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# Norse Modes

## On Geirr Tveitt's Theory of Tonality

Music theories spring out of specific historical and cultural contexts. They are not neutral, and their applicability and validity are limited. This is part of the argument that Phillip Ewell (2020) makes in his recently much-discussed text on the white racial frame in Anglo-American academic music theory and Schenker's position in this discipline. Over the last few decades, several key monographs on the history of music theory have discussed music theorists in light of their different historical and cultural contexts, for example regarding Rameau (Christensen 1993), Fétis (Christensen 2019), Riemann (Rehding 2003), and Schenker (Cook 2007).

In this article, I will—in stark contrast to the above-cited studies—not discuss a music theorist who changed how “we” understand music. Rather, I will discuss a music theorist who tried to do so but did not succeed. The case I am referring to is that of the treatise *Tonalitätstheorie des parallelen Leittonsystems* (1937). In this work, composer Geirr Tveitt reframes four of the church modes as specifically “Norwegian” scales (renaming them based on Old Norse). He argues that these scales, and their latent harmonic possibilities, constitute a separate system of tonality, different from that of modern major/minor tonality or medieval modality. This theory received a mixed reception and has never been accepted by Norwegian musicologists and music theorists.

The contents and premises of Tveitt’s theory have not been properly discussed in modern musicological scholarship—not even by Tveitt researchers. I highlight this case of forgotten music theory because it is a clear example of music theory entangled in nationalistic ideology. I will not argue for a revival of Tveitt’s rather problematic theoretical ideas, but discuss his treatise as a case of radical nationalism in the history of music theory. I will critically discuss both Tveitt’s theory in itself as well as its reception. The following two questions form the point of departure for the discussions: What kind of music theory is presented in Geirr Tveitt’s *Tonalitätstheorie des parallelen Leittonsystems*? To what extent is this theory tainted by Tveitt’s ideological position in the late 1930s? Before discussing the theory and its reception, I provide a brief introduction to the Norwegian composer and theorist Geirr Tveitt, focusing on his relation to music theory and his ideological position in the 1930s.

### *Tveitt, Theory, Ideology*

Geirr Tveitt (1908–1981) is considered one of Norway’s most important composers of the mid-twentieth century and a key figure in the history of music in Nor-

way.<sup>1</sup> Today, he is probably best known for his arrangements of folk tunes from Hardanger, but his large production also includes six piano concertos, two Hardanger fiddle concertos, thirty-six piano sonatas, and much more. He was born Nils Tveit but would later change his name to the more Old Norse-sounding "Geirr Tveitt." He did this in several stages, which explains why his theory treatise is signed "Geirr Tveitt." He simply had not added the extra "t" to his family name at this point. (For the sake of consistency, I spell his name as "Tveitt" in the main text.) The search for a "Norwegian" sound was not restricted to his name but was also an important part of his aesthetical project as a composer and, as I will show shortly, as a theorist.

On recommendation from Christian Sinding—the most influential Norwegian composer in the generation between Grieg and Tveitt—Tveitt enrolled at the Leipzig Conservatory in 1928.<sup>2</sup> Here, he received a thorough training in theory from the famous German music theorist Hermann Grabner.<sup>3</sup> After finishing his conservatory studies, he spent the years 1932 and 1933 between Leipzig, Paris, and Vienna. A 1932 letter proves that Tveitt had started working on his theoretical project during these study years abroad (Storaas 2008, 47).

The *Tonalitätstheorie* from 1937 is Tveitt's only substantial theoretical publication, but it is not his only project as a theorist and researcher. He also worked on a larger theoretical study of Edvard Grieg's music for many years, the material of which was lost in the devastating fire at his farm in 1970 (Storaas 2008, 118). He did, however, publish some preliminary findings from this work as an article (i.e., Tveit 1943). In 1955, Tveitt received a grant from the University of Bergen to conduct a study of the many folk tunes he had collected. The study was never published. Sigbjørn Apeland (2013), who has studied the manuscript, claims that Tveitt uses findings from this project as further proof of his theory of tonality.

Tveitt's political stance in the 1930s and 1940s is a complicated matter. In a later interview, Tveitt (1977) admitted being sympathetic toward Hitler's ideology in the 1930s but stressed that he in 1942 joined the Norwegian resistance movement (*hjemmefronten*) that worked against the occupying Nazi government. He was also never a member of the Norwegian fascist party *Nasjonal Samling*. Sjur Haga Bringeland (2020, 153) recently discussed this part of the Tveitt story, noting that "[t]he case of

- 1 See Aksnes 2000 for an introduction to Tveitt's life and works. For an extensive biography, see Storaas 2008.
- 2 Sinding's biography (not unlike Tveitt's) also includes connections to National Socialism that are both complex and disputed (cf. Vollestad 2005, 237ff *et passim*).
- 3 Grabner was central in the simplification and standardization of Hugo Riemann's function theory, which would lead to its widespread use in Germany and Scandinavia. As will become clear below, Tveitt knew Riemannian theory well, and he likely got these impulses from Grabner. In modern histories of function theory, however, Grabner is often portrayed as the plot's villain. Harrison (1994, 306f) claims that "Grabner made simple what was complex, but he also made weak what was strong" and that "Grabner's treatment of Riemann's theories throws baby out with the bathwater." Holtmeier (2004) claims that Grabner, a follower of the Party, was commissioned to write the official *Reichsharmonielehre* and that the later widespread use of his simplification of Riemann's system was a consequence of Nazi politics. The work of Tveitt's teacher is thus also entangled in a rather problematic relationship between theory and nationalistic ideology.

Tveitt is a complicated one, and still a quite delicate subject in Norway"—a case that is based on discontinuous and sometimes contradictory source material.

Terje Emberland (2003, 311–53), a leading scholar on national socialism in Norway, has nonetheless made a convincing argument for Tveitt being deeply engaged with far-right ideology in the 1930s, including participating in anti-Semitic discourse. Following Emberland's argument, Tveitt's position was that of a neo-paganist, glorifying the Old Norse era and blaming Christianity for ruining a once-great culture—which, for him, was also intertwined with issues of race. With this in mind, his early fascination with Hitler is not surprising. However, the picture remains complicated and contains other nuances than the dichotomy for/against Nazi Germany. Although central to Nazi ideology, ideas of racial purity and the notion of the superiority of a "Nordic race" were in the 1930s and 1940s not restricted to Nazis and Nazi sympathizers (cf. Bangstad 2017, 241). Emberland (2003, 2015) argues that Tveitt in the 1930s belonged to a group of Norwegian radical national socialists that opposed both Quisling's *Nasjonal Samling* and Hitler's Germany. Their strong ties were rather to Wilhelm Hauer's *Deutsche Glaubensbewegung*. The Norwegian group, centered around the journal *Ragnarok*, believed that "[i]n the ideal future society, culture, religion and as well as the socio-political organization of a society had to be moulded to fit the specific racial qualities of a people" (Emberland 2015, 122) and "offered a metaphorical interpretation of Norse religion, where myths and imagery were thought to express deep biological and racial truth" (Emberland 2015, 125). Despite embracing neither Quisling nor Hitler, Emberland (2015, 120) thus dubs *Ragnarok* "the most radical national socialist publication in Norway." Tveitt admired Hauer, whom he had also met personally in 1935 (Storaas 2008, 87f). The composer published several articles in *Ragnarok* in the late 1930s and early 1940s and was for some months a member of its editorial board.<sup>4</sup> One of his articles in *Ragnarok* addresses his music-theoretical work specifically (Tveit 1938). Although my focus here is on Tveitt's 1937 treatise, I will draw on this 1938 article for context on several occasions below.

