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Re-‘cycling’ poetry: Structure in the twentieth-century English song cycle

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Abstract

The genre of song cycle is characterized by significant typological variety and ambiguity, to the extent that a concise working definition of the form doesn’t really exist. This complexity is partly grounded in the historical legacy of the loaded term ‘cycle’ and its inherent connotations of circular succession. Influenced by this notion, much song cycle discourse is underpinned, consciously or unconsciously, by assumptions of unity, on a variety of musical and textual levels, that have typically pointed to the success or failure of works as cycles.

This study seeks to explore several interrelated ideological, methodological and critical strands. Firstly, established singular conceptions of song cycle structure limit the interpretative possibilities available to analysts and performers. Clearly, not all cycles are circles and an openness to alternative patterns, shapes and structures makes space for new understandings of existing works. Secondly, the breadth and diversity of the song cycle repertory requires bespoke methodological approaches that respond to the specific conceptual and contextual circumstances of works and composers to provide the fullest possible account of their potential structure(s). Finally, the intermedial nature of the song cycle demands a sustained and equal preoccupation with both words and music. Close analysis of music and text that is provisional and dynamic provides an effective way of exploring issues of structure.

The repertory of English, twentieth-century song cycles is relatively underrepresented in musicological study. Finzi, Vaughan Williams and Ireland are all well-known composers, yet very little scholarship focuses on their song cycles. Informed by the principles outlined, I argue that the structure of Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge* can be understood as three, paired micro-narratives, that the structure of Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain* is dynamic (having both framing and internal narrative cycle structures) and that the structure of Ireland’s *Mother and Child* is non-linear and determined by experiential qualities.
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Chapter 1

Circling the issues
Critical questions and frameworks

The intermedial nature of the song cycle gives rise to a host of critical complexities, inviting broad interest from scholars working in the fields of musicology and literature. Using the key critical and aesthetic questions that underpin song cycle studies as a framework, this chapter reviews the literature from these areas of scholarship.

What is a song cycle?

The genre of song cycle is a perplexing one, eluding definitive description in almost every way. Much scholarship surrounding the form has focused on the notion of classification, attempting to set out the defining characteristics of the genre and establish criteria against which groups of songs can be authoritatively deemed cycles. The results of these deliberations are diverse to say the least and it is clear that in both musical and literary terms there is little about the form that may be considered as standard. Precise, musical cohesion — both tonal and motivic — is central to the design of some song cycles, but not others. Some cycles are characterized by unified literary elements — poetry that shares common themes and imagery or coherent narrative plots1 — yet other cycles combine apparently divergent texts, sometimes written by more than one poet. Cycles have been known to include settings of anything from between two and thirty poems and whilst the entry of the term ‘song cycle’ into lexicography in 1865 provides a definite historical marker, Schubert, Schumann and other significant composers of song were writing cycles long before this.2

Since the genre’s inception commentators have tried to pin down the precise nature of the song cycle, but always with limited success. Writing about the nineteenth-century song cycle, David Ferris suggests that ‘one reason that the definition of the Romantic song cycle has made such a poor fit with the actual works it is intended to explain is that it was not

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formulated until many years after those works were composed'. The earliest definition for ‘Liederkreis’ and ‘Liedercyclus’, provided by Arrey von Dommer in 1865, describes a ‘coherent complex of various lyric poems’ which, when set to music would typically be ‘through-composed’, with a main melody ‘retained for all of the strophes’. Dommer goes on to suggest that:

in comparison with the dramatic solo cantata, the Liederkreis is actually missing nothing more than the recitative and the aria form of the songs [Gesänge] instead of the lied form. Otherwise one finds it is rather close to the cantata, or regards it as a middle genre between through-composed lied and cantata.

The fact that Dommer’s description of the song cycle manages to outline some fairly precise requirements whilst remaining completely open and ambiguous says a great deal about the complexity and variety of the genre. Writing about Schumann’s Dichterliebe in 1971 in an essay Ferris describes as ‘the beginning of the modern attempt to define the Romantic cycle as a genre’, Arthur Komar assumes that the cycle ‘constitutes an integrated musical whole’. The conception of unity implied in Komar’s description is certainly an enduring feature of much song cycle discourse, but other scholars reject this assumption, or at least the terms upon which works qualify as being integrated. Ruth Bingham, for example, finds little distinction between song cycles and collections in the early part of the nineteenth century, preferring to use the more all-embracing term ‘coherence’ in place of ‘unity’ in order to recognize the different ways song cycles may potentially come together. Yet as Inge Van Rij notes, more sophisticated studies like Bingham’s ‘are typically forced to conclude by defining the song cycle in the vaguest possible terms’, and so the argument turns full circle.

Questions surrounding the song cycle’s definition that began in the nineteenth century are still being asked today, and clear answers still do not exist for those early works or any subsequent repertories. The truth of the matter is that they probably never will, or at least that there is no singular answer. Complexities abound at every level of consideration, and this is

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4 Ferris provides this translation, p. 9.
5 Ferris, p. 11.
6 Ferris, p. 13.
7 Inge van Rij, Brahms’s Song Collections (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 6.
reflected in the breadth, diversity and range of scholarship and critical approaches that the genres of song and song cycle attract.  

**The intermediality of the song cycle**

In the introduction to her historical survey of the song cycle, Laura Tunbridge draws attention to the ‘intriguing complex of creative and aesthetic issues’ that the genre of song cycle raises. Of course, a good deal of this aesthetic complexity originates from the intermedial union of words and music. Robert Samuels summarizes some of these issues from a semiological perspective:

> Any example of song composition raises issues of signification. A song setting suggests that its lyric (which has usually been conceived by its author as self-sufficient) is in need of the supplement of musical accompaniment in order to signify.

This issue of self-sufficiency on the part of the author is vigorously upheld by the poet Raine Maria Rilke, who was expressly opposed to any interaction between his work and the other arts for precisely this reason:

> It is after all my aim to fill with my own creative output the whole artistic space that offers itself to an idea in my mind. I hate to believe (assuming my creation to be successful in a highest sense) that there can be any room left over for another art, which would itself then be interpretative and complementary.

Such contention was no less common amongst composers and poets contributing to the twentieth-century English song repertory as, for example, the vehement dialogue — including references to ‘mutilation’ and ‘castration’ — that emerged between A.E. Housman and Ralph Vaughan Williams upon learning that the composer had disregarded stanzas three and four in his setting of ‘Is my team ploughing’. In answer to Housman’s outrage, Vaughan

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9 Tunbridge, p. 1.


Williams declared that a composer ‘has a perfect right artistically to set any portion of a poem he chooses’.  

Where words and music meet in song, the resulting interpretative layers are indeed complex. The poetic text exists in the light of its authorial crafting, shaped by a set of values, judgements and experiences irrespective of the writer’s intention to be influenced by or convey them. The composer of song encounters that text, reading it in the light of their own values, judgements and experiences (however unwittingly) and applies their musical layer. This combination of words and music — song — is, in turn, read (both in the literal and performative sense) by singers and scholars who engage with the work through the lens of their own values, judgements and experiences, so it is little wonder that performances of well-known songs can vary so tremendously or that scholars can offer such widely-ranging discourse on works that might be considered to be veritable giants of the song canon. That is to say nothing, at this stage, of the interpretative dimension added by listeners and the process of listening itself. To add further complication, there is transience in all of this. This process of interpretative distillation is unique to each engagement with a poem, song, performance or all three. How often does one hear musicians, performers, listeners and readers say that whenever they return to a piece of music or writing over passing years they are struck by the way they can find something new, different, previously unseen that enhances or alters their ‘reading’ of a work? Samuels adds that ‘in a song cycle these issues are enlarged by the potential narrative that arises from the sequence of songs. The qualification “potential” is needed, because this narrative may not be straightforwardly legible from the texts themselves’. In other words, there is the possibility that a latent narrative may only be animated through the interpretative energies of performer and listener. Then, there is the abiding issue of the music-poetry power struggle. Which is more important, the music or the text?

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14 Samuels (p. 135).
Words, music or song?

Lawrence Kramer’s seminal text, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*, explores the complex dynamic between poetry and music in song, questioning whether song should be considered a form of synthesis or ‘transmemberment’; whether song is an ‘appropriation’ or ‘imitation’ of a text; whether song ‘uses[s] a reading’ or ‘is a reading’? Ultimately, for Kramer ‘a poem is never really assimilated into a composition; it is incorporated, and it retains its own life, its own “body” within the body of music’. Where Kramer seeks to determine ‘when and how a poem and composition can be rewardingly discussed in tandem’, the philosopher Suzanne Langer warns against a ‘general method for all the arts’ because ‘it discourages special theories and single-minded technical study’. For Langer, assimilation is a key concept in the union between words and music. ‘When words enter into music they are no longer prose or poetry, they are elements of the music…they give up their literary status and take on purely musical functions’. Furthermore, ‘song is not a compromise between poetry and music…song is music…when a composer puts a poem to music, he annihilates the poem and makes a song’. Adopting a similar position, though possibly framing the argument in less pointed language, Edward T. Cone endorses the right of the composer (like Vaughan Williams) to sacrifice or subvert elements of textual form in the quest to achieve a song that achieves a ‘higher dramatic or rhetorical unity’.

In contrast, Susan Youens argues for the primacy of poetry. Specialising in the nineteenth-century lieder repertory, she affirms that ‘lieder begin with words; they are born when a composer encounters poetry’. More determinedly, she offers that:

Music’s conventional obeisances to poets and poetry are thus in some measure a guilty façade to conceal a form of theft in which an existing work of art is not only robbed but used and sometimes abused for purposes unimagined by the original creator. No longer poetry per se, it undergoes a sea-change – whether for better or worse is out of the helpless (often dead) wordmonger’s hands.

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20 Cone (p. 6).
As such, much of Youens’s research is characterized by its approach to song in the light of composers’ engagement with poets and poetry — their poetic choices, literary discrimination and changing tastes — locating composers as ‘active participants in the literary milieu of their day’. Jonathan Dunsby recalls Schumann’s view that song should be regarded as a higher form of poetry, but this too acknowledges, at the very least, a transformative dimension in relation to the status of the poetic text within song. Cyrus Hamlin, however, makes a more definitive concession. Although his argument is made in relation to the song cycle, the assertion holds true to the wider, hierarchical implications of the word-music dichotomy in song. For Hamlin, ‘the generic form of song cycle is essentially literary but the medium of composition and performance is essentially musical’.

The methodological implications of this issue are far-reaching and have not necessarily been fully determined let alone resolved (if indeed they ever could be). Calvin S. Brown’s 1948 publication, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts*, represents one of the earliest efforts to establish a critical basis for the new intermedial discipline. Some twenty-two years later, the same author wrote that:

> There is no organization of the work or workers in the field of musico-literary relationships…there are no organized or conflicting schools of thought, as there is no official point of view and no standard methodology. The entire field of study remains essentially individual and unorganized.

According to Kofi Agawu’s 1992 article, little progress had been made:

> The marginalization of song as song in the literature speaks to a very real problem, namely, how to account for the syntax of a genre that includes two nominal semiotic systems, music and language. A pursuit of the dynamics of that inclusion relationship cannot be simply reduced to a routine search for patterns of coincidence or non-coincidence between words and music. To embrace the theoretical challenge fully, we need to define song as a single genre and test its semiotic status. And it is because of

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23 Susan Youens, ‘Schubert and his poets’ (p. 99).
this need for basic research that the problems of song analysis cannot be left to music historians, who are usually more content to borrow, apply and criticise analytical methods than to develop them in the first place.  

Summarising approaches to lied analysis some five years later, Suzanne Lodato found that ‘Brown’s observation from 1970 still holds true today. If anything the field of melopoetics seems to have become even more diffuse and fragmented’.  

Lodato goes on to outline the many and varied methodological approaches offered by musicologists, not least: Agawu’s taxonomy of four models of song analysis, studies in textual declamation, studies seeking to illustrate parallels in semantic meaning between music and text, Schenkerian approaches, studies that highlight structural homologies between music and text and studies that approach song on the basis of a lack of correspondence between music and text. A snapshot of more recent contributions to song discourse reveals that the diversity of methodological procedure and critical approach remains vibrant.

**Questions of unity**

In contemplation of the song cycle specifically, another significant critical and aesthetic question that arises is that of unity. In three separate music dictionary entries, definitions of the term ‘song cycle’ concomitantly include references to ‘unity’, ‘coherence’ and ‘narrative continuity, or at least consistency’. Youens’s article is perhaps the most useful in clarifying how this principle is seen to operate, generally, within the repertory:

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29 Suzanne Lodato, ‘Recent Approaches to Text/Music Analysis in the Lied: A Musicological Perspective’ (p. 96).
30 Robert Samuels pursues a Schenkerian approach in his gendered study of two Schumann cycles, ‘Narratives of Masculinity and Femininity; Two Schumann Song Cycles’; Rufus Hallmark whilst adopting a broad, hermeneutic approach follows Agawu’s ‘pyramidal’ model in which the text provides semantic meaning to be signified in the music in *Frauenliebe und Leben: Chamisso’s Poems and Schumann’s Songs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Stephen Rodgers offers a declamation-based analytical method which explores the interaction of the poetry’s music (sonic elements) with the music of song in ‘Song and the Music of Poetry’, *Music Analysis*, 36 (2017), 315-349. It is also interesting to note that many of the same critical and methodological issues are paralleled in the study of popular song: Allan F. Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2012).
The coherence regarded as a necessary attribute of song cycles may derive from the
text (a single poet; a story line; a central theme or topic such as love or nature; a
unifying mood; poetic form or genre, as in a sonnet or ballad cycle) or from musical
procedures (tonal schemes; recurring motifs, passages or entire songs; formal
structures); these features may appear singly or in combination.\(^\text{32}\)

Robert Samuels, amongst others, identifies the ‘aesthetic goals of overarching coherence in
an extended form, and unity of connotative purpose between the small and large scale’ in
relation to the nineteenth-century generally and song cycle composition more particularly,\(^\text{33}\)
but — writing in much broader musicological terms and in reference to eighteenth- and
nineteenth-century, European instrumental music — Fred Maus questions the very notion of
unity. For Maus, the enduring centrality of unity within musical discourse relates to that
musicological privileging of the concept, historically. For him, the reason for the apparent
importance of unity is unclear:

Perhaps we do not always know what we mean by ‘musical unity’; perhaps unity
(whatever it is) is not as important or as central as we have sometimes believed.

Maus goes further:

More radically, one might question whether the attribution of musical unity is ever
appropriate as a critical or scholarly aim.

Whilst it is questionable that this perspective can translate easily or universally to the world
of the song cycle, the argument raises a number of relevant issues. To apply Maus’s rejection
of attributions of musical unity to the song cycle would be to entirely disregard the prevailing
aesthetic principles of many nineteenth- and — by extension of musical legacy — twentieth-
century works. Can any contemplation or reflection of a work on the basis of such a
significant exclusion offer a full and meaningful understanding or appreciation? On the other
hand, it is certainly true that the value and importance placed on unity within song cycles has
influenced the style and tenor of associated criticism relating to both the nineteenth-century
Germanic repertoire and English cycles from the twentieth century. Remarks like ‘the art of

\(^{32}\) Youens, ‘Song Cycle’.
\(^{33}\) Samuels (p. 135). Within *Word and Music Studies: Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field*, John
Neubauer’s paper ‘Organicism and Modernism/Music and Literature’, pp. 3-24, and Leon Plantinga’s ‘Design
and Unity in Schumann’s *Liederkreis, Op.39*’*, pp. 141-164, reference this idea. Additionally, Carl Dalhaus
explores the impact of unity on the development of musical analysis in ‘Some Models of Unity in Musical
interpretation of a song-cycle is an art of self-restraint, for it is obvious that the effect must be
made by the whole, not by each song separately.\textsuperscript{34} are not uncommon, though it is probably
fair to generalize that more recent writers exercise greater cautiousness in their choice of
language.

Another interesting aspect of Maus’s discussion is his advocacy for discourse about
compositional unity to be related to musical experiences; specifically, listening experiences.
Maus wishes to develop analytical or critical formulations in order to communicate to others,
or clarify for himself, his musical [listening] experiences.\textsuperscript{35} But of course the process is more
dynamic than this; after all, the act of listening is itself a form of analysis. Of equal interest
and surprise is the fact that very little literature exists on the place of listening in the
formation of musicological discourse.\textsuperscript{36} Yet this is not an issue exclusive to musicology.
Charles Bernstein’s edited volume, \textit{Close Listening. Poetry and the Performed Word}, seeks
to address the ‘negligible’ critical attention given to the sound and performance of twentieth-
century poetry. Bernstein contends that “‘close listenings” may contradict “readings” of
poems that are based exclusively on the printed text’.\textsuperscript{37} Of course in the discipline of music
(and in intermedial combination with literature) scholarship is often expressed through the
written medium, within which it is not always straightforward or pertinent to make explicit
the degree to which listening has contributed to the findings. Perhaps it is also an inevitable
consequence of a history of musicology and music education (at least in relation to Western
Art Music) in which central forms of analysis have largely developed on the basis of the
(literal) musical text\textsuperscript{38} — the written score — as a fundamental, indeed obligatory, point of
reference.\textsuperscript{39} Yet the act of listening — in isolation and in combination with other techniques

\textsuperscript{34} ‘Concerts’, \textit{Times}, 25 June 1908, \textit{The Times Digital Archive}, p. 13 [accessed 4 July 2018] <https://go-gale-
com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/>
\textsuperscript{35} This concept might equally apply to the reading experiences of literary critics.
\textsuperscript{36} Stewart Campbell’s recent study examines audience experiences of live art song events in the UK, using data
based, in part, on listening: ‘Songs without borders: Complex interpretative song worlds and the audiences that
inhabit them’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 2021). However, the extent to which
musicologists use listening as a critical tool in the formulation of discourse (or actively contemplate the role it
may have played in that process, where used) seems largely undocumented.
\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Close Listening. Poetry and the Performed Word}, ed. by Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford University
\textsuperscript{38} Although I use the term ‘musical text’ to describe the written score, Stanley Boorman explores the wider
notion of ‘musical text’ in relation to issues of performance, notation and authenticity: ‘The Musical Text’, in
\textit{Rethinking Music}, ed. by Nicholas Cook, and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 403-
423.
\textsuperscript{39} Nicholas Cook offers a comprehensive introduction to the history and practice of musical analysis in \textit{A Guide
to Musical Analysis} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) but the activity of analysis, as described and
exemplified, requires engagement with the written score. John D. White acknowledges listening as a form of
analysis and notes the value of it in conjunction with ‘conventional descriptive data’. However, he also
— can function as a revealing, visceral methodology. In relation to the present study some of the analysis offered on John Ireland’s cycle *Mother and Child* was developed, initially at least, by listening to the work without reference to the musical score but only in conjunction with the poetic texts, and I propose that approaching the work in this way highlighted and prioritized a different set of musical features. When engaging in close analysis with a score, one is almost unconsciously drawn to issues of harmony and texture because those features can be clearly, visually-determined in the shapes, patterns and language of the notation. The effects of tempo, rhythm and timbre are inevitably less discernible, or at least less obvious, within the text of a score. That is not to say, of course, that one does not read those elements of the composition — or indeed that harmony, texture, melody and motif cannot be heard — simply that their effects may be more or less manifest when experienced through different mediums.

To return to the issue of unity, Dunsby takes a step back from the somewhat radical brink Maus delineates and proposes the term ‘multi-piece’ as a means by which to understand and analyse a classification of nineteenth-century compositions in which one may ‘take an interest in music in sections which do not make a whole in every sense but which are not entirely unconnected’. Although Dunsby’s concept is developed in relation to the nineteenth-century piano miniature, the implications for other genres are clear and useful. In more specific reference to song cycles the question of unity, or disunity, remains an enduring and central methodological concern. Lauri Suurpää offers a relatively broad summary of important contributions to the debate, again in relation to the nineteenth-century repertory, but Tunbridge synthesizes the issue:

There is also a widening rift between those who prefer to approach musical works such as song cycles as unified objects…and those who are more interested in ways in which moments in the music query those claims of coherence. In other words, there are some whose methodology is based on a premise of organicism and others who habitually question it.

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Whilst organicist aesthetics\textsuperscript{43} have influenced the work on song cycles undertaken by David Neumeyer,\textsuperscript{44} Patrick McCreless\textsuperscript{45} and others, scholars such as Suzanne Lodato,\textsuperscript{46} David Ferris and Leon Plantinga have challenged those conceptions and methodologies. In addition to these considerations, there are also scholars, such as Cyrus Hamlin and Charles Rosen, who locate the question of unity within the ‘hermeneutical consciousness which is imposed on the listener through performance’.\textsuperscript{47} There is of course room for, and validity in, all approaches. Perhaps, as Plantinga suggests, there is as much need for flexibility in our interpretation and appreciation of the genre of song cycle as there is for flexibility of methodology. Within this thesis, for example, I apply a form of diffractive analysis to Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain*, which leads to the conclusion that the work might be understood, appreciated and performed — without prejudice — in more than one way.

**Tricky terminology**

At the heart of this issue of unity is the terminology of ‘cycle’ itself, with the loaded quality of the term often being a point of consideration within critical discourse. However, there is no doubt that the question of the authority of composers in the definition and classification of their works exerts influence on methodological processes. Tunbridge’s comprehensive study, for example, rejects any contemplation of the works of Hugo Wolf on the basis that the composer published works as song collections rather than cycles.\textsuperscript{48} Thus, the extent to which a composer’s view of their work should influence the way in which it may be considered, analysed or performed becomes significant.

Listening to a Radio 3 broadcast in which recordings of Finzi’s *Dies Natalis* were being discussed, I was struck by the way in which the presenter — a notable singer —

\textsuperscript{43}Neubauer summarises and critiques the place and values of organicist aesthetics in relation to modernism in ‘Organicism and Modernism/Music and Literature’.
\textsuperscript{48}Tunbridge, p. xv.
referred to the work as a song cycle. Finzi — a composer well known for the careful
classification of his vocal works — defined it as a cantata. Perhaps the presenter’s choice of
vocabulary was not especially considered, merely an unconscious, passing remark. On the
other hand, it is possible that the presenter, like many scholars writing about the song cycle,
saw no reason not to use classifying vocabulary — such as ‘set’, ‘collection’, ‘sequence’ and
‘cycle’ — interchangeably. Perhaps as an established singer, who had performed that and
many other vocal works, her experiential conception was more closely aligned with the song
cycle than the cantata? If the presenter’s description of the work was not simply a slip of the
tongue, and one disputes the composer’s claim to generic status, then there are wider
ramifications. Is any group of songs open to cyclical consideration? Could the cantata be
considered under the auspices of song cycle, and if so what are the implications for other
forms of vocal music? Should we abandon the term cycle (or cantata for that matter) in
favour of multi-piece or some other less contentious designation?

It is difficult to perceive that definitive conclusions to these questions could ever be
reached, let alone agreed on universally and this study makes no claims to offer a solution. To
that end a liberal, flexible approach to the authority of classification — as determined by
composers and critics alike — is adopted in the works selected and reviewed.

**Narrative**

The other significant aesthetic issue in song cycle scholarship — and indeed words
and music studies more broadly — relates to narrative. To return, momentarily, to the song
cycle specifically, issues such as the musical, poetic or musico-poetic design and the means
by which narrative (if present) may be communicated are germane, but the idea of narrative
— in all these manifestations — is, of course, unquestionably linked to the broader issue of
unity. Narrative in its most pronounced or explicit sense — as the communication of a story
or account — has, unsurprisingly, been addressed in much song cycle scholarship. That the
nature of narrative, in the sense described, varies considerably across the repertory is a point
widely acknowledged in critical discourse. In response to this diversity, scholars such as Ruth
Bingham have attempted to further refine the field proposing sub-categories such as ‘topical
cycles’, ‘internal-plot cycles’ and ‘external-plot cycles’ (again in relation to the nineteenth-century repertory).

However, it must be noted that a good deal of the analysis identifying or refuting narrative schemes operates on the assumption of a single, linear narrative. But might we not consider that the possibility for multiple narrative constructs — both different structural configurations (beyond the traditional linear) and narrative pluralism within the same cycle — exists? Within this thesis some of these issues are explored in relation to Gerald Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain*, and I argue for an alternative reading of narrative design in Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge* as a set of paired responses forming three, independent micro-narratives. If the case can be convincingly made for these cycles — which some have considered to reveal a linear narrative where others find no narrative at all — might it be possible to reconsider narrative constructs for other cycles, whatever earlier observations have been made? This issue is, of course, equally relevant in literary criticism where assumptions about the linearity of narrative have also been challenged. In the domain of reader-response theory, the act and processes of reading, the operation of memory and the impact of readers’ own memories as they engage with a text are all important factors in characterising the uniqueness of narrative experience for individuals, and clearly these ideas hold important implications for listeners.

