EDWARD ELGAR – THE EXPERT OF THE “PARTY”

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As the Classical period gave way to the Romantic period, the compositional techniques used by composers changed drastically. Music in the Classical style was composed with an emphasis on form and homophonic textures whereas music in the Romantic style was classified by passionate and expressive compositions. The harmonic structure of music from the Romantic period added more chromaticism, both linearly and harmonically. Eastern European composers, mainly hailing from Germany, dominated the Romantic period. Very few English composers are known for their contributions to this historical time period. One exception was English-born composer Sir Edward William Elgar who wrote music during the Romantic period, becoming a widely known composer throughout much of the world. Early in life, he gained respect on a local level as a composer, but was dissatisfied with the lack of global respect and popularity associated with a large work. Elgar wrote *Variations on an Original Theme*, Op. 36, which became one of his defining compositions, and one of the first major compositions to come from Western Europe during the Romantic period. The focus of this term paper is the ‘Enigma’ *Variations*, an in-depth breakdown of the main theme and an analysis of each movement. Also to be discussed are Elgar’s life, educational background, and early compositions. This term paper will demonstrate how each movement is written about one of Elgar’s close acquaintances, representing the characteristics of different moods of a group of people.

Edward Elgar was born to William Henry Elgar\(^1\) and Ann Elgar (née Greening)\(^2\) on June 2, 1857. The Elgars had three children before Edward: Henry John, Lucy Ann, and Susannah Mary. The Elgar family first lived in the village of Claines, before Ann decided that she

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\(^1\) William Henry Elgar was a piano tuner and teacher, organist, and violinist. He was employed in a shop that wanted to develop its musical side and was interested in hiring a piano tuner. William would ride on horseback to the homes of customers to tune their pianos.

\(^2\) Ann Elgar née Greening was not musical, but did enjoy her husband’s music. She was a farm laborer’s daughter who enjoyed reading, especially tales of chivalry.
preferred the country life. In 1856, Ann received her wish as the Elgars moved to the country. According to Michael Kennedy, “…in 1856, they rented The Firs, the tiny cottage of Newbury House in the village of Broadheath, three miles north-west of Worchester. It had six rooms on two floors.”

A year after the move, Edward was born on “a day, according to Lucy, when ‘the air was sweet with the perfume of flowers, bees were humming, and all of the earth was lovely.’” After Edward was born, the Elgar family moved back to Worcester and had three other children (Frederick Joseph, Francis Thomas, and Helen Agnes).

His father first noticed Edward’s aptitude for music when Edward would improvise on the piano. As a result of Edward’s piano interest, William took him along to his piano tunings, allowing the son to play after the father finished tuning the piano. Edward gained some local popularity through his piano improvisation. His music instruction included piano, violin, and organ. Simon Mundy writes, “Edward’s first piano lessons were given when he went to a ‘dame school’ in Britannia Place and later he had violin lessons from Frederick Spray, leader of the Worcester Glee Club Orchestra and a respected musician.”

His early music instruction also included reading books on harmony, theory, and orchestration, as well as studying scores. As a schoolboy, Edward would walk three miles from his house to study musical scores from his father’s shop in the churchyard where his mother’s parents were buried. Before he was fifteen, he wrote his first musical composition, *The Language of Flowers*, to a poem by James Gates Percival, an American poet, and dedicated the piece to his sister Lucy for her twentieth birthday. At the age

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of fifteen, Edward worked in a solicitor’s office for a year, leaving to become a freelance musician for the rest of his life.\textsuperscript{10}

Edward found an abundance of local work for freelance musicians. He was the assistant and then successor to his father’s organist position at St. George’s church. Edward had several important roles in the musical community, demonstrating his wide array of musical abilities. “He was leader of the Worcester Amateur Instrumental Society (1877) and the Worcester Philharmonic (1879), accompanied then conducted (1879) the Glee Club, played the bassoon in a wind quintet (with two flutes and no horn), and became ‘composer in ordinary’ to the County Lunatic Asylum at Powick, coaching and conducting the staff (1879–84).”\textsuperscript{11} In 1887, Edward played in the first violin section at the Three Choirs Festival, one of the oldest classical chorus festivals in the world.\textsuperscript{12} It was with the Worcester Musical Society that he played second violin alongside his father and he joined the orchestra of about ten musicians that accompanied the touring opera companies that visited their town. The wind quintet to which Edward belonged also included his brother Frank as the oboist. Because of its unusual instrumentation featuring two flutes and its lack of horn, Edward wrote the music himself.\textsuperscript{13} He showed much resentment in his emotional life while trying to become a musician. He came to dislike his lack of recognition for his work as a young man, even believing “his career had been hampered by his Catholicism.” As a schoolboy, Edward longed for something great while having “concrete

