Benedict Taylor, *Towards a Harmonic Grammar of Grieg's Late Piano Music: Nature and Nationalism (= RMA Monographs, vol. 29)*, London: Routledge 2017

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"Das Reich der Harmonien war immer meine Traumwelt," Edvard Grieg claimed in an oft-quoted letter to Henry T. Finck.[1] Unsurprisingly, harmony has also been a central topic in the field of Grieg research. Benedict Taylor's *Towards a Harmonic Grammar of Grieg's Late Piano Music: Nature and Nationalism* (2017) is the latest extensive treatment of this subject. The book is published as part of Routledge's *Royal Musical Association Monographs* series and is aimed at a specialist readership. Its author is a Reader in Music at the University of Edinburgh and a co-editor of *Music & Letters*, and has published extensively on Romantic music (particularly Mendelssohn but also Sibelius, Dvořák, Schubert, and Sullivan, among others).

Grieg research was long dominated by Scandinavian and German scholars,[2] while studies on Norway's "national composer" produced in the Anglophone world remained limited.[3] During the last fifteen years, however, interest in Grieg within British music scholarship appears to have grown significantly. Key examples include the highly influential work by Daniel M. Grimley and the many Grieg-related articles by Georgia Volioti.[4] Taylor's work constitutes another contribution to this happy development.

The book under review here aims to go further than the several existing studies of Grieg's use of harmony.[5] As stated in its description, "this study is not simply an inventory of Griegian harmonic traits but seeks rather to ascertain the deeper principles at work governing their meaningful conjunction, how elements of Grieg's harmonic grammar are utilised in creating an extended tonal syntax" (i). It does so by drawing on recent developments in music-theoretical research, primarily stemming from what are commonly termed neo-Riemannian theories.[6] These perspectives are novel in the context of Grieg research. The book is also more generally framed as a case study in late Romantic harmony, claiming that "Grieg's music forms a particularly profitable repertoire for focusing current debates about the nature of tonality and tonal harmony" (i). Taylor's analyses demonstrate that Grieg's music provides theorists grappling with late Romantic harmony with ample material for rewarding case studies. In short, he introduces recent developments in music theory to the field of Grieg research and, *vice versa*, Grieg's music to the field of music theory.

This 172-page book (xiv + 158 pp.) includes a bibliography, two indexes, five figures, and fifty-six musical examples. It is thus particularly rich in the latter, and several of the examples are lengthy, including some pieces reproduced in their entirety. This definitely constitutes one of the book's strengths, allowing the reader to easily follow Taylor's highly detailed and often extremely technical analyses without the need to have the scores at hand or consult them online. However, the examples' presentation leaves

1 Grieg 1957, 51.

2 For an extensive Grieg bibliography, see Fog, Grinde, and Norheim 2008.

3 There have, of course, been some notable contributions, including Abraham 1948, Horton 1974, Foster 1990 and 1999, Carley 1993 and 2006, and Jarrett 2003. William H. Halverson has also translated several key texts.

4 Grimley 2006, 2016; Volioti 2010, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2019.

5 The most central are Fischer 1938, Schjelderup-Ebbe 1953 and 1964, and Kreft 2000.

6 For an overview of this diverse field in Anglo-American music theory, see Gollin and Rehding 2011.

something to be desired with respect to both engraving and print. The book comprises three main chapters framed by an introduction and a conclusion. Below, I will summarize its main arguments in order, discussing some strengths and weaknesses along the way. A separate section will be devoted to the analysis of "Siri Dalevisen" (Op. 66 No. 4).

Theory, Aim, and Scope

Through an analysis of "Kulokk" (Op. 66 No. 1) in the book's opening pages, Taylor presents several traits typical of Grieg's harmony that he will later discuss in greater detail. Following this analytical prologue, the relevant theoretical and historiographical concerns are highlighted. In his theoretical discussion, he invokes the concept of a "first practice" (functional harmony) and a "second practice" (triadic chromaticism), including Richard Cohn's idea of "double syntax,"[7] but argues that

> Grieg's music readily demonstrates [that] music which is unquestionably tonal in much of its rhetoric and functional behaviour may display harmonic attributes that cannot be reduced to either a functional first practice or the triadic chromaticism of a second, alternative tradition – nor, even, to their juxtaposition and constant mediation (7–8).