Musical narrativity, in the wider sense, is a significant area of enquiry in the field of melopoetics. Developing her argument within the operatic repertory, Carolyn Abbate advocates the term ‘voice’ to describe not only literal vocal performance, but to encompass the ‘potentially multiple musical voices that inhabit a work’. Clearly, the genre of song cycle invites similar consideration and raises a multiplicity of related questions. By what means is narrative developed and communicated — the words, the music, the performance or

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all of these? To what extent is narrative to be understood as an authorial construct of the composer? Conversely, to what extent is the narrative to be understood as a construct of performance(s) and/or listener(s)? If one understands the instrumental accompaniment as a musical voice inhabiting the work, can said accompaniment be considered an equal protagonist, an antagonist or as a fluctuating, dynamic narrative presence? Finally, if an orchestral song-cycle is under consideration, what role might the conductor have within this complex, multi-voiced narratological realm?

All of these critical and aesthetic concerns feature in wider scholarly discourse relating to song and song cycle and are often explored in conjunction with a broad range of hermeneutic priorities and approaches. For example, Jürgen Thym considers Schumann’s editorial approach to the poetry in his setting of Eichendorff’s *Frühlingsfahrt*; Rufus Hallmark considers the genesis and cyclical status of Vaughan Williams’s *Songs of Travel* in light of the work’s publication history; Sanna Litti explores the role and function of gender in nineteenth-century, German song and Richard Kramer adopts an archival approach, reviewing Schubert song cycles in relation to their autograph materials. Even within this cursory survey, the breadth and variety of scholarship is clear.

**A methodological future for song cycle studies? Translation & Adaptation**

The ‘intriguing complex of creative and aesthetic issues’ that provided the impulse for this reflection are, to some extent, inextricable in nature and the irony of the inconstant dynamic of this nexus of philosophical and critical inter- and co-dependencies as a self-reflexive axiom for the notion of cycle itself is not lost. It is important to note that there is a far greater body of literature relating to the nineteenth-century, Austro-German song cycle tradition than the twentieth-century English repertory. Writings —about song and cycle— dedicated to the explicit consideration of critical methodologies are likewise most often framed with reference to the nineteenth century. Differences between the two repertories, not
least in terms of their historical and cultural contexts, are so clear and obvious they need not be stated, yet arguably there are also homologies in relation to contemporary performance practice and publication. All of these things considered — and in spite of its predominant demonstration through nineteenth-century examples — the existing methodological framework for song and cycle is diverse, providing varied and exciting possibilities for consideration of those English cycles composed during the twentieth century as it does for other repertories.\(^{58}\) Lodato’s views on the critical landscape for lieder analysis are compelling. She writes:

> The growing methodological variety in the field continues to yield stimulating results and could also provide a number of options for investigating less analytically accessible lieder by composers such as Liszt, Strauss, Ritter, Reger, and Zemlinsky. As long as such potential exists, we need not — and should not — establish a single model for lieder analysis.\(^{59}\)

In this spirit, I propose two more recent fields of inquiry under the umbrella of literature that offer critical frameworks within which future song cycle research might be located: Adaptation Studies and Translation Studies. Whilst music certainly features within discourse motivated by issues of adaptation and translation, very little of it relates specifically to English song or song cycles and it seems that these subdisciplines, which place the issue of intermediality at their centre, offer much scope and potential for interesting work to be undertaken.

*Adaptation*

> Literary Media describes a branch of scholarship concerned with the interdependence of literature and media in the age of digital culture — in particular, the relationship between printed texts and their iterations across new media. Whilst this umbrella term constitutes a broad intellectual sphere, the more specific area of Adaptation Studies offers a particularly


\(^{59}\) Lodato, ‘Recent Approaches to Text/Music Analysis in the Lied’ (pp. 108-109).
relevant frame of reference for the song cycle. Casie Hermansson and Janet Zepernick define Adaptation Studies as ‘a cross-disciplinary humanities field exploring adaptation in all its literal and metaphorical forms’. In its infancy in the early twenty-first century, adaptation theory focused particularly on adaptation of the literary to the cinematic, but the field has expanded broadly as Linda Hutcheon articulates in the preface to her comprehensive study, *A Theory of Adaptation*:

If you think adaptation can be understood by using novels and films alone, you’re wrong. The Victorians had a habit of adapting just about everything — and in just about every possible direction; the stories of poems, novels, plays, operas, paintings, songs, dances, and *tableaux vivants* were constantly adapted from one medium to another and then back again. We postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal — not only film, television, radio, and the various electronic media, of course, but also theme parks, historical enactments, and virtual reality experiments.

The possibilities for considering word and music genres as adaptations are clear, but direct application of critical models from within the field of Adaptation Studies is by no means clear cut. Hutcheon defines adaptation as:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work

Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative — a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing.

In many ways this definition encapsulates the intermedial complexities of song and resonates powerfully with Agawu’s theoretical assessment for the need to ‘define song as a single genre’ in order to ‘account for the syntax of a genre that includes two nominal semiotic systems, music and language’. Yet Hutcheon’s ‘double definition of adaptation as process and product’ also marks quite a significant point of divergence from studies more specifically musicological in focus, which typically consider the product itself. Arguably, though, there are a significant number of musical works across repertories that might be

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63 Agawu (p. 3).
considered as music-to-music adaptations, and these pieces offer significant scope for broader methodological application. Sacred music, for example, provides an obvious starting point, where one might consider the creative use of secular song in the parody masses of Josquin, or plainsong in twentieth-century French compositions such as Duruflé’s Requiem as adaptations. Hymn tunes provide another significant source for music-to-music adaptations, whether in form of the Chorale Preludes of J.S. Bach, or Vaughan Williams’s Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes. Of course all of these works, along with many others that might reasonably be included, will already have been subject to more detailed musical classification, perhaps deemed improvisations, arrangements, fantasias, cover versions or described in other related terms. But being any of those things and being an adaptation are not mutually exclusive states. That said, it would be fair to say that in each of the examples considered here the process of adaptation goes beyond the more transitory referential status of paraphrase, quotation or allusion to fundamentally inform the adapted works’ musical structures.

Whilst there are few, if indeed any, musicological studies which offer detailed contemplation of the products and processes of music-to-music adaptation, a good deal of research drawing more broadly on examples and types of musical adaptation — typically trans-medial — exists at the fringes of interdisciplinarity. Adaptation was the focus of the 2005 International Conference on Word and Music Studies, and the subsequent volume of essays reveals a diverse range of subjects, genres and critical approaches in which the structures and systems of music, literature, and other fields are freely exchanged and methodologically applied. Margarete Rubik and Elke Mettinger-Schartmann’s 2007 book, A Breath of Fresh Eyre: Intertextual and Intermedial Reworkings of Jane Eyre, comprehensively surveys the adaptive legacy of Charlotte Brontë’s novel and includes two chapters on Michael Berkeley’s opera to a libretto of David Malouf. Linda Hutcheon and her husband, Michael, have also written extensively about opera from a very broad range of interdisciplinary perspectives, but it would seem reasonable to summarize that the majority

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65 Essays on Word/Music Adaptation and on Surveying the Field, ed. by David Francis Urrows, Word and Music Studies, ix (Amsterdam: Brill, Rodopi, 2008).
67 Hutcheon offers an extended case study on Carmen in A Theory of Adaptation. However, much of her theoretical work relating to adaptation and postmodernist theory uses examples drawn from opera. For example, A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction (London: Routledge, 1988) and Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony (London: Routledge, 1994). Though not specifically concerned with issues of adaptation,
of these kinds of study tend to trace trans-medial adaptation from literary source. Yet musical works can also be the source of adaptation from one media system to another, or indeed others, like T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, which adapts elements of musical form, structure and texture into poetry. A more complex example within the genre of song cycle is the 2003 adaptation of Schubert’s *Winterreise*, the result of a collaboration between baritone Simon Keenlyside and choreographer Trisha Brown. Accompanied by pianist Pedja Muzijevic, Keenlyside performed the cycle alongside three professional dancers, not simply sharing the stage with them but physically participating in Brown’s sparse, gestural choreography.

In her consideration of ‘what’ is adapted, Hutcheon identifies story as the common denominator in most theories of adaptation. Whilst this premise could easily apply to some word and music genres – opera and oratorio, most immediately – such an understanding seems more complex in relation to song and cycle. After all, not all song texts form discrete, or even partial, stories. This is the case for Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *Music When Soft Voices Die*, a text that many English song composers, including Warlock and Quilter, have been drawn to:

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Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory;
Odours, when sweet violets sicken,
Live within the sense they quicken.

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap'd for the belov'd's bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.
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This brief poem explores themes of love and loss through a sequence of sensory experiences, but it cannot claim to be a story; there is no underpinning, chronological sequence of events. So whilst the text explores what life may hold, it does so in the form of an abstract, philosophical musing. As editor to her husband’s *Posthumous Poems*, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley noted that the miscellaneous poems were ‘written on the spur of the

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Linda and Michael Hutcheon have considered the wider context of opera’s subject and substance in several books, including *Opera: The Art of Dying* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).
occasion’. On what terms, then, might one consider song settings of story-less poems as adaptations? Is there a sense in which the temporality of performance — song as a projection of the poetry through time — inevitably narrativizes the text?

The issue is no more straightforward in relation to song cycles, which may explicitly declare a story, as in Schubert’s *Die schöne Müllerin*, or which may be considered to encompass one or more stories (as I argue for *Earth and Air and Rain* and *On Wenlock Edge*). In any song cycle with a story — overt or perceived — it must be remembered that the story formed is a brand-new construct of the composer’s combination of song settings, which are all adaptations of prior texts. That is not to say that the newly-formed story is not familiar in its incorporation of the ‘archetypal rules’ and ‘universal language’ — the introduction of a hero or heroine, an event prompting a call to action, conflict and resolution (whether happy or otherwise) — said to underpin all stories. But the cycle’s story is a new iteration of those fundamental elements that does not necessarily have a direct relationship with its prior text(s).

Hutcheon outlines three different modes of engagement for adaptations: showing, telling, and interacting:

To tell a story, as in novels, short stories, and even historical accounts, is to describe, explain, summarize, expand; the narrator has a point of view and great power to leap through time and space and sometimes to venture inside the minds of characters. To show a story, as in movies, ballets, radio and stage plays, musicals and operas, involves a direct aural and usually visual performance experienced in real time.

Although neither telling nor showing renders its audience passive in the least, they also do not engage people as immediately and viscerally as do virtual environments, videogames (played on any platform), or even theme-park rides that are, in their own ways, adaptations or “remediations”.

Expanding on this final point — interactivity — in relation to the specific medium of computer games, Hutcheon notes that the ‘core’ act of ‘gameplay’ is the ‘intensity of cognitive and physical engagement’ which ‘moves the narrative along through visual

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spectacle, and audio effects (including music) and through problem-solving challenges…What gets adapted here is a heterocosm, literally an “other world” or cosmos, complete, of course, with the stuff of story — settings, characters, events and situations’.  

It is interesting to consider the place of song and cycle within this assessment. The text(s) may tell a story that can be read, but this poetry is also shown in performance, whether live or recorded, supplemented by the musical setting and the conventions of the concert platform. In this sense, song and song cycles immediately straddle two of the three modes of engagement, but I would also argue for their interactivity. Hutcheon does concede that ‘neither telling nor showing renders its audience passive’, but the idea that the experience of a live performance cannot be as immediately visceral as a virtual environment is questionable. It is certainly possible for a musical performance to elicit physical responses, for example hairs on the back of the neck, butterflies in tummy or even tears. Musical performances also often elicit powerful emotional responses, such as fear, sadness, amusement, and surprise, which are in every sense ‘felt’. Furthermore, the types of inherent ‘problem-solving’ engaged in by gamers to move the narrative along are not so different from the processes of listening or performing. Whilst song and cycle are fixed in terms of verbiage, music, and (typically) sequence, on an interpretative level the performers and listeners are processing and solving a whole range of conceptual issues as a performance unfolds in real time. They will be piecing together any potential narrative, analysing the character(s) within the work in terms of their actions and motivations in light not only of the text but the music. On an ongoing basis they will be aware of the dynamic narratorial function of the musical accompaniment in establishing setting and mood, in highlighting the plight of characters — immediately or omnisciently, sympathetically or ironically — and processing those oscillations in light of their own present understanding. They will be analysing the vocalisation of poetry in terms of the nuance of musical interpretation and gesture offered by the performers in that moment. In short, the acts of listening and performance are themselves heterocosm-forming. Performances of songs or song cycles become immersive through sustained intellectual and emotional engagement.

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72 I extend the concept of showing to recorded performance, since Hutcheon includes radio as a medium for direct aural performance.
The influence and incorporation of technology in musical adaptations has produced some interesting results in relation to song cycles more specifically. As part of the 2019 Oxford Lieder Festival, Jeremy Hamway-Bidgood created an animated shadow-puppet film to accompany a live performance of Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge*. Whilst the medium of film and the idea of using live music to accompany the imagery of film is hardly new, the circumstances of this particular project raise many of the important critical issues of adaptation explored in this survey. Firstly, although this adaptation brings together two distinct media systems — film and music — it is arguable that the adaptation is itself not trans-medial. Whilst the projected imagery of the film and Vaughan Williams’s music occupy the same physical space in performance, Vaughan Williams’s unaltered music retains its identity and distinction from the film that responds to it. Of course, Vaughan Williams adapts Housman’s text in the first instance and, unquestionably, the film’s imagery transcodes the sonic atmosphere of Vaughan Williams’s songs, but it is essentially the fusion of those separate media elements expressed and experienced together in live performance that constitutes the adaptation in this case. The issue of story is also problematic, as it often is for song cycles. Whilst many of Housman’s poems share compelling thematic links and even characters, the sequence of texts forming *A Shropshire Lad* do not constitute a story *per se*, and whilst a number of commentators infer a story or stories in *On Wenlock Edge*, Vaughan Williams never clarified or confirmed the work’s status in this regard. Yet Jeremy Hamway-Bidgood’s film presents a cogent, linear narrative that unifies Vaughan Williams’s songs through its emerging story. A press release promoting a 2020 screening of the film *as film* (another adaptation fixing the materials of earlier live performances) describes something of this process:

> Between them, Daniel and Jeremy conceived a through-story for the song cycle, in which the main character, Edward, looks back on his youth and the days spent in Shropshire during the First World War. He is clearly still troubled by his memories and the somewhat complicated relationships he left behind.

> “We wanted it to reflect Housman in some way,” explains Daniel. “He wrote a lot of the poems in London, and here’s this guy in London looking out from Primrose Hill, perhaps, or Hampstead Heath, where Housman wrote poems.”
“It reflects Housman’s homosexuality, which was a driving force for the themes of lost youth and lost young men”.

In short, the film presents Vaughan Williams’s cycle as part of a newly-written, quasi-biographical story of Housman as inferred through the anonymous characters of *A Shropshire Lad*. Taking into account that the film inevitably re-frames and recontextualizes each of Vaughan Williams’s song adaptations, and, by extension, any story or stories they might indicate as part of the original cycle, the derivative intertextual encounters and engagements of this adaptation become significant and complex.

Wherever different art forms meet, conflicts of media hierarchy inevitably follow. The longstanding dissension regarding the supremacy of words or music in song, addressed earlier in this chapter, is mirrored in the prevalence of so-called ‘fidelity criticism’— a comparative approach in book-to-film adaptations ‘whose main tendency is to evaluate the adaptation’s faithfulness to the original’— which, for some time was ‘the critical orthodoxy in adaptation studies’. Paraphrasing Robert Stam in particular, Hutcheon notes the rather lofty view of some adaptation theorists (not including herself): that ‘literature will always have axiomatic superiority over any adaptation of it because of its seniority as an art form’. Yet as she points out, ‘if adaptations are by this definition, such inferior and secondary creations, why then are they so omnipresent in our culture and, indeed, increasing steadily in numbers?’ This dissatisfaction is echoed by scholars with an interest in word/music adaptation as David Francis Urrows points out in his introduction to the twelve essays drawn from the Fifth International Conference on Word and Music Studies in 2008:

Behind this and other papers lies a palpable frustration with the devaluing of adaptation, arrangement, transcription, palimpsest, fantasy – a devaluation which was typical of the twentieth century’s obsession with textual purity, with historical accuracy, with, in short, that difficult-to-define quality, *authenticity*.

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78 Urrows, p. xi.
Yet more recently Casie Hermansson has posited ‘a post-millennial resurgence in fidelity criticism in order to make a (final?) recuperative claim for fidelity as one essential tool in the intertextual toolbox of adaptation studies’: 79

Ultimately — and perhaps most usefully for any remotely unencumbered study of any kind of adaptation — Hutcheon considers the ‘palimpsestuous’ nature of adaptations to be axiomatic:

If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works…To interpret an adaptation as an adaptation is, in a sense, to treat it as what Roland Barthes called, not a “work”, but a “text”, a plural “stereophony of echoes, citations, references”. 80

This seems to provide a useful working frame for a complex genre like the song cycle, and Adaptation Studies offers an extremely deep well of possibilities for exploring works individually and comparatively, in relation to musical and literary sources, conceptually as texts and experientially as performances, to suggest just a few potential research strategies.

Translation

In the introduction to a journal volume of The Translator specifically dedicated to the concept of Translation and Music, Sebnem Susam-Sarajeva highlights the ‘fuzzy boundaries between “translation”, “adaptation”, “version” [and] “rewriting”’. 81 Like adaptation studies, the field of translation often makes ‘a distinction between translation as a final product and as a process’ 82 and in both disciplines a source text is ultimately replaced by an alternative version of itself: the ‘adapted text’ (in the case of adaptations) and the ‘target text’ (for translations). Translations vary considerably in type, purpose and mode. Roman Jakobson outlines intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic forms of translation, 83 giving a sense of the broad scope of translation studies as a field of critical enquiry. Inevitably, intralingual and interlingual translations, whether they are rendered in writing or as spoken word, begin and end with text, but even so these modes of translation hold clear and significant implications

79 Hermansson, ‘Flogging Fidelity: In Defense of the (Un)Dead Horse’ (p. 147).
across a range of interdisciplinary contexts. However, it is the notion of intersemiotic translation, most particularly, that invites consideration of the field of translation studies as a methodological resource for disciplines other than linguistics and literature. Yet, as Peter Dayan observes, there are manifold complexities when we consider music as translation. He asks, ‘how can one judge the music as a translation, if it cannot be called to account by comparison with its original?’ For Dayan, this powerlessness in calculating equivalence is ‘the condition of art’:

Perhaps the peculiar membrane around music that allows it to be perceived as translation, but forbids any economic analysis of that translation, is that which allows music, or even art in general, to exist.  

The forms and mediums through which translation can take place are equally difficult to pin down. For example, is reading an act of translation? If so then the journey of a song translation is infinitely complex. The composer’s initial act of reading poetry or words is itself a translation, which is translated again, intersemiotically, when set to music. The musical text is, in turn, read (translated) by musicians whose performance of the song represents another form of intersemiotic translation. The act of listening translates the music once again.

The history of literary translation is ancient but the history of Translation Studies is much more recent, as Susan Bassnett outlines:

The 1980s was a decade of consolidation for the fledgling subject known as Translation Studies. Having emerged onto the world stage in the late 1970s, the subject began to be taken seriously and was no longer seen as an unscientific field of enquiry of secondary importance. Throughout the 1980s interest in the theory and practice of translation grew steadily. Then in the 1990s, Translation Studies finally came into its own, for this proved to be the decade of its global expansion.

In reference to linguistic translation, Juliane House outlines some of the observed positive and negative impacts of translation. She notes that translation ‘can provide access to new ideas and new experiences that stem from a different language community’, and that it ‘has often been compared to an act of building bridges or extending horizons’. Conversely, ‘any

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translation clearly lacks originality’ as a ‘type of secondary communication’ and translated texts ‘can never be “the real thing”: they remain something second-hand, a kind of inferior substitute for the original’. Although these observations are made in relation to text-to-text translations, the hierarchical tensions between source and target texts seem to mirror the critical concerns underpinning other kinds of intermedial transformations. In relation to song, this discourse echoes the age-old controversy of whether words or music predominate.

The role of the translator is also of fundamental concern, and the status and importance of that role has changed significantly over time. According to Juliane House, as far back as the third millennium BCE translators held low social importance, being ‘not much better than servants’ with their work ‘conducted, to a large degree, anonymously’. Yet if one positions the composer of song as a translator, this appears to mark a significant point of departure. Regardless of abiding critical tensions and the disagreements composers and the living poets they set may have had, it is difficult to conceive of a perspective in which the composer (translator) is considered to be a subordinate agent within the process of musical translation. The issue of translation competence highlights a similar inversion of concept between the fields of linguistics and music.

In translation studies, the skill set of a translator is a matter of central interest. For a translation to be considered successful, it must mediate not only between languages, but between cultures. In short, the translator must demonstrate ‘transfer competence’. Peter Low notes the ‘unusually complex’ nature of making ‘singable translations of songs’ because of the constraints ‘imposed by the pre-existing music’, necessitating consideration of the ‘rhythms, note-values, phrasings and stresses’. Yet if one positions the composer as translator, then, arguably, value judgements pertaining to the relative success of a translation and skill of a translator would appear to be less important. Here, intellectual value is typically derived from acknowledging and highlighting differences between works rather than providing a specific assessment of the quality of individual outcomes. This is especially relevant in the genre of art song, where one will encounter multiple settings (translations) of the same poem (source text) by different composers (translators). Mike Ingham’s study of the

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86 House, pp. 9-10.
87 House, p. 11.
88 House, p. 25.
intersemiotic transposition of Housman’s poetry to song highlights these differences in approach.\textsuperscript{90}

Ingham outlines the remit of his study in terms of exploring ‘the relationship between source and target texts (terms which inevitably imply kinship with translation studies) with special focus on how the poem texts are transformed by vocalization in terms of repetition, variation, expansion, contraction, dilution, accentuation, and colouring of words – and the utterance and performance of written verse as sound vocalization within the tempo-rhythm of performance’.\textsuperscript{91} The author also makes clear his express intention to avoid a ‘musicological approach privileging musical form, harmony and compositional technique’.\textsuperscript{92} His conclusions reflect the importance given to qualitative assessment in translation competence. For Ingham, song settings of Housman by composers such as Orr, Barber and Berkley constitute ‘free adaptation-cum-appropriation[s]’ because ‘the grain of the voice is purely musical’.\textsuperscript{93} Conversely, settings and cycles of Housman by Vaughan Williams, Butterworth, Gurney and Somervell are identified as achieving a ‘fine balance between more prosodically imitative treatments of the verse, and more interpretatively free and idiosyncratic settings’.\textsuperscript{94} Ingham judges the former group of composers to be less successful in their ‘translations’ of Housman’s poetry because the ‘considerable chromaticism in the melodic contours and tonality and wide-ranging intervals in the vocal score’ relegate the words to the ‘background of production and reception’.\textsuperscript{95} In contrast, the latter group of composers respect ‘the phonological contours of the source text’, permit ‘poetic rhythm and accent to be recognizable’ and are ‘faithful’ to the poetry’s ‘inner truth’.\textsuperscript{96} In essence, he argues that the pastoral context and lyricism of Housman’s poetry is most effectively translated into a musical style that is influenced, in lesser and greater part, by the folk idiom (with all the presumptions one might make about harmony, melody and rhythm in that musical domain). This being the case, one might deduce that Ingham would consider that an avant garde

\textsuperscript{91} Ingham (p. 188).
\textsuperscript{92} Ingham (p. 188).
\textsuperscript{93} Ingham (p. 201).
\textsuperscript{94} Ingham (p. 200).
\textsuperscript{95} Ingham (p. 200).
\textsuperscript{96} Ingham (p. 203).
musical translation would offer the most suitable assimilation of cultural transfer for an abstract, free verse poem, such as Allan Ginsberg’s *Howl*.

Whilst Ingham’s findings present a perfectly valid point of view, the position is somewhat problematic. Should we really dismiss the ‘success’ of musical translations that intersect or circumvent historical, cultural and stylistic boundaries? James MacMillan’s *Seven Last Words from the Cross* (1993) sets text from the Gospels in a challenging, contemporary musical language, which bears little relation to the music of biblical times (as far as we can ever know what that might have sounded like). The rhythmic and metrical structures underpinning the word setting are intensely complex, and whilst the score certainly draws on the musical traditions of the church in its incorporation of chant and hymn structures, Macmillan’s sound world is far removed from the typical context of these genres rendering them only as distantly familiar essences. On these terms, should the composer’s translation be determined to be a work of low standing? Perhaps so for Ingham, but his analysis focuses exclusively on the practice and processes of the translator. No regard is given to target readers (or listeners in the case of musical translations). Ultimately, what is highlighted is the subjective nature of translation, as product and process, and its power to bring different aesthetic ideologies to bear.

It must be remembered that translation does not exclusively deal with written forms. Oral translation, generally considered to be a mode of interpreting, presents a different set of considerations. Written translations are fixed and enduring in their accessibility, and typically neither the author or addressee are present at the moment of translation. Conversely, the text of an oral translation is typically available only once and both author and addressee will usually be present. This marks an important difference between translation and interpreting. Where interaction occurs the process of translation becomes dynamic, taking place in cooperation or, indeed, opposition where misunderstanding occurs.