\textsuperscript{11} McVeagh, “Elgar,” \textit{Grove Music}.
\textsuperscript{12} Three Choirs Festival [Web site], “About the Festival” (15 March 2008), http://www.3choirs.org/about/about-festival.html
\textsuperscript{13} Kennedy, \textit{Life of Elgar}, pp. 18-19.
musical ambitions and a considerable self-assurance about his abilities.”¹⁴ Edward met Caroline Alice Roberts, a poet who lived with her mother. Edward set a poem to music that Alice had written in 1880 and called it The Wind at Dawn. This was published in May in the Magazine of Music. He later dedicated another piece to “à Carice” (Caroline Alice) called Liebesgrüss (Love’s Greeting). They were engaged, which met the disapproval of her relatives¹⁵, and after a two-and-a-half year courtship, they were married on May 8, 1889.¹⁶

It was not until Edward was twenty-one that he devoted his time to becoming a serious composer. Leading up to his twenty-first birthday, he had arranged five pieces.¹⁷ He also began and abandoned the composition of a violin sonata and completed a four-movement orchestral suite. Demonstrating his versatility as a musician, Edward conducted the orchestral suite on February 23, 1888 at a Stockley concert. He wrote a suite for strings called Three Pieces that was premiered in Worcester on May 7, 1888. Upon hearing the piece, Alice wrote “mystically, the music swells, / Floats on and on and ever tells / Of joy and love and yearnings past.”¹⁸ Most of Edward’s early published works were small pieces, sold for a very small royalty. In 1890, Edward and Alice moved to West Kensington to move closer to “the most recent music the capital could offer.”¹⁹ In his early career, his orchestral work Salut d’amour was his most frequently performed composition with August Manns conducting the orchestral version in 1889. Beyond this concert and a performance the following February, Edward had no other London performances. This was a blow to Edward’s confidence as he was severely disappointed in his

¹⁴ De-la-Noy, The Man, p. 29.
¹⁵ One of her aunt’s cut her out from her will. Her relatives believed that Edward, a penniless musician, was without a doubt after her money.
¹⁶ Kennedy, Life of Elgar, pp. 32-34.
¹⁸ Kennedy, Life of Elgar, p. 33.
lack of additional concerts. While in West Kensington, the Three Choirs Festival invited him to write a piece of music. As a result, he composed the overture *Froissart*, his first major work, for orchestra and conducted it on September 10, 1890 in the Worcester Public Hall. The piece did not enjoy the success Edward believed it would, as London did not accept the composition. After feeling defeat and humiliation from making a bid for larger success only to fall back onto the smaller jobs of a local music community, the Elgars left London to move to Malvern where Edward resumed his career.\footnote{McVeagh, “Elgar,” *Grove Music*.}

Upon the move the Malvern, Alice convinced Edward, despite their lack of money, to purchase a Gagliano\footnote{Gagliano was an Italian family of violinmakers from about 1700-1850, mainly working on the Stradivari model.} violin. The purchase of this instrument led to Edward’s writing of a virtuoso violin piece called *La capricieuse*, which was written and dedicated to one of his pupils.\footnote{Kennedy, *Life of Elgar*, p. 38.} He developed a tendency to severe depression during the 1890s, mainly a result of the lack of success in his compositions as well as his social status. He disliked all work except composition, even calling teaching “like turning a grindstone with a dislocated shoulder,” despite the fact that most successful composers were only able to live by composing and performing a less pleasing supplementary job.\footnote{McVeagh, “Elgar,” *Grove Music*.} He found some encouragement from his friend Hugh Blair, conductor of the Worcester Festival Choral Society and assistant organist at Worcester Cathedral. Edward played the abandoned framework of *The Black Knight*, and upon hearing it, Blair promised its publication after Edward’s completion of the piece. After completion, Novello’s, a London music publishing company, accepted his piece for publication on the condition that Edward would simplify the piano part. Another project Edward undertook before