Taylor thus highlights the need for a flexible and inclusive conception of tonality. On this basis, he constructs his theoretical framework primarily around Dmitri Tymoczko's five components of tonality.[8]

In a separate section of the introduction, Taylor discusses the ideas of "nature" and "nationalism"—the two keywords in the book's subtitle.[9] He connects the latter term to Grieg's positioning (both by himself and his commentators) as "a nationalist composer, someone dwelling on the fringes of the Austro-German musical empire" (11). Taylor also briefly critiques the idea of nineteenth-century musical nationalism, arguing that it supports the hegemony of the Austro-German tradition as the musical "mainstream." How Taylor conceptualizes nature and the precise role it will play in the present study is less clear. Taylor discusses both how music theory has historically presented ideas of nature (typically relating to the overtone series) as a foundation for tonality and how Grieg found inspiration in ideas of nature (conceived broadly, also including musical ideas of native folk), claiming that "[p]ut simply, the same appeal to nature is used both by a universalising German trend in music theory and by Grieg himself to oppose this hegemonic mainstream" (13). What remains somewhat unclear, however, is in which sense these rather different appeals to nature (i.e., references to an acoustic phenomenon on the one side and inspiration from landscapes and the native folk on the other) are "the same." To be clear, I think that while it may be fruitful to draw this connection, a more thorough discussion providing stronger theoretical and conceptual clarification is required. Rather than scrutinizing the presented concept(s) of nature, Taylor argues that a type of cultural relativism that resists the idea of natural laws may represent a better approach to rehabilitating the significance of Grieg's works (13).

Taylor's study aims to examine "how the music of Grieg may deepen our understanding of the complexity and diversity of late-nineteenth-century harmonic practice" (13). To this end, he works toward defining a "harmonic grammar" of Grieg's late piano music. Taylor defines this as "not just an inventory of his harmonic practices but, going one stage deeper, the hypothetical laws or underlying principles that might be at work behind their functional use" (14). Although Grieg's late piano music is the focal point – specifically, works from the period 1890–1905 – he also draws freely on material beyond these limits, analyzing several works from other genres and periods. As I see it, the scope could justifiably have been broadened, and the book could thus have been presented as a study of Grieg's harmony with special reference to the late piano music.

New Perspectives

Chapters 1–3 (the Introduction and Conclusion are not numbered) constitute the main body of the book. Each chapter focuses on specific aspects of Grieg's harmony. The focus moves

7 Cohn 2012, 199–203.

8 Tymoczko 2011, 3–7.

9 These topics are central in Grieg research and particularly recall Grimley's substantial contributions to this field.

more or less gradually from "vertical" aspects of the music in Chapter 1 to "horizontal" aspects in Chapter 3, thus creating a logical overall structure. Throughout these chapters, Taylor presents several new perspectives on Grieg's harmony, most of which are products of his active engagement with theoretical concepts stemming from the neo-Riemannian tradition.

Chapter 1, "Extending tonality: *Klang*, added-note harmonies and the emancipation of sonority," mainly concerns how "Grieg often appears pre-eminently concerned with vertical sonority, with *Klang* in its own right" (20). In the first third of the chapter's forty-seven pages, Taylor presents various extra-triadic sonorities that are typical of Grieg's music along with modern and historical discussions of possible theoretical interpretations of these. These examples and discussions are largely interesting and enlightening, but some unfortunate inaccuracies have also made it into the book. For example, Taylor makes the following claims:

> Clearly, the more added pitches a harmonic entity takes on, the more ambiguous the identity of its functional root may become. A subdominant chord may add the sixth (as would a local-level tonic), thus corresponding quite conventionally to a secondary dominant seventh in first inversion, or add tertian pitches to create IV^7 or IV^9, blurring the distinction with the tonic (an ambiguity familiar from Rameau's *double emploi* of the *sixte ajoutée*) (29–30).

First, a subdominant with an added sixth surely corresponds to the supertonic seventh (a minor seventh chord in major and a half-diminished chord in minor) and not a secondary dominant seventh. Second, the interpretation and relevance of Rameau's *double emploi* is unclear,[10] made particularly so by the placement of the parentheses, which appear to connect the reference to the latter point about adding tertian pitches to IV blurring the distinction with the tonic (something Rameau's concept does not cover) rather than the former about subdominants with added sixths corresponding to (supertonic) seventh chords.

However, most other references to the history of music theory are more clearly articulated and relevant – for example, the references to Georg Capellen's "monist" tonal theory, which is built around the idea of the ninth chord as a *Naturklang*.[11] Capellen is particularly relevant, as he uses analyses of Grieg's music in support of his theories.[12] Taylor argues that an approach informed by Capellen and others (including Hauptmann and Helmholtz) "may be productive for a modern-day attempt at understanding Grieg's harmony more deeply" (33). Although Taylor incorporates several of these perspectives into this book's analyses, the predominant (and, in my opinion, most rewarding) arguments are products of modern theory.