In relation to music, and song more specifically, Cecil Sharp’s encyclopaedic project of collecting, preserving and archiving English folk songs could be considered within the category of oral translations. Sharp began his endeavour in 1903 and his process of translation is described in Maud Karpeles’s biography:

> Cecil Sharp’s collecting was, of course, done before the days of the tape-recorder and he used to take down the tune in ordinary staff notation and then write out the words.
Occasionally he used a phonograph, but he did not much like it, as he thought it made the singer self-conscious.\(^97\)

Of course this amends the usual model for oral translations by beginning with a spoken (or sung) source text and ending with a written text, and Sharp’s process highlights how a ‘written’ (notated) translation can preserve an otherwise impermanent, irrecoverable oral source text. Yet the positive effects of this are counterbalanced by the complexities and contentiousness of authenticity and access that the translation inevitably brings to bear.

By translating singers’ performances of folk songs into notation, Cecil Sharp effectively rebalanced the status of the songs’ collective ownership. By casting and encoding these oral source texts in a language accessible only by means of a formal musical education, the songs were preserved in a way that denied access and understanding to those who had been their custodians, bringing into sharp relief divisions of social class. Moreover, Sharp’s ‘translations’ simplified the songs to fit the grid of western notation, and in doing so undoubtedly lost many of the idiosyncratic inflections, rhythmic freedoms and gestural expressiveness so central to this musical tradition. These tensions were themselves translated, providing inspiration for Nell Leyshon’s 2021 play with songs, \textit{Folk}, which imagines the encounter between Cecil Sharp and Somerset folk singer Louie Hooper.\(^98\) Writing about the production in \textit{The Guardian}, Leyshon highlights the issues of power and politics at hand:

\begin{quote}
Folk-song collecting was a growing movement in the early years of the 20th century, driven by a desire to rescue these songs before they were lost to the tail end of the Industrial Revolution, when machines would work the land and the sewing would be moved into factories. Sharp published many of them, arranging them for piano and editing the lyrics so that they were suitable for a middle-class audience. He tidied rhymes and rhythms and then placed his name on them, copyrighting them. At the time this wasn’t seen as an egregious act.\(^99\)
\end{quote}

Translation lies at the heart of this dissonance, and the example of Cecil Sharp’s work highlights the potential problems and limitations that the process of translation, musical or otherwise, has the potential to generate.

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \(^97\) Maud Karpeles, \textit{Cecil Sharp, His Life and Work} (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), p. 41.
\item \(^98\) Nell Leyshon, \textit{Folk} (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).
\end{itemize}
It is clear that translation is an important critical concern for music, and interest in the issues arising from the intersection of these two fields has increased over recent years. Helen Julia Minors’s edited volume, *Music, Text and Translation*, approaches the subject from a wide variety of perspectives, emphasising the breadth of this scope. Coming from diverse backgrounds, such as filmmaking, composition, professional translation (medical, scientific, and linguistic), fine art, poetry and audio-visual accessibility, the contributors to the volume highlight the breadth of application in translation and music, as will be summarized. Michael Chanan, quoting Claude Levi-Strauss, observes the unique workings of the language of music and the inherent imbalance between the relatively small number of ‘senders’ (composers, musicians) in relation to ‘receivers’ (everyone). Strauss suggests that ‘this kind of language cannot be translated into anything else, except itself…You can translate music into music…but you cannot translate music into speech – this is description’. Yet this has certainly been attempted. In *Swan Lake Ballet* and *Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony*, William He translates specific musical works into poetry. They are, presumably, a translation based on his own listening experience. Whilst that may constitute ‘description’ for Lévi-Strauss, surely it is a literal translation for its author? Chanan proposes the progress of the ‘European contradanza’ as an example of purely musical translation:

The popular European contradanza crossed the seas with the Spanish to Cuba, where it acquired a new lilt to become the habanera, and then returned to Europe. Bizet and Ravel wrote habaneras for the opera house and the concert platform. It then crossed the Atlantic again southwards to Buenos Aires, where it turned into the tango. A musical translation occurs every time the model enters a new social milieu.

In this case, translation takes place at the level of content, with specific rhythmic, melodic and harmonic features characterizing both source and target texts. Yet scholars also posit that translation of the sense, as opposed to the content, of a non-musical source is equally possible. Minors, for example, has explored translation in the context of music and the visual

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102 Chanan (p. xiii).
103 Chanan (p. xiii).
arts and Debbie Moss has considered translation in the context of music and sculpture, with reference to Arvo Pärt’s musical response to Anish Kapoor’s Marsyas installation.

Adopting a slightly different approach, Jeff Hilson has written about the sound and sense of homophonic translation, where ‘a source text is translated not for its sense (as in interlingual translation) but for its sound. The sound qualities are transmuted into their sonorous equivalents within the target text’. As Hilson notes, this mode of translation, where phonetic equivalence is favoured over semantic equivalence, constitutes ‘a celebration of the possibility of inaccuracy in transmission’. For Hilson, translations ‘succeed (or fail) if they manage (or not) to capture the “music” of the original poetic text’. Homophonic translation ‘attends to a different kind of music, one which is much more in tune with certain developments in the twentieth century such as the admission of noise as a primary musical affect’. This raises interesting possibilities for whether there are circumstances under which one might consider musical sounds as a source text for poetry. Some of the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, for example, is characterized by its overt use of sonic effects, such as alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, neologisms and sprung rhythm. Could Hopkins the poet be categorized as translator of musical sound? Might the innate musical qualities of his poetic works merit consideration of them as compositions and him as composer?

The composer Priaulx Rainier was also particularly concerned with equivalences in sound when working with translated texts, though for Rainier syllabic structure rather than sonority was the essential issue. Fascinated by Rainer Maria Rilke’s poetic cycles, The Sonnets of Orpheus (1922), the composer undertook to write a musical setting which would accommodate both the original German language and English translation without rhythmic alteration. Rainier’s biographer, June Opie, notes:

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107 Hilson (p. 96).

108 Whilst my proposal here is to think of Hopkins’s poems as translations of music, he did also compose music. For an early study see William L. Graves, ‘Gerard Manley Hopkins as Composer: An Interpretive Postscript’, Victorian Poetry, 2 (1963), 146-155. More recently, Laura Hamer has explored his compositional work: ““Every impulse and spring of art seems to have died in me, except for music”: Gerard Manley Hopkins as composer’, The Musical Times, 159 (2018), 27-42.
Rilke was like a spiritual force or fire that pursued her. She was never really happy with the translations, wanting words which could match the syllabic form of the original text. She did not want her music to destroy anything of Rilke’s – only to offer him her gift.¹⁰⁹

Rainier did not live to complete this enormous challenge, but the example demonstrates how in word and music genres the issue of translation often arises in relation to practical as well as philosophical concerns.

Translation in Britten’s songs is the subject of Peter Low’s chapter in *Music, Text and Translation*.¹¹⁰ Low commends Britten’s sensitive musical treatment of the texts he set, which does not obscure verbal meaning through either vocal or instrumental writing. Yet he also acknowledges that Britten ‘does not demonstrate a slavish reverence for the text either’, particularly in terms of observing poetic structure.¹¹¹ But of course, sometimes the translated texts composers encounter and work with do not always accurately represent the essential structural features of their source texts, or at least this may be in doubt. This is the case for Britten’s well-known cantata, *Rejoice in the Lamb* (1943). Britten sets words from Christopher Smart’s *Jubilate Agno*, written between 1758/9 and 1763 during his confinement at St Luke’s Hospital for the insane and, subsequently, a private madhouse in Bethnal Green. Surviving fragments of the work were first published in 1939 in an edition by William Force Stead. However, some twelve years later in 1951 W.H. Bond prepared another edition of *Jubilate Agno*, which ‘offered a radical reappraisal of the poem’s organization’ resulting in a structure ‘universally accepted by modern scholars as an accurate representation’ of the work’s original ‘antiphonal’ structure.¹¹² Composing *Rejoice in the Lamb* in 1943, clearly Britten worked with Stead’s edition (as recommended to him by Auden at that time). It is not certain that the composer ever came to know of the new findings relating to Smart’s text, indeed it seems unlikely, leaving only the possibility of speculating as to if and how his musical approach might have differed had he worked with the later translation.

¹¹¹ Peter Low, ‘*Purposeful Translating*’ (p. 70).
Of course, composers themselves are sometimes involved in the preparation and editing of translated texts. For example, the history and content of Mahler’s orchestral song cycle, *Das Lied von der Erde* (1908-1909), is deeply rooted in processes of translation. Mahler sets Begthe’s *Die chinesische Flöte* (1907), free translations of classical Chinese poetry already translated into German and French prose. Yet, as Jessica Yeung observes, the composer made additional amendments to each of the texts changing words, phrases, verse structures and poetic titles in order to more closely integrate and unify the cycle’s songs, characters and philosophical messages. This might be considered a form of editorial translation, and the processes closely mirror John Ireland’s characteristic treatment of poetic texts in the repertory of English twentieth-century song. In their preparation of texts and musical setting, the composers are translating on intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic levels simultaneously.

Translation Studies offer another fascinating analytical site within which the song cycle might be considered. In song composition translation from words to words and music takes place on linguistic (prosodic setting, grammar, syntax, textual amendments) and semiotic levels. But in accounting for written and oral mediums, Translation Studies perhaps offers a potential critical framework in which a song’s journey from words to words and music to performance might be traced. In the case of individual songs these processes are already complex and fascinating, but in relation to song cycles, where translation of narrative (declared or perceived) may take place, the ramifications are wide-reaching indeed.

**Conclusion**

This survey of critical approaches and methodologies for song and song cycles reveals an already broad, diverse and exciting field of thought whilst still proposing new sites of research for the genre. It is in this spirit of heterogeneity that the present study seeks to explore the song cycle, unashamedly employing a range of methodologies across different cycles and sometimes in reference to a single work. Central to all of these deliberations, however, is a demand for parity in literary and musical analysis where poetry and music are considered as mutually interdependent counterparts within a dynamic, reciprocally-revealing

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113 This raises issues of cultural appropriation for today’s researcher.
partnership. Rather than attempting to formulate an inevitably restrictive taxonomy, it seems likely that a broader and more meaningful understanding of the song cycle may be determined by embracing the idiosyncratic variety of the genre and adopting an individualized approach to analysis centring around issues of structure.
Chapter 2

Breaking the mould
Approaches to rethinking song cycle shapes

Methodological approaches to song cycle studies often appear to develop in the light of influential historical legacies of terminology, and consequently critical writing about song cycles can be characterized by tacit, underlying assumptions about the genre. This means that some song cycle studies are destined to become self-fulfilling prophecies, as preconceptions about what a song cycle is inevitably direct what one can expect to find. This chapter summarizes those issues before proposing a methodological manifesto for the genre and outlining the approaches developed in this thesis.

Terminological legacies

Song cycles vary considerably in their style, scale, scope and shape. It is, in part, this extensive heterogeneity that accounts for the difficulty in clearly defining just what a song cycle is. But there is no doubt that the implications of the loaded term ‘cycle’ are problematic, because not all song cycles are circles. The earliest history of the song cycle is not entirely certain, but as Bingham notes notions of circular or cyclical patterns are an innate artefact of human history:

Origins and forerunners of song cycles probably cannot be determined with any finality. Cycles and circles predate history and continue to permeate our lives in an unbroken tradition: seasonal rites and holidays, gathering around a fire, round table discussions, circular dances, ecological circles of life, wedding rings, halos.\(^{115}\)

Essentially the song cycle rose to significance during the nineteenth century, with the Austro-German tradition being central to its development. Alongside music’s increasingly elevated status as a preeminent mode of individual, emotional expression in the Romantic aesthetic, the song cycle’s development was significantly influenced by commercial concerns. Laura Tunbridge contextualizes the circumstances:

\(^{115}\) Bingham, ‘The early nineteenth-century song cycle’ (p. 101).
...the Lied arose at the same time as, and catered for, a new musical audience: the educated middle classes, who were gradually supplanting the aristocracy as the main patrons of the arts. This shift necessitated a greater commercial awareness on the part of composers and their publishers who now needed to advertise their wares in a competitive marketplace.\footnote{Tunbridge, p. 3.}

Nineteenth-century lieder, like poems, tended to be published in sets, and the terms associated with poetic collections were adopted for those published groups of songs. But at this time, the names given to song cycles were not necessarily indicative of their content or form as Bingham observes:

Terms now associated with song cycles arose haphazardly out of vague associations, intentions and meanings: whimsical titles such as \textit{Liederkreis} (Lied-circle), \textit{Blumenkranz} (Flower-wreath), \textit{Liederroman} (Lied-novel), or \textit{Liedercyklus} (Lied-cycle) sometimes indicated something new in the music, but sometimes did not, and a fair number of cycles held no characterizing title at all.\footnote{Bingham, ‘The early nineteenth-century song cycle’ (p. 101). From John Daverio’s similar listing of the many and various ‘terms employed to designate song cycles and collections in nineteenth-century sources’, it seems that the descriptors identified by both Bingham and Daverio were applied to works by contemporary critics and commentators rather than song cycle composers. See John Daverio, ‘The Song Cycle: Journeys Through a Romantic Landscape’, in \textit{German Lieder in the Nineteenth Century}, ed. by Rufus Hallmark (New York: Schirmer Books, 1996), pp. 279-312 (p. 281).}

Tunbridge adds ‘Reihe (series)’ (or row) to this list, and further highlights the commercial aspect of their application:

These terms might be decided before poems or songs were composed, or they might be applied afterwards. But in large part they were granted with an eye to making a sellable identity rather than out of any abstract concern to establish a new genre.\footnote{Tunbridge, p. 3.}

This somewhat indiscriminate process shows the song cycle operating with what Tunbridge describes as a ‘catalogue’ function in the early part of the nineteenth century, a notion reflected in the selective performance practices associated with the genre. It is thought, for example, that Schubert’s song cycles were not performed complete (at least publicly)\footnote{The notion of public performance was not quite as straightforward in the nineteenth century. Tunbridge suggests that ‘the varied opportunities available to the composer resist categorisation into private or public events’. See Tunbridge, p. 41.} during his lifetime. However, this certainly doesn’t mean that cycles were always conceived with their songs as disparate entities. Indeed, as the century progressed increasing importance
was given to the idea that cycles could present distinct plots through a sequence of related and specifically ordered songs. Observation of this ordering of songs became necessary for the listener’s appreciation of the works’ formal integrity. Over time, increasingly sophisticated musical approaches moved performance away from an activity of amateur musicians to the province of professional singers, which gave further impetus to the musical ambition of composers.  

In summary, then, song cycles have always varied in their design with songs sometimes intentionally connected and sometimes not, and the descriptor ‘cycle’ essentially developed from a nineteenth-century marketing strategy that was not intended to reveal any profound typological characteristics. Yet the legacy of this terminology lives on in our conceptions of what qualifies as a song cycle and, consequently, how the genre should be approached analytically. In the introduction to his study on song order in Schumann’s Liederkreis, Patrick McCreless encapsulates this dilemma:

In the context of art song, we attribute to the word ‘cycle’ not only the implication of relatedness of members of a set, but also implications of order and interdependence; in a bona fide song cycle, the omission of any of the songs or the rearrangement of their order, constitutes a threat to or negation of its cyclic character.

Critical legacies

Tensions surrounding relatedness and unity are by no means limited to discussions about song cycles, and the issue has been considered by scholars from a wide range of musicological backgrounds. Such discussion raises important (necessarily rhetorical) questions about what exactly is meant by unity, on what terms unity is identified and what constitutes the threshold of connective elements (whatever they may or may not be) that determine a work’s unity or disunity. These issues are especially pertinent to song cycle studies given the underlying assumption of unity and connectedness that the legacy of its nomenclature has come to suggest. Writing in the broader context of musicological studies, Robert P. Morgan highlights a wider analytical preoccupation with, to put it crudely, bending

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120 Tunbridge considers these issues in detail in chapter three of The Song Cycle, pp. 40-49.
121 McCreless (p. 5).
122 See, for example, Robert P. Morgan, ‘The Concept of Unity and Musical Analysis’, Musical Analysis, 22 (2003), 7-50. Morgan’s article surveys the range of thinking about unity in musical analysis, considering the contributions of scholars such as Alan Street, Jonathan Kramer, Kofi Agawu, Daniel Chua and Kevin Korsyn.
things into shape. That is, directing the analytical process towards a preordained conclusion. In seeking to move beyond defining the parameters of words and music studies, Eric Prieto highlights the same issue and advocates ‘de-essentializing the arts’, by resisting ‘the temptation to force them to fit established definitions, however widely accepted.’ This temptation is a notable characteristic of some of the criticism addressing song cycle structure, often manifesting itself in suggestions about how the composer’s selection of poetry is indicative of a particular narrative construct. The issue is considered in more detail in chapter five in relation to Ralph Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge*, but the persistence of this practice is perhaps not altogether surprising given the inherent authority of the term ‘cycle’.

Even typological song cycle studies are grounded in the almost inescapable notion of circular relationships. Bingham’s study of the early nineteenth-century repertory identifies a range of conceptual narrative ‘shapes’ that inform ‘topical’ song cycle design, which she represents graphically. (Fig. 1, Fig. 2, Fig. 3)

![Figures](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

There are circular narrative structures, which explore subjects with a progressive, temporal chronology with related start and end points marking a point of return or renewal. Calendar cycles, like Friedrich Schneider’s *Die Jahreszeiten (The Seasons)* (1828), belong to this category. ‘Spoked wheel’ structures — where each point of the circle is defined, potentially in a variety of ways, by its relationship to the central point — are also common in song cycles of this period, an example being Friedrich Hurka’s *Die Farben (The Colours)* (published in 1802). Finally, the repertory encompasses ‘sprung circle or spiral’ structures, that end

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123 Morgan, 5-28.
somewhere other than where they began, such as Friedrich Himmel’s *Die Blumen und der Schmetterling* (*The Flowers and the Butterfly*) (1803).\(^{125}\)

Bingham notes that topical cycles, which are characterized by a looser unifying identity not necessarily related to narrative, have ‘been dismissed either as collections, as “primitive” cycles that lack unity, or as forerunners of “true” cycles’.\(^ {126}\) Paul Anton Wineberger’s *Sechzehn Blumen* (*Sixteen Flowers*), which brings together sixteen song settings of poems about flowers by Joseph Scholz, is an example of this kind of work.\(^ {127}\)

Topical cycles predate the types of song cycles that became prominent later in the nineteenth century, which were more obviously unified either ‘by internal-plot cycles…which narrate in a series of song vignettes’ or as ‘musically-constructed cycles…which cohere primarily through their musical structures’.\(^ {128}\) As Bingham notes, these earlier topical cycles ‘are striking more for their contrast than their unity’,\(^ {129}\) yet even where their connectedness is more abstractly discerned, descriptions and depictions of their structural shape still conform to the circular. But if the historical legacy of the terminology of ‘cycle’ is, even in part, an unintentional consequence of the nineteenth-century song market, should such consummate emphasis be placed on circles? Could a broader range of potential shapes, quite possibly with the circle still being of central importance amongst them, better accommodate the structure of some circularly ill-fitting song cycles? Conversely, might a broader conceptual range of song cycle shapes encourage scholars to reflect alternatively on well-known, long-explained song cycles? Might it be possible for song cycle structures to assume more dynamic characteristics, open to a multiplicity of structural readings, as I argue for Gerald Finzi’s *Earth and air and Rain* in chapter four?

To summarize, these different lexical and critical concerns form the backdrop to the methodological approaches employed in this thesis. The ambiguity of the terminology of ‘cycle’, with its various implications, poses significant problems in terms of definition, typology and unity. Perhaps even more importantly to the present study, the term ‘cycle’ inadvertently limits the potential for alternative views of the structure and shape that

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125 Ruth Bingham, *Topical Song Cycles of the Early Nineteenth Century* (Wisconsin: A.R. Editions, 2003), pp. xii-xv. All of the song cycle examples given in this passage are cited by Ruth Bingham and figures 1, 2 and 3 recreate the graphic diagrams she devises in this edition.
127 Dating the work precisely is problematic. See Bingham, *Topical Song Cycles*, p. xvi.
129 Bingham, *Topical Song Cycles*, p. xvi.
particular song cycles may take. That is, that the conformity of works as linear progressions around an almost obligatory circumference often informs claims for the success or failure of a cycle in structural terms. Moreover, the preeminent spectre of the circular discourages alternative ideas and thinking about the potential connectedness, or otherwise, of songs in cycles and how this may inform the broader structure of individual cycles. The issue of unity is implicitly bound to the terminology of ‘cycle’ raising specific concerns in relation to this genre, but conceptions of unity inform and underpin fundamental questions about musical analysis in a contested field of enquiry. However, Nicholas Cook argues for a unification of methodological approach, by way of analytical fusion. He writes:

As I see it, the important thing is not so much to invent new techniques, nor to go on endlessly refining those we already have, but rather to make the fullest possible use of them. One way in which the techniques can be made more useful is through their being employed in combination with one another.130

This perspective is compelling and especially relevant to interdisciplinary scholarship that explores the intermedial relationship between words and music, where the density and complexity of associated aesthetic and critical strata demand broader examination and approach.

**Breaking the cycle: A manifesto**

The methodological principles applied in this thesis have been developed in light of the critical and terminological difficulties, dilemmas and divisions already outlined, with a central aim of exploring issues of structure both at the macro level of song cycle design and at the micro level of word and music relations in individual songs. My approach to each of the extended song cycle case studies in this thesis — Gerald Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain*, Ralph Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge* and John Ireland’s *Mother and Child* — uses a range of analytical practices predicated on the following five ideological positions:

1. That striving for melopoetic parity should be a fundamental aim in studies of word and music genres.

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130 Cook, p. 3.
2. That methodological processes should be developed and applied to song cycles on an individual basis, specifically moulded to complement a work’s unique characteristics.

3. That hermeneutic contextualisation in partnership with close reading (of music and text) can generate detailed and specific interpretative accounts to offer the broadest possible conception of song cycles.

4. That an uninhibited approach to analysis being a dynamic, provisional process, led by emerging detail and understanding, can yield unexpected and original perspectives.

5. That flexibility of expectation in the geometric possibilities for song cycles offers the opportunity for creative reflection on the shape and structures of works old and new.

It is likely that genuine and sustained melopoetic parity is something of a utopian ideal, or at least that, in theory and practice, melopoetic parity has the potential to be defined quite differently amongst musical, literary and musico-literary thinkers.\textsuperscript{131} As Eric Prieto notes, ‘more than thirty years after Scher first began writing about it (and more than fifty years after Calvin S. Brown made his first tentative efforts to delineate its boundaries)’, we are still ‘in the process of “defining the field”’ of word and music studies’ and ‘the relations between music and literature’\textsuperscript{132}. Yet in outlining his ‘Five Laws of the Interart Aesthetic’, Peter Dayan argues that ‘between art in any two different media (for example, poetry and music), any equivalence is incalculable. [...] The only way to convey the incalculable relations that pertain between media is to describe work in one medium as if it were operating in another.’\textsuperscript{133} Of course, music and poetry already share a good deal of technical vocabulary — phrase, cadence, rhythm and metre, amongst other terms — which supports attempts to describe equivalence, however incalculable it may be. Yet it is more difficult to conceive how a composer’s brushstrokes, a poet’s melody or an artist’s rhyme can help us to better know or comprehend the work of art, which ‘should properly be considered as an object’.\textsuperscript{134} Without necessarily always succeeding, this study strives, using the technical apparatus and vocabulary of each discipline, to give equal weight to words and music — as structural elements, signifier and signified — conceiving of them as interdependent partners in a


\textsuperscript{132} Prieto, p.49.

\textsuperscript{133} Peter Dayan, Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art, from Whistler to Stravinsky and Beyond (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{134} Peter Dayan, Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art, p. 2.
dynamic and reciprocally-revealing relationship. In each of the case studies, discussion about
the structural dimension of songs and cycles has evolved either by discoveries and findings
initially revealed through words or literary processes suggesting ideas about the music, or the
opposite: musical features highlighting previously unseen possibilities within the texts. This
links closely to point four, that an uninhibited approach to analysis as a dynamic process led
by emerging detail can yield unexpected and original perspectives. This, perhaps, reflects the
spirit of Prieto’s call for ‘cognitive dissonance’, where the promotion of “surprise” and
“cognitive dissonance”, not “appropriateness” or “adequacy” as the primary criteria of value
when studying word-music analogies’ may offer opportunities for broader insight. In this
study the analytical process has been characterized by an unashamedly free oscillation
between thinking led by words or music, with no particular expectation, at least initially, as to
where the analysis might lead or on what terms connections between songs and cycle
structure might be made. The accuracy of the claims made, in relation to compositional
intention, can, of course, never be known, but each case study presents fresh ideas about
structure and design for the song cycles considered, which may offer performers new ways of
thinking about and approaching these and other works. How convincing and original the
perspectives offered here are must, naturally, be determined by the reader.