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Gagliano was an Italian family of violinmakers from about 1700-1850, mainly working on the Stradivari model.
\item[22] Kennedy, *Life of Elgar*, p. 38.
\item[23] McVeagh, “Elgar,” *Grove Music*.
\end{footnotes}
working on his *Black Knight* was the conversion of his *Three Pieces* into the *Serenade* in E-minor. While Novello’s rejected his *Serenade*, they did accept his final version of *The Black Knight*. Edward went to the offices of German publishing company Breitkopf and Härtel, who did accept the *Serenade* for publication. All of this success as a composer greatly boosted Edward’s self-esteem and encouraged him to compose additional works.\(^{24}\)

Both Edward and Alice were inspired by his recent success and worked together on songs. “They visited Germany for all the next three summers and gradually built up a set between them which became the *Songs from the Bavarian Highlands* – their most complete and lengthy collaboration.” Edward’s compositions at this point in his career start to show his influences from other composers, most notably Brahms, Dvořák, and Wagner.\(^{25}\) In 1893, he temporarily returned to the theme from his abandoned violin sonata, trying to recast it as an Andante religioso. It was not until Bair “requested it for a special service to celebrate a visit to Worcester by the Duke of York (later King George V)” that Edward completed the work scored for organ, strings, brass, and timpani in 1894 and called it *Sursum corda*, which is Latin for “lift up your hearts.” The brass parts show the influence of Wagner, but still maintain his musical identity. The piece as a whole demonstrates Edward’s special ability to write “noble ceremonial music.”\(^{26}\) The year 1896 brought the first performances of his oratorio *The Light of Life (Lux Christi)*\(^{27}\) and his *Scenes from the Saga of King Olaf*.\(^{28}\) Shortly before Edward’s fortieth birthday, George Sinclair, the Hereford cathedral organist, asked Edward “to compose a Te

\(^{26}\) Kennedy, *Life of Elgar*, pp. 44-45
\(^{27}\) Premiered at the Worcester Three Choirs Festival on September 18.
\(^{28}\) Premiered during the North Staffordshire Festival at Hanley on October 30.
Deum and Benedictus for the opening service for the Three Choirs Festival.”29 After Edward sent the scores to Novello’s and the first performance occurred, publishing manager A.J. Jaeger wrote him a letter. After attending the first performance, Jaeger wrote, “I am conceited enough to think that I can appreciate a good thing and see genius in musicians that are not yet dead, or even not yet well known….”30 This began an important relationship with Edward because he felt Jaeger was the only person who understood his works and how Edward felt they were living.31 Elgar wrote, “…what I feel is the utter want of sympathy…Now my music, such as it is, is alive, you say it has heart – I always say to my wife (over any piece…of my work that pleases me): ‘if you cut that it would bleed!’ You seem to see that, but who else does?”32 The Worcestershire Philharmonic Society, which Edward conducted until 1904, was formed in 1897 as recognition of his increasing popularity and success. The repertoire performed was that of composers Edward was meeting professionally as well as the classics and contemporary music from Germany and France. In 1898, Edward completed Caractacus, a large-scale work that was commissioned for the Leeds Festival and dedicated to Queen Victoria.33 Even with 1897 being his best year for performances, his financial situation was at its worst. In October of 1897, he wrote to Jaeger, saying, “…but am about taking a new house – very noisy close to the station where I can’t write at all…I have no intention of bothering myself with music.” He continued in his letter, saying, “After paying my own expenses at two festivals I feel a d–d fool (English expression) for thinking of music at all. No amount of ‘kind encouragement’ can blot out these

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29 Mundy, Life and Times, pp. 52-53.
31 Kennedy, Life of Elgar, pp. 52-53.
32 Moore, Letters, pp. 49-50.
This depression involving music lasted for about a year, as in September of 1898, Edward wrote, “I’m really giving up on all music & am refusing everything – I cannot afford to waste my precious few years of remaining outdoor life – so I fish &c. much better than your damned old blasted music.”

Edward’s depression came and went on many occasions and in addition to Alice, Jaeger was the only other person in whom Edward confided. On October 24, 1898, Edward wrote to Jaeger.