The final three sections of Chapter 1 contain analyses of pieces from *Haugtussa* (Op. 67), *19 norske folkeviser* (Op. 66), and *Slåtter* (Op. 72). These are unquestionably the highlights of this chapter. The detailed reading of the song "Ved Gjætle-Bekken" (Op. 67 No. 8)[13] is particularly intriguing: Taylor demonstrates "the manner in which Grieg maintains consistently tetrachordal harmonies throughout the song, while articulating in the third and fourth strophes a systematic yet flexible large-scale chromatic progression that plays on the efficient voice-leading possibilities between four-note collections" (43). In line with his pursuit of a harmonic grammar, he investigates this song's systematic aspect and invokes neo-Riemannian concepts to do so. Particularly interesting is Taylor's demonstration of how the third and fourth stanzas move around tetrachordal cycles in complementary ways.

Chapter 2, "Modality and scalar modulation," at sixteen pages long, is the shortest of the three main chapters. As a theoretical lens for the analyses in this chapter, Taylor invokes Tymoczko's concept of "scalar modulation,"[14] which Taylor summarizes as "the movement from one set of background pitches to another" (66). From this perspective, Taylor presents several brief yet illuminating analyses. While the reading of "Drømmesyn" (Op. 62 No. 5) mostly elaborates

10 The concept of the *double emploi* is developed in Rameau 1737. See also Christensen 1993, 193–199.

11 For a discussion of Capellen's theoretical works, see Bernstein 1993.

12 Capellen 1904.

13 Although usually translated as "At the Brook," Taylor uses the less common "By Goat Brook." The latter, probably introduced in Grimley 2006, is not accurate. A more literal translation would be "By Shepherd's Brook."

14 Tymoczko 2011, 129–136.

on Tymockzo's analysis of the piece,[15] the most captivating and original analysis is of "Ho vesle Astrid vår" (Op. 66 No. 16). In the latter analysis, Taylor convincingly argues that "the entire setting revolves around a missing ficta, D♯, and the witty conflict that ensues between D♭ and D♯ with their associated scalar modes" (80).

Chapter 3, "Systematisation: Chromaticism, interval cycles and linear progressions," is also the lengthiest. In the chapter's introduction, Taylor claims that Grieg's music "was frequently prone to high levels of chromaticism. Yet at the same time, he often appears to have tried to control this chromaticism by structuring it though systematic frameworks" (83). Each section explores such systematic frameworks based on different intervals, moving from smallest to largest. The first section – on chromatic lines – is the most extensive, occupying half of the chapter's fifty-five pages. Taylor presents an intriguing perspective on Grieg's chromaticism, arguing that "[p]aradoxical though it might seem, often such chromatic lines in Grieg appear to be used as a means to control chromaticism" (105). I will discuss one of the analyses from this section at length below.

In the section on diatonic lines, Taylor argues that "despite appearing less systematic than chromaticism in its rationalisation of the unit of scalar distance, diatonic writing is just as powerful a means of linear articulation" (112). As a parallel to Cohn's "double syntax,"[16] he claims that Grieg uses the two as complementary systems. Grieg's use of diatonic lines is particularly well demonstrated in the analysis of "Gangar" (Op. 54 No. 2). Regarding third cycles, Taylor highlights Grieg's use of diatonic third sequences and partial statements of equal interval cycles. He cites "Dansen går" (EG 112) as another example, a piece that aptly demonstrates not only third cycles but also the interaction between such cycles, chromatic lines, functional fifth progressions, scalar modulation, and registral gap-filling.

Unsurprisingly, a large part of the section on fifth cycles and the limits of diatonic tonality addresses "Klokkeklang" (Op. 54 No. 5). For Taylor, this piece is "the most extreme vision of tonal possibility in Grieg's music" and an example of how "in certain pieces root motion through a perfect fifth (or fourth) becomes systematically explored beyond the limits imposed by traditional tonal progression" (123). Taylor's analysis is informative, although heavily indebted to W. Dean Sutcliffe's ground-breaking study of this piece.[17] It is accompanied by an intriguing and original analysis of "Nattlig ritt" (Op. 73 No. 3), which argues that this piece "sets the relation of chromatic lines and fifth progressions in a novel light, as if forming a 'linguistic battleground' between a semitonal principle and functional fifth progressions" (129).[18] The chapter's final section, on tritones, is only three pages long and thus the briefest. Taylor makes an interesting observation, noting that tritone progressions appear with increased frequency in Grieg's later works.

