ANALYSIS OF ‘AMERICA: A PROPHECY’ BY THOMAS ADÈS

BY

SHIN YOUNG AUM

THESIS

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Heinrich Taube, Chair
Associate Professor Stephen Andrew Taylor, Director of Research
Associate Professor Erik Lund
Associate Professor Jeffrey Magee
The purpose of this study is to show two of composer Thomas Adès’ musical strengths: the consistency with which his work employs durational or intervalic succession, and the unification resulting from continuous motivic transformation. In this dissertation, Adès’ orchestral work *America: A Prophecy* will be thoroughly discussed to show how the main concept of the work, opposition is expressed as well as how the music expresses its texts - the Mayan *Chilam Balam* and the Spanish *La Guerra* - at both dramatic and structural levels.
For my husband and parents as a gesture of love
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CHAPTER ONE ADÈS’ MUSICAL STYLE

I. Thomas Adès’ Musical Style

Adès’ compositional approach is not easily defined; his prodigious talent lies in his integration of a variety of styles. His music displays diverse compositional models from Couperin, Ives, Janáček, Ligeti, Nancarrow, Brahms, and includes the moods of jazz, tango, and house music. His idiosyncratic style results from keen control of pitch structures, rhythm and orchestral timbres, and blending vividness of detail within a clear sense of overall form.

For example, Adès’ early neo-baroque work, “Sonata de Caccia (1993) for baroque oboe (or oboe), horn, and harpsichord could be imagined as an ‘homage’ to Debussy and Couperin, in the manner of the former’s sonatas for violin and piano, and the latter’s L’Apothéeose de Corelli or L’Apothéeose de Lulli.”

He often puts his own postmodern musical medium into a conventional sonata frame. In Brahms (2001), Adès sets a poem by Alfred Brendel, and alludes to the style of Brahms with such devices as hemiola, sequences based on descending thirds, and dense contrapuntal textures. The sonata’s recapitulation is compressed by a tempo taken twice as fast as the original speed, with his characteristic interval-cycle pitch structure.

In his Brahms, an “anti-homage” to the composer, Adès says, “I wondered what would happen if I wrote a piece just about the logic of Brahms’s music and not about the beauty and warmth.” The Piano Quintet (2000) shares similar characteristics with Brahms. The quintet features relatively strict sonata form with tonal themes.

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2 Aaron Travers, “Interval cycles, their permutations and generative properties in Thomas Adès’ ASYLA” (PhD diss., Eastman School of Music, 2005).
Like Brahms its recapitulation is temporally compressed. He ingeniously intermingles the characteristics of Brahms with contemporary idioms of Ligeti and Nancarrow; Adès assigns different meters to strings against the piano, so that bar lines occasionally coincide, creating a constantly shifting temporal focus. In addition, unconventional time signatures such as 1/6 and 2/7, divisions based on sextuplets and septuplets as opposed to crotchets and quavers, create metric instability, reflecting his idiosyncratic sensibilities.

Throughout his career Adès has integrated ubiquitous elements of popular music and culture into complex works. For instance, Life Story (1993), a setting of Tennessee Williams, is modeled on the late style of Billie Holiday. Living Toys (1993) is drawn from a Spanish folk tale, featuring big band music and funk. The opera Powder Her Face (1995) juxtaposes imitations of popular music such as tangos, American Broadway music, jazz, with faux-Stravinsky and blatant Richard Strauss quotes.

In the same period as Powder Her Face, he wrote Cardiac Arrest (1995), influenced by the same titled piece of a 1981 album by the ska/pop band Madness, written by Christopher Foreman and Cathal Smyth. Adès respects both the energy and the form of the original, translating it into a three-minute septet with clarinet, bass clarinet, viola, cello, double bass, and two pianos. Paul Griffiths wrote “In respect of repetitive structure and dance character, it is not so far from Les Baricades mistérieuses, a movement from François Couperin’s seventh suite of harpsichord pieces (1716), which Adès transcribed the year before.” His breakthrough orchestra work Asyla (1997) integrates polystylistic music of the past with non-idiomatic orchestrations:

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big band music with late Romantic expressiveness in the first movement; tone poem with Renaissance polyphony in the second; and a mixture of big band combined with the enthusiastic repetitions of drum/high-hat rhythmic patterns of house music in the third.

He also often applies English material to his music. In his late teens he had drawn on his precocious engagement with T.S. Eliot, choosing a series of lesser-known poems for his *Five Eliot Landscapes* (1990). In addition, the “*O Albion*” movement of his string quartet, *Arcadiana* (1994) features an idyllic homage to Elgar’s “*Nimrod*” from the Enigma Variations. Taking the same key (Eb major) as Enigma, the Elgarian voice-leading and counterpoint is not for identification with Elgar, but for reminiscing in his own eloquent musical language. *Arcadiana* also evokes various figures such as Schubert (The Lied *Auf dem Wasser zu Singen*). In addition, *Arcadiana*, as a pastoral piece in suite form is reminiscent of Britten’s third string quartet and his orchestral suite on English folk tunes, *A Time There Was*.

His interest in English Renaissance music appears in the solo piano piece *Darknesse Visible* (1992). His second opera, *The Tempest* (2003), is based on the play by William Shakespeare; here Adès and his librettist Meredith Oakes have reconfigured and compressed much of its poetic imagery.

Despite this attachment to English music and literature of the previous generations, David Mellor’s description of him as a ‘Messiah’ has been an annoyance for him. “I try to tune that out. I am English, but I spend so much of my time in other places. I was always aware I had this name that was difficult to pronounce and didn't quite fit in.”

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Other musical predecessors include Benjamin Britten to Henry Purcell. Britten’s fascinating orchestrations, and sharp musical sense across various genres give his music a popular appeal and universality just as Adès’ does. On the other hand, his eclectic musical style more closely resembles Henry Purcell’s, unfettered by rules, freedom of musical style, limitless transformation, irregular phrasing, meter, and rhythmic complexity. Purcell had a strong influence on the composers of the English renaissance by using his unbounded musical sense within clearly defined forms. The critic Andrew Porter has “again and again been excited by the way that in work after work young Adès, like Purcell and Britten, without repeating himself, has freshly touched and revitalized mainsprings of modern music.”

One of his few detractors, critic Rupert Christiansen, ventured a negative sentiment with a reference to the “overrated golden boy.” But Peter Culshaw commented that “he is open, humorous and empathetic, but also someone who will go to considerable lengths to protect his hard-won freedom as an artist.” Adès has said, “I can use anything I want in my music - the sound of a tram, Mahler, I don't care. It all comes through me. That's what babies are like, using DNA from a long time ago.”

Finally, he does not hesitate to deal with disturbing subjects, often resulting in an increased interest in his music. While the chamber opera Powder Her Face attracted critical praise, its so-called “fellatio aria” proved more controversial than he had anticipated. According to an interview with Peter Culshaw, Adès said, “I've thought about doing an opera with two

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8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
male leads, but would that be too gay, too contrived.” According to Adès, he never expected the degree of shock the scene provoked. The piece is based on the life of society beauty Margaret, the Duchess of Argyll, a woman brazenly both avaricious and licentious however, as Adès said, her story shows that “even horrible people are tragic.” “But in response to his adversaries, Adès defended himself by stating that he intended to create an outrageous, unlikable character whom the audience, in the end, feels compelled to identify with.”