Since I’ve been back I have sketched a set of Variations (okestry) on an original theme: the Variations have amused me because I’ve labelled ‘em with the nicknames of my particular friends – you are Nimrod. That is to say I’ve written the variations each one to represent the mood of a ‘party’ – I’ve liked to imagine the ‘party’ writing the var: him (or her) self & have written what I think they wd. have written – if they were asses enough to compose – it’s a quaint idee & the result is amusing to those behind the scenes & won’t affect the hearer who ‘nose nuffin’. what think you?

Thus began Edward’s writing of his Op. 36, the ‘Enigma’ Variations. The Variations has been called the best known of his music and the work that has “occupied the largest portion of interesting speculation.” It is a piece of music that is largely “regarded as an essential part of national heritage.” One example of this national heritage is seen through “Variation IX”, also known as “Nimrod”. The somber hymn-like quality makes the movement one played frequently on somber days. Friends of Edward tell the story of the conception of the original theme, saying “…on Friday 21 October 1898 [Elgar] had dinner, lit a cigar and improvised at the piano. Alice remarked…‘That’s a good tune.’ Elgar ‘awoke’ from the dream: ‘Eh! tune, what tune?’ And she said, ‘Play it again, I like that tune.’” When asked by Alice what the tune was, Edward

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34 Moore, Letters, p. 56.
35 Moore, Letters, p. 90.
36 Moore, Letters, p. 95.
37 Mundy, Life and Times, p. 39.
responded, “Nothing – but something might be made of it.” The tune is assumed to be the “original theme” serving as the basis for his Variations.39

The ‘Enigma’ Variations are considered one of Edward’s most appealing musical works. He dedicated the piece to his friends “pictured within.” The piece consists of an original theme and fourteen variations. The fourteen variations represent eleven of Edward’s friends, a bulldog named Dan, his wife Alice, and himself.40 He wrote the Variations intermittently through the autumn of 1898. While composing, he also focused his time on conducting the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society.41 Less than a month after writing to Jaeger to inform him of the set of variations he had sketched, he wrote to Jaeger again, saying, “The Variations go on slowly, but I shall finish ‘em one day.” He continued to mention his current obsession with the Gordon Symphony that he was working on.42

Edward was also focused on another possible commission, a scena for the vocalist Clara Butt, for the Norwich Festival. Edward talked with Clara’s manager Narciso Vertigliano, anglicized to Nathaniel Vert, who was the agent of Hans Richter.43 Vert agreed to talk to Richter about premiering the Variations in London.44 After presenting the score and negotiating for the premiere to be conducted by the prestigious conductor and his orchestra, the Variations were set for a June 19th premiere.45 After the manuscript returned from Richter and was delivered to Novello’s, Edward apparently asked that the word “Enigma” be written above the original theme. The handwriting on the manuscript does not match Edward’s, but appears to be Jaeger’s.

39 Kennedy, Life of Elgar, pp. 61-62.
41 Mundy, Life and Times, p. 40.
42 Moore, Letters, p. 96.
43 Hans Richter was the conductor of The Hallé Orchestra, the most revered and one of the oldest professional orchestras in London.
44 Kennedy, Life of Elgar, pp. 64-66.
45 Mundy, Life and Times, p. 42.
After three rehearsals, *Variations* was premiered at St. James’s Hall in London with the concert resulting in a great triumph for Edward. His mother wrote to him, saying “…I feel that he is some great historic person – I cannot claim a little bit of him now he belongs to the big world.”\(^{46}\) The *Variations*, however, was not in its final state. Jaeger expressed his sentiment that the piece ended too abruptly and also informed Edward of Richter’s agreement with Jaeger’s feelings in relation to the ending. Despite Edward’s resistance to revising his piece, he wrote an addition of ninety-six measures to the final movement including an organ part.\(^{47}\) *The Musical Times* praised the *Variations*, saying, “Effortless originality…combined with thorough savoir faire and…beauty of theme, warmth, and feeling are his credentials, and they should open to him the hearts of all who have faith in the future of our English art and appreciate beautiful music wherever it is met.”\(^{48}\)

