

ABSTRACT

This thesis centres on an examination of the music and commentary of Thomas Adès. Though academics and journalists alike have noted the importance of Adès's programmatic descriptions, there is little work that considers his music alongside his commentary. Reinforcing this split is the notion that Adès is not merely reticent but also deliberately misleading: Service (2012) notes the way in which Adès wittily plays with his questions in interview whilst Fox (2004) suspects the composer of being knowingly naïve when outlining his approach to *Brahms* and the Piano Quintet. Venn (2006) has investigated the relationship between the discourse stemming from *Asyla*'s title and the music, concluding that 'the notion of asylum inspires the musical processes only in an abstract manner, if at all'. However, examining the music alongside his commentary can uncover valuable insights into his music and enrich our experience of the work.

I shall explore the two of his works, *Polaris* (2010) and *Living Toys* (1993) and their programmatic discourse in order to demonstrate how it can be understood as part of the work. Thomas Adès, builds up elaborate conceptual metaphors which I shall explore through Facounnier and Turner's theory of Conceptual Blending. It is my position that, rather than understanding programmatic discourse as an explanation or translation of Adès's music, it is more fruitful to view it as an extension of the compositional process, and an active part of the work. The final part of this paper relates the issues found in the thesis to my own composition portfolio.

The portfolio of compositions comprises four pieces: *Round Trips*; *Foreboding*; *Lowell Settings* and *A Reflection Di(still)ed*. Though these pieces are distinct, they collectively seek to explore ways of integrating programmatic discourse into the work. This is especially true of the largest piece *Round Trips* which comprises three movements that develops two strands of conceptual metaphors.