In short, in the 1930s Tveitt did in fact advocate what one today would call a radical nationalist ideology. In the context of this article, I understand the term *radical nationalism* as a broad category encompassing "far-right politics [...] in which groups are excluded on racial, ethnic or cultural grounds" (Fardan and Thorleifsson 2020, 12). In Tveitt's writings, both culture and race are used in arguments for who and what may (and, by extension, may not) qualify as being "Norwegian," "Nordic," or "Norse." He refers to these categories more or less interchangeably, and it is sometimes unclear how he distinguishes between them. His nationalism is thus somewhat complicated. The glorification of the Old Norse era in some sense rather indicates a *pre-nationalistic* position (cf. Emberland 2003, 344). His preoccupation is not the modern Norwegian nation-state, but an older Norwegian/Nordic/Norse culture (and race). It is beyond the scope of this article to go further into the complicated biographic discussions on Tveitt's ideology. (The extent of his Nazi sympathy is disputed.) I instead retain a focus on the music-theoretical contents of his treatise and

4 For a bibliography of Tveitt's writings, see Storaas (2008, 409f).

the reception of this content. As will become clear, though, Tveitt's theoretical ideas are entangled in the deeply problematic ideological position outlined above.

### *Tonalitätstheorie des parallelen Leittonsystems* (1937)

Geirr Tveitt's *Tonalitätstheorie* is a rare example of a speculative theory in the history of music theory in Norway. By *speculative* theory, I refer to the much-used distinction between *speculative*, *regulative* (or *practical*), and *analytical* theory, which is particularly associated with Carl Dahlhaus (1984). In this context, speculative theory is defined as the "ontological contemplation of tone systems" (Dahlhaus, translated in Christensen 2002, 13), and I cannot think of a better definition of what Tveitt attempts to do with this work. Tveitt wrote the treatise in German, but it was published in Norway by Gyldendal Norsk Forlag. The choice of language probably reflects a wish for international outreach, but may also be read as a way of entering a specifically German, and (as will be shown shortly) Riemannian, music-theoretical discourse.

As a preface to his treatise, Geirr Tveitt cites the *Edda* poem "Hávamál." According to Tveitt, it is in this verse of the Old Norse poem that the origin of music is presented. I reproduce it exactly as Tveitt quotes it, including his added italics. These indicate the endings that he used to name the scales of his tone system. Later in his treatise, Tveitt (1937b, 24) claims that the character of the scales reflects the beings in the poem from which they had received their name: *þjoðreyrir* (the origin of music, the great cosmic power of tones), *aosum* (the gods, personified forces of nature), *qlfum* (the elves, beings of light), and *Hroptatyr* (Odin, the god who wishes to know everything).

<u>From "Hávamál"</u> (Tveit 1937b, 5)	<u>English translation</u> (Bray 1908, 109)
ÞAT KANN EK FIMTAONDA	A fifteenth I know, which Folk-stirrer sang,
ER GÓL ÞJÓÐREYRIR	the dwarf, at the gates of Dawn;
DVERGR FYRIR DELLINGS DURUM:	he sang strength to the gods, and skill to the elves,
AFL GÓL HANN AOSUM,	and wisdom to Odin who utters.
ENN QLFUM FRAMA,	
HYGGJU HROPTATÝ(R)	

In the following introduction, Tveitt makes clear the aim of his theoretical project:

At different times, with different folk mentalities, and under different natural conditions, the tonal feeling [Tonalitätsgefühl] and musical experience will bear different fruits. Unfortunately, "civilization" has made its impact also in this area: Due to social-technological advantages, the later Inter-European (respectively international) major and minor tonal feeling has been forced upon many peoples, among whom a quite different tonal feeling lived as a natural expression of the folk spirit and nature, thus completely or partially destroying cultures, as these could exist only through a certain specific tonal sensitivity. (Tveitt, translated in Aksnes 2002, 222)

He concludes the introduction by stressing that he does not wish to discredit the major/minor system, which has many advantages and possibilities, but to show that there are other tonal systems that are of equal worth. Tveitt's project as such was warranted. Based on racist and colonialist premises, it had been common since the nineteenth century to posit major/minor tonality as more developed and sophisticated than other tone systems (Christensen 2019, 203ff; Rehding 2003, 97). On the very first page of the introduction, Tveitt (1937b, 9) paints a picture of a conflict between center and periphery by claiming that "civilization" (*Zivilisation*) and the "urban" (*städtisch*) destroy the purity and proximity to nature of rural folklife and art, also with regard to music. Even more overt radical nationalist claims regarding Tveitt's theoretical project are found in the theory article that he published in *Ragnarok* (Tveit 1938). His project was thus clearly nationally motivated in the sense of protecting (and saving) Norwegian culture from "Inter-European" influence. It is an attempt to establish a view of Norwegian music as pure and unsullied, hence positioning it center stage rather than in the periphery of European musical culture. Somewhat paradoxically given his resistance to "Inter-European" influence, Tveitt would rely heavily on German models when developing his theory.

The treatise's introduction implies that Tveitt, through studying Norwegian folk music and its latent harmonic possibilities, aims at defining an authentic "Norwegian" or "Norse" tone system that existed prior to the continental tone systems and their influence. That this indeed is his project becomes clear later in his treatise (cf., e.g., Tveit 1937b, 35ff), as well as in the article published the following year (Tveit 1938). As Hallgjerd Aksnes (2002, 228ff) argues, this part of Tveitt's project was impossible given that it is based on the false premise that Norwegian folk music had resisted foreign influence—and not changed—for centuries (cf. also Kolltveit 2010, 155ff). What Tveitt puts forward is in fact a *modern* tone system built on select traits found in traditional Norwegian folk music. This is further underlined by Tveitt's use of examples from contemporaneous Norwegian composers explicitly operating within a national stylistic idiom—Klaus Egge, Eivind Groven, and himself—to validate his tonal theory (neither Egge nor Groven shared Tveitt's political allegiances).

### A Theory of Tonality

To make clear how his theory of (modal) tonality is different from the major/minor system, Tveitt (1937b, 11–15) starts by defining the latter. In this context, he relies on Riemannian theory and employs Grabner's function nomenclature (i.e., "T," "+Tp," "°Tg," etc.; cf. Grabner 1944). Although Riemannian theory was certainly known in Norway at this time, it was not widespread. Rather, Roman numerals were the common means of harmonic analysis. Tveitt's book is in fact the earliest book published in Norway I have come across that employs Riemannian function symbols.<sup>5</sup> Tveitt argues that the defining feature of the major/minor system is the two leading tones

<sup>5</sup> While harmony textbooks relying on (post-)Riemannian theory had appeared in Sweden and Denmark in the early 1930s, Norwegian harmony books employing function symbols first appeared in the 1970s (cf. Kirkegaard-Larsen 2018).

(together: a tritone) that resolve to a third (or its inversion: a sixth). This implies two things: that the leading tones resolve in contrary motion and that the third is the building block of this particular tone system. He discusses the differences between major and minor (and the close relationship between the relative scales). Since the main principles are the same in both major and minor, I will not go into Tveitt's discussion of the distinction between them here.