The original sketches for *Variations* are not numbered pertaining to their completion but there are hints as to the order of their composition. Edward himself kept track of his progress by a list, several with musical incipits. It is suggested that the writing in pen implies that Edward was finished before he made the list and writing in pencil suggests a later completion after the list’s creation.\(^{49}\) There is debate still occurring today over the interpretation of the headings of some of the movements. Some believe one of the variations is about a house and not a friend of Edward’s. Others question why some of his friends are not represented in the *Variations*, including childhood friend Hubert Leicester and Rosa Burley, the headmistress at the Malvern

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\(^{48}\) Mundy, *Life and Times*, p. 43.  
School in which he taught. In addition to the original theme, Edward suggests, through the program notes from the first performance, that there is more to the Variations than meets the eye. He wrote, “The enigma I will not explain – it’s ‘dark saying’ must be left unguessed, and I warn you that the apparent connection between the variations and the theme is often of the slightest texture: further, through and over the whole set another larger theme ‘goes’ but is not played.”

Table 1 lists the theme and variations as well as the friend of Edward that is portrayed followed by the measure numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variation Number</th>
<th>Heading</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Measure Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Enigma</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-17 (18-19 serve as a link)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>C.A.E.</td>
<td>Caroline Alice Elgar, the composer’s wife</td>
<td>20-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>H.D.S-P.</td>
<td>Hew David Steuart-Powell, amateur pianist</td>
<td>41-96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>R.B.T.</td>
<td>Richard Baxter Townshend, scholar, author, eccentric</td>
<td>97-131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>W.M.B.</td>
<td>William Meath Baker, ‘squire’ of Hasfield Court</td>
<td>132-163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>R.P.A.</td>
<td>Richard Penrose Arnold, son of Matthew Arnold</td>
<td>164-187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ysobel</td>
<td>Isabel Fitton, amateur viola player</td>
<td>188-209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Troyte</td>
<td>Arthur Troyte Griffith, artist and architect</td>
<td>210-280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>W.N.</td>
<td>Winifred Norbury, secretary, Worcestershire Philharmonic Society</td>
<td>281-307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nimrod</td>
<td>August Johanne Jaeger, of Novello’s</td>
<td>308-350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dorabella/Intermezzo</td>
<td>Dora Penny (later Mrs Richard Powell)</td>
<td>351-424</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

50 Kennedy, Life of Elgar, pp. 62-63.
51 Mundy, Life and Times, p. 39.
The original theme that Edward improvised and later developed for his composition is set in a complete ternary form. Preceding the Variations, composers typically set the theme for a set of variations in binary form as seen through composers like Brahms; however, Dvořák’s Symphonic Variations features a main theme in ternary form. The theme is set in the key of G-minor and a simple quadruple meter. The melody is played by the violin section and is comprised of many melodic thirds, which can be seen by the red brackets in figure one. The remainder of the theme is made up of sevenths, which when inverted become the interval of a second, and seconds. However, the interval of a seventh is much more pleasing to the ear and creates more tone color as opposed to the interval of a second. The dynamics of the theme are generally soft, with the loudest dynamic being a mezzo forte. Another compositional technique Edward uses is rhythmic retrograde. Each two bar group has the same rhythm played forwards and backwards. For emphasis, he repeats this rhythmic motif twice more before ending the phrase.

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The B section of the theme consists of rising thirds followed by a descending fourth or fifth before the pattern repeats again. Figure 2 is a piano reduction of both lines to show the whole B theme and the rising and falling intervals.

The first variation bears the heading of “I (C.A.E.)” which musicologists have determined to stand for Caroline Alice Elgar. Edward himself called this variation “really a prolongation of the theme.” The variation begins in the same key as the theme, but modulates in the B section to E-flat-major, a key relationship that is typically less stable than a modulation to the theme’s tonic major. Edward then uses this key change to modulate to the theme’s tonic major of G-major. The melody transfers to the second violin and viola sections and adds woodwinds to the strings by adding the flute and clarinet. The linking material before the

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57 Rushton, ‘*Enigma*’ Variations, p. 33.
variation begins has the second violins resting and preparing to play con sordini.\textsuperscript{58} This allows for the melody to have less presence and a different tone color in a movement that is more texturally complex than the original theme. The dynamics of the variation are louder than those of the theme, with the loudest dynamic being fortissimo. Similarly to the theme, the variation ends with a solo instrument playing the theme’s recognizable motif as seen in Figure 3, which illustrates how both movements end with a picardy third, ending in G-major. The oboe and bassoon part have been identified as the “whistle” motive, which was Edward’s call to Alice when he arrived home. The coda is also believed to be a representation of Alice through its light and lovely characteristics.\textsuperscript{59}