First performed on 11 November 1999 as part of the ‘Messages for the Millennium’ program, America: A Prophecy, a vision of American disaster, proved eerily foreboding of the 9/11 attacks. In an interview with Tom Service, Adès said, “I don’t think that the notion of America as the future of modernity is available seriously as a creative idea any more.” Instead his America “started when I saw an enormous view from a pyramid in Belize. There were trees in every direction. But there were these little dents, which were also green, which were the ancient Mayan pyramids.”

Setting aside the work’s ominous prophecy, it has received excellent reviews from critics. Stephen Pettitt of the Evening Standard remarked, “America: A Prophecy also effectively censures the cheap and easy culture to which too many technically well-equipped but emotionally shallow composers, American and not, have contributed these two decades.” Paul Griffiths wrote that “America: A Prophecy is forceful, it is thrilling. What it says, though, is shimmering and many-layered. It projects the prophet’s sense of doom, but also the exaltation of

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the prophetic stance…In terms of the future, it seems to be saying that something momentous is coming and we do not know which side we will be on. Its expressive character, complex but precise, comes partly from an orchestral polyphony that has those same qualities.”

Rian Evans commented, “America: A Prophecy would in any circumstances be powerful. Here the parallels with [the] Ives made it quite overwhelming…Adès’ sound-world wove magic and horror by turn, manic yet vibrant…together they reinforced the perception of Adès as one of the most enlightened imaginations of his generation. Setting aside the word’s more perturbing connotations, he is indeed a visionary.”

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16 Ibid. Paul Griffiths, review on The Times Literary Supplement, 3 December 1999.
I. Introduction

Adès has described the sixteen-minute, two-movement work as “a prophetic vision of invasions of America.” The first movement (around 10 minutes) is immediately followed by the second (attacca), which is an elegiac coda to the first movement (6 minutes). The chorus sings in Spanish and Latin, while the mezzo-soprano sings only in English. Her text consists of apocalyptic prophecies from the Mayan books of *Chilam Balam*, translated by Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno, including an adaptation by the composer of text from *The Destruction of the Jaguar*. The books of *Chilam Balam* (1967) are the main surviving sacred texts of the ancient Mayans. Written in the Mayan language but in European script, they are poetic materials containing curious and fascinating combinations of prophecy, history, chronology, ritual, and mythology with numerous later interpolations and superimpositions of Christian symbolism and belief. Early Spanish accounts tell of the texts being sung, danced, chanted and recited to the accompaniment of drums and a variety of wind instruments.  

The chorus, contrasting with the soloist, sings in Spanish and Latin. The Spanish text is from *La Guerra* by Matteo Flecha, (c.1481-1553) who was a poet and composer of madrigals. *La Guerra* is one of the *ensalada*, a form of 16th century secular music for four voices. The Latin text, a celebration of victory from 1 John 5:4 in the New Testament, is performed at the end of the second movement.

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18 From a press release by Boosey & Hawkes Inc. New York.
20 Spanish for salad, a type of 16th-century quodlibet. The best-known *ensaladas* are those in Mateo Flecha’s collection of 1581. Such pieces were often humorous or programmatic (e.g. *La guerra*, ‘The Battle,’ and *El fuego*, ‘The Fire’), but some were longer, with religious subject matter.
In sections II and III, *America: A Prophecy* will here be analyzed from three perspectives: 1) the ways in which simple elements (short motives, rhythm etc.) are fused together to create an elaborate, complex work; 2) how the music expresses its texts - the Mayan *Chilam Balam* and the Spanish *La Guerra* - both at the dramatic and structural levels; and 3) how the concept of opposition applies to the musical parameters and orchestration.
II. Analysis of Movement 1

The first movement is composed of six sections, as shown in Table 1.1. Section 1, the orchestral introduction, begins with four flutes playing a simple, lively ostinato, suggesting the character of Mayan folk song. Although I call this the Mayan motive, Adès does not use this term. But I would argue that he regards this motive as “Mayan” for the following reasons: the ostinato is played by flutes, which are important instruments in indigenous Central American music; the soprano sings “They will come” set to this motive; and the quasi-pentatonic nature of the motive links it both to indigenous music, and Western composers’ representation (sometimes stereotypical) of indigenous music.

This simple tune lasts for only four bars before it is suddenly obliterated by the rest of the orchestra, playing with descending, piercing accents in opposing registers (high and low), a completely foreign key (Eb minor), and meter. This opposition between the “Mayan” folk song and “European” lament grows inexorably until it is interrupted by the mezzo-soprano’s clarion call, warning of the enemy’s imminent invasion:

O my nation, Prepare!

This warning triggers a chaos increasing tension and complexity until it suddenly vanishes up into the high register.

After this entire disturbance has subsided, section 2 begins with tinkling camel bells filling the sudden emptiness. This section is interwoven with thin, elongated canonic melodies with soft dynamics, accompanying the soloist’s indictment of her people.

The people move as if in dreams,
They are weak from fuck and drink
The prophets and the priests are blind
   In his bed the governor weeps
   It is the end of all our ways

The Mayan motive returns in section 3. The mezzo-soprano urgently sings a prophecy of doom:

   They will come from the east
   Their god stands on the pole
   They will burn all the land
   They will burn all the sky
   They will break with a cross

Her phrases are so chopped and repetitive that it sounds as if she is gasping for breath. With a dizzy repetition of Mayan motives, the music gradually reaches an intolerable tension, leading directly to the next section.

   Now the Spaniards burst onstage, in a strong and magnificent orchestral tutti. The Mayan motives resist, but are soon crushed by the enormous orchestral forces, playing martial fanfares. The following chorus of La Guerra leads to the highest climax with extremely strong dynamics, \textit{ffff}.

   The remaining sections 5 and 6 recapitulate the opening. The Mayan motive returns once again with its original harmony in section 5. Most of the gestures presented in section 3 (the prophecy) reappear, now with varied characters, rearrangements of its order, and new overlaying materials. If section 3 shows a prophecy, section 5 suggests a lament heard in the mezzo-soprano’s elongated, descending melody.
Your gods, your fathers, your children.

Your cities will fall

Your trees will be scaffolds

O They will rule from the backs of your fallen.

It is foretold

Prepare

Lastly, the slow, calm atmosphere and relatively thin texture of section 6 resembles section 2, ending with the main Mayan motive; its sound has lost its vitality. Now I will discuss each section in further detail, looking at motives and the relation of text to music.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections (Tempo)</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rehearsal letter</th>
<th>Vocal text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Section 1  
(♩=96)            | 1-54     | Orchestral introduction (Mayan motives) | A B C D | O (open vowel sound) O my nation Prepare |
| Section 2        | 55-83    | Calm M-sop. solo | E F | The people move as if in dreams They are weak from fuck and drink The prophets and the priests are blind In his bed the governor weeps |
| Section 3  
(♩=52/96)        | 84-123   | Prophecy M-sop. solo | G H I J | It is the end of all our ways O my nation Prepare They will come from the east Their god stands on the pole They will burn all the land They will burn all the sky They will break with a cross O my nation |
Section 4
($j=162/171$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>124-193</th>
<th>Climax Chorus (Spanish)</th>
<th>KLMNO</th>
<th>Section 4 (Spanish)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Todos los Buenos soldados que asentaren a esta querra no quieren ir descansados/ Si salien con victoria la paga que les darán será que siempre tendrán en el cielo eterna gloria</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 5
($j=90$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>194-230</th>
<th>Lament M-sop. solo</th>
<th>PQRST</th>
<th>Section 5 (Spanish)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Your gods, your fathers, your children. Your cities will fall Your trees will be scaffolds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 6
($j=32/46$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>231-250</th>
<th>Slow M-sop. solo</th>
<th>TV</th>
<th>Section 6 (Spanish)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calm closing</td>
<td></td>
<td>O They will rule from the backs of your fallen. It is foretold Prepare</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1 Structure of Movement 1.