Tveitt argues that a premise for the validity of the major/minor system is the position of the tritone in the scale: One of the tones constituting the tritone must not be further apart from the scale's tonic than a half step, and neither of the tones constituting the tritone may be the scale's first or fifth degree (Tveit 1937b, 20). This is necessary if the tritone is to possess tonality-defining power (*tonalitätsdirigierende Macht*). The scales discussed in Tveitt's work do *not* fit these criteria, and the major/minor system is thus poorly suited to explicate the harmonic possibilities and tonal logic of these scales. They must belong to a different tone system relying on a different concept of tonality—a system that Tveitt (1937b, 10) claims is not inferior to the major/minor system. I find this general challenge of the universality and primacy of the major/minor system to be the strongest and most convincing part of the argument in Tveitt's treatise.

The scales he discusses are commonly found in Norwegian folk music and are exactly the same as the old church modes (excluding the later Ionian and Aeolian modes). They are usually called Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian, but Tveitt infamously proposes to call them *rir*, *sum*, *fum*, and *tyr* instead, based on the above-quoted passage from "Hávamál." These (diatonic) scales in which the tritone does not affect the feeling of tonality also have identical intervals surrounding the scale's first and fifth degrees (Tveit 1937b, 20). In *rir* and *tyr*, the first degree is surrounded by a whole step below and above, and so is the fifth degree; in *sum*, there is a whole step below and a half step above; and in *fum*, there is a half step below and a whole step above. The only degree left to be filled to create a diatonic scale is the third. There are only four scales that share these properties without resorting to augmented intervals (cf. Figure 1).



Figure 1: Tveitt's (1937b, 23) presentation of the four scales and their "inner relationship" (*innere Verwandtschaft*). These share the same tone material and are relative (*parallel*) keys in his system (Tveit 1937b, 24). Note that the word *parallel* has a different meaning here (i.e., relative keys) than in the name of the tone system (i.e., leading tones in parallel motion).

In contrast to the major/minor system, Tveitt (1937b, 25ff) argues that these scales have leading tones that resolve in parallel motion—hence the title of the system—and that the building blocks of the tone system are fifths, as the resolution of the parallel leading tones is a fifth (or a fourth, by inversion).<sup>6</sup> As opposed to the major/minor system, however, the leading tones also make out a fifth (or a fourth). This precludes a similar sense of harmonic tension caused by a dissonant interval that resolves to a consonance in this tone system.

Tveitt's argument for parallel leading tones most obviously applies to the fum scale, which has a half step below both the first and fifth scale degrees. Thus, the two parallel leading tones ascend a half step in parallel fifths. In the sum scale, the leading tones are descending instead of ascending. The matter is less intuitive for rir and tyr, as there are no half steps surrounding the first and fifth scale degree in these scales. Tveitt argues that since the first and fifth degrees of a scale are most important, the neighboring tones also have some kind of leading tone effect in these scales, despite not being half steps. He concludes that these scales have parallel (pseudo-)leading tones from above *and* below (cf. Figure 2). I find the latter part of this argument less convincing.

The figure consists of three staves of musical notation. Each staff begins with a treble clef. The top staff is labeled "G fum: I V" and shows a sequence of notes: a note with an arrow pointing up to a sharp note, followed by a sharp note with an arrow pointing up to another sharp note, followed by a sharp note with an arrow pointing down to a note with a sharp sign, and finally a note with a sharp sign with an arrow pointing up to another note with a sharp sign. The middle staff is labeled "G sum: I V" and shows a sequence of notes: a note with an arrow pointing down to a note with a flat sign, followed by a note with a flat sign with an arrow pointing down to another note with a flat sign, followed by a note with a flat sign with an arrow pointing up to another note with a flat sign, and finally a note with a flat sign with an arrow pointing down to a note with a flat sign. The bottom staff is labeled "G rir: I V" and shows a sequence of notes: a note with an arrow pointing up to a note with a sharp sign, followed by a note with a sharp sign with an arrow pointing up to another note with a sharp sign, followed by a note with a sharp sign with an arrow pointing down to another note with a sharp sign, and finally a note with a sharp sign with an arrow pointing up to another note with a sharp sign. The staff for "G tyr" is identical to the "G rir" staff.

Figure 2: The parallel leading tones of the four scales, illustrated with G as tonic. They may appear simultaneously as fifths or fourths. Following Tveitt (1937b, 25ff *et passim*), the Roman numerals indicate scale degrees, not chords.

Tveitt does not only rename these four church modes: He reframes them. He constructs the theory of a separate tone system, and it is important for him to stress this difference. Although his scales are exactly the same as the old church modes (and some of the even older Greek scales), they should—according to Tveitt—be named differently because they belong to a different tone system. My understanding is that in the same sense that Ionian and major—or Aeolian and natural minor—are theoretically dissimilar, Tveitt assumes that sum and Phrygian—or fum and Lydian—are

<sup>6</sup> As Gjermund Kolltveit (2010, 155) notes, the historical backdrop for Tveitt's theoretical ideas is Icelandic *tvísongur*, an old practice of parallel singing in fourths and fifths “which Tveitt tends to overestimate the importance and historical significance of.” There was considerable interest in *tvísongur* at this time. The Icelandic composer Jón Leifs, for example, integrated it into his musical style (Bjerkestrand 2009, 153).

different things entirely.<sup>7</sup> He argues that the Greek scale names should be reserved for music based on the ancient “tetrachordal tone system” (*tetrachordale Tonalität*), which is primarily melodic (Tveit 1937b, 16–19). Tveitt, in contrast, attempts to define a harmonic tone system (a *Kanglehre*) and focuses on how the same tone material is used in Norwegian folk music and modern Norwegian art music based on this folk music, rather than in ancient Greek music or later church music. He does not deny, of course, that Dorian and rir consist of the same tones (and are thus in some sense the exact same scales), but claims that they belong to two different tone systems governed by two different types of tonality. As will become clear, many readers had problems accepting his reasoning for not utilizing the established scale terminology. The most obvious explanation of why this was so important to Tveitt is his nationalist ideology: To allow for the construction of his system as “Norwegian” (or “Norse”), it had to be distanced from the ancient Greek scales and their later use as church modes.

Tveitt aims at defining a function theory for this tone system that is completely different from the one that defines the major/minor system (Tveit 1937b, 20). His theoretical framework is clearly inspired by Riemann’s function theory, which is most famously presented in his *Vereinfachte Harmonielehre* (1893). The inspiration not only appears in the premises of the theoretical framework but also the terminology. For example, Tveitt (1937b, 31) speaks of the *unterer dependenter Relativquintenklang der Konträrvariantfunktion*. It is challenging to translate such very German, and very Riemannian, terminology into English. This challenge is also neatly demonstrated by the English translation of the mentioned harmony book by Riemann, in which simple terms such as *Parallelklänge* and *Leittonwechselklänge* are awkwardly translated as “parallel-clangs” and “leading-tone-change clangs” (Riemann 1896). To not make a complicated theory even more inaccessible, I mainly retain Tveitt’s German terminology when discussing his so-called function theory.