**Figure 3. Measures 16-17 (top) and Measures 39-40 (Clarinet transposed, bottom)**\textsuperscript{60}

Variation II H.D.S-P. is the first variation to have a livelier tempo as well as a change to triple meter. The main homage to Hew David Steuart-Powell, a competent pianist, is the running chromatic sixteenth notes through the orchestra. The variation sounds darker and more ominous because of the theme being played in the celli and bassi. Figure 4 shows that the rhythmic values are exaggerated, changing to fit the meter change but still resembling the theme.

\textsuperscript{58} Con sordini is Italian for “with mute”
\textsuperscript{59} Rushton, *Enigma* Variations, p. 34.
\textsuperscript{60} *Enigma Variations*, pp. 3-7.
Figure 4. Measures 58-75.\textsuperscript{61}

The timpani solo in measures eighty-three through ninety-one also touches on the rhythm of the theme in this variation. This is also the first movement to end without a picardy third, ending in G-minor.\textsuperscript{62}

The first variation to begin in a major key, starting in G-major, is the third variation. The texture is more flowing and at times similar to a waltz-like feel as a result of the triple meter.\textsuperscript{63}

The theme in the oboe is marked *scherzo*, which was defined in the Baroque era as a joke.\textsuperscript{64} The B-section of the variation is extremely chromatic in nature, with the first half ascending chromatically in the winds and the second half descending. Setting up the B-section, the G-major chord descends a half step to an F-sharp-major chord. The theme present during this section is the B-theme, which was not present in Variation II. Some describe the movement as whimsical, an imitation of Richard Baxter Townshend’s impersonation of an old man in theatre where the low voice sometimes wandered into the soprano range without his voice breaking.\textsuperscript{65}

According to the variations, Townshend was not an exciting person; however, he was well traveled having left England and not returning for eight years.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{61} *Enigma Variations*, pp. 10-12.
\textsuperscript{62} Rushton, ‘*Enigma* Variations’, pp. 36-37.
\textsuperscript{63} Rushton, ‘*Enigma* Variations’, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{65} Rushton, ‘*Enigma* Variations’, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{66} Young, “Friends Pictured Within,” pp. 96-97.
The shortest variation of the fourteen is the fourth variation, which portrays William Meath Baker. Baker was heir to the Hasfield Court after the first William Meath Baker died. The first Baker’s property was passed to his brother, a clergyman whose heir was the second Baker. He also was involved with the Three Choirs Festival in 1898. Baker was more a friend to Alice than to Edward. The fourth variation is the closest in design to the original theme. The texture and orchestration, while similar in nature to the original theme, is expanded to a more open structure. Both the original theme and the B-theme are present in this variation.

The fifth variation is the first movement to start in a new key. The original theme and first four variations are in G-minor; however, the fifth variation starts in C-minor. The meter changes from a triple to a quadruple meter. The bassoons, celli, and bassi play the theme while the violins play a repeated rhythmic motif. Illustrated by Figure 5, this variation features polyrhythms where the theme is written in a simple quadruple meter and the countermelody is written in a complex quadruple meter.

Figure 5. Measures 164-170.

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68 Young, “Friends Pictured Within,” p. 96.
71 Enigma Variations, pp. 24-25.
The variation represents Richard Penrose Arnold, a man whose talents went to waste. He was a piano player but avoided difficulties associated with the instrument. The movement uses a form of elision, where the end of the movement is also the start of the next variation. The beginning of the sixth variation serves as the picardy third to the fifth variation, with the elision chord being a C-major chord.\textsuperscript{72}

Variation VI, Ysobel is a representation of Isabel Fitton, a piano player who took lessons with Edward on viola.\textsuperscript{73} The movement begins in C-major, which was set up by the elision from the fifth variation. This movement, like Variation II and Variation V, features a new contrapuntal motif that is present in every measure. The Ysobel motif features an interval of a rising tenth. This is attributed to the fact that she came from a very tall family and that the interval of a tenth is a very difficult on a stringed instrument. Her motif is described as representing the difficulty beginning musicians encounter. She also assisted Edward by helping to correct the proofs for \textit{Caractacus}.\textsuperscript{74}