Section 1

The main melody of the work first appears in the flute part; its repetitive ostinato lasts until m. 17, just before the first entrance of the mezzo-soprano. The melody is composed of two contrasting motives, shown below as A and B.

![Flute melodies in mm. 1-8.](image)

Figure 1.1 Flute melodies in mm. 1-8.

Motives A and B function as the fundamental elements of the whole first movement. In motive A, each F note on the strong beat is articulated by a tenuto marking, implying an F
pentatonic tonality; the simple rhythmic and tonal character gives this motive its folk, “Mayan” character. The ascending motive A is occasionally interrupted by the descending motive B in which F♮ is sometimes replaced with F#, suggesting an unstable G tonality. This opposition of tonality is the first of many oppositions that will appear in the course of the movement. The contrasting motives, C-D-F(F#) and G-F#(F)-D each have two types of pitch class (PC) set, while sharing the set, [0 2 5].

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{C-D-F(F#)} & \rightarrow [0 \ 2 \ 5], \ [0 \ 2 \ 6] & \text{G-F#(F)-D} & \rightarrow [0 \ 1 \ 5], \ [0 \ 2 \ 5]
\end{align*}
\]

These PC sets generate intervals of m2, M2, m3, M3, P4, and A4. Among these intervals, combinations of P4, M3, and A4 are favored harmonically over m3, M2, and m2.

Rhythmically, both motives start on strong beats, then gradually appear one-sixteenth note later from their previous starting points, as shown in Figure 1.2. These delays accumulate in m. 6, in which three motives B that appeared in mm. 2, 4, and 5 are combined in a single measure.

![Figure 1.2 Different starting points of motives A and B.](image)

The confrontation of rhythm, register, and harmony between the flutes and the rest of the orchestra dominates section 1. The Mayan ostinato motive appears in the middle register, with a persistent rhythm. Compared to the flute ostinato, the piano/orchestra ostinato is much more elaborate; it appears in the extreme high register with a slow rhythmic unit of four triplet
eight notes. This triplet motive is repeated eight times to make a long, falling phrase. After repeating four times, the last phrase lasts for six triplet-eighth groups before the mezzo-soprano interrupts the orchestra. The rhythmic unit of string harmonics, doubling the piano, spans eight triplet eighths, twice as slow as the piano (see Figure 1.3). While the strings and piano play their lament in the extreme high register, the tuba and contrabassoon play buzzing lines, shown in Figure 1.4. Throughout this paper, I describe descending melodies as laments. These melodies do not feature a typical “Lament bass” tetrachord. However, they do express a height of emotional intensity, which is certainly distinguished from the ascending motions that only appear in the Spanish section 4. Descending melodies are also later associated with the mezzo-soprano’s despairing text in section 5.

The different rhythmic units between flutes, piano, violin, and low winds result in a temporal conflict, reinforcing the three-layer polyphony (flutes vs. piano/strings vs. low winds), and inducing a sense of growing tension.

Figure 1.3 Piano and strings rhythmic unit in mm. 4-7.
Contrary to the flutes’ implied key of F or G, the rest of the orchestra clearly plays in Eb minor. The Bb-Eb drone bass of the bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, and piano first appears in m.5, and then transforms into a perfect fourth sequence (or interval cycle), Bb-Eb-Ab-Db-Gb-Cb, and gradually begins to incorporate the Mayan motive A (see Figure 1.4). Most of these bass phrases begin with Bb or Eb, which helps create a tonic and dominant relationship throughout section 1. In addition, the piano’s lament melody descends from Ab to Gb(G), F, Eb, D(Db), Cb(C), Bb with octave displacements. Even though the Gb-G, C-Cb pitches are variable in the scale, the pitch collection implies Eb minor.

Figure 1.4 Wind bass lines in mm. 10-15.
The pitch sequence bass line of tuba and contrabassoon mentioned above is an example of an interval cycle, one of Adès’ often-used techniques.\textsuperscript{21} An interval cycle is “a collection of pitch classes created from a sequence of the same interval class”\textsuperscript{22}, which can provide a strong motivic unity. George Perle, one of the first theorists to write on interval cycles, labeled them with a letter C (for cycle), followed by an interval class integer. The combination of continuous upward motion of perfect fourth (C5) in mm. 10, 13, and 15, its downward motion of perfect fifths (C7) in mm. 11-12, and accompanying motive A fragments in mm. 11, 13-15 all contribute to the bass line.

For another example of interval cycles in Adès, the initial motive of his string quartet, \textit{Arcadiana} shows a succession of four descending perfect fifth (C7) dyads in which the descent continuously occurs from the root to the fifth note of next dyad, overlapping each other (see Figure 1.5; this collection of six PCs is also known as the hexatonic collection).

\begin{align*}
(G#5------C5) & \quad (C\#5------F4) & \quad (E4------A3) & \quad (G#3------C#3)
\end{align*}

Figure 1.5 Succession of perfect fifths (C7) in Adès’ \textit{Arcadiana}, 1, mm. 1-5.


In *America: A Prophecy*, m. 26, Adès again reshapes the C7 bass line into a succession of chords. The chords appearing after m. 26 stacks the intervals 7, 12, 4, and 6, generated from the Mayan motive (see Figure 1.6). While another 7 appear after m. 26, the individual canonic melodies also demonstrate 7 or 12 (5+7) interval leaps, followed by a stepwise descending motion (see Figure 1.7). The ascending-descending melodic contour of the quintuplets also resembles that of the Mayan motives, C-D-F / G-F#-D. In addition, the outer perfect fifth (C-G), and pitch components (C-G-F#-F-D) are similar to those of the quintuplet melody, belong to Eb major/minor, (Eb-Bb-Ab-G-Gb-F).

![Figure 1.6 Vertical sonorities of Quintuplet canonic melody in mm. 26-29.](image1)

![Figure 1.7 Canonic melodies in mm. 34-41; reduction.](image2)
The Mayan motivic transformation reappears after m. 24. The rhythm is altered to sixteenth septuplet; broken up; recombined; and it begins to climb from the middle register up to the higher register. After m. 25, the motives are accompanied by quintuplet canonic melodies in low-register instruments. Since the canon is quite compact, the resulting vertical sonorities of the quintuplet chords are thick and heavy.

Overall, the quick 16th notes of the Mayan motive in flutes and horns, contrasted with the slower triplet rhythm in piano and strong, create a tension-filled 4:3 polyrhythm. While the flute motive rhythm is compressed to sixteenth note septuplets after m. 24, the strings expand from triplet to quartet note quintuplet; the Mayan motive accelerates while the Eb minor lament slows down. The 16th-note septuplet links the transition from triplets to quintuplets and the rhythm reaches its highest point of complexity in mm. 51-52. Here the vertical layering of 16ths, 16th quintuplets, 8th triplets, and 8th quintuplets creates a polyrhythmic climax with maximum dynamics--but moments later it quickly flies off into the high register. A short interlude of suspended camel bells, timpani, and bass drum fills the silence, and links to the next section.