Tveitt (1937b, 28ff) presents three primary functions (*Hauptfunktionen*) in his system. They are all perfect fifths (and thus dyads, not triads). Each scale is, however, constructed around two of these primary functions. Common to all scales is the *Prinzipalklang*, which is the fifth on the scale’s tonic and thus contains scale degrees I and V (in the treatise, Tveitt uses Roman numerals to indicate scale degrees, not chords). It is analyzed as P<sup>5</sup> (or P<sub>4</sub> if inverted to a fourth). The second primary function in rir, fum, and tyr is the *Konträrklang*, which is the fifth on the scale’s fifth and thus contains scale degrees V and II. It is analyzed as K<sup>5</sup> (or K<sub>4</sub> if inverted to a fourth). Sum, in contrast, has the *Lateralklang*, which is the fifth on the scale’s fourth degree and thus contains scale degrees IV and II, as its second primary function. The *Lateralklang* is analyzed as L<sup>5</sup> (or L<sub>4</sub> if inverted to a fourth). The primary dyads are thus exactly the same in rir, fum, and tyr tonalities with the same tonic. Due to the low second degree in sum, it

<sup>7</sup> There is an interesting parallel to Edvard Grieg here. In a 1901 correspondence with Johan Halvorsen, he discussed how G♯ often appears in folk tunes in D major. Grieg assumed that it was the relics of an old scale but did not know which one. The church modes were well-known in Norway at this time, and it is startling if neither Grieg nor Halvorsen knew of the Lydian mode. However, it is possible that they (like Tveitt) thought that this was something different. This is not completely unlikely, given the different use of the Lydian scale in folk music compared to archaic church music (cf. Utne-Reitan 2021, 78f).

takes a *Lateralklang* (on the fourth degree) instead of a *Konträrklang* (on the fifth) as the other primary dyad in addition to the *Prinzipalklang* (on the tonic). The function of the *Konträr-* and *Lateralklänge* is not really made clear. They do not appear to have a dominant-like function (cf. the parallel leading tones of the scales), which would be natural to assume by analogy to Riemann's framework.

The four secondary functions (*Nebenfunktionen*) are terms of a purely positional nature: They indicate the interval distance of a harmony in relation to one of the scale's primary dyads. Borrowing a term from Thomas Jul Kirkegaard-Larsen (2018, 2020), one could call the relationship between the primary and secondary functions "interval-relational." A *Relativklang* (r) is a half step apart, a *Familiarklang* (f) is a whole step, a *Variantklang* (v) is three half steps, and a *Medialklang* (m) is two whole steps. They may either be above or below the primary dyad in question, which is indicated by placing the analytic symbol to the left (below) or the right (above) of the primary function's symbol (i.e.,  $r^5P$  is the lower *Relativklang* of the *Prinzipalklang*, and  $Pr^5$  is the upper). Naturally, not all combinations of primary and secondary functions are used in all four scales (cf. Figure 3). Some are used in several of them, some only in one, and some theoretical combinations are not possible in practice without resorting to alteration (e.g.,  $v^5L$  and  $Lm^5$ ). In stark contrast to Riemannian theory, Tveitt does not argue that the secondary functions represent the primary functions. Some of the *Relativ-* and *Familiarklänge* are actually the closest one gets to a "dominant function" that conveys tension, leading back to the *Prinzipalklang*. I am thinking of the following functions that contain the defining parallel leading tones of the scale in question:

- 1 In fum:  $r^5P$  (or  $r_4P$ )
- 2 In sum:  $Pr^5$  (or  $Pr_4$ )
- 3 In rir and tyr:  $f^5P$  (or  $f_4P$ ) and  $Pf^5$  (or  $Pf_4$ )

E rir: P<sup>5</sup> Pf<sup>5</sup> Pv<sup>5</sup> f<sup>6</sup>K K<sup>5</sup> f<sup>6</sup>P P<sup>5</sup>  
m<sup>5</sup>K

E sum: P<sup>5</sup> Pr<sup>5</sup> Pv<sup>5</sup> L<sup>5</sup> m<sup>5</sup>P f<sup>6</sup>P P<sup>5</sup>  
m<sup>5</sup>L f<sup>6</sup>L Lv<sup>5</sup>

E fum: P<sup>5</sup> Pf<sup>5</sup> Pm<sup>5</sup> v<sup>5</sup>K K<sup>5</sup> v<sup>5</sup>P r<sup>5</sup>P P<sup>5</sup>  
Kf<sup>5</sup> Km<sup>5</sup>

E tyr: P<sup>5</sup> Pf<sup>5</sup> f<sup>6</sup>K K<sup>5</sup> Kf<sup>5</sup> Kv<sup>5</sup> P<sup>5</sup>  
v<sup>5</sup>P f<sup>6</sup>P

Figure 3: Diatonic perfect-fifth dyads in the four scales analyzed following Tveitt (1937b, 28ff), illustrated with E as the tonic. Their inversions would be analyzed similarly but with the subscript 4 replacing the superscript 5.

## 1. RIR-FUNKTIONSTABELLE

Rir-Tonart:	d (esses)	a (hesses)	e (fes)	h (ces)	fis (ges)	cis des	gis- as	(dis-) es	(ais) b	(eis) f	(his) c	(fissis) g
	P5	f5K	f5P	Pv5	Kbr5	#r5PF Pbr5	#r5K FKbr5	#r5P FPbr5	#r5FK PVbr5	#r5FP t	Pf5	K5
1.												
2.												
3.												
4.												
5.												
6.												
7.												
8.												
9.												
10.												
11.												
12.												
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII

Figure 4: Tveit's (1937b, 101) table with functional interpretations of all chromatic perfect-fifth dyads in all rir keys. He provides similar tables for the other scales as well (Tveit 1937b, 102–4). Together, the four tables also map possible modulation routes by pivots.

It is hard to grasp how Tveitt's theory constitutes a theory of harmonic function. He does not really clarify why P, K, and L are primary functions or their relationship to the four secondary functions r, f, v, and m (including which label to use when several of them are possible interpretations). It is thus difficult to understand what Tveitt means with the term *function* in his system. The resulting analytical nomenclature is rather an elaborate descriptive tool: It conveys the position of the fifth-based harmonies of his tone system by relating them to the two primary dyads of the scale key in question.

The tone system is not restricted to diatonicism. It allows for modulation between different keys (relying on the same or a different scale), but it also incorporates functional interpretations of different kinds of chromaticism inside a given key. One common type of chromaticism is the *dependente Relativklänge* (Tveit 1937b, 82–95). They describe non-diatonic *Relativklänge* (#r and br) that relate to (or “depend” on) one of the diatonic primary or secondary dyads. They may both be used inside a given key or as a means of modulation. I interpret this as Tveitt's take on secondary dominants given that they mainly act as leading tones to the dyad they relate to. This is thus part of Tveitt's theory that actually does warrant the use of the word *function*. For example,

although the dyad consisting of the tones G♯ and D♯ is three half steps below K in E rir, it should not be labeled v⁵K—a unique label for fum that should thus only be used if modulated to E fum—but rather #r⁵FK (the lower “dependent” *Relativklang* of the *Konträrfamiliarfunktion*). This fifth dyad functions as lower chromatic neighbors (or leading tones) to the fifth dyad on the fourth degree, something the analysis reflects. Through the concept of *depentende Relativklänge*, Tveitt manages to account for all chromatic perfect-fifth dyads in his tone system (cf. Figure 4).

Although the tritone does not have a tonality-defining power in this tone system and the third is not its main building block, both tritones and thirds are nonetheless part of the system. Tritones will naturally appear in the context of diatonic parallel fifths and fourths (as shown in the parenthesized intervals in Figure 3). When this happens, it is analyzed as Tr⁵ (“Tr” for *Triton*). Tveitt (1937b, 63), however, claims that this is a result of a *melodic* motion and not a *harmonic* phenomenon. It is to be considered a passing harmony. Tr⁵ is thus not a function. It is, however, also common that the tritone is eliminated by altering one of its tones, turning it into a perfect fourth or fifth (Tveit 1937b, 63–81), which alone does not necessarily entail modulation. The resulting tritone alterations have their own special analytical symbols in the form of a fusion between a “t” and a “<” or “>” (the symbols appear in Figures 4 and 5). They may alternatively be interpreted as *dependente Relativklänge*, which may—but do not have to—induce a modulation.