The seventh variation is a representation of Arthur Troyte Griffith, who was a friend of the Elgars and assisted with their dealings with house agents. The reference to the original theme in this variation is seen in the timpani as well as the celli. The main link between the original theme and the theme in this movement is seen through the rhythm. The B-theme is presented in the trombones with a very dark timbre. The relation to Griffith is said to be his social manner, which ranged from very quiet to rude. The B-theme is a representation of his curt nature.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{72} Rushton, \textit{‘Enigma’ Variations}, pp. 39-41.  
\textsuperscript{73} Young, “Friends Pictured Within,” p. 93.  
\textsuperscript{74} Rushton, \textit{‘Enigma’ Variations}, pp. 41-42.  
\textsuperscript{75} Rushton, \textit{‘Enigma’ Variations}, pp. 42-43.
It is believed that Winifred Norbury is portrayed through the eighth variation; however, Edward informed us that the variation is really a depiction of a place rather than a person. The true persona of this variation is the Norbury house. Members of the Norbury family were involved in the proofing of Edward’s parts, but Winifred was the most involved. She, along with Monica Hyde, was a secretary of the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society. “The sketches bear the note ‘secys’, suggesting an intention to honour…secretaries to the Worcestershire Philharmonic Society.” The key changes from C-major to G-major in this variation. The main theme is passed between the winds on ascending passages and the strings on descending passages. The B-theme is dovetailed between the double reed instruments and the single reed instruments. The descending single reed passage in the B-theme is said to possibly represent Winifred’s laugh.

Variation IX, also known as Nimrod, is the most popular of the variations. Its nobility allows for performances of this variation alone. The variation is close in nature to the theme with a similar melody, with one note changed from the original theme, and form. The key of the variation changes to E-flat-major. As seen in Figure 6, the B-theme is present with contrasting contour, with the voices moving in contrary motion instead of similar motion in previous variations.

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76 Young, “Friends Pictured Within,” p. 44.
77 Rushton, ‘Enigma’ Variations, p. 44.
Nimrod was written to represent August Johanne Jaeger, Edward’s closest friend. Not only was Jaeger an editor for Novello’s publishing company, he also published notes on Edward’s music in *Musical Times*. The variation has “acquired an independent life as a national elegy.”\(^{79}\) It has been transcribed for numerous instrumental ensembles and was heard at many somber occasions including the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales.\(^ {80}\)

The tenth variation is a portrayal of Dora Penny, a musically educated woman who became close friends with Edward. They met as often as possible because of the relationship between Dora, an enthusiastic girl, and Edward, a rising composer.\(^ {81}\) Like Nimrod, this variation was also published separately. The movement changes key to G-major and demonstrates only a slight connection to the theme. The violins outline part of the original theme while the viola countermelody hints at the B-theme. Dora Penny was nicknamed “Dorabella” from Mozart’s “*Così fan tutte*” and frequently rode alongside Edward on bicycle rides.\(^ {82}\) The oldest son of William Baker wrote this and believed the music represented “the wheels going along the roads

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\(^{78}\) Rushton, *‘Enigma’ Variations*, p. 45.

\(^{79}\) Rushton, *‘Enigma’ Variations*, p. 46.

\(^{80}\) Rushton, *‘Enigma’ Variations*, pp. 46-47.

\(^{81}\) Young, “Friends Pictured Within,” p. 98.

\(^{82}\) Rushton, *‘Enigma’ Variations*, pp. 47-48.
and the general pleasant and summery feeling.”

Dora believed the connection to be to her minor speech impediment with the first note of the descending sixteenth notes to have a tenuto marking.

Variation XI G.R.S. starts with a flourish of descending strings, a major contrast from the last two variations. The variation depicts George Robertson Sinclair, organist for Hereford and the only professional musician of the friends. The movement changes mode to G-minor, the original key of the Variations. The original theme and B-theme trade back and forth, starting with the original theme in the bassoons and bassi being answered by the B-theme in the oboes, clarinets, and horns. The tie to the original theme is not rhythmic but melodic, with the intervals representing the theme. Sinclair is described as sitting “very stiff and straight” at a tea party, which is illustrated by a passage in the variation. The low presentation of the theme is thought to represent Sinclair’s amazing footwork at the organ, as shown in Figure 7; however, Edward denied connections to organs and cathedrals and said it was the adventure of a bulldog named Dan.