The Case of Siri Dale

Before turning to the book's conclusion, I will consider and critically examine one of the analyses in greater detail: that of the 1896 folk song setting "Siri Dale-visen" (Op. 66 No. 4). As Taylor rightly claims, the final eight measures of this short piece (Ex. 1) are probably "the most discussed bars of Griegian harmony in scholarship *tout court*" (98). They are not only discussed within Grieg scholarship but also in some of the most influential general studies of nineteenth-century music by Ernst Kurth and Carl Dahlhaus respectively.[19] Taylor devotes six pages to a discussion of these fascinating measures, claiming that it "is arguable that several chords in this sequence are in fact 'atonal,' in that they arise merely from the abstract intervallic law set up by the composer rather than bearing any conceivable functional relation to either melody or their neighbouring harmonies" (100). This passage is a prime example of the "haarreissende harmonische Kombinationen" in Op. 66 that Grieg spoke of in a well-known letter to Julius Röntgen.[20] Later, he also famously claimed that these harmonies somehow lay "hidden" within the Norwegian folk songs.[21]

15 Ibid., 314–316.

16 Cohn 2012, 199–203.

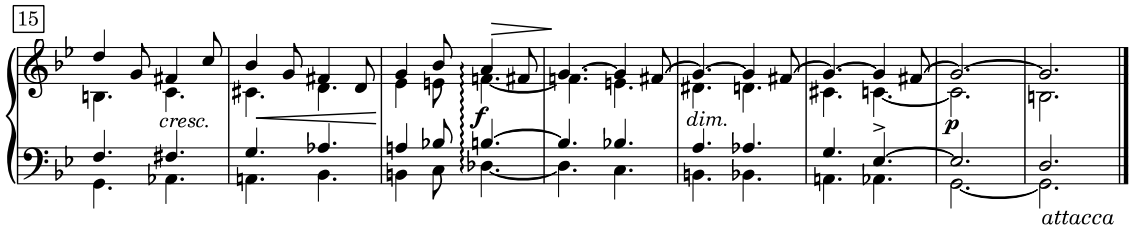
17 Sutcliffe 1996.

18 The use of the apt term "linguistic battleground" also ties this analysis to Sutcliffe 1996.

19 Kurth 1920; Dahlhaus 1989.

20 Grieg and Röntgen 1997, 169.

21 Grieg 1957, 52.



Example 1: Grieg, "Siri Dale-visen" (Op. 66 No. 4), mm. 15–22

Similarly to Dahlhaus,[22] Taylor argues that a functional interpretation of the first three chords in mm. 15–16 is doable, but "[b]y the fourth chord in Grieg's progression, the logic of 'n+1' (where n is a {0,4,10} chord and 1 designates a step on the series of twelve chromatic pitches) indubitably takes over" (101–102). As Jørgen Jersild demonstrated,[23] the descending sequence may be interpreted as a functional sequence of falling fifths if every other chord is read as a tritone substitution. Jersild, and later also Jing-Mao Yang,[24] interpret the ascending sequence similarly (i.e., as a sequence of dominant-function chords in rising fifths). Taylor, on the other hand, claims that the sequence's symmetry demonstrates how "what is acceptable slipping down chromatically sounds bizarre and destructive when rising" (100).[25] In light of this, he argues that although "some analysts […] attempt to find functional grounds for every chord here, even if every pitch might be altered from its hypothetical basis, this surely misses the point" (100–101).

What is unfortunately lacking in the analysis, is a discussion of the tonal context(s) in which this chromatic and linear (rather than functional) sequence is situated. Taylor heavily implies that he reads "Siri Dale-visen" as monotonal, taking for granted that it both starts and ends in G minor. This is most clearly indicated by the fact that he calls the last two chords "the concluding plagal cadence" (100). However, analysts have reached no consensus as to whether the piece ends in G minor – with a Picardy third – or with a half cadence in C minor – the key of the next piece in the collection, "Det var i min ungdom" (Op. 66 No. 5), which is to be played *attacca*. In addition to Taylor, the former position is held by scholars such as Kurth, Fischer, and Yang.[26] Jersild, however, takes the latter position and interprets the final chord as the dominant of C minor.[27] In a particularly close reading, Kevin J. Swinden discusses both options, underlining the tonal ambiguity in the piece's ending, but concludes by proposing a reading that emphasizes the latter.[28] More recently (and since Taylor's book was published), the present reviewer has also proposed another reading that supports the latter position.[29] In contrast to some of the progressions within the linear sequence, which Taylor convincingly argues could be called "atonal," the piece's ending

22 Dahlhaus 1989, 310.

23 Jersild 1970, 56. In this reading, the C^7 chord in m. 17 is also read as a pivot to F minor (!), and the following measure is analyzed in this key.