The second point informing approaches to song cycles in this thesis — that
methodological processes should be developed with specific attention to the characteristics
and context of individual works — responds to the extraordinary heterogeneity of the
repertory from the genre’s inception to the present day. With such significant dissension
about the nature of the song cycle and a hugely varied corpus of works, bespoke
methodologies provide an obvious solution to problems borne of these complexities, and the
principle of formulating unique, idiosyncratic approaches is fundamental to the aims of this
thesis. Analysis is an inherently creative act, a process that sometimes generates a response to
a work of art without attempting to elucidate or explain it. Set within this conception, analysis
has the potential to stimulate thinking beyond individual works in and of themselves. In the
context of bespoke methodologies for song cycles, this rationale inevitably produces
deliberately non-replicable analyses, which are open and provisional. In other words, a
different analyst, taking into account the full range of a song cycle’s contextual detail, may
determine that an entirely different set of features are the most relevant in constituting a

135 Prieto, p.56.
‘bespoke’ analytical methodology. This is a policy of expansion, which aims to increase the attention given to song cycles (particularly in less represented repertories), stimulate new thinking and ideas about cycle shapes and structures and augment the genre’s critical literature without invalidating prior readings.

The three song cycle case studies in this thesis consider each of the composers’ individual approach to working with their chosen texts, and, more prominently in the case of Gerald Finzi and John Ireland, how the idiosyncratic character, disposition and working practices of the composer might have influenced the resulting cycle. Contextual factors, such as the trends and practices amongst music publishers and broadcasters also inform and justify certain elements of the analytical process. As Prieto notes, ‘the initial impetus for a musicoliterary interpretation should come from clues within the work itself’. In relation to Gerald Finzi’s cycle, extensive archival research of the Boosey and Hawkes Directors’ Papers housed at the British Library played a fundamental role in developing a bespoke methodological design. The many and various documents relating to song (during the period considered in this study) reveal something of the complex commercial landscape composers had to navigate, the aesthetic concessions they chose (or not) to make and, crucially, the consequences of the publisher’s demands on the structure and organisation of song cycles. In relation to this final point, the underpinning principal of not taking the apparent structures of published song cycles at face value is a direct consequence of the trends discerned through this archival research.

In the case of John Ireland, the interconnectedness of his music (imbued and encoded with symbolic musical and textual references) represents a unique set of characteristics, which require an equally unique methodological response in order to explore the full potential of his work in song cycles. This, of course, connects closely to the third point: that hermeneutic contextualisation in combination with close reading of music and text can generate specific and detailed interpretative accounts offering the broadest possible conception of song cycles. Prieto proposes that a search for ‘deep structures and underlying principles’ rather than ‘the description of direct one-to-one correspondences between the arts’ is the best way of addressing the ‘larger, and ultimately more interesting, questions of interpretation and meaning’.

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136 Prieto, p.56.
137 Prieto, p.57.
music relations at both macro and micro level? This is certainly at the centre of the methodological approaches posited in this study, perhaps most obviously demonstrated in the analysis of cycle structure in *On Wenlock Edge* (chapter five). Here, the broader, sequential correspondences in structural organization between *A Shropshire Lad* and *On Wenlock Edge* provide an initial platform for thinking more closely about micro-correspondences in word and music relations: word to note, rhythm to word, grammar and syntax to musical form, poetic voice to musical narrative, musical motive to poetic meaning, character or image to cite just a few possibilities. I contend that the richest analysis encompasses structural correspondences at every level.

As described, each of the three case studies draws on the circumstances of the works’ *milieu* with reference to the composer and other relevant conditions in a discussion that combines contextual detail with close musical and textual reading. The equivocal nature of music and polysemic character of poetry mean that the scholar of words and music seldom deals in absolutes. Arguably all musical works, but almost inevitably intermedial genres (like the song cycle) generate (or elicit interpretation of) a broad spectrum of meanings subject to wide and varied understanding. Yet matters are even more complicated than this, since song cycles are rendered through the filter of performance and encountered individually through listening. Thus, however technically and/or metaphorically detailed assertions about song cycles are, they can, ultimately, only be one of many interpretative outcomes.

Finally, flexibility of expectation for the geometric possibilities of song cycle structures is fundamental to the methodological processes and analytical outcomes of this thesis. Expanding the range of shapes that cycles can take offers the potential for songs to be connected in different ways and by different means. As will be argued in this thesis, in the case of John Ireland’s *Mother and Child*, songs linked closely to personal experience form a fractured, non-linear shape, Gerald Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain* can be understood within a multiplicity of potential structures and Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge* presents an innovative approach to narrative structure, offering another distinctive but unconventional cycle shape.
The shape of things to come

Context and methodology for *Earth and Air and Rain* (1935)

Finzi had an extensive knowledge of and love for literature, but he had a special affinity with the poetry of Thomas Hardy. Hardy was the poet Finzi turned to most often in song, but he was particular about defining some sets of songs as collections and others as cycles. As a composer Finzi was plagued by self-doubt, producing copious musical sketches and fragments that sometimes became fully-fledged songs and other times did not. Amongst these sketches there are examples of thwarted ambitions in the genre of song cycle, supported by annotations in the composer’s personal copies of the poetry. Prevailing opportunities for publication, performance and broadcast did not particularly lend themselves to production of extended, narrative song cycles, as my archival research of the Boosey & Hawkes Director’s Papers (MS Mus. 1813/2/1) housed at the British Library and discussed in detail in the next chapter) attests in relation to publishing. But Finzi’s insistence on certain levels of organisation in publication suggest an interest in structure and integrity to some extent.

In its final publication, *Earth and Air and Rain* is presented as a collection of ten diverse and varied songs unlinked by narrative thread and without adherence to related musical structures. However, when the composer’s selection of poetry for *Earth and Air and Rain* is subjected to a thematic analysis, new relationships between songs from across the ordered sequence emerge. Close reading of the words and music in those songs (linked by poetic theme) reveal a coherent plot and story. Musically, unifying motivic recollections assume a more compelling structural status within the smaller cycle’s narrative structure and conjunctive tonal relationships develop across and between the identified songs. Thus, the structure of *Earth and Air and Rain* might be understood to be dynamic, existing in two forms. Firstly, as the published sequence of ten individual songs and secondly as a subsumed, concise, narrative cycle formed from the five thematically-related songs which are diffracted across the published collection.

Context and methodology for *On Wenlock Edge* (1909)

As a composer of song, Vaughan Williams is known for his somewhat irreverent approach to handling texts. He was not indisposed to serious rearrangement and truncation, much to the dismay of some of the poets whose works he edited. Critical analysis of *On
Wenlock Edge highlights the emphasis that has been placed on the terminology of ‘cycle’ and its implications for expectations of structure and shape, particularly with regard to any emerging narrative. As will be discussed in detail in chapter five, whilst some critics see a clear and cogent story developing through the six songs, others see no such thing. There is also a dubious middle ground in the debate, with some critics unwilling to deny the inevitable, inherent integrity of any song cycle, but also unable to suggest the terms on which such integrity might be discerned. However, as all of these assertions are implicitly founded on a single understanding of song cycle narratives as linear constructs whose plots and stories are successively revealed through consecutive songs, it is clear why no satisfactory reading of the cycle’s potential narrative trajectory has been outlined.

My thematic analysis of Housman’s A Shropshire Lad reveals discrete levels of organisation within the poet’s sequence, and I argue that one such level is poetic pairings. In these pairings consecutive poems are connected — either by character, diction or situation — to become mutually revealing. Notably, Vaughan Williams adopts one such pairing for the first two songs in On Wenlock Edge. Whilst the opening songs are the only consecutive combination drawn from Housman’s sequence, if the pattern of combinatorial partnerships is pursued analytically through the rest of Vaughan Williams’s song cycle, a compelling sequence of three micro-narratives formed from poetic pairings is suggested. The proposed structure counters many of the apparent cyclical failings proposed by critics over the years, notably the disproportionate lengths and overly-dramatic nature of some of the song settings.

Context and methodology for Mother and Child (1918)

John Ireland’s idiosyncratic compositional language is characterized by its intensely personal context. As a homosexual interested ‘specifically’ in ‘much younger men’138 at the beginning of the twentieth century, overt emotional expression of those feelings was illegal. Unable to openly live out his desires, Ireland’s hopes, relationships and romantic aspirations, whether reality or fantasy, were subsumed into his compositions. As such his music is cryptic, often constructed from musical ideas and motives with specific referential qualities relating to important people, places and events, and works are punctuated with coded literary

references and quotations. Ireland’s own childhood was a distinctly unhappy one, characterized by loneliness, isolation, estrangement from his older siblings and the death of both parents by his early teens.

The composer was extremely knowledgeable about literature and took great interest in writings and poetry of all kinds. However, it is notable that his choice of texts from Christina Rossetti’s *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* for his cycle of 1918, *Mother and Child*, mirrored the song-writing activity of many other composers at the time, who — like John Ireland — held close connections with the Royal College of Music (RCM). As such, primary source research amongst the archives at the RCM (discussed in detail in the next chapter) also informs some of the background and thinking about this and other works. In combination with the highly personal context of Ireland’s music, it is perhaps the composer’s profound fascination for literature that precipitated his editorial approach to working with texts. Notable amongst Ireland’s editorial practices is his custom of retitling, and this is a particular feature of his songs. Amongst the composer’s song cycles *Mother and Child* stands out, with all eight songs receiving new titles. This study of *Mother and Child* considers Ireland’s editorial practice of bestowing new titles as a means of exploring the semiotic trajectory of the song settings. Close reading of the text and music, which includes the identification of symbolic phrases and motifs (musical and textual), is overlayed with important biographical detail to suggest the uniquely, personally-reflective qualities of the cycle, whose structure is defined by experiential rather than narrative qualities in an unconventional conceptual shape.
Chapter 3

Circles of influence
The historical, social and commercial contexts of twentieth-century English song and cycle

Introduction

English song did not develop in splendid isolation. Like all musical histories, the influence of social and political change, of technological advancement and new directions in the arts and musical style played an essential part in the evolution of the repertory. In relation to English song, a number of important issues emerge from these wider circles of influence. The ongoing tensions surrounding song’s status shade the genre’s history during the early decades of the twentieth century. The pre-eminence of the ballad centred song within the sphere of popular music. However, this position appears to have been challenged by composers who would elevate song to become a more serious genre. Perhaps related to this drive towards higher cultural values, the expansion of music education through specialist conservatoires founded during the nineteenth century produced the generation of highly trained composers and performers that would direct the development of twentieth-century English art-song. Established in 1822, the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) was the earliest of these institutions with Trinity College of music (intended to improve the teaching of church music) being founded in 1872 and the Guildhall School of Music (the first municipal music college) in 1880. Outside of London, the Royal Manchester School of Music opened in 1893. However, the RCM — established in 1882— seems to have been a particular nexus in the development of English song, with a significant number of leading song composers being associated with the institution either as students, as teachers or, in many cases, as both.

The expansion of music publishing at the turn of the twentieth century presents another extremely important context for the development of English song at this time. With commercial success at the centre of their decision-making, publishers wielded considerable power in almost every aspect of a song’s design, development and presentation. The implications of these uncompromising diktats in relation to song cycles are significant indeed, and the discussion surrounding Boosey & Hawkes (later in this chapter and in other parts of the thesis) only really scratches the surface of what may prove to have been a pivotal
influence on the way we now, typically, understand and consider issues of structure in
twentieth-century English song cycles.

Vaughan Williams composed *On Wenlock Edge* in 1909, John Ireland wrote *Mother and Child* in 1918 and Finzi completed *Earth and Air and Rain* in 1935. In endeavouring to highlight the notion of individual methodological approaches, as well as the uniqueness of each work and my idiosyncratic structural readings of them, the chronology of the song cycles is not observed in the unfolding presentation of case studies in this thesis. All three composers and works were influenced, in one way or another, by the historical, social and commercial conditions of this period and by new directions in the approach to song (either in terms of musical style or the handling of texts). These three song cycles are closely linked to the contemporary circles of influence described, and so the shadow of these different contexts over the methodological frameworks adopted for *On Wenlock Edge*, *Mother and Child* and *Earth and Air and Rain* is essential in revealing the structural possibilities of the works.

Setting the scene: 1909-1935

The years between 1909 and 1935 were a time of considerable change and development, politically, societally, technologically and musically in the British Isles and across the world. Politically, the period is characterized by its unsettledness as annexation, conflict and the gradual dissolution of empire began to reshape Europe. Closer to home, much of Ireland seceded from the United Kingdom with its partitioning in 1921 being formally recognized in the awarding of Dominion status in 1922. The period between 1909 and 1935 was presided over by five British prime ministers and encompassed World War I and the political conditions and changes influencing the onset of World War II.

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139 In the General Election of 1918, Sinn Féin won seventy-three of one hundred and five Irish seats in British parliament. The elected members did not take their seats in Westminster but set up their own assembly in Ireland, passing a Declaration of Independence. The Irish War of Independence that followed lasted until 1921, at which time the Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed allowing for the creation of the Irish Free State and an option for the Parliament of Northern Ireland not to be included in said state. For more detailed studies of the political and social history of Ireland during this period, see: *The Cambridge history of Ireland. Volume IV, 1880 to the present*, ed. by Thomas Bartlett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

140 Herbert Henry Asquith (Liberal) 1908-1916, David Lloyd George (Liberal) 1916-1922, Andrew Bonar Law (Conservative) 1922-1923, Stanley Baldwin (Conservative) 1923-1924, James Ramsay MacDonald (Labour) 1924-1924, Stanley Baldwin (Conservative) 1924-1929 and James Ramsay MacDonald (Labour) 1929-1935.
In the context of societal change, the suffrage movement gathered momentum worldwide. In the United Kingdom this brief period encompassed the martyrdom of Emily Davidson in 1913, the 1919 Representation of the People Act (giving married women of property over the age of thirty the right to vote) and women over the age of twenty-one receiving the right to vote in 1928. The effects of the Great Depression beginning in the United States of America in 1929 were felt as keenly this side of the Atlantic, with economic collapse leading to large-scale unemployment and currency crises in the United Kingdom and Europe. More positively, progressive social legislation saw the introduction of the old age pension, unemployment insurance and provision for child welfare. The period was also marked by innovation with new inventions, such as the tank, the bra, the talking picture, polaroid photography, electricity as an increasingly commonplace utility\textsuperscript{141} and the radio, revolutionising daily life both at the level of nation and the individual.

The advent of radio as a means of mass communication marked an enormous moment of cultural change. The first Director General of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), John Reith, developed a clear ethos about the aims and objectives of the service, ‘which should not simply entertain, but inform and educate as well’.\textsuperscript{142} Radio broadcasting was, of course, transformational to the ways in which classical music was accessed. As Tony Stoller notes, classical music ‘had featured on BBC radio services from the very beginning, even before the earliest radio companies had come together in the new British Broadcasting Company in 1922’.\textsuperscript{143} Swift technological advancement meant that the quality of broadcasts continued to improve rapidly, and soon regular outside broadcasts of opera and concerts, both large- and small-scale, led to classical music comprising ‘between a fifth and a quarter of all BBC radio programmes between 1927 and 1930’.\textsuperscript{144} Although the gramophone was invented before 1909, it was at about this time that falling prices allowed people across the globe to make the technology ‘a part of their daily lives’.\textsuperscript{145} Alongside radio, the gramophone was a primary means of musical dissemination during this period.

\textsuperscript{141} The Electricity (Supply) Act of 1926 led to the establishment of the Central Electricity Board and National Grid.
\textsuperscript{144} Stoller, p. 32.
In terms of musical style, the period between 1909 and 1935 is an especially rich melting pot with the pinnacle of tonal expression meeting modernist approaches in a climate where links between music and national identity (an increasingly important concept during the nineteenth century) continued to gain momentum. To take a musical snapshot of a single point in time in the repertory of Western Art Music during this period, in 1911 Anton Webern began composing his *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, Op.10, Richard Strauss completed *Der Rosenkavelier*, Igor Stravinsky’s *Petrushka* was premiered, Edward Elgar completed his *Second Symphony in Eb major*, Op.63, Bartok wrote *Bluebeard’s Castle* and George Butterworth finished his *Two English Idylls*.

**The beginnings of the English song tradition**

According to Stephen Banfield, the history of art song in twentieth-century England did not begin with the same distinction as its European counterparts, as his bluntly censorious account of English song before 1900 describes:

A vast and facile productivity is amply evident, and, by comparison with the *Lieder* of Schumann, Brahms and Wolf, the *mélodies* of Bizet, Fauré, Duparc and Debussy, and the songs of Grieg, the overall impression is one of worthlessness. Whole volumes of mid- and late-Victorian songs and ballads by various composers are indistinguishable, showing a uniform lack of musical imagination. Even an apparently serious attempt to set up a *Lied* tradition in England, Sullivan’s cycle *The Window or The Loves of Wrens*, published in 1871 as settings of poems especially written by Tennyson in 1866, can hardly be exempted from this censure…It was the attitude of Victorian England to music as an exportable or importable – and on occasions expendable – commodity based largely on the proven international standards of design and dimension which led to the ballad style, immediately recognisable by its very lack of distinction, in which personality was submerged, the influence of the text on the music was at best pedestrian and at worst non-existent, the texture of the flowing accompaniment was uniformly ‘pianistic’, and the general idiom was such that procedures of Schubert, harmonies of Schumann, histrionics of Liszt, echoes of Grieg and foretastes of Fauré were alike reduced to a level of mediocre unmemorability.¹⁴⁶

Banfield’s analysis, written in 1985, is scathing and there are certainly critics who do not share his view. Derek Scott, for example, views the ballad in terms of the first popular music revolution and has written extensively on the Victorian parlour-song, noting the complexity and diversity of the genre, its cultural reach and the opportunities it offered to women.

composers.\textsuperscript{147} So what Banfield’s description perhaps highlights is that the tensions surrounding the aesthetic value of ballads were a central point of interest to the composers and works his study considers: namely, those whose works began to establish a more definitive art-song tradition.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the English song market was dominated by two forms of song: royalty ballads and art-songs. Royalty ballads were common in both Britain and the USA and were so-called because publishers awarded significant payment to singers (not necessarily also to the composer) for their sustained public performance of a particular ballad over a specified period.\textsuperscript{148} The tenor Sims Reeve, for example, had ‘made a great hit’ of Balfe’s \textit{Come into the garden, Maud} through his performances of the work, just as the Irish baritone Harry Plunket Greene did with \textit{Off to Philadelphia} in the ballad concerts overseen by William Boosey in the Queen’s Hall during the 1890s.\textsuperscript{149} The precise nature of the financial arrangements is not always clear with historical accounts varying to some degree, but, as Banfield notes, it was John Boosey who ‘consolidated the system’ through ballad concerts, during which singers would perform ballads mostly or exclusively drawn from a publisher’s catalogue (as will be explored later in this chapter).\textsuperscript{150} However, having studied surviving concert programmes Sophie Fuller contends that ‘Ballad Concerts could in fact provide a wide range of vocal music, including songs by canonical composers such as Schubert or Schumann as well as an array of ballads’.\textsuperscript{151} Irrespective of the detail of the programming, from this early time an important link between publishing and the development of English song was established.

In contrast to the sentimental, popular ballad, the art-song was categorized amongst serious music, but points of distinction between these two song types were not always clear. Banfield, again rather bluntly, suggests that differences between the two categories of song

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Nicholas Temperley, ‘Ballad’ (The English sentimental ballad), in \textit{Grove Music Online} <https://oxfordmusiconline.com> [accessed 29 July 2022]
\item \textsuperscript{149} Dorothy De Val, \textit{In Search of Song: The Life and Times of Lucy Broadwood} (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 63.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Banfield, \textit{Sensibility and English Song}, pp. 4-5.
\end{itemize}
might be marked by a composer’s level of literary engagement, but even then at a very low ebb:

If the criteria for a serious song are a sincere sense of identification with the text and a personal expression of it in a style which is worthy of it, of the period and of the composer, then there are a great many English songs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries which do not pass the test, the majority of them in the ballad category.152

Fuller further highlights the muddied waters of ballad and art-song during this period, using the example of the changing reception of songs written by Maude Valérie White and Liza Lehmann:

Both these songwriters heard their work performed at a wide range of public and private venues. In their early careers both were regarded as raising the level of the English song and, particularly in the case of White, choosing a better class of lyric to set […] Nevertheless, later in their careers both White and Lehmann came to be regarded only as ballad composers, and after their deaths their contribution to British song was almost entirely overlooked and forgotten.153

Clearly gender compounds the complexities of legacy in the case of White and Lehmann, with there being no serious expectation that female composers could be capable of producing works of any quality. But the lowly status of song as a musical genre is also central to this idea, and not divorced from gender, as Fuller notes:

The two issues of gender and genre are of course not unrelated: the prominence and success of female songwriters at the turn of the century undoubtedly contributed to the later downgrading of British song as a genre, despite the indisputable power and beauty of songs by composers as diverse as Parry, Quilter, White and Vaughan Williams.154

English song composers were acutely aware of the tension between musical quality and commercial demand, and this is well demonstrated in the example of Ralph Vaughan Williams. After signing a five-year agreement to sell songs exclusively to The Vocalist — a monthly periodical focusing on English song — in 1902, Vaughan Williams considered he had ‘sold [his] soul to a publisher’.155 The composer also alluded to the issue of song’s

152 Banfield, Sensibility and English Song, p. 7.
153 Fuller, ‘The songs and shorter secular choral works of Vaughan Williams’ (p. 110).
154 Fuller, ‘The songs and shorter secular choral works of Vaughan Williams’ (pp. 110-111).
155 Letter from Ralph Vaughan Williams to Raph Wedgwood (early 1902?) catalogued as VWL133 in the online database at <https://vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/discover/letters/> [accessed 1 August 2022]
cultural value when, in the same letter, he remarked ‘he is going to publish several pot boiling songs of mine – that is to say not real pot boilers – that is to say they are quite good – I’m not ashamed of them – as they are more or less simple and popular in character’. Notably, Linden Lea was amongst the works published in The Vocalist, which would be the song to earn Vaughan Williams more money than any other. Yet the composer also campaigned for higher standards of musical taste in relation to song, appealing directly, and rather plainly, to the ballad-loving public in his ‘Sermon to Vocalists’. Fuller summarizes the details:

   In this article he addresses amateur vocalists and implores them to use their intelligence when selecting songs, and to choose the sincere rather than the false. He describes the royalty ballad as possessing ‘neither melody nor rhythm’, and asks singers whether they really imagine that it is ‘so called because it is patronized by Royalty’?\(^{157}\)

Over the course of time ballads gradually fell out of public favour, with other forms of popular song being brought to the fore through the advent of radio broadcasting and recording. Ballad concerts featuring multiple singers gave way to solo recitals and so the system of royalties fell away. The tide also turned for composers and publishers, with song composition becoming increasingly characterized by enlightened literary engagement and publishers marketing songs with reference to their musical quality rather than by endorsement of singer. Hitherto, the English art-song carved a more distinctive identity within the song repertory and enjoyed higher standing as a musical genre during the early part of the twentieth century.

The song cycle in England

   Although 1909 marks the earliest date of composition for the three song cycles considered in detail in this thesis, Banfield identifies five pivotal events occurring around 1900 that are of significant historical importance in the development of English song. Notably, three of these events are first performances of song cycles by male composers: Edward Elgar’s Sea Pictures, first heard at the Norwich Festival in 1899, Arthur Somervell’s Maud, performed at the Salle Érard in London also in 1899, and Roger Quilter’s Four Songs

\(^{156}\) Banfield, Sensibility and English Song, p. 2.  
\(^{157}\) Fuller, ‘The songs and shorter secular choral works of Vaughan Williams’ (p. 109).
of the Sea at the Crystal Palace in 1900. Yet, in fact, one of the earliest song cycles to enjoy wide critical acclaim was composed by a woman: Liza Lehmann.