What appear to be third-based harmonies (seventh chords, triads, simple thirds) are in this tone system alterations of fifth-based harmonies. This is exactly the opposite of what is the case when explaining fifth-based harmonies in the major/minor system. Through the concept *kontemporale Klänge*, Tveitt (1937b, 167–71) analyzes combinations of the fundamental fifth dyads. Combinations of fifth dyads a half step apart are called *doppelte Relativklänge*, a whole step *doppelte Familiarklänge*, three half steps *doppelte Variantklänge*, and two whole steps *doppelte Medialklänge*. The two latter categories produce conventional seventh chords. Triads and thirds are variants of these where one or two tones are omitted. Thus, what is the most natural thing in the major/minor system is in this system a deviation from the norm. The concept of *kontemporale Klänge* also allows for easy labeling of fifth-based chords, which would require more complicated explanations if using terminology made for the third-based major/minor system. The chord consisting of the tones F, G♭, C, and D♭ is simply a “double” *Relativklang* in the same sense that F, A, C, and E is a “double” *Medialklang*. These examples could, for example, be analyzed as P⁵r⁵ in F sum and P⁵m⁵ in F fum (depending on the tonal context).

Tveitt’s (1937b, 109–56) lengthy chapter on *Polarität* is the most theoretically complicated part of the treatise. The chapter proves that this indeed is a work of speculative theory: His object is the tone system, and the aim is an investigation of its ontology. With the concept of *Polarität*, Tveitt aims to investigate “the distance or tension between two harmonies” (*der Abstand oder die Spannung zwischen zwei Klängen*). He wants to account for the nature of the harmonic progressions that he describes using the above-presented functional nomenclature. The symbol “⇄” represents *Polarität*,

and his first analyses are of *Familiarpolarität* in rir. He starts with  $P^5 \rightleftarrows Pf^5$  in an arbitrary rir key (dubbed "p"). He then lists the different interpretations of this exact progression in the other rir keys (in descending fifths): "1. *p-rir*  $P^5 \rightleftarrows p\text{-}rir$   $Pf^5$  = 2. *fk-rir*  $K^5 \rightleftarrows fk\text{-}rir$   $Kf^5$  = 3. *fp-rir*  $Pf^5 \rightleftarrows fp\text{-}rir$   $PVbr^5$  = 4. *pv-rir*  $r^{\sharp}FP \rightleftarrows pv\text{-}rir$   $\#^5P$  [and so on until 12]" (Tveit 1937b, 110). He follows up by arguing that this list only includes some of the possible functional interpretations. To provide a more comprehensive overview, he presents reductions in the form of quasi-mathematical formulae. The next forty-plus pages are filled with such formulae (cf. Figure 5). They do indeed map the theoretically possible enharmonic interpretations for the progressions in his tone system, but what theoretical insight this actually reveals about the tension between the harmonies (the *Polarität*) is unclear.

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \left( p\text{-}sum \left[ P^5 \xrightarrow{\Pr^5} m^5L \right] \right) = \left( l\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{\text{t}\flat r^5}{r^{\sharp}MP \text{ bzw. } r^{\sharp}LV} \rightleftarrows \frac{Lv^5}{m^5P} \right] \right) = \\
 &= \left( fp\text{-}sum \frac{PR\flat r^5 \text{ bzw. } ML\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5PV \text{ bzw. } \sharp r^5FL} \rightleftarrows \frac{Pv^5}{f^5L} \right) = \\
 &= \left( pv\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{MP\flat r^5 \text{ bzw. } LV\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5FP} \rightrightleftarrows f^5P \right] \right) = \\
 &= \left( lv\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{PV\flat r^5 \text{ bzw. } FL\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5L} \rightrightleftarrows L^5 \right] \right) = \left( pr\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{FP\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5P} \rightrightleftarrows P^5 \right] \right) = \\
 &= \left( \sharp r\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{\sharp r^5t}{L\flat r^5} \rightrightleftarrows \frac{\text{t}\flat r^5}{r^{\sharp}MP \text{ bzw. } r^{\sharp}LV} \right] \right) = \\
 &= \left( \sharp rp\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{Pr^5}{m^5L} \rightrightleftarrows \frac{PR\flat r^5 \text{ bzw. } ML\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5FP} \right] \right) = \\
 &= \left( \begin{array}{l} \sharp p\flat r\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{m^5P}{Lv^5} \rightrightleftarrows \frac{MP\flat r^5 \text{ bzw. } LV\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5FP} \\ \sharp fl\text{-}sum \end{array} \right] = \\
 &= \left( \begin{array}{l} \sharp mp\flat r\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{Pv^5}{f^5L} \rightrightleftarrows \frac{PV\flat r^5 \text{ bzw. } FL\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5L} \\ \sharp rfp\text{-}sum \end{array} \right] = \\
 &= \left( \begin{array}{l} \sharp pr\flat r\text{-}sum \left[ \frac{f^5P}{\sharp r^5P} \rightrightleftarrows \frac{FP\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5P} \\ \sharp rlp\text{-}sum \end{array} \right) = \left( \begin{array}{l} rmp\text{-}sum \left[ L^5 \rightrightleftarrows \frac{L\flat r^5}{\sharp r^5t} \\ \sharp rlv\text{-}sum \end{array} \right)
 \end{aligned}$$

Figure 5: Tveit's chapter on *Polarität* is packed with lengthy and complicated quasi-mathematical formulae. This example maps *Relativpolarität* in sum (Tveit 1937b, 123).

Tveitt knew that the system he put forward was both rigorous and immensely complicated. He addresses the intricate terminology of his system early on in his treatise, saying that terms like *oberer Prinzipalrelativquintenklang* (abbreviated  $Pr^5$ ) should not scare readers away. As a warrant for his claim, he compares it to the term *Subdominant*-

*parallelquartsextakkord*, or “Sp<sup>6</sup>,” used in Riemannian theory (Tveit 1937b, 29). I concur that the terminology in itself is not a problem when compared to contemporaneous European music-theoretical discourse. He could, however, have clarified why he coins so many new terms—and why these exact terms and not others. What is more problematic is Tveitt’s usage of his terminology. When trying to explain (or at least describe) every minute detail of the tone system, the analyses reach a level of complexity that makes Riemann’s dualistic function terminology pale in comparison. As the examples from Tveitt’s chapter on *Polarität* demonstrate, it is often hard to grasp the theoretical insights he tries to convey through his complicated analyses.

### Nationalism as Theoretical Premise

In his treatise, Tveitt exclusively cites Norwegian folk music and music from three Norwegian composers who wrote in a specifically national style in the interwar period (Egge, Groven, and himself). In the introduction, he states that the scales he will investigate are central to the “Norwegian tone feeling” (*norwegisches Tongefühl*), justifying taking all examples from Norwegian music (Tveit 1937b, 10). His project is thus clearly nationally motivated. However, he does not claim that the tone system he describes is restricted to Norway or explicitly claim that it necessarily originated in Norway (or the Nordic region) in the treatise, though both are heavily implied. In the 1938 article, it is clearly expressed that what he speaks of is something specifically Nordic. There he claims that “the Nordic race has a much older and greater musical culture than any other people” (*den nordiske folkerasen hev ein mykje eldre og større tonekunstkultur enn noko anna folkeslag*; Tveit 1938, 65). He also argues that the most similar music culture to Norway’s is found in India: “The Indo-Aryan national music is closer to our old Norse music than any other music culture in the world” (*Den indisk-ariske nasjonalmusiken er meir lik på den gamle norrøne tonekunsti vår enn nokon annan musik-kultur i verdi*; Tveit 1938, 66). He follows up by claiming that this is due to “the common racial origin” (*det sams rasiske upphavet*) and the fact that Indians, in contrast to Europeans, have preserved this old musical culture (Tveit 1938, 66).