24 Yang 1998, 158–161.

25 Later, Taylor asks why this is so and suggests that "[o]ne might appeal to a sense of 'tonal gravity:' falling motion, presumably through cultural use and expectations, seems to lead more clearly to a state of rest" and more technically that "the common tetrachordal composition of such harmonies might imply a remnant of functional behaviour still persisting from the rule that the seventh falls by step" (105).

26 Kurth 1920, 333; Fischer 1938, 87; Yang 1998, 159. The recomposition of the piece's ending in Grimley 2006, 100, also implies this reading.

27 Jersild 1970, 56.

28 Swinden 2005. The article presents readings of the piece from three perspectives (form-functional, Schenkerian, and functional) and an attempt to reconcile these.

29 Utne-Reitan 2018, 128–129. This analysis proposes that the different manifestations of the dominant of C mark the structurally important points that frame the linear sequence (i.e., its beginning, apex, and end). Thus, the ascending sequence accumulates tension towards the apex and turning point in the most dissonant version of the structural dominant chord (which is also a point of a tonal crisis as the melody clearly closes in G minor but the harmony refuses to follow suit). Conversely, the descending sequence decreases tension towards a half cadence in C minor.

is indisputably tonal. The tonality is, however, unclear and may plausibly be interpreted within two tonal contexts. This duality is indeed more interesting than attempting to decide which tonal context is most "right." The chromatic linear sequence is certainly crucial in the staging of this tonal ambiguity. Surprisingly, Taylor's analysis wholly neglects this central aspect.

That said, the analysis does elucidate how chromatic lines become a primary structuring principle for the harmony of the final measures of "Siri Dale-visen." Taylor's arguments for a linear reading and, conversely, against attempting to find functional interpretations of each chord in these measures, are strong and convincing. His analysis also underlines how this highly chromatic passage is strictly systematic and, by extension, how the chromatic lines are somewhat paradoxically used as a means of controlling the chromaticism.

Conclusions and Contributions

In the conclusion, Taylor claims that "Grieg may be witnessed enriching and widening particular elements of tonal practice, sometimes in isolation, on other occasions in complex interaction," which demonstrates that "a plurality of approaches to harmonic tonality were available to composers by the late nineteenth century" (139). In the final paragraph before the book's epilogue, Taylor argues that his study could be read as an argument for a "post-nationalist" understanding of Grieg's music.[30] He follows this argument up and concludes the book by asking the following rhetorical question:

> [D]espite granting the historical reality of Germanocentric music-historical narratives and the composer's own, uneasy participation in these, if we grant that both tonality and late-nineteenth-century harmonic practice are a constellation of divergent elements and techniques, then should not the very diversity of Grieg's practice and distance from a central Austro-German chromatic tradition, rather than being marked as peripheral, be held up instead as a model of tonal music in all its 'messy diversity' and cosmopolitan multiplicity? (143)

Building up to (and supporting) this proposition, throughout the preceding three main chapters, Taylor has masterfully analyzed a range of Grieg's late pieces, showing how "[f]unctional fifth progressions, second-practice triadic chromaticism, modality and scalar modulation, extended supra-triadic tonal harmony and the systematisation of lines and interval cycles all belong to the rich array of techniques Grieg utilises in his later music" (138). The analytical comments on how these are methodically and systematically employed and combined provide clues as to which elements may constitute part of the grammar of Griegian harmony. This, to my mind, is the strongest aspect of Taylor's project and his most important contribution to the scholarly fields in which the book is situated. The book, therefore, fulfills the promise of a harmonic grammar offered in the title. Compared to the brilliant technical analyses in the three main chapters, the strength of the arguments relating to the keywords in the book's subtitle is somewhat uneven. Although the reflections on nature and nationalism in music historiography are interesting and thought-provoking, they would (particularly regarding the former) have benefited from having been subjected to lengthier and more probing discussions than those provided in this volume's brief introductory and concluding chapters.

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In conclusion, Benedict Taylor's book presents several novel and valuable perspectives on Grieg's music. Rather than attempting to define a clear grammar of Griegian harmony, it takes crucial steps toward this goal and lays an important foundation for several further discussions on this topic.[31] Taylor's study thus represents a substantial contribution to Grieg scholarship and will be an important resource for future research. It provides detailed analytical discussions of harmony and tonality with reference to a range of Grieg's works and is a rewarding read for scholars interested in late Romantic harmony in general and Grieg's music in particular.

Bjørnar Utne-Reitan

30 A somewhat similiar argument was also recently put forward in Weber 2018, which highlights and reassesses the complex nature of Grieg's cosmopolitanism.

31 For two recently published contributions to such discussions, see Rehding 2021 and Utne-Reitan 2021.

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