Lehmann’s *In a Persian Garden*, first performed in 1896, sets translated texts from the twelfth-century Persian poet Omar Khyyám’s *Rubáiyát*. Formed from twenty-two, musically-integrated, continuous sections and written for piano and a quartet of singers (who are deployed both individually and in combination), the work was highly ambitious in its scale and scope and was well received amongst contemporary critics and audiences. Fuller’s detailed discussion of the work cites a range of commentary offered around the time of its first performance at a Monday Popular Concert in St James’s Hall, London.\(^{158}\) This includes a claim for it being ‘one of the most impressive works ever penned by a female composer’.\(^{159}\) (The positive review being qualified by a reference to gender speaks volumes about the status of women composers at this time). Several years later, the music critic Edwin Evans suggested that the work’s ‘…phenomenal success places it almost beyond the sphere of ordinary discussion’.\(^{160}\) Although Lehmann is generally remembered now as a composer in the ballad style, it is clear that her experimental approaches to form, vocal forces and, as the American commentator Professor Edward Dickinson noted, ‘startling boldness in the use of dissonant harmonies’ which occasionally ‘exceeds the bounds of the permissible’ were significant and influential in the elevation of the ballad towards art-song.\(^{161}\) Lehmann’s output includes no less than seventeen song cycles, yet in spite of contemporary views such as that held by Evans — that ‘she was the first to apply the form of the song-cycle to English songs - an innovation which has had remarkable results’\(^{162}\) — her place in the history of English song has received relatively little attention. It is notable, for example, that two of the most extensive surveys of the genre — Banfield’s *Sensibility and English Song* and Trevor Hold’s *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* — offer no extended discussion or

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\(^{160}\) Fuller, ‘Women Composers during the British Musical Renaissance, 1880-1918’, p. 223.


analysis of Lehmann or indeed of any woman composer or her works.\textsuperscript{163} Fuller highlights this issue in the wider context of the British Musical Renaissance between 1880 and 1918:

Most scholars, for example, see this Renaissance as almost entirely male. Any contributions made by women, but especially those of composers, are either marginalised or simply disappear.\textsuperscript{164}

Undoubtedly this is the case for many musical repertories, but there is a particular imbalance here given the substantial contribution women composers made to the genre of song. However, more recent efforts to raise awareness of neglected women composers, scholarship dedicated to their work and more diverse concert programming offer some positive points of action in addressing these inequalities.\textsuperscript{165}

Just a few years after Lehmann’s \textit{In a Persian Garden} came to recognition, Elgar produced his \textit{Sea Pictures}. Setting five poems by five individual poets, the work was composed in 1899 and first performed in 1900. Elgar took \textit{In Haven} — a poem written by his wife, Alice — as a starting point, then selected other sea-inspired texts to form his cycle, a process that Jerrold Northrop Moore notes to be ‘in the manner of Berlioz’s \textit{Nuits d’été}’.\textsuperscript{166} Indeed, given the operatic scope of the vocal part and the large-scale accompaniment, \textit{Sea Pictures} does seem to have more in common with the European orchestral song cycle tradition begun by Berlioz and brought to greater prominence through the endeavours of Mahler, Richard Strauss and others. The quality and combination of the texts Elgar selected for the cycle have been questioned by a range of critics,\textsuperscript{167} leading to claims for the inferiority of \textit{Sea Pictures} amongst the composer’s other works. Elgar himself seems to have been conscious of the issue, but unconcerned. As a friend of the composer later recalled: ‘E.E.
used to say that it is better to set the best second-rate poetry to music, for the most immortal verse is music already’.\textsuperscript{168}

The nature of the work’s cyclical status has also been questioned, as Edward McGuire summarizes:

Commentators have analysed Sea Pictures as a set of stand-alone miniatures…and even argued that it is cyclical only in a literary sense because (purportedly) the five songs lack a compelling sense of musical unity.\textsuperscript{169}

Contemporary critics also found fault, but from the point of view of textual disunity. Karen Leistra-Jones notes that ‘…even sympathetic critics were sometimes perplexed by aspects of the cycle. At a time when the song-cycle genre was increasingly defined by expectations of poetic and musical unity, Elgar had chosen to set texts by five different poets’.\textsuperscript{170} The enduring ambiguity of the concept of ‘cycle’ here is striking, with song cycle discourse being shaped by the same critical and typological questions asked both then and now. Yet of equal importance and interest is the way in which some recent studies of Sea Pictures seek to consider the work’s cyclical qualities from new and quite different perspectives. McGuire, for example, offers a ‘multivalent interpretation’ and considers that there are ‘three journeys represented throughout the work: the physical one, as implied by the locations described in each of the cycle’s five poems; the metaphorical journey, noting that the poems describe various states of human life from childhood to maturity; and the aesthetic journey, from lyric and static to dramatic and narrative’.\textsuperscript{171} Similarly, Leistra-Jones notes how Sea Pictures stands apart from other nineteenth-century sea music because of its ‘focus on depth rather than distance, and vertical rather than horizontal motion’.\textsuperscript{172} Taking this, along with ‘new oceanographic discoveries’ and ‘the increasing popularity of the seaside holiday’ into account, Leistra-Jones considers ‘how Sea Pictures’ depths were imagined and experienced in dialogue with scientific, literary, cultural, and bodily discourses at the time’ to propose a new understanding of the work as a cycle:

\begin{itemize}
  \item 168 Northrop Moore, p. 280.
  \item 170 Karen Leistra-Jones, ‘The deeps have music soft and low: Sounding the ocean in Elgar’s Sea Pictures’, Music and Letters, 97 (2016), 61-99 (p. 62).
  \item 171 McGuire (p. 181).
  \item 172 Leistra-Jones (pp. 63-64).
\end{itemize}
Despite its diverse poems and lack of a clearly unified voice, these spatial tropes provide the cycle with a linking thread. Indeed, by exploring how various meanings attached to the sea combine across the songs, it is possible to take Elgar’s designation of Sea Pictures as a ‘cycle’ seriously and discern in it a thematic interconnectedness and a narrative framework that have previously been overlooked.\(^{173}\)

These creative ways of considering connectedness are compelling and sympathetic to some of the ideas expressed in this thesis.

The orchestral song cycle was certainly a form explored by other twentieth-century English composers. Granville Bantock composed a number of orchestral cycles, including *Five Ghazals of Hafiz* (1903) and *The Sphinx* (1941), as did Benjamin Britten whose orchestral cycles include *Our Hunting Fathers* (1936) and *Nocturne* (1958). However, song cycles written for voice and piano or small-scale chamber accompaniments form the mainstay of the repertoire. Arthur Somervell’s *Maud*, for voice and piano, falls into this latter category, and for Banfield the work’s first performance at the Salle Érard, London in 1899 marks another significant moment in the development of English song. But as one of the earliest pieces in which the composer selects and combines poetic texts to convey a specific narrative, *Maud* is also a very important work within the more specific repertory of English song cycles.

Somervell sets words from Tennyson’s *Maud* for baritone and piano, significantly reducing the extended poetic text to present a more concise drama, which evolves over twelve songs.\(^{174}\) Trevor Hold describes the process:

Somervell’s ‘shooting-script’ for the song-cycle contains only a small portion of Tennyson’s monodrama. What he does is to fillet the poem, cutting out narrative too factually bare to set to music. In doing so, he makes what is already an enigmatic story even more so…All in all he barely uses a third of Tennyson’s original, omitting fifteen poems and reducing all but two.\(^{175}\)

Hold also comments, rather forthrightly, on how the composer distinctly improves on the poet’s efforts, further emphasising the ongoing tensions around the integrity of words in music that underly much musicological song cycle discourse:

\(^{173}\) Leistra-Jones (pp. 63-64).
\(^{174}\) Somervell added a thirteenth song, entitled ‘Epilogue’, in 1907.
\(^{175}\) Hold, p. 90.
But a rambling, garrulous poem such as *Maud* will always pose problems for the songwriter, and in omitting such Tennysonian doggerel as the opening of I.19 (‘Her brother is coming back tonight, | Breaking up my dream of delight’), one feels Somervell is doing the poet a literary service.\(^{176}\)

Leaving aside the question of whose text is best, it is clear that Somervell carefully carves a narrative from Tennyson’s text that is all his own, and this is characteristic of his other contributions to the repertory of English narrative song cycles. Aside from *Maud*, Somervell composed three other major narrative cycles: *A Shropshire Lad* (1904), *James Lee’s Wife* (1908) and *A Broken Arc* (1923), in each case selecting and combining poetry from a single writer to create a new and distinct plot. But this kind of song cycle was less common than cycles that brought together or anthologised a group of texts by poet or poets without consciously forming a story. Roger Quilter’s *Four Songs of the Sea* falls into this category.

*Four Songs of the Sea* has a curious history being first composed and performed in 1900 and published shortly thereafter, then revised and republished in 1911 as *Three Songs of the Sea* (omitting the opening song) before the original four-song version (with further revision) was republished some time later. This complex genesis is perhaps indicative of doubts expressed about the quality of the poems, which Quilter also composed.\(^{177}\) However, all four poems — *I have a friend*, *The sea-bird*, *Moonlight* and *By the sea* — present momentary scenes or reflections on the sea and it is this thematic thread that links the songs. Clearly, this represents a completely different kind of work to the consciously constructed narrative cycles that Somervell was writing and speaks to the breadth and diversity of the umbrella term, song cycle. Of the one hundred and twenty or so songs that Quilter composed, the vast majority belong to song cycles of precisely this kind. Only *To Julia*, composed in 1905 and setting six lyrics by Robert Herrick (1591-1674), stands apart as a conceptually and motivically unified song cycle. However, somewhat unusually Quilter incorporates short movements for solo piano, opening the cycle with a ‘Prelude’ and separating songs five and six with an ‘Interlude’.\(^{178}\) The work came in to being during what the composer described as

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\(^{176}\) Hold, p. 90.

\(^{177}\) Banfield feels the first song is weak, ‘especially in its words’: see *Sensibility and English Song*, p. 111. Hold describes the verse as ‘insipid imitations of Mary Coleridge and R.L. Stevenson’, which are ‘hardly the inspiration for a masterpiece’, p. 146.

\(^{178}\) John Ireland also included a closing movement for solo piano in his Housman cycle of 1928, *We’ll to the woods no more.*
a ‘Herrick fever’, observing that ‘the lady of Herrick’s dreams became, in a way, the lady of mine’. Quilter commented on the nature of the cycle:

I chose six of the most beautiful and singable lyrics, which seemed sufficiently varied in mood and shape to make a little garland of songs . . . I think, perhaps, Devotion is the keyword to the cycle.

The composer’s remarks are extremely interesting, because whilst Quilter unquestionably refers to the work as a cycle he also describes how the texts are brought together because of their variety. For the composer, then, the cycle’s inherent unity lies in the ephemeral, emotional connection between the texts rather than in specific musical relationships between songs (even though these exist). Yet for the listener, the relatively prominent recurrence of musical themes, ideas and textures, which are presented in a pattern of almost successive alternation, may offer a different conception. Once again, the ambiguous and idiosyncratic notion of cycle is evident.

Whilst In A Persian Garden, Sea Pictures, Maud and Four Songs of the Sea were composed within a fifteen-year window, the works could not be more different in their style scope and structure, demonstrating the extraordinary variety within the repertory. Accompaniments extend from piano to full orchestra, formal designs incorporate anything between four and twenty-two song movements, which explore a variety of vocal styles and textures through scoring that ranges from single voice to quartet. Within these cycles there are structures that loosely frame reasonably independent songs, consolidate broader thematic connections or convey a concise and cohesive narrative. Given the breadth of creative response evident in this small selection of works, it is hardly surprising that critics began posing the same deeper questions that still stimulate song cycle scholarship today.

The power of the publisher

Publishers were an important component of the nexus that connected poets, composers, broadcasters and performers. Whether determining the worth of poetry or music, proposing revisions — minor or substantial — to submitted literary or musical works or

authorising new orchestrations and arrangements of existing pieces, publishers exerted powerful influence, at every level, over the direction that English song would take during the early part of the twentieth century. David Rowland notes how ‘the increasing demand for published materials of all kinds’ led to technological developments that profited publishers of printed music during the nineteenth century and considers the impact and influence of changing patterns of music consumption:

Around 1800 it was mostly the social elite who purchased printed music. Sales were modest and music publishers’ catalogues were limited. It was not unusual for publishers to produce just 100 or 200 copies, or even less, of works such as sonatas, or quartets. But even at this time a new popular market was emerging, as songs and other small-scale works began to be sold in their thousands for the expanding domestic market. The demand for printed music continued to expand in the second quarter of the century as the lower middle- and working-classes gained greater access to music.¹⁸¹

Technical advances in the machinery and materials used to print music along with new processes, such as stereotyping and lithography, enabled publishers to meet the increased demand for printed music and maintain profits.¹⁸²

By the beginning of the twentieth century a number of British music publishing businesses were operating successfully, including Novello & Co, Chappell & Co and Augener & Co with Stainer and Bell setting up shop in 1907. The firm of Boosey & Co — a branch of the Boosey and Sons business devoted specifically to music— was of particular importance for song, establishing the London Ballad Concerts in 1867 (discussed earlier in this chapter) that would drive the market for this genre into the twentieth century. At this time John Boosey, great grandson of the founding John Boosey, was in charge assisted by his nephews William and Arthur before the latter’s son, Leslie, took over in 1920. Helen Wallace notes that as an accomplished amateur singer, Leslie had ‘a fine discernment for voices’ but this was in no way indicative of any ‘musical pretensions’:

… his comments on music are strictly personal, modest and always defer to authority. He had in a smaller way what Hawkes had been exceptionally blessed with, a nose rather than an ear for music."¹⁸³

¹⁸² Rowland’s chapter provides a detailed account of these innovations.
The Boosey & Hawkes Directors’ Files archive, housed at the British Library, preserves internal and external correspondence, memoranda, reports and business documents from 1904 to 1976 — a great deal of which relates to Leslie Boosey—and the collection provides a fascinating insight into the business of song. My archival research of these primary source documents raises a number of interesting points with regard to the tension between artistic endeavour and commercial drive that appear to characterize the interactions between composers, poets and the publisher. Moreover, the level of creative control retained and exerted by publishers is also made clear through these papers, and the potential for that authority to influence the structure and presentation of songs and cycles is an essential factor in my discussion of Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain* in chapter four. The place of singers in determining the promotion and success of particular works and composers is also an important and influential factor in the industry of song at this time. However, the collaborative model within which these various stakeholders operated, suggests a paradigm quite different from that which one might expect today.

Firstly, it seems very clear that music publishers occupied a nodal position in the interactions between composers, poets and performers. But evidence from the Boosey and Hawkes papers suggests that music publishers were not simply concentric intermediaries within an egalitarian network. Rather, they sat omnipotent at the top of a vertical hierarchy exercising their authority at every level of the creative process. Singers were next in the pecking order, with Boosey & Co courting the best and most popular performers in order to promote the songs in their catalogue and raise sales. William Boosey, nephew of John Boosey, became involved with the concert series from 1880. In his personal history of the publishing firm, he recalls performances from ‘various famous artistes’ including: ‘Madame Carlotta Patti, Miss Louisa Pyne, Madame Sainton Dolby, Madame Antionette Sterling, Madame Trebelli, and Madame Patey’. Last (and possibly least) came the composers and poets, who, in equal measure, might have their work accepted, dismissed altogether or approved subject to revisions determined by the publishing house in order to appeal to the song-buying public. The ascendancy of the publisher and lowly status of the composers and

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184 After several months of negotiations, the merger forming Boosey & Hawkes was completed in 1930.
poets within this hierarchy speaks to the ideas of artistic restraint and obligation that creators could encounter.

Singers formed the crucial link between publishers and music consumers, and correspondence between Leslie Boosey and the performers at his ballad concerts (which continued right up to 1937) demonstrates that they occupied an important place in the business model. The director’s own interests in singing must surely have sustained the success of the Ballad Concerts, and the many requests from prospective musicians asking to audition and be considered for performances indicate that the series represented an important opportunity for singers. Boosey & Co boasted a number of well-known singers of the time on their books, and the views of performers were very much taken into account, particularly with regards to concert programming. Writing to the soprano Isobel Baillie in January 1933, Leslie Boosey was keen to make sure his performer was entirely happy to include a new song by Michael Head: ‘I am so glad you like the song, but as I said before I don’t want you to put it in unless you would like to’. Indeed, concert programming seems to have been very much a process of negotiation. The bass Harry Dearth, for example, selected Sea Haven and The Old Shepherd from Boosey’s suggestions for his ‘fairly cheerful programme’ for 10 October 1925, and there are many other examples of singers stating their preferences and proposing works for their concert programmes. Singers who had particular associations with songs sometimes had their names printed on the score, as, for example, the baritone Raymond Newell did in 1927. Even though singers were central to Boosey & Co’s business strategy, they were by no means indispensable and there were limits on their financial worth. The bass-baritone Keith Falkner wrote to Leslie Boosey in April, 1929, asking whether his ‘usual London fee for sometime past’ of £15:15:- could be paid for the next season. However, notes from a telephone call from Boosey & Co responding to the letter describe how the singer’s request would come as a shock to Leslie Boosey, with Falkner quickly confirming

186 Exactly how singers came to perform in the ballad concerts is unclear. It seems likely that Boosey & Hawkes, at least in the early decades of the concerts, approached and recruited many of the leading singers of the day. However, it is certainly clear from the Boosey & Hawkes archive that in the earliest decades of the twentieth century many singers also approached the firm.
188 Harry Dearth, letter to Leslie Boosey, 23 September 1925. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/270.
189 Raymond Newell, letter to Leslie Boosey, 18 October 1927. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/278. The handwriting in the letter makes the title of the song indecipherable, but it appears to include the word ‘Gypsy’.
that he would ‘be pleased to sing anyway, whether you can increase his fee or not’.

Singers, then, were at the forefront of what music the public were introduced to and, given the royalty system in place, it certainly paid performers to promote the works most favoured by their audiences rather than complex art-songs that may have presented a more challenging experience for listeners and amateur singers.

As well as requests from singers, Boosey & Co received a great many submissions from song composers eager to have their works published, all of which were considered by adjudicating musical experts engaged by the firm. During the early 1930s many of the song submissions were appraised by the composer Julius Harrison, whose comments on the quality of the music were often rather frank. For example, in an internal document dated 3 May 1934, Harrison offers feedback on submissions from three separate composers: Carl Fischer, Arthur Baynon and Helen Beckett. Carl Fischer’s efforts were considered to be ‘All dreadful. Too shocking to contemplate’. Helen Beckett’s pieces did not fare very much better, with Harrison concluding that ‘There is no merit in this composer’s work, I am afraid’. Arthur Baynon’s unison song, *If eggs were laid by monkeys*, was also rejected, though the poetic imagery seems to have been the major hurdle: ‘The words suggest anatomical operations and functions which are hardly nice, I think. No school would take it up, surely?’ Fortunately, Leslie Boosey’s letters responding to prospective composers, which were always characterized by a courteousness of tone, softened the blow.

In other cases, rejections were made in light of more specific musical inadequacies. Commenting on Kenneth Finlay’s *Islands of Mist* in July 1934, Harrison remarked ‘…this is very manufactured stuff. The modal touch is so inconsistent and unsatisfactory’. Harrison also considered Kenneth Finlay’s *Neptune’s Empire* to be ‘Not at all bad in general conception of the tune, but it is all overgrown with formal counterpoint in the piano part and so makes it very academic’. In contrast, Ernest Moeran’s *Cherry Ripe* fared considerably better and was determined to be ‘A fine piece by a fine composer’ which was ‘strongly’ recommended for publication. Sometimes songs were not immediately dismissed or

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191 Notes from a telephone conversation between a Boosey & Hawkes representative and Keith Falkner, 26 April 1929. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/271.
192 The works of all three composers are considered in the same document: Julius Harrison, notes on song submissions, 3 May 1934. London, British Library, MS Mus, 1813/2/1/206.
accepted, but proposals for revisions were made. This was the case with Stoll’s part song, *When thou dost dance*. After reviewing this piece, Julius Harrison concluded that:

> There is promising material in this partsong. But the faults of inexperience make it, at present, unprintable. I would like to meet the composer for half-an-hour sometime to make a few suggestions that would take it into a publishable composition.\(^{196}\)

However, suggestions for musical revisions were not always met with the approval of the composer. Responding to a request for an amendment to a song accompaniment in May 1931, Roger Quilter wrote:

> I am afraid I cannot make a different ending to “I arise from dreams of thee”: it would entirely spoil the shape of the song. If the accompanist cannot play the last part he certainly could not play the middle part of the song. I really do not think it worth while to spoil the song for the sake of just a few people[…]\(^{197}\)

The criteria for these, sometimes severe, value judgements do not appear to be disclosed within the archive. Neither is it fully clear to what extent suggestions for revisions were made in service of elevating the musical quality or increasing saleability. However, what is particularly interesting is the idea that composers might have to abandon their original artistic expression to conform to Boosey & Hawkes’s standards and ideals, whatever they may have been, in order to have any chance of being published.

Poets faced similar fates, with many writers submitting their verse in the hopes of it being set as song. Once again, Leslie Boosey’s tact is evident from the archive. Returning texts to a hopeful poet, Mrs J Banham, in May 1933, he wrote:

> We do not undertake to have lyrics set to music and only under very exceptional circumstances do we purchase lyrics that are not set.\(^{198}\)

Yet in October of the same year he also wrote to a Mrs Bremner:

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\(^{196}\) Julius Harrison, notes on song submissions, undated. London, British Library, MS Mus, 1813/2/1/206.

\(^{197}\) Roger quilter, letter to Leslie Boosey, 6 May 1931. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/278. It seems that Quilter won this battle, with Boosey & Hawkes publishing the song in 1931. However, Valerie Langford notes the ‘enigmatic’ circumstances of the work’s creation. Quilter subsequently orchestrated the song and it was broadcast in a Promenade Concert in this version on 7 May 1933. See Valerie Langfield, *Roger Quilter: His Life and Music* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2002), pp. 169-171.

\(^{198}\) Leslie Boosey, letter to Mrs J. Banham, 3 May 1933. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/205.
I am returning you the poems which Evelyn gave me to look at with the exception of “Underneath the Everlasting Arms” and “Vigil” which I have given to Mr Maurice Bealy, who rather likes them. If he sets them I will let you know. I also showed “The Mirror” to Miss Jean Fordell, who has made a setting of it, but I don’t think we shall publish it. Possibly she may show it to another publisher.199

It is not clear how often publishers proposed possible texts to composers, but the example of Mrs Bremner suggests that it did happen and reaffirms the extent to which publishers shaped the production and artistic direction of songs to best commercial success.

Like composers, poets were also sometimes asked to revise their materials. Writing to Eleanor Farjeon in September 1939 about a setting of her poem The Night Will Pass by Miss Dorothy Parke, Leslie Boosey wondered ‘whether you could see your way to writing us another couple of verses’ on account of the musical setting being ‘so short, it is hardly possible to bring it out as a 2/- song, or even as a unison song’.200 Ms Farjeon did not react positively:

I just wouldn’t! That tiny poem is complete, says all it has to, & would be ruined by elongation…To add to it now would be impossible, & a mistake for myself as a poet. I don’t think Walter de la Mare, for one, would ever forgive me; so you must try to.201

Ever polite, Leslie Boosey issued a hasty apology note, but the exchange provides yet another real-world example of the deeper philosophical and critical tensions underlying word and music genres. The spectre of commercialism is also very much present in this account.

Sometimes composers were introduced to the company through existing associations. This was the case for Gerald Finzi, whose Hardy songs were recommended by the singer Keith Falkner, who performed in the Ballad Concerts. Writing to Leslie Boosey in November 1935, Falkner said:

Yesterday I saw for the first time a set of songs of Hardy’s words (14). To me they are the finest set of songs I’ve seen since Stanford and Parry. I have already put some of them in my performances this winter…I feel you ought to see them if you can’t publish them. I think say a set of 10 should be published together – they are all good.

199 Leslie Boosey, letter to Mrs Bremner, 5 October 1933. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/205.
extremely vocal & quite unlike most songs I’ve come across by contemporary composers.\textsuperscript{202}

Of course, Boosey & Hawkes went on to publish Finzi’s songs, often in sets of ten, and \textit{Earth and Air and Rain}, to be considered as a detailed case study later in this thesis, represents just such an example. But Falkner’s suggestion for publication is intriguing, particularly when he considered that the fourteen songs he came across were ‘all good’ (Faulkner’s emphasis). Why ten? Did ten songs represent the best number of pieces from a vocalist’s perspective? Was he planting the seeds of a suggestion that the composer himself had made or was he thinking, with a business head, about optimising sales and performances? There seems little doubt that freelance composers and singers would have had just as much awareness of the financial workings of the musical world as publishers. Indeed, the Boosey & Hawkes archive contains a substantial amount of correspondence between the company and singers, composers and poets (or their living relatives) protesting their fees and royalties or negotiating or demanding more favourable terms.\textsuperscript{203} But whatever the reason, it is clear that Boosey & Hawkes would have made their decision based on market demands.