Tveitt (1937b, 212) claims that pointing to examples from other countries could also be possible, but the limits of the system’s applicability and validity beyond the Norwegian context is not discussed. Although he is careful to keep the door open to the possibility of this kind of tonality also existing elsewhere, it thus nonetheless stands out as an attempt to construct a tone system that is specifically “Norwegian” (regularly broadened to “Nordic” or “Norse”).

The treatise appeared at a time when several Norwegian composers (e.g., Klaus Egge, Eivind Groven, and David Monrad Johansen) searched for national stylistic idioms—both inspired by Norwegian folk music and ideas of the Old Norse era—that differed from the older established national-romantic style of Grieg and others. There was also a growing scholarly interest in the history and theory of Norwegian folk music (e.g., Ole Mørk Sandvik, Erik Eggen, and Catharinus Elling). Musical nationalism was thus widespread, and the subject of Tveitt’s treatise had a high actuality in its

specific historical and cultural context.<sup>8</sup> It is, however, important to stress that nationalism takes many different forms and need not be radical. As discussed above, Tveitt's ideological position in the late 1930s and early 1940s was of a radical kind—especially concerning his affiliation with the *Ragnarok* circle (cf. Emberland 2003, 2015).

Tveitt's radical nationalism surfaces several times in his theoretical work and in many ways serves as its premise. For example, it is indicated by his choice of names for his "new" scales and his insistence on this being a separate tone system. The rejection of all connections to the medieval church modes and modern triadic harmony also underlines how he constructs Norwegian music as something different from (and purer than) the "Inter-European" traditions.

### *The Reception of Tveitt's Treatise*

Although the theoretical content of Tveitt's treatise has previously been granted very little attention, the theory's initial reception has been discussed in both scholarly and popular music-historical literature (e.g., Kvalbein 2013; Dalaker 2011; Storaas 1990, 2008). My contribution to the existing literature is to see this reception in light of the first critical discussion of Tveitt's theory presented above.

### **Initial Reception**

That the 1937 publication of Tveitt's treatise was a major event in the history of music—and of music theory—in Norway is made clear by the book's broad media coverage. There were adverts for the book in the largest Norwegian newspapers; local and nationwide newspapers interviewed him about it (*Aftenposten* 1937; *Hardanger* 1937; *Nasjonen* 1937; *Sunnhordland* 1937); and it was reviewed in the leading music magazine *Tonekunst* and in the general newspapers *Arbeiderbladet*, *Bergens Tidende*, and *Dagbladet*. I will briefly summarize the reviewers' positions before discussing the heated debate that followed the review in *Dagbladet* and Tveitt's attempt at a doctoral degree.

The review in *Arbeiderbladet* (O. M. 1937) and the review in *Bergens Tidende* (O. W.-P. 1937) are almost exact opposites. The former is extremely critical of Tveitt's project—and music theory in general it seems, as the reviewer claims that music theorists have had no influence on the history of music whatsoever (mentioning Albrechtsberger, Hausegger, Riemann, and the like as examples and Rameau as an exception due to his success as a composer). The reviewer in *Bergens Tidende*, however, writes a very sympathetic and positive review of the work (though he admits that he could not comprehend all of Tveitt's complicated arguments). Neither of them truly address Tveitt's theoretical claims and describe the contents of the work only superficially.

In his two-part review in *Tonekunst*, Klaus Egge (1937b) is sympathetic toward Tveitt's project but ultimately disagrees with his theoretical conclusions. What he disagrees with most is Tveitt's reframing of traditional scales and chords. In his review, Egge consequently uses the traditional scale names and only mentions that Tveitt

8 For a study of national currents in Norwegian music during the interwar period, see Dalaker 2011.

renames them as a curiosity in his afterword—making it clear that he disagrees with Tveitt's new names due to the fact that the scales are not Norwegian inventions.<sup>9</sup> Egge also objects to Tveitt's insistence on fifths being the building blocks for chords and shows how some of the chords that Tveitt addresses could just as easily be interpreted as normal third-based chords. He does agree with Tveitt that the regular use of the intervals fourths and fifths and the Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian scales is characteristic of Norwegian music, but he argues that this music nevertheless belongs to the same international tone system that revolves around the triad. Instead of a separate harmonic tone system different from major/minor tonality, Egge argues that what Tveitt ultimately describes is a variation of this tone system that emphasizes these specific intervals and scales. He employs a Norwegian saying as his conclusion: Tveitt's proposed new theory of tonality is “to cross the brook for water” (*å gå over bekken etter vann*).

Pauline Hall's (1937b) extensive review in *Dagbladet* was the harshest by far. She reads Tveitt's book as an attempt to replace the major/minor system with his own system. She calls this latter system a “musical dictatorship” (*musikalsk diktatur*), which explains the title of her review: “Music Caged” (*Musikk i bur*). Hall makes clear that Tveitt's scales are the same as the medieval church modes—which are related further back in history to the ancient Greek tone system—and that replacing the medieval modes with major/minor tonality was a big step for musical development. She points to the possibility of including the church modes in the latter system (as many Norwegian composers had done successfully before), but argues that to base a tone system solely on these scales is narrow-minded and would lead to very monotonous music. In her assessment, the only new thing Tveitt puts forward is his cumbersome terminology: It is old facts in a new wrapping (*gamle fakta i ny pønt*). Moreover, the structure is bad and the German knotty. She ends her review by questioning the seriousness of Tveitt's theoretical attempt, rhetorically asking whether the treatise is just a clever joke.

Hall completely rejects Tveitt's treatise. The core of her criticism, however, is her fear of what would happen if composers started to follow Tveitt's principles—which, according to her, constitute a dictatorship and a cage. Returning to Dahlhaus's distinction, this implies that Hall presumes Tveitt's treatise to be a piece of regulative theory, which would entail that Tveitt's work is prescriptive, similar to the textbooks on “practical” harmony used at the conservatories. In contrast, I have argued that it is a piece of speculative theory.<sup>10</sup> From a strictly music-theoretical perspective, the premise for some of the most central objections Hall presents in her total rejection—including her catchy title—is thus questionable. Still, in a broader context, this does not matter

9 Egge was not alone in rejecting the new names. Probably because of the many reactions to this specific aspect, Tveitt avoided the Old Norse scale names in his later writings. Instead, he used the more neutral terms *re-modal*, *mi-modal*, *fa-modal*, and *sol-modal* (cf. Tveit 1940a, 1940b). Apart from this, the nationalistic premise remained as pronounced as ever in his music-theoretical discussions.

10 Richter 1853 (with its exercises, rules, and explicit focus on *how*, not *why*) is a prime example of a regulative harmony book. Hauptmann 1853 (with its philosophical reflections on the ontology of the major/minor tone system) is, in contrast, a good example of a speculative harmony book. Tveitt's treatise is undoubtedly much closer to the latter than the former.

much. More than the theory as such, Hall's primary issue with Tveitt's work is the nationalistic ideology it represents.<sup>11</sup> The harsh tone in the debates over Tveitt's treatise reflects the very different political affiliations at a time of growing polarization, and Hall's primary point in her critique is surely to call out Tveitt's radical nationalism.

