers, while first condescending towards the pair and their escape, decide to help the young couple elope and reunite. As the hurricane intensifies, the community of the island takes refuge in the church, where this year's production of *Noye's Fludde* is cancelled due to the weather conditions. Life imitates art, and the flood wreaks havoc on the island. Sam and Suzy, in their attempt to stay together and escape the adults that are chasing them, climb the church's tower and contemplate suicide. The two children, together with the chief of police, are left dangling rather precariously from a blasted steeple. Happily, Captain Sharp rescues the children, offers to adopt Sam and all three come through just fine (though their rescue is not shown). This is the film's *deus ex machina*; the trio get home safely, without even so much as a fear of heights. After the storm has passed, a new, stronger community has formed on the island. In attempting to create their own private utopia, albeit temporary and doomed to fail, Sam and Suzy's adventure reveals the dichotomy between the inexhaustible optimism of youth and the crippling disappointment and responsibility of adulthood, while drawing a clear distinction between those burdened with genuine care for the runaway children, and those simply weighted by the pretence of duty. Their disappearance mobilizes the community on the island in a united effort to find them, and thus sets in motion the rending, and the subsequent repairing of their immediate society. The film is a Biblical allegory, as seen in its depiction of a miracle, Anderson's moral vision, and the powerful imagery he uses to present that vision. Britten's theatrical work *Noye's Fludde* finds mimesis in *Moonrise Kingdom* through the literal flood that transforms the island's geography and the emblematic cathartic waters that Sam and Suzy's adventure bring upon the community. Noah's Ark, the anchoring myth of the film, tells the story of animals in pairs. *Moonrise Kingdom* brings the isolated together into a community that will have to learn to act as an ark, if its inhabitants are to make the voyage through life.

Santrauka

Kinas – žaisminga ir kartu griežta aplinka, kurioje įvairios meno rūšys, tokios kaip vaidyba, scenografija, režisūra, muzika, fotografija ir rašymas, kuria sinergiją, kad rastųsi vienas bendras kūrinys. Pasidaliję darbus ir kurdami menininkai įneša savo indelį į didesnės apimties kūrinį. Edwardas Saidas teigia, kad nuorodos ir aliuozijos, neigiamos ir teigiamos, kuria

muzikos pateikimo ir reprezentacijos kontekstą, kuris itin svarbus kino muzikos ir paties kino rezonansui ir aktualumui, o kartu pasižymi malonumo ir atradimų potencialu (1991). Bet kokia muzika kelia kultūrinių asociacijų, o daugumą šių asociacijų dar labiau kodifikuoja muzikos industrija. Filmai savo ruožtu yra kupini tekstinių, intertekstinių ir paratekstinių nuorodų ir aliuozijų. Taip kino kūrinys, dar labiau nei literatūros veikalas, nėra vieno autoriaus produktas; jis susijęs su kitais tekstais, praktikomis ir pačiomis diskurso struktūromis: kaip tik šis intertekstualios interpretacijos faktas leidžia rasti tekstui.

Remiantis tokiu disciplinų ribų peržengimo principu, straipsnyje nagrinėjama Benjamin Britteno muzikos traktuotė Weso Andersono filme „Mėnesienos karalystė“. Ypač daug dėmesio skiriama ideologinėms, sociokultūrinėms ir semiotinėms konotacijoms, kurios apima visą Britteno kūrybą ir gyvenimą, kartu įvertinant šių konotacijų poveikį filmo prasmės kūrimui. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kaip Britteno „Nojaus laivas“ (*Noye's Fludde*, 1958) Andersonui pasitarnauja kaip pagrindas savo naratyvui realizuoti, o tolesnė analizė atskleidžia, kad paties Britteno kūriniai filme atgimsta kaip teatrinės priemonės. Šis atgimimas pavertčia „Mėnesienos karalystę“ pagarbos duokle asmeninei, tautinei ir kultūrinei atminčiai. Daug kas režisierių linke vadinti autoriumi; jo „Mėnesienos karalystė“ – savisaugos diktuojamas kvietimas bendrystei.

Straipsnis pradedamas apmąstymais, kaip abu menininkai savo kūrybos praktikoje telkiasi į bendrystės temą, kartu žadindami vaikystės atmintį ir jos kerus ir taip skatindami bendruomeninius kultūrinės nostalgijos būdus. Koncentracija į jaunystę ir vaikystę veikia ir kaip naratyvo turinys, ir kaip stilistinės charakteristikos. Atskleidžiant Andersono režisūrinės praktikos ir Britteno kūrybos etoso bendrumus, parodoma, kaip „Mėnesienos karalystė“ atkuria kerus per dirbtinį ir idėjinį kino ir naratyvo aparatą. Vaikams skirti Britteno kūriniai nagrinėjami kaip įkvėpimo šaltinis pedokratinėi filmo prieigai. Andersono režisūra filme „Mėnesienos karalystė“ dekonstruojama, taip atiduodant pagarbą Britteno gyvenimui ir kūrybai; tiriama garso takelio naratyvinė ir metanaratyvinė funkcijos.

Be to, technologijų naikinamos bendrystės problema subtiliai, bet aštriai pristatoma filme „Mėnesienos karalystė“, atspindint Britteno susirūpinimą modernybės klausimais ir išsaugant ištikimybę Andersono laiko traktuotei. Jo filmai išsiskiria tuo, kad juose nėra jokių istorinės specifikos ar kultūrinių ženklų. Straipsnyje atskleidžiama, kaip Andersonas, pasitelkdamas garsines priemones ir subtilias nuorodas į socialines problemas, pirmiausia iškeltas Britteno, inscenuoja komunikacijos žlugimą bendruomenėje.

Siekiant ištirti teatrinis atnaujinimo procesus, būdingus ir Andersono, ir Britteno kūrybai, straipsnyje Britteno opera vaikams „Nojaus laivas“ pirmiausia analizuojama už filmo kinematografinio pasaulio ribų, o paskui pereinama

prie šio kūrinio panaudojimo „Mėnesienos karalystės“ naratyve. Operos „Nojaus laivas“ žanrą modifikuojantis pobūdis apima įvairius muzikinius ir teatrinis gestus, orientuojančius į praeitį. Naratyvinė filmo struktūrinimo pagal Britteno muziką prasmė nagrinėjama analizuojant būdus, kuriais Andersonas kuria panašius teatrinio atnaujinimo procesus. Kultivuodami mitą ir kultūrinį paveldą, abu kūriniai pasiekia pakartotinį teatrinį žavesį per bendrystės plėtrą, peržengdami laiko, muzikos ir kultūros ribas.

Operoje „Naujaus laivas“ istorinio Nojaus arkos mito teatrinė struktūra panaudojama per mėgėjišką atlikimą

ir dalyvavimą, kad bendruomenė patirtų teatrinį katarsį. Brittenas atgaivina vaikystę žaisminga inscenizacija ir prieinama instrumentuote, tautinę atmintį – anglikonų giesmių giedojimu, o kultūrinę atmintį – archetipinio tvano rėmais. Panašiai alegorinis „Mėnesienos karalystės“ naratyvas kupinas religinės simbolikos; pagrindiniai veikėjai pasitelkia ritualą ir mitą žinioms kurti ir kaip katalizatorių savęs transformacijai. Taip jie atkuria savo vietą pasaulyje, interpretuoja ir supranta savo tikrovę, save ir pasaulį ir įsitraukia į bendruomenę, kad formuotų naujas tapatybes, taigi ir naujas bendruomenes.

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