Figure 7. Measures 426-428.

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83 Young, “Friends Pictured Within,” p. 99.
85 Rushton, ‘Enigma’ Variations, pp. 48-49.
86 Enigma Variations, p. 74.
The twelfth variation is written as a portrait of Basil Nevinson, an amateur cellist. The clear tie to Nevinson is the cello solo with parts of the original theme that leads into a cello solo section with the original theme. This variation utilizes more embellishment of the theme than the other variations, using neighbor and passing tones. The variation may be more influenced by the instrument rather than the person.\textsuperscript{87} Nevinson was part of the circle of music-loving friends that Alice belonged to before marrying Edward; as a result, the Elgars were frequent guests at parties that Nevinson was also a guest.\textsuperscript{88}

Variation XIII is the last variation to represent a friend of Edward’s. The key again changes mode to G-major out of the parallel minor. Similar to Nimrod and G.R.S., the original theme is presented very early in the variation. Instead of following the usual pattern the variations have been using, he repeats the opening hint of the original theme rather than letting it develop into the theme like the rest of the piece. The movement bears the heading of “***” which many questioned its explanation. Edward explained, “The pretty lady is on the sea & far away…”\textsuperscript{89} Little did Edward know, the lady he spoke of, Lady Mary Lygon, was not on the sea.\textsuperscript{90} Parts of the movement represent throbbing engines, no doubt of the boat he believed she was on. There is a reference to Mendelssohn’s \textit{Calm Sea and Prosperous Voyage} found in the clarinets twice, which later moves to the brass. The score even features quotations above the passage in the clarinets. Figure 8 illustrates the first reference played by the clarinets.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{87} Rushton, ‘Enigma’ Variations, pp. 50-51.  
\textsuperscript{88} Young, “Friends Pictured Within,” pp. 89-90.  
\textsuperscript{89} Rushton, ‘Enigma’ Variations, pp. 51-52.  
\textsuperscript{90} Young, “Friends Pictured Within,” p. 93.  
\textsuperscript{91} Rushton, ‘Enigma’ Variations, pp. 52-53.
The final variation is a self-portrait of Edward himself. Originally, there were 684 bars total in the entire *Variations*. After Jaeger suggested extending the ending, Edward added ninety-six measures to the last variation. The variation is in G-major, a picardy third to the whole set of variations with the original key being G-minor. It presents the theme twice in two different ways, acting as two variations combined into one. Most of the variations have some introductory material before the theme is presented which the fourteenth variation does. The style is categorized as somewhat march-like with a “sharp, almost military profile.”\(^93\) Allusions in this variation also include Alice and Jaeger, which is fitting in that they served as great inspiration to Edward. He described this movement as written “at a time when friends were dubious and generally discouraging as to the composer’s musical future.”\(^94\)

Many have provided solutions to the “enigma” of the *Variations*, none of which can be proven right or wrong. A list of criteria has been established based on clues from Edward’s writing as to what the “enigma” must contain. It also must contain multiple definitions dealing with music as well as cryptographic issues, produce materials consistent with Edward’s style, and seem obvious to anyone the idea is presented.\(^95\) The intervals present in the theme are prevalent to Edward’s work. The falling thirds separating by a rising fourth motive is found in

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\(^92\) *Enigma Variations*, p. 88.

\(^93\) Rushton, *‘Enigma’ Variations*, p. 54.

\(^94\) Rushton, *‘Enigma’ Variations*, p. 57.

\(^95\) McClelland, “New Light on Elgar,” 1.
The Black Knight and the first three notes of the theme are significant to Caractacus. Melodies such as “Auld Lang Syne” and the theme to Beethoven’s “Pathétique” sonata have been referenced to be the “enigma.” All of the ideas meet some of the criteria, but not all of the guidelines are met for any of the solutions.

Edward Elgar, still revered for his accomplishments, became one of England’s most respected composers. His legacy in the Romantic era became inspiration to others as his Variations are performed as part of normal orchestra repertoire as well as on special occasions. His accomplishments are the result of his wide musical background as well as mental status. Edward showed how music could portray what words could not and demonstrated how a story or image could be depicted through music. His music along with other composers continues to inspire modern composers to paint a picture through music that will influence many generations beyond the current time.

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