In the next issue of *Dagbladet*, Norwegian composer Eivind Groven (1937b) defends Tveitt's book from Hall's attack. His main point is that Hall wrongly claims that Tveitt tries to replace the major/minor system. Groven is right that Tveitt did not claim this in his treatise, but it would soon become clear that Hall was not completely wrong either. Again, it is in the 1938 article that Tveitt's radical nationalist ideology is expressed most explicitly. He ends this article by arguing for renouncing the major/minor system completely and proclaims polemically: "No international tone feeling in our country!" (*Burt med internasjonal tonekjensla frå landet vårt!*; Tveit 1938, 67).

Hall (1937c) replies to Groven by quoting more or less Tveitt's complete introductory chapter as a warrant for her claims; she also questions Groven's bias, given that his music is cited in Tveitt's book. Soon, both Egge (1937a) and Groven (1937a) responded to Hall's defense. The former—whose music is also cited in Tveitt's book but nevertheless disagrees with the theoretical claims—disagrees with Hall's tone. Although he too opposes Tveitt's conclusions, Egge argues that his attempt needs to be met with respect and not an article full of mockery (*gjeipeartikkelen*). Groven applauds Hall for actually quoting Tveitt, but naturally interprets the introductory passages rather differently. He ends his response by turning Hall's argument upside down: The hegemony of the major/minor system has led to folk tunes being caged when appropriated into Western art music. An alternative tone system acknowledging the harmonic possibilities of the modal scales is rather part of breaking out of the cage that is major/minor tonality. In her response, Hall (1937a) makes it clear that she does not agree with Egge in that credit is due: Tveitt presents nothing more than "the emperor's new clothes" (*Keiserens nye klær*). The only thing on which she agrees with Groven is his wish that the quotes from Tveitt's book will "open the eyes of anyone and everyone" (*åpne øinene på noen hver*). They do, naturally, disagree on what the readers should realize when their eyes are opened.

All this happened within one week at the end of May, when Tveitt also held a popular lecture at the Old Assembly Hall (*Gamle festsal*) in Oslo to publicly defend his theoretical claims. The nameless reporter from *Dagbladet* (1937) claims that to call it "popular" (as in easily accessible) was an over-exaggeration. It was hard to follow, as there was no piano available. The two-and-a-half-hour-long discussion that followed was dominated by Tveitt himself, as well as by Egge presenting his objections to the theory and Groven defending Tveitt's "genius" ideas. Tveitt also defended himself in writing in both *Dagbladet* and *Tonekunst*. In the former (Tveit 1937a), he blames Hall—and O. Mørchmann in *Arbeiderbladet*—for spreading insults and lies instead of debating the actual theoretical content. He writes that both of them could have attended his aforementioned lecture and discussed the theory publicly there,

<sup>11</sup> See Kvalbein 2013 for a detailed study of Pauline Hall, including discussions of her relation to Tveitt and nationalism.

but none of them attended. The defense in *Tonekunst* (Tveit and Egge 1937) is a more sober response to Egge's (1937b) objections. Tveitt challenges Egge to substantiate his claims—which he does in an attached answer. Egge addresses the inconsistency in the definition of the leading tones in the different scales; essentially, he says that although Tveitt's idea of parallel leading tones in fifths makes some sense in Lydian (or in Tveitt's terminology, "fum"), it needs too many adjustments when applied to the other scales—downward leading tones (and no leading tone on the seventh scale degree) in Phrygian and whole-tone leading tones in Dorian and Mixolydian—to be convincing.

In the same year as his treatise was published, Tveitt delivered it to the Royal Frederick University (renamed the University of Oslo in 1939) to be considered for a doctoral degree. The university did not have a musicology department at the time, but had previously awarded doctoral degrees in music to three candidates (Georg Reiss, Ole Mørk Sandvik, and Erik Eggen). Olav Gurvin, who would become Norway's first music professor, received his degree from the same institution the following year based on his treatise on atonality (Gurvin 1938). To assess Tveitt's treatise, the university appointed an international committee consisting of Jacques Handschin (Basel), Ilmari Krohn (Helsinki), and, a bit later, Yvonne Rokseth (Strasbourg). Rokseth's response is not part of the archived papers, and it is unknown whether she wrote one before Tveitt protested against the appointed committee, which he did not consider qualified, as they were too grounded in (and biased in favor of) church music; he ultimately withdrew his application (Storaas 2008, 115). Tveitt's antagonism toward church music is made very clear in the 1938 article. Therein, he argues that church music was the root of the ("civilized") music culture of "the international parasite race" (*den internasjonale parasitrasen*) that had forcibly destroyed the national ("natural") Norwegian tone feeling. Bringeland summarizes Handschin's and Krohn's statements as follows:

In his statement letter (written in Swedish and dated Sammatti, Finland, 23 June 1937), Krohn reports that it is his impression that the author is a capable and original composer, but that the book – from a scientific point of view – doesn't qualify as an academical thesis. Krohn also states the obvious fact that the four 'Norse modes' presented by Tveitt under the Norse names 'Rir', 'Sum', 'Fum', and 'Tyr' are identical to the church modes dorian, phrygian, lydian and mixolydian. In his statement letter (written in German and dated Basel, 20 November 1937), Handschin too comments on this obvious fact and carries on: [...] Tveit's [sic] theory refers to an art that is still developing, even though the approaches date back decades; this musical development has not yet been clarified so far as that we can know whether this theory is not only applicable to a part of it, or the whole thing can be reconciled music-theoretical at all.' (Bringeland 2020, 157n18)

Although rejecting it, Handschin and Krohn (both renowned musicologists) found Tveitt's theoretical work to be interesting and thorough. The main reason for their ultimate rejection was that the treatise lacked academic formalities: There is no

bibliography in Tveitt's treatise; he does not discuss his work's relation to previous relevant research; and he does not, or only to a limited extent, critically scrutinize his own theoretical claims. Handschin questions if Tveitt's treatise qualifies as proper musical research (*Musikwissenschaft*) and indicates that it rather belongs to the discipline of music theory (*Musiktheorie*), which he considers less academically rigorous. As it is evident that Tveitt's scales are the same as the church modes regarding tone material, Krohn also states that a critical discussion of the cases where these do not match would be both interesting and necessary (cf. Storaas 2008, 114f).<sup>12</sup>

In his protest, Tveitt referred to statements from what he considered to be "real authorities" (Storaas 2008, 116). These statements were also used in the advertisements for his treatise (e.g., in *Dagbladet*, May 24, 1937). Fritz Reuter (Dresden) compares Tveitt's work with the "genius" theoretical systems of Riemann and Karg-Elert. Josef Achtélik (Leipzig) states that the theory is completely convincing. Florent Schmitt (Paris) claims that it reflects a colossal amount of theoretical knowledge, and Otto Weinreich (Leipzig) calls the work epoch-making for both musical theory and practice. Some of these authorities did, however, have a problematic ideological position similar to Tveitt's.<sup>13</sup>

Tveitt's work thus received a very mixed initial reception, including unconditional rejection, unconditional praise, and everything in between. I find one perspective especially interesting regarding the treatise's initial reception: that of *universality*. Particularly in Egge's review, Tveitt's work is criticized because it does not accept (but rather challenges) the universality, naturality, and the hegemonic position of the major/minor system as a theoretical lens for understanding harmony and tonality. Notions of universality were widespread in music theory. Hugo Riemann is a prime example of a German music theorist claiming his theory of functional tonality to be universal (cf. Rehding 2003, 127–38). Schenker (1954, 279) similarly argues for "the complete conformity to Nature of our major system." According to Alexander Rehding (2003, 97), Riemann would argue that music that did not fit the major/minor system—be it pre-tonal or non-Western music—"had not attained the same level of perfection." Thus, the universal rules of modern Western tonality were still applied as a yardstick for other musics, securing major/minor tonality the hegemonic position as the universal tone system of which all others were less perfect variants. Both Egge's and Hall's reviews reflect similar attitudes. Tveitt's claims were at odds with taken-for-granted tenets of the discipline. The central premise for Tveitt's main idea was, to say it with Foucault (1981, 61), not "within the true" and he thus became "a true monster." For the readers who refused to accept his premise, Tveitt's theory would be unconditionally rejected *a priori*. Somewhat ironically, it is this general challenge of the major/minor system's superiority I find to be the most interesting—and the strongest—

12 Copies of Krohn's and Handschin's statements are kept in Reidar Storaas's private Tveitt Archive, Bergen Offentlige Bibliotek. I wish to thank Sjur Haga Bringeland for making these copies available to me.