The fact that commercial concerns and financial success were at the centre of publishers’ decision making is hardly surprising, but the extent to which ‘the market’ may have influenced and impacted on the presentation of songs intended as groups, collections or cycles is somewhat unexplored and there is certainly a case for further research in this regard. This concept is considered in more detail in relation to Gerald Finzi in chapter four, but some of the items in the Boosey & Hawkes archive suggest that this was a wider issue. Responding to Howard Ferguson in November 1933 regarding the \textit{Three Songs} that he had submitted, Leslie Boosey wrote:

I have now given very careful consideration to your Three Songs, and I am afraid I simply could not undertake the publication of the three together in these very difficult days, as I am sure a book of this kind would not have any sale at all. I think the middle one “I Saw Three Ships” is much the most possible, and if you would be willing to let us do that one separately, I would certainly like to put it in the Winthrop Rogers’ catalogue.\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{202} Keith Falkner, letter to Leslie Boosey, 7 November 1935. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/271.
\textsuperscript{203} For example, see Leslie Boosey, letter to Robert Graves, 3 September 1934. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/273 and Robert Easton, letter to Leslie Boosey, 5 April 1927. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/271.
\textsuperscript{204} Leslie Boosey, letter to Howard Ferguson, 16 November 1933. London, British Library, MS Mus. 1813/2/1/271.
Howard Ferguson, however, would not compromise on the structural integrity of his *Three Songs*, suggesting that to publish the middle one alone ‘would hardly be satisfactory from my point of view’. He added that ‘to break up the set irrevocably when it was conceived essentially as a whole, would I am sure, be a mistake musically. I would sooner none of it were published than that this should happen’.²⁰⁵

Correspondence between Leslie Boosey and Michael Head, dated May 1933, reveals another conflict between composer and publisher regarding groups of songs. Michael Head wrote:

> Would it be possible to bring out my new songs ‘More Songs of the Countryside’ together in a book as well as separately? I think it will be an advantage, as they can all be sung by one voice, either high or low. I also felt, although a minor point, that the special picture cover, and method of printing the titles of the songs together was an asset to the previous cycle.²⁰⁶

Whilst, once again, the composer was anxious to preserve the work’s structural integrity through its unity and appearance in print, Leslie Boosey was more sensitive to commercial considerations:

> I have been into the question of doing “More Songs of the Countryside” as an album as well as separately, and I find it would necessitate a special print, and I am very doubtful as to whether it would not be injurious to the sale of the single songs.²⁰⁷

As before, the preeminent importance of financial return is clear, but in both of these cases commercial priority —in terms of revenue for the publisher— had a direct impact on the musical structure of the works as intended by their composers. It is not unreasonable to assume that there are likely to be other examples where this tension between business and artistry resulted in works intended as song cycles to become fragmented, published disparately or not published at all. It also raises the possibility that composers, well aware of publishers’ uninterest in producing song cycles, did not bother to submit works in their intended form. An awareness of this concept seems essential to any contemplation of the early twentieth-century song cycle repertory and further highlights the need for flexibility,

analytical open-mindedness and bespoke methodological process when considering these works.

### The pedagogy of song and the Royal College of Music

The RCM produced a significant number of the early twentieth-century composers who wrote art-songs. Just as contemporary complexities of publication may have influenced the style and format of songs and cycles, the expansion of specialist music education provision, which developed through the RCM and other institutions, is important to the evolution of English song during this period. David Wright’s detailed history of the RCM describes the development of the institution from its earliest beginnings. Born out of several failed attempts to establish an effective National Training School for Music, the RCM finally opened its doors to students in 1883 with George Grove as Director. Grove had a well-formulated philosophical and educational vision, as Wright notes:

> From the outset, Grove was clear that the RCM should present a full complement of instrumental staff, and that, when it opened, there should be in place a coherent, systematic, curriculum of practical and theoretical instruction based on the principle of a three-year period of study. Scholarships would be awarded on a competitive basis, and the most accomplished scholars would be able to continue their studies at the College until they were mature artistically. Grove also felt that the college should be open to talented paying students prepared and able to complete their course of instruction.

Grove’s ambitious programme continued to develop over ensuing decades under the leadership of his successors, Sir Hubert Parry and Sir Hugh Allen. The RCM archives preserve a range of documents, which highlight some of the impact of this continued educational expansion on professional musical training generally and English song more specifically. My examination of these primary source materials provides much of the information that follows.

As Wright notes, the Examination for Associateship (A.R.C.M.) ‘was one of the new raft of “professionalizing” diplomas that began to change the nature of music instruction in

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209 Wright, p. 8.
Britain’ and was a programme followed by both internal and external students. The syllabus from 1918 lists thirty-seven examiners for the qualification, and although there is no formal reference to which instrument or discipline the examiners were associated with it features familiar names from the world of composition and singing. Amongst them were Sir Hubert Parry (Director between 1895 and 1918), Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (professor from 1883-1924) and Arthur Somervell (professor between 1894 and 1901) as well as the singer Harry Plunkett Greene (professor from 1912-1919), who championed the work of English composers and played an important role in establishing the songs and cycles of Vaughan Williams and others as part of the mainstream concert repertory. By 1920 syllabi had become detailed and specialist enough to record College teaching staff as well as examiners in subject-specific listings. The brochure for that year gives the names of the ten members of staff who taught composition, harmony, counterpoint and analysis at RCM. By 1930 that number had increased to twenty-five, demonstrating the significant and ongoing expansion of the College’s specialist provision over time. A similar augmentation of the training opportunities can be discerned for students of voice. Where ‘singing’ alone was the original educational offering, later syllabi list additional tutors for ‘Dramatic Class’, ‘Elocution’, ‘French’, ‘Italian’ and ‘German, ‘Operatic Class’, ‘Ensemble Class’, ‘Sight Singing Class’ and ‘Choral Class’.

There was also a close link between English song and vocal pedagogy. For example, listed amongst the repertoire for ‘Public Singing’ in 1918 are a substantial number of works by English composers with strong connections to the RCM or the sphere of professional music education. Songs by Charles Wood, Herbert Brewer, Thomas Dunhill, Harold Samuel, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Landon Ronald and Arthur Somervell (all former RCM students), Alexander Mackenzie (principal of the RAM) and Maude Valerie White (a former RAM student), Stanford, Parry and Charles Harford-Lloyd all feature amongst the prescribed works. Over ensuing years English song formed the backbone of the repertoire for the Associateship exam in singing, which continued to feature works by successive generations of composers with close ties to the RCM. The 1924-1925 syllabus, for example, included songs by later RCM students of composition: Granville Bantock, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Frank Bridge, Herbert Howells, Gustav Holst, Leslie Woodgate, Martin Shaw and Cecil Armstrong Gibbs. Some of the earlier composers — Dunhill, Parry and Maude Valerie White

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210 Wright, p. 103.
— still featured amongst the prescribed repertoire alongside contemporary British composers without strong connections to the RCM, such as Roger Quilter, Michael Head and Hamilton Harty. At this particular moment in time, then, English song dominated the A.R.C.M. syllabus and strongly influenced the repertoire aspiring singers encountered, studied and performed. But equally, the A.R.C.M. diplomas may also have provided an outlet for composers of song beyond the concert platform and commercial behest of publishers.\footnote{A.R.C.M. syllabi from 1918 onwards are housed in the \textit{Royal College of Music History} collection at the RCM Library.}

The RCM Patron’s Fund provided another opportunity for composers to produce works for performance. David Wright describes the history and purpose of the fund:

> In 1903 and 1906, the College received two tranches of a significant capital endowment called the ‘Patron’s Fund’, in honour of the College’s Patron, King Edward VII…The Patron’s Fund had a fourfold purpose: to support the reception and performances of deserving works by British Composers, to help launch talented young British Performers, to provide travelling scholarships and special grants to students (primarily to benefit past and present students of the RCM, but available to any British subject, regardless of where educated) and to subsidize the preparation of orchestral parts and the publication of deserving but uncommercial works.\footnote{Wright, pp. 93-4.}

By July 1914, twenty-two concerts — twelve featuring orchestral works and ten featuring chamber music — had been supported by the Patron’s Fund and details of the works performed at those concerts are amongst the archival materials housed at the RCM.\footnote{Table 1 and Table 2 were compiled using information from archival materials relating to the Patron’s Fund, including concert programmes and examiner’s reports from within the \textit{Royal College of Music History} collection at the RCM Library.} Song appears to feature as prolifically as any other genre as table 1 (which lists the catalogue entries for performances of song compositions between 1904 and 1914) demonstrates.
Table 1: Songs performed at the RCM Patron’s Fund concerts 1904-1914

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work as listed</th>
<th>Educational affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balfour Gardiner, Henry</td>
<td>Two songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bath, Hubert</td>
<td>Never-ever</td>
<td>RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyes, Dan</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge, Frank</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carey, Clive</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chignell, Robert</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coates, Eric</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coviello, A.</td>
<td>Three songs from Shelley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davenport, Natalie</td>
<td>Between sleeping and waking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davidson, Malcolm</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunhill, Thomas</td>
<td>Comrades</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farjeon, Harry</td>
<td>Jungle songs</td>
<td>RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrar, Ernest</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrison, Julius</td>
<td>Margery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurlstone, William</td>
<td>Miniature song cycle (Baby songs)</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennings, Mabel</td>
<td>Helen of Kirconnell</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson, John St. A.</td>
<td>Songs of Selma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Molyneux Palmer, G.</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris, Thomas F.</td>
<td>Songs (with wind accompaniment)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicholls, Frederic</td>
<td>Songs of sun and shade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owen, Morfydd</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudall, C.</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed, Harper</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaw, Martin</td>
<td>Death song</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wadeley, F.</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wall, Alfred</td>
<td>A summer song</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Felix</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York Bowen, Edwin</td>
<td>Songs</td>
<td>RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The shepherdess</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Wright notes, the activities of the Patron’s fund were suspended for the duration of World War One, with financial resources channelled into ‘morale-boosting activities, such as the Music in War Time Concert Fund’ instead.\(^{214}\) From 1919 the fund replaced concerts with rehearsal workshops. Again, song featured as prominently as other genres amongst the works that were selected. Table 2 lists songs selected for workshops between 1919 and 1933.

\(^{214}\) Wright, p. 94.
Table 2: Songs selected for Patron’s Fund workshops at the RCM 1919-1933

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work as listed</th>
<th>Educational affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dunhill, Thomas</td>
<td>Songs. The wind among the reeds</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erlebach, Rupert</td>
<td>Two songs</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. The ecstasy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. The beauty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head, Michael</td>
<td>Four songs from Songs of the countryside</td>
<td>RAM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heward, Leslie</td>
<td>Song. The dark chateau</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Two Songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. My flocks feed not</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Trees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howells, Herbert</td>
<td>In green ways. Song group for soprano and orchestra</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacobson, M.</td>
<td>Song. Mamble</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naylor, Bernard</td>
<td>Four poems set for tenor voice, chamber orchestra and harp</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppenheimer, D. R.</td>
<td>Five songs for baritone and orchestra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peterkin, Norman</td>
<td>Songs. The mountainy singer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speight, Joseph</td>
<td>Two songs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Lubin is away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Sister awake</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sullivan, G. H.</td>
<td>Song. Midnight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, Felix</td>
<td>Song. Cyclops</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodgate, Leslie</td>
<td>Three songs</td>
<td>RCM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. The three travellers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. How should I your true-love know?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. The tyrant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wright notes that ‘very few of the new compositions presented [at Patron’s Fund concerts] continue to enjoy any presence today’. Whilst the slightly vague cataloguing of the songs performed at concerts between 1904 and 1914 (table 1) makes it difficult to assess the extent to which this is an accurate claim, the more detailed records of songs performed in workshops from 1919 do seem to confirm this. Amongst the composers listed only Michael Head and Thomas Dunhill are names well-known to those with a special interest in song, but their works might not necessarily be familiar to a broader audience.

Sadly, no meaningful detail about the composition curriculum at RCM during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been preserved. The requirements for the
A.R.C.M. diploma in composition as listed in 1918 are broad and general with no specific references to the length or number of works required and no information about the marking criteria (if indeed, anything so formal existed). The wording in syllabi and prospectuses remains unchanged across the first three decades of the twentieth century:

Candidates will be required —

To submit Compositions of their own different classes and characters, including orchestral and choral works. Such Compositions must be sent in not less than one week before the date of the Examination. Candidates will also be required to work a paper to show proficiency in technique.215

From what little information there is, it does not seem that song was considered an essential or necessary part of any portfolio submission. Indeed, the reference to the inclusion of orchestral and choral works suggests a stronger focus on larger-scale forms and genres, which speaks to Fuller’s assertion of the ‘downgrading of British song as a genre’.216 As no records or copies of student submissions from this period exist, it becomes difficult to propose to what extent song composition featured in the curriculum, if it did at all. Moreover, the nature and content of the ‘curriculum’ itself is something of a mystery. It seems doubtful that standardized assignments were issued to all students of composition, as might now be the case. An account from Vaughan Williams on his lessons with Stanford at the RCM suggests that students presented whatever compositions they had elected to work on to their teachers, stimulating feedback and subsequent exercises and assignments to develop or improve skills that were deemed to be lacking. In today’s educational speak, this system might be described as ‘personalized learning’. Vaughan Williams noted:

Though artistically we were poles apart, I had for him that affection which certain types of man seem to call up. He was intolerant and narrow-minded, and it was this, I think, which made him a good teacher. If a thing was wrong, it was wrong; if it was right it was right, and there was no question about it. It is fatal for a teacher to say, even mentally, to a pupil ‘well perhaps you are right after all’. Stanford was often cruel in his judgements and the more sensitive among his pupils wilted under his methods and found comfort under a more soft-hearted teacher…Stanford’s teaching was constructive. He was not content to criticize what his pupils brought him, but he set them tasks to perform in order to strengthen certain parts of their work. When I was with him at the Royal College he had just been back to school with Rockstro,

215 These requirements, quoted from the A.R.C.M. syllabus of 1904, are identical to the listings in syllabi from the 1930s. The documents are housed in the Royal College of Music History collection at the RCM Library.
216 Fuller, ‘The songs and shorter secular choral works’ (p. 111).
studying all over again what was then known as modal counterpoint. This study had fascinated him, and partly for this reason and partly to counteract a growing tendency to Tchaikovskian lusciousness which he discovered among his pupils, he set them to work writing masses and motets in strict modal counterpoint. I was let off this discipline because Stanford found that I was too far gone in the modes already. Also, he found in my work too much seriousness and even stodginess; so he decided that I must write a waltz. True to my creed I showed him a modal waltz!²¹⁷

Whilst it appears that there was no singular approach to the teaching of composition and that there is no definitive account of the place of song within that programme, such as it was, both Parry and Stanford — the RCM’s compositional forefathers — composed a substantial number of songs and it seems highly unlikely that there would be no crossover or influence of their musical and poetic interests in this genre on the subsequent generations of composers that they educated. Upon surveying the poets chosen for setting by composers closely associated with the RCM, this is precisely what one finds.

The songs of Hubert Parry reveal the composer’s preference for earlier poetry. Elizabethan writers, like Shakespeare and Sir Philip Sidney, seventeenth-century cavalier poets, including Richard Lovelace and Sir John Suckling, and the early nineteenth-century poet and author Sir Walter Scott all feature amongst Parry’s musical settings. He also selected poets from his own generation, including George Meredith and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Charles Villiers Stanford’s poetic choices are perhaps a little more eclectic, with songs setting the words of A.P. Graves, Edmond Holmes, William Allingham, Moira O’Neill and Winifred Letts speaking to the composer’s proud Irish heritage. Other poets and writers represented in Stanford’s song output include Heinrich Heine (setting the original German text), Sir Henry Newbolt, George Eliot, Robert Herrick, Robert Louis Stevenson and Walt Whitman. It is notable that all of these writers were contemporaneous with the composer. Parry and Stanford share a small number of poets in common, one of whom was Mary Coleridge. As the daughter of influential amateur musician Arthur Duke Coleridge, the poet was known personally to both composers, who admired her work and set it in both solo vocal and choral pieces.

The poetic selections made by Stanford and Parry do appear to have influenced the songs written by their students, with common poets, and sometimes texts, percolating down the RCM pedagogical family tree. For example, Vaughan Williams, like his teacher Charles

Villiers Stanford, set the poetry of Walt Whitman and Robert Louis Stevenson, whilst Thomas Dunhill, Cecil Armstrong Gibbs and Sidney Peine Waddington all set the very same Tennyson poem (The Poet’s Song) that Hubert Parry had composed music for years earlier. The poetry of Christina Rossetti, and in particular her Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme, provides an especially pertinent case in point.

In 1916, H.F.W. Deane & Sons published Kookoorookoo and Other Poems, an anthology of twenty-six songs by different composers each setting a poem from Rossetti’s 1893 collection. All of the musical contributors either held or had held teaching posts at the RCM — including Frederick Bridge, Charles Villiers Stanford, Walter Alcock, Thomas Dunhill, Hubert Parry, Percy Buck Walter Parratt, Charles Wood, Charles Harford Lloyd and Henry Walford Davies — or had links to the world of professional musical training and education, like Alexander Mackenzie (Director of the RAM). The musicologist and established composer, Donald Tovey, who was a former private composition student of Parry’s, also contributed a song to the collection. In the years following this 1916 publication, many composers who had studied at the RCM set texts from the same poetic collection including, amongst others, Martin Shaw, Cecil Armstrong Gibbs, Herbert Howells, Henry Ley, Imogen Holst and Emily Daymond, so the idea that tutors may have introduced their students to some of the texts they themselves were working on or had encountered in setting becomes very attractive. It is also notable that John Ireland selected from the same poetic collection for his 1918 song cycle Mother and Child (to be considered in detail later in this thesis). Ireland even chose one of the same poems, ‘I dug and dug amongst the snow’ (which he retitled ‘Hope’), that had been set in the 1916 anthology by Sir Walter Alcock, to whom he was assistant organist at Holy Trinity Church in Chelsea whilst studying at the RCM. Whilst the extent of pedagogical influence on the development of twentieth-century English song can probably never be fully known, it seems possible that the closely-connected network of composers that the RCM trained — many of whom returned as teachers — may have generated something of a musico-literary milieu within which trends for particular poets and poetry in song settings were established.218

218 The bases for the poetic choices that inspire song settings mooted in this chapter present a very small range of possibilities. It seems likely that literary curricula for school and university education, data relating to library stock and borrowing, publishers’ catalogues, records of book sales and histories of the expansion of readerly markets across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would all provide fascinating sites for future research in this regard.
Gerald Finzi, Ralph Vaughan Williams and John Ireland

The three composers selected for extended discussion in this study are Gerald Finzi, Ralph Vaughan Williams and John Ireland. The dominant representation of male composers is an inevitable consequence of the gender balance in song cycle composition. Whilst many women were composing songs around the turn of the century — like Maude Valerie White, Rebecca Clark and Ethel Smyth — very few of them wrote song cycles. This is, of course, equally true of a number of male composers. Peter Warlock, for example, was prolific in the genre of song. But although he composed over one hundred individual songs, he only produced one song cycle — The Curlew (1920-1922) — which in itself is a curious example of the genre given its relatively limited inclusion of the singer. Although Finzi, Vaughan Williams and Ireland are highly familiar figures amongst English twentieth-century composers, the relatively small corpus of scholarship that focuses specifically on their songs remains a continued source of surprise, with passing references and fairly general musical analysis tending to characterize the discussion of songs offered in monographs and biographies dedicated to the three composers. In relation to their song cycles, and more particularly the structure of those works, scholarly discourse is very limited indeed. Yet of the three cycles explored in detail in this thesis — Earth and Air and Rain, On Wenlock Edge and Mother and Child — those by Finzi and Vaughan Williams, at least, are generally well known to performers, audiences and listeners in the UK.

The fact that it has been possible to develop detailed, novel case studies around three, essentially, mainstream works by male, ‘establishment’ composers of the early twentieth century is striking, and speaks compellingly to the underrepresentation of the repertory in critical writing. In selecting works by Finzi, Vaughan Williams and Ireland, I have attempted to address this gap in the literature whilst acknowledging the prolificity and significant contribution each composer made to the repertory of song cycles during this period.

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219 As the author of seven song cycles, Liza Lehmann is a notable exception amongst English women composers of this period. Poldowski’s Trois melodie sur des poésies de Paul Verlaine were published in 1911, but otherwise her song output comprises individual settings. In Europe and the United States, women composers of song cycles during this period include Nadia Boulanger and Amy Beach (though her earliest song cycles date from the 1880s).

220 A brief, non-exhaustive survey of concert listings during 2022 identifies performances of selections from Earth and Air and Rain in London (Wigmore Hall), Leeds (Opera North) and Wiltshire (All Saints Church, Ham). Performances of On Wenlock Edge took place in East Anglia (The Town Hall, Kings Lynn), London (Wigmore Hall), Oxford (Holywell Music Room) and Nottinghamshire (Southwell Minster).
Operating contemporaneously in their London-centric sphere, the three composers knew each other either personally or by compositional reputation. Vaughan Williams forms a particular associative linchpin through his lasting friendships with both Finzi and Ireland. Although Vaughan Williams was some years older, he and John Ireland studied together at the RCM in the late 1890s and were part of group of composers and musicians (including Gustav Holst and Thomas Dunhill) who met regularly. As Ireland recalled:

We were much together, attending regularly Stanford’s bi-weekly orchestral rehearsals with the R.C.M. Orchestra […] Our group were together frequently and discussed music voraciously. We showed each other our compositions with much mutual criticism. We used to frequent a teashop in High Street Kensington, then known as Wilkins’, where we could sit for hours in animated discussions.\(^{221}\)

Later, they also held teaching positions simultaneously at the RCM: Vaughan Williams between 1919 and 1939 and Ireland between 1923 and 1939. They remained sometime correspondents, with their letters revealing how they continued to take an interest in each other’s works and reminisced about their time as students of Stanford.\(^{222}\) In contrast, Gerald Finzi’s musical education was more unorthodox. He studied composition with a series of private teachers including Edward Bairstow and Ernest Farrar, whose death at the front in 1918 had a devastating emotional impact. Finzi also held a conservatoire teaching position between 1930 and 1933, but at the RAM. Finzi had no particular association with the RCM, other than that his teacher, Ernest Farrar, was a student there between 1905 and 1909. He met Vaughan Williams shortly after moving to London in 1926 and the two men, and their families, remained firm friends until Finzi’s untimely death from Hodgkin’s Disease in 1956.\(^{223}\) They too took an interest in each other’s work, offering compositional advice and feedback as well as promoting opportunities for performance and publication. However, the three composers highlighted in this study were not consciously chosen because of these associations. Indeed, only during the course of the research did the closer links become clear. But their revelation speaks to the connectedness of the English music ‘scene’ in the early


\(^{222}\) The Vaughan Williams Foundation offers a database of Vaughan Williams’s letters, which records correspondence between the two composers between 1941 and 1952. See: <https://vaughanwilliamsfoundation.org/discover/letters/>

\(^{223}\) Their correspondence (as preserved in the Vaughan Williams Foundation database of letters) spans the years from 1927-1956, almost the entirety of their acquaintance.
decades of the twentieth century as a personal network underpinned by institutional reach. Of much greater significance in selecting Finzi, Vaughan Williams and Ireland was each composer’s contribution to the repertory of English song cycles.