Before this, the first two mezzo-soprano entrances softly interrupt the orchestra. The first appears in m. 17: a soft, insistent D with a long “O-” syllable. The second interruption appears in m. 41, after the motivic transformation of the opening idea, and the mezzo-soprano now sings a full sentence, “O my nation prepare” (this sentence will re-appear two more times in section 3). The long last F# note on “prepare” is continued by flutes and resolved up to G by flutes, oboes, and trumpets in m. 49. This mezzo-soprano melody shares some intervals with the main motive, although its shape is different. Figure 1.8 shows that its intervals increase by two semitones in a wedge shape. Similar shapes with successively increasing intervals appear in several other pieces
by Adès as well. Figure 1.9 shows a scale in his “New Hampshire,” from Five Eliot Landscapes.

The descending melody shows a note-series that increases by a whole step.

Figure 1.8 Mezzo-Soprano melodies in mm. 41-48.

The mezzo-soprano text “O my nation” recalls the main motive again. The strong C-D-F motive tutti in m. 45 follows and spreads to the entire orchestra with the mezzo-soprano’s “prepare.”

Adès’ closely considered structural design contributes to the work’s drama. For example, the impressive gesture of the Mayan motive tutti appears three times throughout the entire movement. The first one appears in m. 45, and calls for attention from listeners by making a dramatic entrance of the text that follows, which is “prepare.” The second tutti in m. 120 breaks
the momentum of the mezzo-soprano’s climax and calls attention to the text that follows, “O my nation.” The third Mayan tutti, in m. 201, also highlights the gravity of the following text, “your children.”

Section 2

The main feature of section 2 is a double neighboring canon in all the instruments except flutes. This calm and chilly canon is expressed by non-vibrato winds, muted brass, non-vibrato strings, flautando, sul tasto. The mezzo-soprano, who has been singing non-vibrato since the introduction, contributes to the effect, as if she were a strange voice from an unknown world. The Mayan motive in section 1 is transformed to double neighboring motions by sharing the same M2-m3-M2 intervals. The quarter note quintuplet rhythm in section 1 is finally expanded into longer durations in section 2. The three-voice canon progresses throughout section 2 with tone color changes, and the instruments are switched into a single voice. The reiterating double neighboring motion moves by a perfect fifth down or a perfect fourth up in canon that elongates the melody. The initial melody starts in a cello solo, is most often answered by perfect fifths and octaves, and also in inversion. Figures 1.10 and 1.12 show the relation between the three-voice canon of instruments and the mezzo-soprano (the rhythms in Figure 1.10 are simplified to show long-short relations). Figure 1.11 shows characteristic rhythmic patterns in the canon, forming various patterns of long and short notes. Figure 1.12 shows Adès’ controlled consonant/dissonant relations. For example, within the continuing diatonic canon, the conflict that appears between
D# and D♮ in m. 64 and 82, results in charming dissonance; this dissonance is not unlike the conflict between F and F# in the introduction’s Mayan motives A and B.

Adès uses a repetitive long-short rhythmic pattern as a durational motive for the entirety of section 2. The mezzo-soprano and the orchestra both share the long-short pattern. A comparison of Figure 1.11 and 1.13 shows that while the mezzo-soprano melodies have a fixed ratio (1:2) consisting of a long-short rhythmic pattern, the orchestra rhythms are more free. Along with the flutes’ 16th note Mayan motives, the mezzo-soprano’s dotted quarter rhythms, and similar orchestral rhythms create multiple temporal dimensions.

Figure 1.10 Reduction of Section 2; rhythms are modified to show long and short values.

Figure 1.11 Rhythmic patterns of instruments in section 2.
The mezzo-soprano’s four canonic entries follow several measures behind the orchestra, as if echoing with the same pitches but different rhythms. The mezzo-soprano’s entries come in m. 65; a response to the violin and clarinet in m. 70; another response to the violin and clarinet in m. 75; and a final response to the trumpet and viola in m. 81. All four of these entries share the same pattern of durations, a dotted eighth and short dotted quarter, and vice versa. The vocal text in
section 2 contains sorrow and a warning against corruption and indulgence. Each group of four lines corresponds to each canonic phrase below, as shown in Figure 1.13. The tetrameter text setting here is somewhat unusual. For example, words such as “and,” “are,” and “the” take longer than more important words such as “people,” “move,” and “weak.” Melodically, the pitches follow the accents of the text, but the rhythms go against them. This subtle rhythmic dissonance expresses, perhaps, the uneasy mind of the Mayan people. Or, perhaps Adès is searching for a way to set the text that does not sound simplistic or banal.

The people move as if in dreams
They are weak from fuck and drink
The prophets and the priests are blind
In his bed the governor weeps

Figure 1.13 Mezzo-soprano pitches and rhythms in section 2.
In contrast to the sustained, motionless canon, the four flutes interact with each other in active counterpoint, resulting in a relatively compact texture. The Mayan motives in flutes are rhythmically transformed; the original rhythm is fragmented into small segments, which are recombined, juxtaposed, and reshaped into different polyphonic textures. The repetitive, delicate combinations can be classified into several types. Each type is marked in Figure 1.14. The harmony at the beginning of section 2 implies an A tonality. Each A is articulated by a tenuto marking. The melodies leap from A5 to A4 or A5 to E4 (C4 = middle C). The leading tone G# and B notes are later accented as a double neighboring motion of A notes. The initial strings melody of the canon “A-B-G#-A-D-E” implies an A harmony as well. In addition, the flutes’ leap from A to E at the beginning is reminiscent of the previous perfect fourth chord successions that occurred in section 1. On the other hand, the mezzo-soprano’s first three canons can be interpreted as B Dorian mode.

Figure 1.14 Rhythmic categories of flutes, mm. 59-62.

If we simplify the part played by the four flutes, we find that the inner structure of the flutes’ melody contains virtually the same PC set as the main motives A and B. However, the new melody has a different order of notes, interval alteration, deletion of a note, various two
note-, and three note-combinations, an octave displacement, and a wriggling gesture, all of which act together to transform the Mayan motive (see Figure 1.15).

Figure 1.15 Reduction of flute melodies in mm. 58-82.
Section 3

The beginning of section 3 is similar to the beginning of section 1. Together with the opening C major triad in m. 85, what follows the D-G-F# melody in the vocal part briefly recalls the Mayan motives A and B, the pitches C-D and G-F# respectively. The nine-measure Bb drone bass in the double bass and the percussive sound of the piano, followed by the Mayan motive ostinato, and the animated triplets in the low bass, resemble the clamorous triplet bass line of the tuba and contrabassoon in section 1. However, the triplet bass is extremely soft, and its intervals are composed of octave displacements instead of successions of perfect fourths.

In m. 86, augmented triads (Bb1-D4-F5) based on the Bb drone follow the opening C major triad. The three notes lead to three distinct layers; D4 leads to a fragmented Mayan motive in the middle register; F5 smoothly connects with the mezzo-soprano melody, and the Bb bass leads a whole-tone descending bass line starting from C to Bb, Ab, Gb(F#), E, and D. This bass line is composed of two augmented triads, C-Ab-E and Bb-Gb-D, the same one that appears at the beginning of section 3. Each note, repeated by octave displacement, results in M2, m7, P8, and M9 intervals. This descending gesture is not a one-time appearance. It is reminiscent of the piano part at the very beginning of the piece that shows a descending, lament melody in an extremely high register; the right-hand melody descends from Bb to Ab, Gb, F, Eb, and C. Both descents share the Mayan motivic repetition in the middle register.
Figure 1.16 Piano part in mm. 4-7 of section 1.