13 Reuter was a member of the Nazi party and (together with Tveitt's teacher, Grabner) among the German theorists who "enthusiastically welcomed National Socialism" (Holtmeier 2004, 257). Schmitt was a "fierce nationalist" but also "thought to have sympathized with the Vichy regime" (Pasler and Rife 2001).

aspect of Tveitt's treatise.<sup>14</sup> There were, of course, other issues that hindered general acceptance of Tveitt's treatise as well. The dense quasi-scientific prose, the strong nationalistic undertones (including the Old Norse scale names and refusal to acknowledge any connection to the church modes), the complicated analytical nomenclature, and the many intricate tables and figures did not strengthen his credibility, but rather the opposite. The treatise ended up not being academic enough to be accepted as a doctoral dissertation and too inaccessible for a broader non-academic readership.

### **Later Scholarly Reception**

Tveitt's *Tonalitätstheorie* is undeniably a unique work in Norway's history of music theory and also an interesting case of an attempt (albeit a failed one) to challenge taken-for-granted universal truths in the context of Western music theory. Nevertheless, it has not been discussed seriously in the research literature. There is a clear pattern in the modern reception of Tveitt's treatise among Norwegian musicologists and music theorists: The work is mentioned and its content described (often almost caricatured) in a few sentences before it is completely dismissed as a theoretical work of little interest. For example, one of the leading Tveitt scholars, Hallgjerd Aksnes, writes the following in her dissertation:

As mentioned, he even wrote a treatise, *Tonalitätstheorie des parallelen Leitton-systems*, where he argues that the most common modes in Norwegian folk music (Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, and Mixolydian) are Norse inventions, and where he uses Old Norse word endings from the *Edda* poem "Håvamål" (rir, sum, fum, and tyr) as designations for these modes. Except for a heated newspaper debate in Norway and a number of favorable critiques by European theoreticians and musicians immediately following the appearance of the treatise [...], Tveitt's theory has not received much attention within the musical society. I myself have not found it worthwhile to treat the treatise or its reception in depth, as this would require that I entered into its myriad of complicated terms, its quasi-scientific formulae which in some cases extend over several pages [...], and its in my view erroneous harmonic interpretations, only to discuss harmonic traits which can be explained in much simpler terms. (Aksnes 2002, 231)

Short and dismissive accounts are also put forward by other central Norwegian musicologists and music theorists (cf. Bjerkestrand 2005, 267f; 2009, 114; Grinde 1993, 214, 244; Kleiberg 2000, 127). Although I certainly agree that many aspects of Tveitt's theory are deeply problematic, I have attempted to present a fuller and more informed contextual discussion of the treatise. This had been lacking in the scholarly literature.<sup>15</sup> For the first time, this article addresses the theoretical contents of Tveitt's

<sup>14</sup> This is not to say that I in any way subscribe to Tveitt's problematic nationalistic framing of this challenge or his proposed music-theoretical alternative.

<sup>15</sup> The closest thing to a discussion of the treatise's theoretical contents (i.e., not only its reception) that I have been able to find in the available literature is a chapter in an unpublished master's thesis by Tore Tveit (1983, 78–93). This is, however, a summary and not a discussion as such.

*Tonalitätstheorie* in its complexity, discussing the work's few strengths and many weaknesses. I have used this as a basis for the more thorough discussion of its initial reception presented above. I found this necessary in order to draw a more nuanced picture of this interesting case in the history of music theory.

### *Concluding remarks*

Geirr Tveitt's *Tonalitätstheorie des parallelen Leittonsystems* (1937) is a particularly clear example of a music theory entangled in radical nationalist ideology. The theory is specifically constructed to back his claim of a tonality (framed as typically "Norwegian" or even "Norse") that differs from the old southern-European modal system and the modern Western major/minor system. On the one hand, Tveitt challenges hegemonic understandings of the ontology of Western musical tone systems as well as the position of these systems (and the value judgments they promote), which were taken for granted as universals of music rather than historical and cultural constructs with limited applicability and validity. On the other hand, he does this from a problematic ideological position and proposes a theory of tonality tainted by a radical nationalism with racist undertones. Ultimately, Tveitt's attempt at "Norwegianizing" parts of the music theory discourse was not successful. Nonetheless, the attempt clearly reveals how much may be at stake ideologically in music-theoretical discourse.

Presenting the first critical discussion of the contents of Tveitt's treatise, this article has not argued in favor of reviving its theoretical ideas. The premises of his theoretical claims are not only shaky but also too entangled in his radical nationalist ideology. That the theory demonstrates Tveitt's own conception of tonality as a composer—which may be useful in analyzing his own music and possibly the music of other composers who propagate a similar stylistic idiom—is undeniable, but that is more or less its limit. The discussion has also demonstrated how, rather paradoxically, Tveitt relied heavily on Riemannian impulses—including Riemann-esque terminology—when developing his theoretical ideas, which were framed as a challenge to Riemannian theory. As a contribution to the history of music theory, this article has approached Tveitt's work and its reception as a case study of relations between music theory and ideology.

The case study has not only revealed the deeply problematic ideological entanglements of Tveitt's theory, but also the strong hegemony of certain ideas of universality in music-theoretical discourse in this historical context. The question remains, if theories of music, when moving beyond the most basic level of description, can provide neutral and ahistorical concepts and thus claim to be truly universal. This is a vast topic beyond the scope of this article, but the above discussions do at least underline the importance of revealing ideological entanglements in music theory. If we treat the idea of a neutral and universal theory of music as a dangerously deceptive illusion, a fundamentally critical attitude (e.g., towards power structures that maintain racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, etc.) becomes imperative. This does not entail that the theories in question cannot be legitimately used in music-analytical research, but rather that they must not be applied (or taught) uncritically. The limits of applicability, and

the fragility, of all theories of music must be acknowledged and discussed. Geirr Tveitt aptly pointed to the limits of the theories of major/minor tonality and challenged their hegemonic position. His own theory, however, had an even more limited field of validity and applicability—much more so than he was prepared to admit—and was never accepted as an alternative ontology of the modal tone system that is specifically “Norwegian” or “Norse.”

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### Abstract

In his treatise *Tonalitätstheorie des parallelen Leittonsystems* (1937), Norwegian composer Geirr Tveitt attempts to construct a theory of tonality based on Norwegian folk music as an alternative to the established "Inter-European" theories. He reframes four of the church modes as a specifically "Norwegian" or "Norse" tone system (even giving the scales new names based on Old Norse: *rir*, *sum*, *fum*, and *tyr*). The treatise received a mixed reception and has never been acknowledged by Norwegian music scholars. This article discusses Tveitt's work discussed as a case of music theory entangled in radical nationalist ideology.