John Ireland’s output includes no less than fifteen song cycles, which are formed from anything between two and eight songs. Ralph Vaughan Williams numbers twelve cycles amongst his song output with the Two Poems of Seumas O’Sullivan, composed in 1925, representing the smallest in scale and the Ten Blake Songs for Voice and Oboe (1957) the largest. Finzi’s output totals nine cycles all of which are generally more substantial, with the five-song Shakespeare cycle, Let us Garlands Bring (composed between 1929 and 1942), being the smallest in scale. The works of all three composers include cycles that are loosely drawn together or anthologized in structure, alongside works that are more closely integrated — textually and musically — by narrative or theme. Tables 3, 4 and 5 present an overview of each composer’s output in the repertory.
Table 3: Gerald Finzi’s song cycles (Where the poem’s title differs from the song’s, it is presented subsequently in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Composition</th>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1921-1922           | *By Footpath and Stile*    | Thomas Hardy                | 1. Paying calls  
2. Where the picnic was  
3. The oxen  
4. The master and the leaves  
5. Voices from things growing in a churchyard  
6. Exeunt omnes |
| 1. 1920s            | *To A Poet*                | James Elroy Flecker         | 1. To a poet a thousand years hence  
2. On parent knees (On parent knees a naked new-born child)  
3. Intrada (An empty book is like an infant’s soul)  
4. The birthnight  
5. June on Castle Hill  
6. Ode - on the rejection of St. Cecilia (Ode against St. Cecilia’s Day) |
| 2. 1935             |                            | Sir William Jones           |                                                                      |
| 3. 1951             |                            | Thomas Traherne             |                                                                      |
| 4. 1956             |                            | Walter de la Mare           |                                                                      |
| 5. 1940             |                            | F.L. Lucas                  |                                                                      |
| 6. 1948             |                            | George Barker               |                                                                      |
| 1929                | *Oh Fair to See*           | Thomas Hardy                | 1. I say, “I’ll seek her”  
2. Oh fair to see  
3. As I lay in the early sun  
4. Only the wanderer  
5. To Joy  
6. Harvest  
7. Since we loved |
<p>| 2. 1929             |                            | Christina Rossetti          |                                                                      |
| 3. 1921             |                            | Edward Shanks               |                                                                      |
| 4. 1925             |                            | Ivor Gurney                 |                                                                      |
| 5. 1931             |                            | Edmund Blunden              |                                                                      |
| 6. 1956             |                            | Edmund Blunden              |                                                                      |
| 7. 1956             |                            | Robert Bridges              |                                                                      |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>A Young Man’s Exhortation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>PART I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>1. A young man’s exhortation</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>2. Ditty</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>3. Budmouth dears</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>4. Her temple</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>5. The comet at Yell’ham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>PART II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>1933</td>
<td>6. Shortening days (Shortening days at the homestead)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. The sigh</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8. Former beauties</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. Transformations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. The dance continued (Regret not me)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Pre-1936</td>
<td>Earth and Air and Rain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Pre-1935</td>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1929</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1. Summer schemes</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>2. When I set out for Lyonesse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Pre-1936</td>
<td>3. Waiting both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Pre-1936</td>
<td>4. The phantom (The phantom horsewoman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Pre-1936</td>
<td>5. So I have fared (After reading psalms XXXIX, XL etc,)</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>6. Rollicum-rorum (The sergeant’s song)</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>7. To Lizbie Browne (Dear Lizbie Browne)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>8. The clock of the years</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9. In a churchyard (While drawing in a churchyard)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. Proud songsters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td><em>Before and After Summer</em></td>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
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<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td><em>Til Earth Outwears</em></td>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1930s</td>
<td><em>I Said to Love</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1956</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1956</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>1956</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>1956</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Ralph Vaughan Williams’s song cycles (Where the poem’s title differs from the song’s, it is presented subsequently in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Composition</th>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1904</td>
<td><em>Songs of Travel</em></td>
<td>Robert Louis Stevenson</td>
<td>1. The vagabond&lt;br&gt;2. Let beauty awake&lt;br&gt;3. The roadside fire (I will make you brooches)&lt;br&gt;4. Youth and love&lt;br&gt;5. In dreams&lt;br&gt;6. The infinite shining heavens&lt;br&gt;7. Whither must I wander (Home no more home to me)&lt;br&gt;8. Bright is the ring of words&lt;br&gt;9. I have trod the upward and the downward slope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1908-1909</td>
<td><em>On Wenlock Edge</em></td>
<td>A.E. Housman</td>
<td>1. On Wenlock Edge&lt;br&gt;2. From far, from eve and morning&lt;br&gt;3. Is my team ploughing&lt;br&gt;4. Oh, when I was in love with you&lt;br&gt;5. Bredon Hill&lt;br&gt;6. Clun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Composer(s)</td>
<td>1.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td><em>Four Hymns, for tenor, piano and viola obbligato</em></td>
<td>Jeremy Taylor, Isaac Watts, Richard Crashaw, Robert Bridges (from the Greek)</td>
<td><em>Lord, come away</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td><em>Merciless Beauty – Three Rondels, with accompaniment for two violins and cello</em></td>
<td>Chaucer</td>
<td><em>Your eyen two (Captivity)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1922</td>
<td><em>Four poems by Fredegond Shove</em></td>
<td>Fredegond Shove</td>
<td><em>Motion and stillness</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td><em>Two Poems by Seumas O’Sullivan (optional piano)</em></td>
<td>Seumas O’Sullivan</td>
<td><em>The twilight people</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td><em>Three Poems by Walt Whitman</em></td>
<td>Walt Whitman</td>
<td><em>Nocturne (Whispers of heavenly death)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td><em>Three Songs from Shakespeare</em></td>
<td>Shakespeare</td>
<td><em>Orpheus with his lute</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Composer</td>
<td>Content</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1927     | *Along the Field – Eight songs for voice and violin* | A.E. Housman    | 1. We’ll to the woods no more  
2. Along the field  
3. The half-moon westers low  
4. In the morning  
5. The sigh that heaves the grasses  
6. Good-bye (Oh see how thick the goldcup flowers)  
7. Fancy’s knell  
8. With rue my heart is laden |
| Pre 1951 | *Seven Songs from the Pilgrim’s Progress* | The Bible, John Bunyan, Ursula Vaughan Williams | 1. Watchful’s song - Nocturne (Untitled)  
2. The song of the pilgrim (Who would true valour see)  
3. The pilgrim’s psalm (Untitled)  
4. The song of the leaves of life (Untitled)  
5. The song of Vanity Fair  
6. The woodcutter’s song (Song: He that is down need fear no fall)  
7. The bird’s song (Untitled) |
| 1954-1958| *Four Last Songs*            | Ursula Vaughan Williams | 1. Procris  
2. Tired  
3. Hands, eyes and heart  
4. Menelaus |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 5: John Ireland’s song cycles (Where the poem’s title differs from the song’s, it is presented subsequently in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of Composition</th>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1912                | *Songs of a Wayfarer*        | William Blake                                | 1. Memory (Memory, hither come)  
|                     |                              | William Shakespeare                          | 2. When daffodils begin to peer  
|                     |                              | D.G. Rossetti                                | 3. English May  
|                     |                              | Ernest Dowson                                | 4. I was not sorrowful (Spleen)  
|                     |                              | James Vila Blake                              | 5. I will walk on the earth  
| 1913                | *Marigold (Impression for voice and piano)* | D.G. Rossetti                                | 1. Youth’s spring-tribute  
|                     |                              | D.G. Rossetti                                | 2. Penumbra  
|                     |                              | Emest Dowson, after Verlaine                 | 3. Spleen  
| 1916                | *Two Songs*                  | Eric Thirkell Cooper                         | 1. Blind  
|                     |                              |                                              | 2. The cost  
| 1917-1918           | *Two Songs to Poems by Rupert Brooke* | Rupert Brooke                                | 1. The soldier  
|                     |                              |                                              | 2. Blow out, you bugles (The dead)  
| 1918                | *Mother and Child*           | Christina Rossetti                           | 1. Newborn (Your brother has a falcon)  
|                     |                              |                                              | 2. The only child (Crying my little one)  
|                     |                              |                                              | 3. Hope (I dug and dug amongst the snow)  
|                     |                              |                                              | 4. Skylark and nightingale (When a mounting skylark sings)  
|                     |                              |                                              | 5. The blind boy (Blind from my birth)  
|                     |                              |                                              | 6. Baby (Love me – I love you)  
|                     |                              |                                              | 7. Death-parting (Goodbye in fear)  
|                     |                              |                                              | 8. The garland (Roses blushing red and white)  
| 1918-1919           | *Three Songs*                | Arthur Symons                                | The adoration  
|                     |                              |                                              | The rat  
|                     |                              |                                              | Rest  

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Collection</th>
<th>Poet(s)</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td><em>Two Songs</em></td>
<td>Aldous Huxley</td>
<td>The trellis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sir Philip Sidney</td>
<td>My true love hath my heart (Song from Arcadia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920-1921</td>
<td><em>The Land of Lost Content</em></td>
<td>A.E. Housman</td>
<td>1. The Lent Lily</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Ladslove (Look not in my eyes, for fear)</td>
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<td>3. Goal and wicket (Twice a week the winter thorough)</td>
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<td>4. The vain desire (If truth in hearts that perish)</td>
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<td>5. The encounter (The street sounds to the soldiers’ tread)</td>
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<td>6. Epilogue (You smile upon your friend to-day)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td><em>Three Songs to Poems by Thomas Hardy</em></td>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
<td>1. Summer schemes</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Her song</td>
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<td>3. Weathers</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td><em>Five Poems by Thomas Hardy</em></td>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
<td>1. Beckon to me to come (Lover to mistress - Song)</td>
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<td>2. In my sage moments (Come not; Yet come! – Song)</td>
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<td>3. It was what you bore with you, woman (Without, not within her)</td>
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<td>4. The tragedy of that moment (That moment)</td>
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<td>5. Dear, think not that they will forget you (Her temple)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td><em>Three Songs</em></td>
<td>Emily Brontë</td>
<td>1. Love and friendship</td>
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<td>Anon</td>
<td>2. Friendship in misfortune (Give me the depth of love)</td>
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<td>D.G. Rossetti</td>
<td>3. The one hope (Vain longing, the one hope)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td><em>Two Songs</em></td>
<td>Arthur Symons</td>
<td>1. Tryst (In Fountain Court)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>D.G. Rossetti</td>
<td>2. During Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Songs</td>
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<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td><em>We'll to the woods no more</em></td>
<td>A.E. Housman</td>
<td>1. We’ll to the woods no more</td>
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<td>2. In boyhood (When I would muse in boyhood)</td>
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<td>3. PIANO SOLO: Spring will not wait (‘Tis time, I think, by Wenlock town)</td>
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<td>2. All in a green garden</td>
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<td>3. An aside</td>
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<td>4. A report song</td>
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<td>5. The sweet season</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td><em>Songs Sacred and Profane</em></td>
<td>Alice Meynell Sylvia Townsend Warner Alice Meynell W.B. Yeats Sylvia Townsend Warner</td>
<td>1. The Advent (Advent meditation)</td>
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<td>2. Hymn for a child</td>
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<td>3. My fair (The lover urges the better thrift)</td>
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<td>4. The Salley Gardens (Down by the Salley Gardens)</td>
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<td>5. The soldier’s return</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. The scapegoat</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As tables 3, 4 and 5 attest, cycles form an important and substantial element of each composers’ work in the genre of song. Moreover, some of the specific characteristics of each composers’ approach to the composition of song cycles, which have to some extent informed the methodological approaches adopted for this study, begin to emerge through these overviews.

In table 3, which summarizes the song cycle output for Gerald Finzi, the formulation and compilation of song cycles discontinuously and over extended periods of time can be clearly discerned by the ranging and sporadic dates of composition for individual songs. This very much speaks to the composer’s deliberate, meticulous and somewhat painstaking process of sketching, developing and revising his musical ideas. It also supports the notion of Finzi’s faltering confidence in the quality of the music that he produced, with abandoned grand ideas ultimately coming to fruition in new incarnations, contexts and combinations. This is, of course, especially evident in those cycles arranged and published posthumously in 1958 by his executors: Til Earth Outwears, I Said to Love and Oh Fair to See.

The pre-eminence of Hardy’s poetry in Finzi’s song cycles is also abundantly clear from table 3. Of the composer’s nine song cycles, six are formed exclusively from Hardy settings and only two cycles feature no Hardy texts at all. It is notable that each of Finzi’s song cycles includes poems from several poetic volumes, with the Hardy cycles being especially diverse in this regard. The poetry for the ten songs of Before and After Summer (completed in 1949), for example, is drawn from seven different collections of Hardy’s verse. Given Finzi’s encyclopaedic knowledge of Hardy’s poetry this is, to some extent, unsurprising, but it is also likely that the editions of poetry Finzi was working from may have influenced the breadth of the selection. According to the catalogue of the Finzi Book Room Collection (housed in the University of Reading Library) copies of Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy (Ricardi Press Books, 1921) Collected Poems (Macmillan, 1930), Chosen Poems of Thomas Hardy (Macmillan, 1929) and Selected Poems (Macmillan, 1940) could all be found on Finzi’s bookshelf along with some thirty-four newspaper cuttings of Hardy poems. As these editions all compile and anthologize multiple poetic collections, Finzi was

224 Pauline Dingley, The Finzi Book Room at the University of Reading: a catalogue (Reading: University of Reading, 1981). Available online at: <https://collections.reading.ac.uk/special-collections/collections/finzi-book-room>

225 Poetry was widely published in newspapers and periodicals during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, representing another important point of reference in considering the way that composers read and encountered poetry. Linda K. Hughes has written about the subject: ‘Poetry’, in The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 124-137.
not necessarily reading texts from Winter Words, Satires of Circumstance or any other sequence in isolation. The way in which composers encounter poetry provides a fascinating point of entry into the contemplation of song cycle structure and design, and the potential for poetry to be innovatively recontextualized and for unintended connections between poems to be made seems compelling and significant. Yet the extent to which these factors are ultimately influential is, of course, largely unknowable. Nevertheless, in Finzi’s case his extensive legacy of manuscript sketches and personal books, with their various indicative markings and annotations, offer tantalising possibilities for insight and suggestion in this regard.

Table 4, which summarizes Ralph Vaughan Williams’s song cycle output, reveals a very different approach to the genre. Unlike Finzi, Vaughan Williams is not poetically monogamous, for the most part choosing a different writer for each of his cycles. Indeed, A.E. Housman and Ursula Vaughan Williams are the only poets to be represented in more than one song cycle. Yet whilst the composer did not apparently favour any single writer above others, his song cycles almost always tend to be formed from multiple texts by a single poet (the Four Hymns, for tenor, piano and viola obbligato composed in 1914 and Seven Songs from the Pilgrim’s Progress composed before 1951 are two exceptions amongst Vaughan Williams’s twelve cycles). Moreover, where cycles are formed from texts by an individual poet, more often than not they are drawn from a single poetic collection. Only Along the Field – Eight songs for voice and violin (1927) deviates from this pattern, where Vaughan Williams combines poems from two different collections by A.E. Housman: A Shropshire Lad and Last Poems. Yet whilst there is a sense of constancy in the composer’s choice of poet and volume, there seems to be little sense of obligation to preserve the integrity of the poet’s sequence. Indeed, other than Four Last Songs (1954-1958) formed from poems by Ursula Vaughan Williams, in all of the cycles setting texts by a single

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226 The predilection of particular composers for certain poets and the idea of song composers as readers has been a matter of interest for a number of scholars: Natasha Loges, Brahms and His Poets: A Handbook (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020); Susan Youens, Heinrich Heine and the Lied (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) and Schubert’s poets and the making of lieder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
227 Ursula Penton became a student at the Old Vic in 1932. Her first husband, Michael Wood, shared her love of the arts and supported her literary interests. She wrote verse and produced poetry programmes for the BBC. She met her second husband, Ralph Vaughan Williams, in 1938 after sending him an outline for a masque. After being widowed in 1942, Ursula became a regular visitor to Ralph and his wife Adeline. Adeline died in 1951 and Ursula and Ralph married in 1953. Janet Tennant has written a biography: Mistress and Muse: Ursula – The Second Mrs Vaughan Williams (Tonbridge: Albion Music, 2017).
writer Vaughan Williams combines texts from across the poetic sequence(s) to create his own, new ordering in song.

Like Finzi, Vaughan Williams’s bookshelves were also well stocked, and, like Finzi, Vaughan Williams made various notes and markings against texts that interested him. The remnants of the composer’s library are now in private ownership, with the ninety or so books including everything from ‘A Twopenny Guide to Thaxted Church’ to The Apocrypha, according to the Authorised Version. Amongst Vaughan Williams’s poetry books there are editions of collected works for Matthew Arnold, William Barnes, Robert Bridges, Lord Byron, Frederic Maitland, John Skelton, Christina and Dante Rossetti, Percy Bysshe Shelley and Walt Whitman, amongst others. The library also includes a substantial number of poetic anthologies, such as The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1918, Selections from Modern Poets and editions of Georgian Poetry from 1911-12, 1916-17 and 1918-19, and, naturally, there is some replication of individual poets and poems across these volumes. Interestingly the collection does not preserve a single book devoted to the poetry of Housman, and his verse is not particularly well represented within the remaining anthologies that Vaughan Williams owned. As such, the exact nature of the composer’s engagement with the poetry in relation to his two Housman cycles, On Wenlock Edge and Along the Field, remains unclear.228

John Ireland’s output in the genre of song cycle, as summarized in table 5, certainly represents the most extensive and perhaps the most diverse and eclectic repertory of the three composers. In terms of works that set a single writer and works that combine texts by several poets, Ireland’s fifteen cycles are almost evenly divided with eight in the former category and seven in the latter. His cycles also vary more significantly in their scale and scope, with the Two songs of 1928 representing the smallest-scale works and the eight-song Christina Rossetti cycle, Mother and Child, representing the work with the highest volume of individual songs. That said, Marigold (Impression for voice and piano), composed in 1913 and comprising three movements, is probably the most substantial cycle in terms of performance duration. Ireland’s combinations of writers are diverse and unfettered by distinctions of historical period, as in his Two Songs of 1920, for example, which sets poems by Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) and Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586). Whilst the two poets are separated by hundreds of years, the texts that Ireland selects and combines share a romantic,

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228 Grateful thanks to Stephen Connock and the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust for generously sharing the catalogue of Vaughan Williams’s remaining books.
archaic vocabulary and whimsical tone that transcends any potential stylistic inconsistency. So whilst Ireland’s poets and their poetry may vary considerably in style and era, the composer’s combinations seldom operate incongruously within his song cycles. Like Finzi and Vaughan Williams, John Ireland owned a great many books, the remains of which are now in the possession of the John Ireland Trust but inaccessible and uncatalogued at this time.\textsuperscript{229}

Ireland’s practice of retitling poetry when setting it as song is clearly determinable from table 5, but the overview highlights some interesting trends indicating that his custom of retitling was not always approached on the same terms. For example, in *Mother and Child* and *The Land of Lost Content* Ireland gives new titles to the song settings of all but one text. Yet in the *Five Poems by Thomas Hardy*, for which Hardy specifically provides titles for each poem, Ireland abandons the poet’s appellation substituting the first line of each of the poems in their place. On the other hand, in the *Five Sixteenth-Century Poems, Marigold (Impression for voice and piano)* and *Three Songs to Poems by Thomas Hardy*, Ireland makes no changes whatsoever. As the dates of composition for these cycles span the range of Ireland’s song-writing period, retitling does not appear to be a custom that developed or dissipated at particular points in time. Rather, the composer’s titles appear to be closely linked to his innate responses to the poetry, providing another thread to the intriguing web of personal and musical symbolism that characterizes all of his music. As is clear from tables 3 and 4, both Finzi and Vaughan Williams also retitled some songs. However, neither composer did so nearly as often as Ireland and it seems that where Finzi and Vaughan Williams did retitle, they were generally driven by pragmatic, streamlining concerns. For example, Finzi anonymizes Hardy’s ‘The phantom horsewomen’ by reducing the title to ‘The phantom’ in song four of *Earth and Air and Rain*. Similarly, he unspecified the location in Hardy’s ‘Overlooking the river Stour’ by reducing the title to ‘Overlooking the river’ for song four of *Before and After Summer*. In both cases, the effect is to make universal in song what to Hardy’s poetry is fixed and explicit. Vaughan Williams retitles even less often than Finzi and to similar summarising effect. In song six of *Along the Field – Eight songs for voice and violin*, for example, Vaughan Williams abandons Housman’s first line (‘Oh see how thick the goldcup flowers’) and instead encapsulates the textual detail — a knowing

\textsuperscript{229} The composer’s books were put into storage when the former Director of the John Ireland Trust retired, which coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. At this time, it is unknown when and how the books may be available.
maiden’s resistance to a hopeful lad’s seductive efforts — in the poem’s final word: ‘Good-bye’.

Interestingly, when the song cycles of all three of these composers are considered side by side, they share just one writer in common: Shakespeare. But even this connection is limited, with Ireland only choosing Shakespeare’s words for a single song — ‘When daffodils begin to peer’ — in his Songs of a Wayfarer cycle of 1912. Otherwise, Finzi and Ireland both set Hardy and Christina Rossetti (Finzi a single song, Ireland a complete cycle), Vaughan Williams and Ireland both set Housman, Dante Rossetti and William Blake (Ireland for a single song, Vaughan Williams for a complete cycle) and Finzi and Vaughan Williams both set William Blake (as single songs within mixed-poet cycles). This absence of any significant overlap in poetic choices and the distinctively different approaches to cycle structure — in terms of poetic combinations, thematic links and other unifying features — considered alongside the highly idiosyncratic compositional characteristics and values that can be teased out from a review of each composer’s song cycle repertory speaks to the diversity of the genre, even within this short timeframe and amongst contemporary composers — indeed friends and acquaintances — who would have known each other’s works. Furthermore, it makes the argument for derivative analysis — methodologies developed in accordance with the unique characteristics of the work being considered — compelling.

Finzi, Vaughan Williams and Ireland were all knowledgeable literary enthusiasts, they were all prolific composers of song cycles and they all had some songs and cycles published by Boosey and Hawkes and broadcasted by the BBC. Whilst their musical and textual approaches to the genre were clearly very different, these points of commonality all influence the structure of their song cycles, as the ensuing chapter on Finzi’s Earth and Air and Rain begins to explore.
Chapter 4

Gerald Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain*
Connected divergence or thwarted narrative ambition?

**Introduction**

Gerald Finzi’s interest in and affection for literature was profound. The composer felt a special affinity for the work of Thomas Hardy and this is strongly represented in his song output, which features Hardy’s poetry extensively. As a composer Finzi was characteristically insecure, with his perpetual sense of self-doubt leading to some works being withdrawn or abandoned altogether and ambitious compositional plans for other pieces much reduced in their scale and scope. He held specific views about which of his works constituted song cycles, with the characteristics of those pieces he determined to qualify as cycles providing an indication of what that term meant to Finzi. Yet as discussed in the preceding chapter, during the early part of the twentieth century British publishing companies showed relatively little interest in preparing and promoting small groups or collections of songs, let alone extended, integrated cycles, so any artistic aims song composers may have had were not necessarily acknowledged or supported by the commercial interests of the publishing process. All of these individual and contextual issues come to the fore in Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain*. Published in 1936, the work comprises ten Hardy songs that, taken as a whole, do not present a cohesive narrative and have limited musical connections. Yet the complexities of *Earth and Air and Rain*’s genesis — from the perspective of Finzi’s idiosyncratic compositional practices and contemporary publishing trends — justify an analytical method that does not assume the final sequence of ten songs to be an authoritative representation of the composer’s intentions. When *Earth and Air and Rain* is considered diffractively — as the parts of its sum, non-sequentially — a dynamic, dichotomous structure is revealed. The broader ten-song design of the final published work conceals a smaller narrative-cycle, which, when extracted from the external ten-song frame, offers a compelling plot and story supported and narrated by cogent musical connections of tonality, theme and motif.\(^{230}\)

\(^{230}\) The ideas presented in this chapter have been published in an article: Natalie Burton, ‘Structural Pluralism in Gerald Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain*’, *Brief Encounters*, 4 (2020), 1-11.
Finzi and Hardy

The evocative language of Thomas Hardy’s poetry has attracted much attention from musicians. Gooch and Thatcher’s catalogue, compiled in 1976, records some three hundred and five settings, including songs by many prominent, early twentieth-century, English composers such as Arnold Bax, Gustav Holst and Arthur Bliss.231 Charles Pettit’s more recent, two-part study of music inspired by Hardy’s words for The Hardy Review confirms that this interest has not diminished. Indeed the author considers that a ‘…book-length study would be required to do justice’ to the entire musical repertory of Hardy settings, and, as such, is obliged to confine his discussion to works from outside the repertory of song.232

Of all of the song composers to have worked with Hardy’s texts, Gerald Finzi is unquestionably the most prolific. Indeed, of the three hundred and five settings of Hardy’s poetry recorded in Gooch and Thatcher’s catalogue, Finzi’s songs and sketches account for approximately one quarter. The composer’s wide-ranging literary interests and expertise are well documented. He began collecting books as a teenager and by the time of his death had accumulated some three thousand volumes.233 As his biographer, Diana McVeagh, notes:

This was not a ‘musician’s library’, not collected by a composer looking for texts. These books were read for their own sake, by a man of consuming curiosity who loved literature. Much is poetry, but there are also pamphlets, diaries, letters, novels, plays, and translations from European and Classical Literature.234

Given this special knowledge and interest, it is notable that Hardy was the poet Finzi turned to more than any other,235 and Finzi’s attraction, indeed devotion, to Hardy’s poetry has been a matter of interest for McVeagh, who comments:

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231 Bryan Gooch and David Thatcher record that musical settings of Thomas Hardy are surpassed only by Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, James Joyce and A.E. Housman. See Musical Settings of Late Victorian and Modern British Literature: A Catalogue (New York: Garland, 1976).
233 The Finzi Book Room at Reading University Library now houses the Finzi’s library collection along with a further, substantial range of archival material.
Finzi admired Hardy’s dignity, his compassion, what he considered to be his rationalism, and above all his freedom from religious bigotry. In 1938 he singled out from William Rutland’s just published Life of Hardy a quotation to illustrate why, as he said, ‘I have always loved him so much and from earliest days responded, not so much to an influence as to a kinship with him. (I don’t mean kinship with his genius, alas, but with his mental make-up).’ The quotation reads: ‘The first, manifest characteristic of the man who wrote The Dynasts is his detestation of all useless suffering, and his loathing of cruelty. The suffering that fills the world, and the thought that it is unnecessary, are to him a nightmare. This was the long tribulation of Hardy’s life’.  

Ultimately Finzi completed fifty-two Hardy songs. However, annotations in the volumes of poetry that the composer owned and remarks to his correspondents suggest that there were a great many more (‘perhaps another hundred’) of Hardy’s poems that attracted him. As the composer acknowledged in a letter of 1949, ‘I shall go to my grave with most of them unset’.  

The genesis of Earth and Air and Rain

The majority of Finzi’s completed song settings are compiled within six collections that exclusively feature Hardy’s verse, but the classification of these works remains open to question. Aside from By Footpath and Stile, composed between 1921 and 1922, Finzi was unwilling to describe any of his subsequent Hardy collections as song cycles, which suggests that, for him at least, that generic status demanded greater integration of poetry and music. Yet By Footpath and Stile — Finzi’s only official, self-determined cycle — did not meet his own exacting standards and he subsequently withdrew it from the publisher’s catalogue before having all stock and plates destroyed. These two factors — the concept of a song cycle as Finzi understood it and the composer’s reputation as a self-deprecating perfectionist — are crucial elements in exploring how and in what ways his song cycles might be considered and understood.  