Figure 1.17 Reduction, mm. 85-101.
The Mayan motive constantly appears throughout section 3, in which the motives shift by approximately four octaves, the widest registral motion of the work. The motives are repeated with strong dynamics, gaining momentum towards the climax. Within this dizzying, quasi-minimalist repetition, two-note and three-note motives keep transforming their pitches little by little in the middle register, and then gradually move down and widely spread from the flutes to other winds and brass (see Figure 1.18).

![Figure 1.18 Pitch transformation of Mayan motives in section 3.](image)

Rhythmically, both of the motives in the ostinato develop as they did in section 1; they start on a strong beat, then they gradually shift one 16th note later from their previous starting points.

![Figure 1.19 Different starting points of motives A and B in section 3.](image)
In m. 94, the “O my nation, Prepare” melody from section 1 reappears. This second call has the same pitch material, and is resolved up to G, then follows an interval cycle between notes, which increase every two semitones. However, the two-semitone interval cycle here goes one step further to A.

![Figure 1.20 “O my nation, Prepare” in mm. 94-102.](image)

After m. 102, the soloist and orchestra prepare for the choral entrance. Along with the mezzo-soprano’s growing melody, five separate musical ideas occur simultaneously, creating a bustling juxtaposition: a chain of triads in tubas; the Mayan motive in the low horns, later continued by double bass; low-register chords of winds with free rhythm; piercing high winds’ triplet chords with string harmonics; and sharp Bartók pizzicati in the double basses heighten the sense of confusion and urgency.

![Sheet music](image)

(Cont.)
The ominous prophecy sung by the soloist in section 3 prepares for the climactic choral entrance in the next section. The chopped, repetitive melodies cause the soloist to breathe nearly in gasp; the tension gradually ratchets higher and higher, and reaches a climax in Section 4.

In the voice, “they will come from the east. Their god stands on the pole,” “their god” is repeated three times. After two more repetitions of the entire sentence, the phrase “they will come” separates from the rest, and is urgently repeated while continuing to gain momentum. Finally, “burning, breaking” prepares for the climax. During the repetitions, several words such as “east,” “come,” and “god” are emphasized with an accent or tenuto mark. At mm.120-123, the third appearance of “O my nation, Prepare”’ is an inversion of the first appearance (Figure 1.22).
Figure 1.22 Mezzo-soprano melody, mm. 103-123.

The mezzo-soprano melody in section 3 is the climactic point of the soloist. This melody rarely interacts with the instruments instead of it moves independently. The motive A in m. 103 is part of the double-neighbor melody from section 2. Until the middle of m. 115, Adès repeats the A motive with slight changes that include different rhythm and accent points, interval modifications, reordering of notes and inversions. For example, A is chopped and reordered as A’ in m. 106; intervals are slightly modified as A’ in m. 111-112; and all A” are partially inverted forms of A. After the double-neighbor motive ends in m. 115, the melody gradually turns to the main motive (C-D-F/ G-F#-D). Motive B contains all of the pitches of the main motive (C-D-F-F#-G) but ordered differently. Motive C also features the main motive but is
missing F♭ in this different order. The gasping ostinato gradually builds up tension to call the Spanish chorus.

Section 4

The immense and powerful Spanish march makes a grand entrance with a simple, tonal harmony in extremely fast tempo (♩=162/171 after m. 142). It starts in F# major, then moves to A major at m. 129, and B major at m. 142. These tonal center movements are similar to the contour of main motive A. The A major music is briefly interrupted by the Mayan motive in m. 133; it suggests the Mayans struggling against their fate. Indeed, the two Mayan motive lines are not played in unison but are instead dissonant as if they are in a state of disorder (see Figure 1.23). They are soon destroyed by the enormous B major Spaniard march: the piccolo trumpet’s brilliant solo melody follows a sudden halt in the orchestra, maximizing the following enormous tutti (as does the trumpet solo in mm. 186-188 and the following giant final chord tutti).

Figure 1.23 Discordant Mayan motives in mm. 133-137.

This piccolo trumpet flourish features an elaborately designed quintuplet rhythm that leads directly (notated “Avanti”) to the B major tutti. The strings’ quarter notes are marked martellato
and **fff**, (the dynamics of all of the other instruments reach **ffff**); decrescendo marks follow each quarter note, to create accent effects.

The atmosphere in section 4 is highly charged by the ascending B major scale of fanfare of a trumpet and the Spanish chorus. The piccolo trumpet fanfares in mm. 139-141, 149-150, 163-169, 186-188 connects subsections in section 4. The overall ascending motion continues until the end of section 4; the horns, bells up, play an ascending scale in dotted 8th notes. This is followed by trumpets in 8th notes, and then by winds in 16th notes (see an example in Figure 1.24). These ascending motions appear only in this Spanish section, making a clear distinction with the lament motives of the outer sections. The scales constantly change their accidentals to create ambiguous harmony. Another ascending motion is the tetrachords composed of two dyads between m. 181 and m. 188, connecting two G# minor chords chromatically. These dyads alternate between root position and inversion. The outline chords, eb (d#)- F#-G#, which appear at the beginning and the end of the phrase imply the Mayan theme. Most of their harmony implies Eb minor/major. The ambiguous harmony of ascending scales and tetrachords contrasts strongly with the clear harmony of the upcoming chorus. (see Figure 1.25)

Figure 1.24 Ascending melodies in mm. 171-183.
The Spanish chorus starts with staggered breathing. *La Guerra* leads to the highest climax in the movement with extremely strong dynamics, *ffff*. The Spanish text in section 4 and the Latin text in the second movement are from *La Guerra* by Matteo Flecha (c.1481-1553; see the beginning of Chapter 2). Below are the original Spanish text and its English translation. Its celebration of eternal glory, of course, is ironic for the Mayan people at this climactic moment of Spanish conquest.

Todas los Buenos soldados que asentaren a esta guerra no quieren ir descansados.  
Si salieren con victoria la paga que les darán será que siempre tendrán en el cielo eterna Gloria  
(All the good soldiers who enlist in this war do not seek for rest.  
If they emerge with victory the pay they will be given shall be that they will for ever have in heaven eternal glory.)

In *La Guerra*, the Spanish text appears in the tenor voice. The tenor voice mostly repeats in a single pitch, F, while the other voices actively move around. (See Figure 1.26)

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Figure 1.25 Ascending chords in mm. 181-189.

Figure 1.26 mm. 93-106 from *La Guerra* by Matteo Flecha (c.1481-1553).
The Adès’ chorus does not follow the melody of *La Guerra*. Instead of repeating a single note in a single voice part, all voice parts accent the B, and leap to E, back and forth. It is grandly concluded in a B major chord, and then moves to a climactic, ultra-high-register cluster.

Figure 1.27 Spanish Chorus in mm. 181-186, and mm. 189-193.

The events introduced above occur simultaneously after mm. 180-184; the quintuplet ascending tetrachords, the 16th-note ascending melody of flutes and piccolos, chord repetitions of B major/E major of a half and an eighth note, and the immense chorus. The harmony of the chorus, chord repetitions of B major/E major, and the piccolo trumpet’s fanfare feature B major/E major. The harmonic conflict between events, complex polyrhythmic texture, and the frequent time signature changes are maintained until the strong tutti (“eterna gloria”) concludes section 4.
Figure 1.28 Reduction of mm. 180-183 in section 4.

**Section 5**

Section 5 abruptly starts with Mayan motives in flutes and the soloist’s lament melody. The opening Mayan gesture is similar to that in section 3. The descending melody D-G-F♯-E-D♯ (see Figure 1.29) and opening melody of section 3 are also alike (see Figure 1.19). In addition, the accompanying C major chord in m. 195 and the following Bb bass in m. 197 are reminiscent of the chord progression in section 3.

(Cont.)
In the opening Mayan motives, Adès only makes use of major and minor seconds from motives A and B, featuring a combination of C-D from motive A and G-F# from motive B. All of the pitches move in pairs, while the G-F# repetition of flutes is sustained in middle register. The C-D motive of the rest of the orchestra features pitch modulation and octave displacement: the C bass from the opening C Major chord and the following Bb bass are initially paired in m. 198 for double bass and piano. This dissonant pairing shifts to Bb3-C4. In m. 200, it goes up by a half step for another pair of B-C#, and then finally spreads out in the entire register to produce a strong tutti cadence. This follows the repetition of G-F# of motive B in trumpet and bassoon, and creates an air of anxiety. The pitch modulation of B-C# by a half step to C-D finally occurs once again in the mezzo-soprano in m. 205.
In section 5, most of the gestures that were presented in section 3 reappear with variation in the character of their original material, rearrangement of its order, and overlay material. The gestures of m2 and M2 motive repetition, following the sudden tutti cadence, resemble the gestures in section 3 between m. 117 and m. 123.

If section 3 depicts a prophecy, section 5 suggests a lament. The soloist’s “Your” phrases gradually become elongated and begin to descend in a lament motive. All the pitches descend using a combination of seconds and perfect 4\textsuperscript{th} intervals, with one exception, which appears in mm. 205: the pitch on “your” (G5-F#5) drops sharply down to “children” (C4-D4, again recalling the Mayan motive). The orchestra’s sudden silence here accents the word “children,” suggesting that a horrible disaster is about to happen. A rhythmic unit of 7 appears here as well. Type A, B (which is based on the triplet rhythms from the introduction), and their half durations are marked in Figure 1.31.

Figure 1.31 Lament melodies of the mezzo-soprano in section 5.
Section 5 recapitulates the introduction and section 3 in several ways. Similar to the
beginning of section 3 with its whole-tone descending bass line from C, Bb, Ab, Gb (F#), E, and
D, and to the piano part at the very beginning of the piece, showing a descending ostinato of Bb
to Ab, Gb, F, Eb, and C in extremely high register, flutes, oboes, and clarinets feature melodies
that descend from the extremely high register. This high lament briefly appears in mm. 206-208,
then becomes enlarged in mm. 221-229. Each pitch has a constant rhythmic unit of four triplet
8th notes, which is the same rhythmic unit as the piano part at the beginning. Their harmony
mostly features a combination of P4 and P5, doubled in octaves. Repeating three phrases of
equal length, all of which start from B7, however, each phrase gradually expands its register
downward.

Figure 1.32 Lament melodies of high winds in mm. 206-208.
Figure 1.33 Lament melodies in the chords of piccolo, flute, and oboe in mm. 221-230.

On the other hand, mm. 212-215 briefly reminds listeners of section 2; the double neighboring melody canon that appears in section 2 appears shortly afterward as five-voice canon. Strings and horns play these canons in the high register. The long-short, or short-long rhythmic patterns are applied as well. In a manner that contrasts with the elongated canon, two types of the flutes’ fragmented motives are shown as they were in section 2.
Soon after the brief recapitulation of section 2, the canonic melodies are spread to all instruments, extended longer and thickened by means of octave doublings. As in section 2, but on a more frequent basis, this octave canon features semitone conflicts that are circled by a dashed line (see Figure 1.35).

Figure 1.35 Double neighboring canon with circled dissonances in mm. 219-229.
Section 6

This section is calm, simple, and has a relatively thin texture, as was the case in section 2. The recurrence of main motive gives a sigh of resignation. The text “Prepare,” the last warning in the first movement, is sung with heavy, penetrating non-vibrato.

The mezzo-soprano’s melody that opens section 6 in mm. 231-234 implies a G major tonal center. The descending G major scale fills the upward leap from D to G at the beginning of the phrase. This opening melody and its accompanying chord is similar to the introduction of section 3 and 5. String chord move from a C major, to a Bb augmented, to a diminished triad (a#-c#-e)—the same as those in section 3. Each chord in m. 233-4 later features the vertical shape of the Mayan motive A. As in the three previous “prepare” texts which concluded on F#, its appearance in m. 236 also ends on F#, but does so an octave lower than before. This F# is enhanced by F# (f#) seventh and eleventh chords that spread over the vocal’s F#. This leading tone, however, does not clearly resolve to G as was the case before. It instead follows B in m. 240, and enables the interpretation of the F# as dominant of B minor (and the entire mezzo-soprano melody from m. 231 as B minor as well).
Adès keeps the idea of opposition alive until the end. The first movement concludes with the transformed shapes of the two main motives A and B. Motive B is located in a limited middle range as a horizontal melody, rhythmically irregular, and chopped into 16th-notes. Contrasting with motive B, motive A now appears vertically in the form of sustaining chords, spread over three octaves. Starting with C1 and D1 dyads, the chords move upward to C4 with a regular five-sixteenth rhythmic duration until the end, creating a temporal conflict between the two motives.
Figure 1.37 Mayan motives in mm. 241-250.
III. Analysis of Movement 2

The second movement is the epilogue to this piece. This elegiac movement presents a very grave, sorrowful atmosphere, which becomes intensified by the mezzo-soprano and Latin chorus. It is as if we are looking at the destruction of a Mayan city, which lies in ruins after the Spanish conquest. In contrast with the lively, primitive melodies and crowded, eventful texture of movement 1, the second movement is decorated with a delicate, light and linear instrumental texture. The vocal melody dominates the second movement and echoes from the instruments closely it.

The second movement unfolds in three sections including the introduction and coda, as shown in Table 2.1. The tempo (velocissimo ♩=132) and time signature (6/4) never change throughout the movement. The short introductory part presents the first new theme, whose elements are all actually derived from the Mayan motives.

In section 1, the mezzo-soprano sings the second new theme with a feeling of hopelessness and grief. It carries a sense of emptiness but the gelid timbre of the strings does not relax the tension. Meanwhile the vocal melody repeats, ascends and increases its tension. The vocal calling finally bursts into a climax of enormous power, and of a heavy texture that symbolizes the Spaniards in section 2. The thick texture consists of a canon of new theme melodies.

Section 3 features a Latin chorus singing of achieving victory while the mezzo-soprano sings the word “ash.” Finally, the solemn ritual ends with a grave coda.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section (Tempo)</th>
<th>Measure number</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Rehearsal letter</th>
<th>Vocal text</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction (\downarrow=132)</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Burn Burn Burn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 1</td>
<td>8-50</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td>On earth On earth we shall burn we shall burn On earth On earth we shall burn we shall burn We shall burn We shall burn We shall turn to ash shall turn shall turn shall turn to ash Shall Drift Shall Drift across the land Over the mountains, out to sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 2</td>
<td>51-62</td>
<td>Climax (\text{Instrument Only})</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>62-77</td>
<td>M-Sop. with Chorus (\text{(Latin)})</td>
<td>G H</td>
<td>(M-Sop.) weep, weep,weep But know this But know this But know this well: Ash Ash Ash Ash Ash feels no pain (Chorus) Haec est victoria qua vincit mundum fides nostram (This is the victory by witch our faith conquers the world)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>78-86</td>
<td>Coda (\text{Instrument only})</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1. Structure of movement 2.
Introduction

The harmony of the second movement implies bi-tonality by counterpoising two harmonically different themes. The first new theme is introduced by the mezzo-soprano with the text, “Burn, Burn, Burn.” Although the text deals with the fall of a civilization, the first theme is expressed in D major, which breaks our expectation. This melody will be labeled as “type A” and its fragments are classified as X, Y, and Z.

![Figure 2.1 First new theme, second movement.](image)

The segment Y [0 2 5] shares the same PC set as the Mayan motive. Segment X is a subset of segment Y. The segment Z [0 1 2 5] is a transformed type of segment Y. As can be seen in segment Z, theme type A features the unstable tonality of D because the F♮ and C♮ appear in m. 3. In addition in m. 4, right in the middle of the introduction, the theme type A is interrupted by the bass chord Bb-Eb and the high Ab which is exactly the same sequence of perfect fourths that appeared at the very beginning of the work (the chord is marked by a rectangle in Figure 2.3). While the Bb-Eb chord is sustained, the entire theme type A is repeated using the sharp and swift sounds of three muted trumpets. The D major theme suggests a new mood for the second movement, whereas the Bb sequence chord is reminiscent of the first movement. The coexisting two different types of materials and harmonic conflict create tension. In addition, the reappearance of the Bb-Eb chord enhances the harmonic coherence between the two movements.
Section 1

The Mezzo-soprano introduces a second new theme in m. 8. The second theme remains in an ambiguous D major (or perhaps B minor) tonality until m. 23, when D# appears (this D# could possibly be interpreted as belonging to B major). This second is opposed to the first because its pattern is relatively regular, and it is actively transformed throughout the second movement. The melody will be labeled here as type B, and its fragments are labeled A, B, C, D, and D’.

Figure 2.2 Second new theme, second movement.

Section 1 is divided into four parts according to the mezzo-soprano melody. The entire section features the form a (mm. 8-16) a’ (mm. 16-23) b (mm. 24-32) a’’ (mm. 32-50), in which the final part is nearly twice as long as the other three parts. While theme type A dominates the entire vocal melody in section 1, the instruments play both themes simultaneously throughout sections 1 and 2. In part a, the instruments passively imitate the theme type A in the vocal melody, in the form of several elongated layers which result in stacks of chords. The music of section 1 features a subtle timbre that consists of the alternate fingerings of oboe, senza vibrato of winds, strings’ harmonics, sul pont, sul tasto, at the point on the string techniques, whispering, extremely soft dynamics, and a thin texture. In part a’, Adès adds another layer in the piccolo (see Figure 2.4) to create dissonance. Examples of these conflicts between adjacent pitch classes such as B-Bb, and C-C#-D, are circled by a solid line. In fact, these combinations do not sound
extremely dissonant because the dynamic is very soft, and they are in the extremely high register, far from the vocal part and theme types A and B in the middle register. However, this dissonance is sufficient to produce subtle tension and enhance the sense of musical space. In part a’, each instrument plays independent segments from theme types A and B. These segments are combined to form a three-part counterpoint. The original segments are transposed, compressed, extended, and displaced by an octave (see Figure 2.5). At the end of part a’, m. 23, the chord Bb-Eb-Ab that appeared in m. 4 appears again with strong dynamics, making a dissonance between Bb and B♮; however, it now functions as a closure of part a’ as well as a connection to part b, and triggers the vocal melody’s transformation using a high pizzicato violin and viola (see Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.3 Reduction of second movement, mm. 1-16.
In the vocal melody from mm. 24-31, only the segment D’ is repeated and gradually varied with the sentence “we shall burn.” After several instances of “burning,” the text finally changes to “we shall turn to ash” in m. 32. The melody from m. 27 exhibits a pattern within the repetitions. One additional pitch is added to segment D’ and its final two pitches begin to shift down. The B descends by a whole step while the C# descends by a half step, which results in their intervals gradually increasing by half step, forming two interval cycles. C1 (interval cycle 1) and C2 are superimposed here (see Figure 2.6). Figure 2.5 shows section a’ and section b. Figure 2.6 shows the transformation of segment D’.

Figure 2.4 Subtle dissonances between the vocal and instruments in mm. 15–25.
Figure 2.5 Reduction of part a’ and b, mm. 16-32.

Figure 2.6 segment D’ and its transformation with C1 and C2 superimposed.

The last a’’ section appears in mm. 32-50. In the voice, theme B is briefly recapitulated, and then ascends and reaches its peak, which leads to a climax. Figure 2.7 is an example of the last section. The texture consists of a linear repetition of short, single pitches. Each rhythmic
group features a sixteenth, sixteenth quintuplet, eighth triplet, quintuplet, sextuplet, and septuplet. Each layer plays a different rhythmic group, which results in a complex polyrhythmic texture, reminiscences of Ligeti. Figure 2.8 is a reduction of the texture. The horizontal lines adjacent to notes indicate how long the repetition of the pitch continues. Some repetitive notes follow the mezzo-soprano melody. Other notes can be grouped as a triad, mostly minor triads distantly related to the mezzo-soprano.

Figure 2.7 Textures of winds in mm. 33-34.
Section 2

After the strong, Mayan motive call of the mezzo-soprano in mm. 46-48 (C#-D#-F#), the enormous power of the extremely thick, polyphonic climax that symbolizes farewell to life of Mayan people. The polyphonic chaos contains segments of the two new themes. These segments mostly appear in a discrete manner, but the trumpet and horn normally sing them in the form of a complete melody. Strong dynamics, extremely wide register from C#1 to C8, and the fast rhythm of tenor and bass drum also support that climax. Segments of theme types A and B, and its RI, and I are labeled below.
Figure 2.9 Climax in mm. 58-60.
Section 3

Section 3 begins with an Eb minor tonality as at the beginning of the first movement. The mezzo-soprano melody introduces m3 and M2 intervals in mm. 62-65 at the beginning of section 3. The first two notes evoke the Mayan motive A (missing C), and the last two notes resemble the C-D of Mayan motive A. In this case C-D is transposed up by a half step and finally reaches the Eb minor. The mezzo-soprano pitch stays on Eb for six measures, while a succession of perfect fourth chords that start from Bb to Eb-Ab-Db-Gb reappears in the instruments. The chain of pitches marked by the square is spread over the four octaves without respect to order. Adès’ favored subtle dissonance (Db-Eb-E♮) simultaneously appears in mm. 65-67.

Figure 2.10 Introduction of section 3 in mm. 62-68.

Section 3 ends with the Latin chorus that resembles the chorus in *La Guerra*. There is obvious opposition between the chorus and the mezzo-soprano. The hushed and grave chorus uses Latin text to speak about achieving victory (1 John 5:4, New Testament) while the mezzo-soprano finally arrives at the word “ash.” The Latin chorus concisely states theme type B in the form of chords whereas the mezzo-soprano melody concludes with theme type A. The Latin chorus chords are echoes of the orchestra that entered before the chorus with theme type B.
Haec est victoria qua vincit mundum fides nostra  
(This is the victory by which our faith conquers the world)

Figure 2.11 Latin Chorus in mm. 69-77.

The intervals m3 and M2 that appear in the mezzo-soprano in mm. 62–65 are later extended to form an interval cycle. The melody after m. 71 features a continuous C1 (interval cycle 1) and C2. It shows an arpeggio that includes m3, and each m3 interval descends by whole step. The beginning pitch of each arpeggio descends by half step. The melody simultaneously contains segments X, Y, and Z from theme type A.
Figure 2.12 Reduction of the mezzo-soprano melody in mm. 62-65, mm. 71-77.

Coda

Finally, the solemn ritual ends with deep breathing, and eerie silences consisting of four chords. The B minor chord is sustained in the bass, which is reminiscent of segment A of theme type B. The piece contains the concept of opposition between the instruments, even in the coda. The coda appears to be in conflict with the sounds D# (Eb) and D. After m. 78, the D# glissandos of trombone and cello attempt to descend to D, resulting in maximized dissonance between Eb and D. In the high register in mm. 78-81, the Bb-Eb-Ab chord is stacked up on the Eb (D#) resulting in opposition to the B minor bass. The chord in m. 82 is a combination of two chords of C#-D-G (modified Mayan motive that appears in m. 90, section 3 of the first movement), and A-B-D (m. 103, section 3 of the first movement) that shares a PC set with the Mayan motive.
Figure 2.13 Coda in the second movement.

The final C# to D, and A to D voice leading in the Double bass in m. 82 supports the key of D major. At the same time, the lowest pitch in the sustained chord that appears three times in the coda supports the key of B minor. Therefore, the coda briefly restates the key elements of this work: the key of Eb minor from movement 1, the key of D major and B minor from movement 2, and the Mayan motives.
CHAPTER THREE CONCLUSION

The piece *America: a Prophecy* shows two of Adès’ musical strengths: the consistency with which his work employs durational or intervallic succession; and the unification resulting from continuous motivic transformation. In addition, the work portrays its tragic drama through the concept of opposition, while building a well-balanced structural form.

First, *America: a Prophecy* shows musical consistency with durational succession and interval cycles, one of Adès’ often-used techniques. For example, the vigorous bass line starting from Bb in the beginning is interval cycle 5. The melody “O my nation, prepare” that appears four times in the first movement successively increases the size of its intervals. The canons in sections 2 and 5 show successive long-short rhythmic patterns as a durational motive. Particularly in section 2, along with the flutes’ 16th note Mayan motives, the mezzo-soprano’s dotted quarter continuity, and various durational continuities of each instrument, create multiple temporal dimensions. The lament melody in sections 1 and 5 features continuous repetition of its four triplet-8th rhythms. Another interval cycle appears in the last mezzo-soprano phrase in the second movement, transformed by C1 and C2.

Second, the transformations of the Mayan motive throughout the entire first movement enhance the continuity and multivalent conjunctions between sections. For example, the original Mayan motive introduced in section 1 is fragmented, recombined, and juxtaposed to shape new polyphonic textures in section 2, such as double neighboring canons and twisting gestures in the flutes. The Mayan motives constantly appear throughout section 3, in which they shift by four octaves, the widest registral motion in the work. They feature an intensified repetition with pitch transformation that sounds almost minimalistic. Section 4 shows a brief but symbolic Mayan
motive that is not played in unison but is instead dissonant. In section 5, Adès only makes use of the major/minor second intervals from motives A and B, and all of the pitches move in pairs. The Mayan motives in the final section are transformed into two contrasting motives. In addition, the second movement introduces two new themes; segments from these themes swirl through the mezzo-soprano and orchestra.

Another example of motivic transformation happens at the very beginning. The perfect fourth bass line (Bb-Eb-Ab) that appears in the beginning of the work is reshaped into a succession of quintuplet chords (shown in Figure 1.7). The reappearance of the Bb-Eb chord in the second movement affirms the harmonic coherence between the two movements. In section 1, it functions as the connection to the next part as well as triggering the vocal melody’s transformation. In section 3, the chain of pitches spread over four octaves. In the coda, the cycle Bb-Eb-Ab is stacked up as a chord on Eb (D#), which results in opposition to the b minor bass.

Third, Adès’ closely considered structural design results in the work becoming a musical drama. For example, the gesture of the Mayan motive tutti appears three times throughout the first movement. Its purpose calls attention to the dramatic entrance of the text that follows, and breaks the momentum of the mezzo-soprano’s climax. The magnificent entrance of the Spanish march in section 4, the subsequent martial trumpet fanfares, and the Spanish chorus La Guerra leads to the highest climax with extremely strong dynamics. The final warning to “prepare” and the reminiscence of Mayan motives conclude the first movement. The appearance of the Latin chorus at the end of the work, ppp, balances the enormous choral climax in the first movement. Although they sing about achieving glorious victory, the musical expression is ironically solemn.

Lastly, the concept of opposition appearing between instruments (and voices) in various musical parameters is a distinguishing feature of the piece. Opposing gestures dramatize the
tragic story of the Mayans: the Mayan melody itself consists of two opposed motives. The Spanish march and other parts constitute another form of opposition on a large scale. In section 1, the Eb minor lament melody in the high register and the F pentatonic Mayan motivic repetition in the middle register result in opposition and musical tension. The lament bass that appears in section 3 and 5 contrasts with the Mayan motives as well. On the other hand, the ascending motion that appears only in the Spanish section makes a clear distinction with the lament motives. The ascending scales’ ambiguous harmony comes into conflict with the clear B major/E major bitonality in Spanish chorus. In sections 2 and 5, the flutes’ fragmented Mayan motives contrast with the smooth, elongated canon. In section 6, the Mayan motives are placed separately: motive B is located in the middle range as a horizontal melody, whereas motive A is restated vertically in the form of sustaining chords spread over three octaves. The durational succession of five 16ths in motive A results in a temporal conflict between the two motives. In the second movement, the fragmented type A theme in D major is continually opposed to theme type B, which floats ambiguously between D major and B minor. This opposition is especially heard in section 3: as the chorus sings its Latin text about achieving victory (theme type B), the mezzo-soprano sings “ash” (theme type A). Even in the coda, the harmonic conflict between Eb and D is still heard (see the glissandi in Figure 2.13 above).

This paper has examined the ways in which Adès persistently transforms simple motives to create an elaborate, complex musical drama. Adès’ creative personality and sophisticated compositional syntax enables him to combine various kinds of opposing material into a compact, sixteen-minute orchestral piece.
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Review

Scores and Recordings


APPENDIX

List of Performances of *AMERICA: A PROPHECY*, 1999-2008


Aldeburgh Festival, Snape Maltings Concert Hall 13/06/2000.


City of Birmingham, Symphony Hall, Birmingham/ Symphony Chorus and Orchestra/ Susan Bickley (mezzo-soprano), Thomas Adès (conductor) 27/03/2002.

Helsinki 06/09/2002.


Copenhagen 01/10/2004.


Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, Santa Cruz, CA/ Gale Fuller (mezzo-soprano) 12/08/2006.

Presences Festival, Paris 04/03/2007.


Gothenburg Concert Hall, Gothenburg/ Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra/ The Gothenburg Symphony Choir, Monica Danielson (mezzo-soprano), Dmitri Slobodeniouk (conductor) 13-14/11/2008.

Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, CA/ Los Angeles Philharmonic/ Los Angeles Master Chorale, Mary Nessinger (mezzo-soprano), Thomas Adès (conductor) 14-16/11/2008.