Earth and Air and Rain, published in 1936, draws together ten of Finzi’s Hardy songs. The composer did not specifically describe the work as a song cycle, but, nevertheless, assessing the structure of Earth and Air and Rain is both challenging and complex. In their

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236 McVeagh, p. 173.
237 McVeagh, p. 173.
238 A Young Man’s Exhortation, By Footpath and Stile, Before and After Summer, Earth and Air and Rain and Till Earth Outwears and I Said to Love (both compiled by Finzi’s executors).
consideration of the work scholars and critics, echoing the composer’s own reflections on the work’s status, unequivocally emphasize that the piece is not a cycle.\textsuperscript{239} Leaving aside the broader philosophical question of just what does constitute a song cycle, this determination is made on the basis that there is no overarching plot and story operating through Finzi’s selection of poems and that there are no significant, recurrent musical structures or gestures that draw the work together thematically.\textsuperscript{240} That said, the very same critics and scholars have also described the ‘extreme care’\textsuperscript{241} with which the ‘carefully ordered’\textsuperscript{242} sequence of songs is compiled and the greater effectiveness of the songs when performed as part of Finzi’s sequence rather than in individual rendition. Regardless of how one ultimately chooses to classify \textit{Earth and Air and Rain}, the work’s somewhat ambiguous genesis along with a complex publication and performance history combine to present significant difficulty in addressing precisely how to navigate its structure.

Knowing when and in what order Finzi composed the songs would seem, potentially, to offer some insight as to his ultimate artistic intentions for this cycle, yet this too is complicated. Finzi’s uncompromising artistic standards, disposition for hypercritical self-reflection and discontinuous method of composing are all well documented. The composer is known to have worked slowly and meticulously across several works at a time, often beginning compositions but subsequently abandoning them for several years, if not altogether, when unable to sustain the creative impetus. These characteristics, in combination with inconsistent and sometimes incomplete manuscript evidence, mean that there are inherent difficulties in providing precise and conclusive dates for the composition of each of the songs in \textit{Earth and Air and Rain}. Piecing together manuscript evidence with temporal, documentary information from Finzi’s correspondence, Banfield proposes that ‘The phantom’ and ‘In a churchyard’ date from 1932 and that ‘Proud songsters’, ‘Waiting both’ and ‘So I have fared’ had also been composed at this point. The other five songs, therefore, were likely to have been written after 1932 but all completed by October 1935.\textsuperscript{243} However, beyond this it is impossible to be certain of the detail. As such it becomes difficult to propose

\textsuperscript{239} Banfield, \textit{Sensibility and English Song}, p. 290 and Hold, p. 404.
\textsuperscript{240} Brian Richardson addresses the limitations of existing narrative theory in being unable to account for the ‘innovative treatments of emplotment, endings, temporality, and story construction’ in postmodern and experimental poetics, extending and modifying methodologies to encompass broader conceptions of plot and story in \textit{A poetics of plot for the twenty-first century - theorizing unruly narratives} (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2019).
\textsuperscript{241} Banfield, \textit{Sensibility and English Song}, p. 290.
\textsuperscript{242} Hold, p. 405.
\textsuperscript{243} Banfield, \textit{Sensibility and English Song}, p. 206.
how the cycle’s structure might operate based on the work’s compositional development and progression, either musically or poetically.

The publication and performance histories of *Earth and Air and Rain* add further layers of complexity to any assessment of the work’s structure. As discussed in the previous chapter, Finzi’s publishers, Boosey & Hawkes, favoured the publication of single songs as the most commercially viable proposition, since concert programming at the time typically didn’t include ‘more than four or five modern English songs together’.244 These considerations were equally reflected in contemporary broadcasting practices, with the BBC tending to programme in fifteen-minute segments. Writing to fellow composer and close friend William Busch in 1936 about the possibility of a broadcast performance, Finzi wondered whether the BBC ‘wd [sic] let him do 25 minutes of one composer!’245 The somewhat flippant tone of Finzi’s remark suggests he had little expectation that the broadcasters would schedule a full performance of the work, and sure enough the first broadcast performance of *Earth and Air and Rain* in 1937 only included five of the songs, which were not performed entirely in sequence.246 As discussed in chapter three, it seems, therefore, that at that time Finzi and his fellow composers would have experienced significant difficulty in attracting any meaningful interest — from publishers, broadcasters or performers — in an extended, integrated song cycle. Yet it is also true that the composer pressed determinedly for his songs to be published in sets of ten and ultimately succeeded in this.247 On some level, then, Finzi was certainly concerned with the integrity of the work’s structure in publication and performance. However, one must consider to what extent those contemporary contextual conditions shaped, or perhaps limited, the work’s structure.

The structure of *Earth and Air and Rain*

When considered as a whole, the poetry and music of *Earth and Air and Rain* appear to confirm a structure of connected divergence, in the sense that a diverse set of poems and

244 Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 203-204. Vaughan Williams experienced similar difficulties with the publication of *Songs of Travel* — see Fuller, ‘The songs and shorter secular choral works’ (pp. 113-114) — and in complete performance — see Rufus Hallmark, ‘Robert Louis Stevenson, Ralph Vaughan Williams and their *Songs of Travel*’ (p. 135).
245 Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, p. 204.
246 A performance given by Sinclair Logan of songs 1, 2, 3, 7, and 6 was broadcast on 20 February 1937. See Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer*, p. 204.
247 Finzi’s Hardy song collections *A Young Man’s Exhortation, Earth and Air and Rain* and *Before and After Summer* all comprised ten songs.
songs are drawn together by limited points of musical and textual commonality. It is true, for example, that the imagery in the texts of the outer songs prominently features singing birds, and that the title — even though it was adopted at the suggestion of Finzi’s wife, Joy — being drawn from the closing line of the final song certainly forges a gently circular link between the beginning and end. But ultimately, the combination of poetry that makes up Earth and Air and Rain can only really be seen as a wider reflection of the thematic and formal spectrum of Hardy’s output in general terms. There are, for example, poems that contemplate the inexorability of fate, poems that recall Cornwall and Emma (Hardy’s first wife), self-reflexive poems, poems that contemplate missed opportunities and poems that explore the theme of death alongside an example of Hardy’s satirical, Napoleonic verse. The range of poetic structures and voices that the cycle encompasses is no less diverse with first-person accounts, mystical dialogues and interior monologues operating side by side. Indeed, Finzi’s choice of poems is truly representative of Hardy’s breathtaking inventiveness in language and prosody, but the selection considered as a whole emphasizes difference rather than similarity. (See table 6)

248 McVeagh, p. 80.
### Table 6: Earth and Air and Rain poetic structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verse form</th>
<th>Poetic voice/tense</th>
<th>Subject/setting/themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 ‘Summer schemes’</td>
<td>2 stanzas (each 9 lines)</td>
<td>Iambic tetrameter, with line 2 of each stanza formed of three trochaic syllables <strong>Rhyme:</strong> AABABABAA</td>
<td>First person plural</td>
<td>Nature/fate/ potential for lost love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 ‘When I set out for Lyonnesse’</td>
<td>3 stanzas (each 6 lines)</td>
<td>Lines 1, 4, 5: iambic tetrameter; Lines 2, 3, 6: iambic trimeter <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABABB</td>
<td>First person</td>
<td>Cornwall/mystical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 ‘Waiting both’</td>
<td>2 stanzas (each 5 lines)</td>
<td>Lines 1–4: iambic trimeter; Line 5: three trochaic syllables <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABABB</td>
<td>Dialogue (man &amp; star) Present tense</td>
<td>Philosophical reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 ‘The phantom’</td>
<td>4 stanzas (each 9 lines)</td>
<td>Lines 1 &amp; 9: 9–10 syllables; Lines 2–8: 4–5 syllables, combining dactylic and iambic patterns <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABCBCBCAA</td>
<td>First person (describing the experience of another) Tense changes</td>
<td>Emma/death/memory/lost love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 ‘So I have fared’</td>
<td>6 stanzas (each a quatrain)</td>
<td>Trochaic lines alternating 7 &amp; 6 syllables (with some variation) <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABCB CDA</td>
<td>First person/interior monologue Past moving to present</td>
<td>Macaronic/self-reflexive/aging/religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 ‘Rollicum-rorum’</td>
<td>4 stanzas (each 6 lines: 4+2-line refrain)</td>
<td>Lines 1–4: iambic tetrameter; Lines 5–6: 9 &amp; 8 syllables, dactylic and trochaic <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABAB</td>
<td>Third person Present and future</td>
<td>Napoleonic/satirical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 ‘To Lizbie Browne’</td>
<td>9 stanzas (each 6 lines)</td>
<td>Iambic dimeter <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABCBCA</td>
<td>Second person address combined with first person reflections Past and future</td>
<td>Missed opportunity/time passing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 ‘The clock of the years’</td>
<td>5 stanzas (each 6 lines)</td>
<td>Lines 1, 4–6: 4–5 syllables; Lines 2–3: 9–11 syllables, variable rhythm <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABCDDA</td>
<td>Dialogue (man &amp; spirit) Past tense</td>
<td>Death/Memory/time passing/lost love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 ‘In a churchyard’</td>
<td>5 stanzas (each a quatrain)</td>
<td>Lines 1–3: variable; Line 4: 4 syllables, variable rhythm <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABAB</td>
<td>Dialogue (man &amp; yew tree) Past tense</td>
<td>Death/acceptance of loss by the living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 ‘Proud songsters’</td>
<td>2 stanzas (each 6 lines)</td>
<td>Lines 1–3: 8–10 syllables; Line 4: 3 syllables; Line 5: 8 syllables; Line 6: 6 syllables <strong>Rhyme:</strong> ABCDBB</td>
<td>Interior monologue Present tense</td>
<td>Nature/renewal/philosophical reflection/time passing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Integrating musical features are similarly tenuous. Hold identifies one or two recurring motifs within a few of the songs, but their fragmentary nature and aural familiarity within Finzi’s wider musical lexicon does not afford them an especially compelling unifying identity within the work. Perhaps most important of all in the classification of integrated song cycles, at least to musicologists, is the presence of conjunctive tonalities, which is probably why Finzi’s less than cohesive tonal scheme in Earth and Air and Rain is cited as one of the work’s failings. Hold identifies D as an important tonal centre, but also recognizes that there are as many disparate harmonic progressions between songs as there are closely-related ones. Banfield also acknowledges this ‘weakness’ of tonal cohesion, but as a more general feature of Finzi’s compositional style.\(^{249}\)

Macroscopically, then, — considering Earth and Air and Rain in the entirety of its completed, final state — the music and poetry appear to substantiate the work’s structural status as one of connected divergence. Viewed in this way, the cycle reveals a level of organisation that provides significant musical and dramatic contrast. The work takes the listener on a journey that embraces comedy and tragedy, revelry and philosophy, satire and seriousness, life and death, with Finzi’s musical settings closely mirroring the moods, meanings and nuances of the language. The quality and variety of the writing is rightly considered to be one of the work’s great strengths and the careful placement and juxtaposition of songs — which balances tempo, tonality, character and mood — ensures sustained pleasure and interest for performer and listener alike. The fact that there is limited poetic and musical integration, overall, is in no way indicative of inferiority. Indeed, the macroscopic structure supports this aesthetic aim most effectively. However, there may also be reason to consider the cycle’s structure from a diffractive perspective, a methodological approach that considers the songs of Earth and Air and Rain, musically and textually, non-sequentially.

**Approaching Earth and Air and Rain diffractively**

Given the uncertainties of contemporary performance, publication and broadcasting practices, the debatable compositional evolution of Earth and Air and Rain and Finzi’s reticence to classify the work as a cycle, there is an argument to be made for analysing the

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\(^{249}\) Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, p. 291.
work as the parts of its sum. There is also the matter of Finzi’s exacting standards as a composer. To return to By Footpath and Stile, Finzi’s only official, narrative ‘song cycle’, the dissatisfied composer withdrew the work from Curwen’s catalogue in 1934, but he did contemplate the possibility of future revision and expansion of the original, speaking to the idea that in this, and all of his works, there was often an evolving aesthetic aim. Yet this is not the only instance of Finzi’s thwarted narrative ambition in the genre of song. The composer planned another Hardy cycle in 1921, also for voice and strings, which would have been entitled The Mound. The cycle was to include settings of The darkling thrush, The self-unseeing (later used in Before and After Summer), Postponement, The night of the dance, In a wood, The subalterns and My spirit will not haunt the mound. What is particularly striking about the outline of this proposed cycle is the way in which the narrative structure it projects seems to echo Schubert’s Winterreise in setting, theme and experience. In a sense, Finzi’s prospective selection of poetry reconstructs Müller’s ‘Weg nach Innen’, as the ‘wanderer’, represented in a consistent first-person account, journeys through the ‘snow-bound’ landscape — ‘The bleak twigs overhead’ — past a house in which happy memories have turned to despair, all the while contemplating the pangs of unrequited love and communing with nature. Although Vaughan Williams’s cycle of 1904, Songs of Travel, drew, to some extent, on this tradition, few would doubt the monumental ambition of attempting to match Winterreise — a veritable giant in the song cycle canon — and, accordingly, Finzi’s projected cycle never came to be.

It is not unreasonable to propose that this pattern — of grand, large-scale musical ambitions not necessarily coming to fruition — is characteristic of Finzi’s compositional development and output. In relation to transforming Hardy’s poetry into song, Finzi appears to have had almost encyclopaedic intentions, but one can only speculate that the sustained and profuse nature of the composer’s own sense of self-doubt ultimately proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to the production of a narrative Hardy ‘cycle’ with which he could be entirely satisfied. Although Finzi’s grander ambitions in the genre of song cycle were

250 Banfield, Sensibility and English Song, p. 289. In terms of Finzi’s wider compositional output, consider the genesis of the Grand Fantasia, Op.38 (See McVeagh, pp. 58-59 and pp. 219-221), Dies Natalis, Op.8 (see McVeagh, p. 47), the Violin Concerto (see McVeagh, pp. 51-52) and the Oboe Interlude, Op.21 (see McVeagh, p. 77).
253 Banfield, Gerald Finzi: An English Composer, p. 53.
unrealized — whether by the limitations of contemporary performance and publication conditions, his self-doubt, untimely death or a combination of these things — it does not mean that the structure of the extant Hardy collections generally, and *Earth and Air and Rain* specifically, cannot tell us anything about what direction the composer would have taken or what he might have hoped to achieve.

**A diffractive analysis**

An alternative, and undoubtedly unorthodox, diffractive structural analysis of *Earth and Air and Rain* — considering the work in terms of its constituent parts, non-sequentially — begins to offer some attractive alternative levels of organisation. When one classifies the poetry of *Earth and Air and Rain* thematically, texts that explore and emphasize the theme of lost love — songs one, four, eight, nine and ten — account for the majority. Although Finzi’s final order diffracts these poems, when they are considered side-by-side within the broader sequence the beginnings of a compelling, tragic narrative are suggested. In song one, ‘Summer schemes’, the happy lovers contemplate their future hopes, but with a profound sense of fatalistic awareness the speaker repeatedly tempers the optimistic mood. In the next thematically-related song — ‘The phantom’ — the speaker’s worst fears are realized and the rural idyll in which the lovers dreamily contemplate their future is replaced with the menacing gloom of a ‘seaward haze’ as the lone lover in his ‘careworn craze’ seeks his now deceased ‘ghost-girl-rider’. The next thematically-related song, ‘The clock of the years’, has Faustian echoes, or perhaps shades of Orpheus, as the grieving speaker, in his desperation, makes a pact with a mysterious spirit to turn back time and restore his lost lover. Yet this is not to be, and in the next related song, ‘In a churchyard’, the lonesome lover, again in dialogue with a mysterious spiritual voice, finally reaches acceptance and peace. In the closing song, ‘Proud songsters’, the setting and imagery of the opening returns, affirming the cyclical nature of life and the speaker’s acceptance of the unassailable consequence of destiny.

Aside from the attractive, potential story formed from this selection of songs, there are musical features that enhance the proposal of this combination. Firstly, the broader tonal scheme becomes considerably more succinct and analogous. (See table 7)
Table 7: *Earth and Air and Rain* tonal scheme

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>‘Summer schemes’</td>
<td>D major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>‘The phantom’</td>
<td>D minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>‘The clock of the years’</td>
<td>D minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>‘In a churchyard’</td>
<td>D minor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>‘Proud songsters’</td>
<td>B minor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondly, the recurrence and development of motivic material across songs becomes more compelling when distilled within this condensed cycle structure. This is, perhaps, most strongly emphasized through rhythmic and textural, rather than melodic, connections. For example, the galloping, dotted rhythms with noticeably falling patterns that persist throughout ‘The phantom’ become immediate echoes when heard successively in ‘The clock of the years’. (Example 1, example 2a and example 2b)

Example 1 (‘The phantom’)

![Example 1](image)

Example 2a (‘The clock of the years’)

![Example 2a](image)

Example 2b (‘The clock of the years’)

![Example 2b](image)
The rhythmic figure is equally significant to the musical design of the ensuing song, ‘In a churchyard’, stated prominently in the piano introduction and postlude. (Example 3a and example 3b)

**Example 3a** (‘In a churchyard’)

**Example 3b** (‘In a churchyard’)

It also features prominently in the vocal line of the song, used to set the yew’s profound, opening declaration. (Example 4a)

**Example 4a** (‘In a churchyard’)

A Tempo

It is sad that so many of worth,
However, the dotted rhythm is also heard in the vocal melody when the persistent and ponderous compound metre finally desists. (Example 4b)

Example 4b (‘In a churchyard’)

Yet listening retrospectively, one wonders whether these pressing dotted rhythms — in all their forms — were not suggested, albeit subtly, even earlier. Specifically, in the opening song, ‘Summer schemes’. (Example 5)

Example 5 (‘Summer schemes’)

Certainly, set against a flowing quaver accompaniment and rhythmically augmented, the character of the rhythmic figure becomes soothing and understated, but it is present nonetheless. It is also notable that Finzi’s placement of this distinctive rhythm within the vocal setting coincides precisely with the repeated phrase in each of Hardy’s stanzas. Considered in this light and presented twice in immediate succession within a strophic structure, it becomes hard to miss.
However, there is evidence of further motivic relationships within this smaller selection of songs. For example, the second section of ‘The phantom’ opens with the principal melodic material of the final song, ‘Proud songsters’. (Example 6a and example 6b)

Example 6a (‘The phantom’)

Example 6b (‘Proud songsters’)

Similarly, the closing *meno mosso* of ‘In a churchyard’, with its rippling, consistent semiquavers, recalls the flowing texture of song one, ‘Summer schemes’. (Example 7a and example 7b)

Example 7a (‘In a churchyard’)

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Example 7b (‘Summer schemes’)

And the dramatic, opening flourish of ‘The clock of the years’ is prefigured in the only semiquaver passagework of ‘The phantom’, which is heard in the closing strains of the piano postlude. (Example 8a and example 8b)

Example 8a (‘The clock of the years’)

Example 8b (‘The phantom’)

It may be suggested that these musical connections are tenuous, transient, mere reminiscences of Finzi’s musical language at best and no more convincing than the small unifying gestures Hold identifies. Considered within the broad ten-song sequence of *Earth and Air and Rain*, and in musical isolation, these declarations would be true. However, when this smaller group of thematically-linked songs is heard sequentially, the motivic relationships become significantly more aurally compelling. Furthermore, when set against
Hardy’s poetry, and the tragic narrative Finzi appears to construct from it, the motives operate with powerful, dramatic function.

_Earth and Air and Rain’s internal, narrative cycle_

_Song one: ‘Summer schemes’_

In the poetry of the first song, ‘Summer schemes’, Hardy explores the figurative fine line between fulfilment and despair and the seemingly inevitable intervention of fate. As such, the poem essentially adopts binary patterns in elements of its structure and imagery. This even extends to the ambiguous title. Should the word ‘schemes’ be read optimistically as a noun, or conspiratorially as a verb? Given the sniggering sibilance of the phrase, the latter, perhaps, seems more likely. If that is so, then ‘Summer’ — with its typically sanguine associations — assumes a suitably troubling, indeed menacing, allegorical personification. The division of the text into two stanzas broadly supports Hardy’s binary ambitions. Yet whilst there is consistency in the poem’s scansion, rhyme and use of natural imagery throughout, there is a notable change in focus and tone between the two stanzas with the writing increasingly marked by pessimism and doubt as the scene unfolds. Finzi’s quasi-strophic setting closely reflects the nuances of this transition, with musical development and pictorial gestures — particularly in the piano writing — used to highlight the composer’s detailed and thoughtful reading of the text.

The music, like the poem, opens cheerfully with the rippling quavers of the piano accompaniment immediately evoking the rural charm. Like Hardy’s scene, Finzi’s music develops organically from an embryonic, rising five-note figure, which swiftly blooms into a sweeping, imitative counterpoint. Yet, equally, Finzi’s introduction also acknowledges the obstacles to fruition that Hardy alludes to, by way of the clipped chords in the left hand of the accompaniment of bars four and five and the newly descending pattern of the right hand. (Example 9)
Undeterred for now, the flowing quaver figures resume in support of the opening vocal phrase, which first echoes then extends the material of the piano introduction. Harmonically, the music remains rooted in D major for the setting of the first three poetic lines. The first fleeting sense of doubt is suggested in the descending sequence on ‘We’ll go – we too’. Here, the music moves suddenly and unexpectedly through broken chords on F# minor, C# minor, G major and B minor, forming a quasi-distorted circle of fifths. (Example 10)

These harmonic hesitations mirror those indicated poetically through caesuras. Furthermore, the speaker’s increasingly sceptical tone is reflected in the subtle yet continued destabilisation of the harmony, beginning with the double appoggiatura on ‘Before they start
to flood the plain’ and culminating in a sustained oscillation between dominant eleventh chords in the dominant and relative minor keys. The harmony, like the speaker, is uncertain.

The static style of the vocal line at this point gives added emphasis to the rhythmic urgency of the quavers, which ascend ever higher in what becomes an attractive representation of bird song. Ultimately, the activity subsides, as Finzi closely mirrors the reflective mood of Hardy’s closing couplet. The music at this point feels markedly different. Indeed, with the accompaniment essentially reduced to sustained chords and a newly-flexible tempo imposed, the writing bears some of the hallmarks of recitative. As such, Finzi bestows the responsibility of fully characterising the pensive, reticent disposition of the speaker to the singer. However, the harmony tells much the same story with the unprepared dissonance on ‘What may not chance’ serving as a particularly gloomy harbinger, and the subsequent succession of suspensions, appoggiaturas and accented passing notes confirming the futility of hope. Finzi’s voicing of these harmonic procedures in increasingly low tessitura is especially effective in evoking the forlorn mood. (Example 11)

Example 11 (‘Summer schemes’)

![Example 11](image.png)
In the setting of the second stanza Finzi returns to the music of the introduction but anticipates the increasingly subdued tone of the poetry, briefly transposing the motivic material to B minor in bar thirty-seven. That said, the renewed rhythmic impetus momentarily relieves the bleak outlook, and the flowing quavers, earlier used to illustrate the birdsong of Hardy’s ‘little fifers’, now serve to paint the lovers’ contemplation of bearing witness to the ‘waters spring’. (Example 12)

**Example 12** (‘Summer schemes’)

![Example music notation](image)

It is notable that Finzi’s sustained use of the song’s opening thematic material appears to support the poet’s underlying structural aims. Just as Hardy’s use and placement of nature imagery unifies the scene and context of a poem otherwise defined by binary oppositions, so too the sustained rhythmic identity of Finzi’s accompaniment draws together the various vocal phrases, all the while evolving to musically represent specific poetic images. Indeed, the piano writing setting the second stanza incorporates a number of attractive pictorial gestures, such as the playful *staccato* figures on ‘chinks the scrubby copses crown’. However, it must be said that the musical setting seems to highlight Hardy’s crisp consonances as much as anything else and one wonders whether Finzi’s creative impulses are driven by the language itself rather than the imagery it evokes. (Example 13)
Example 13 (‘Summer schemes’)

This feature of his compositional approach to song writing is further suggested in the treatment of ‘where the cascade tumbles down’. Where many composers would exploit this distinctive image to full musical advantage, Finzi, somewhat counterintuitively, writes a brief rising figure. For Finzi, maintaining poetic integrity is of unparalleled importance, and so the vocal line remains uncompromisingly wedded to Hardy’s phrase. Uninterrupted by musical digression, Hardy’s sentence is set exactly as written, allowing the meaning and context of the phrase to be understood just as the poet intended.

As Hardy’s imagery becomes increasingly dark, the sustained and flowing character of Finzi’s accompaniment gradually fractures with disjointed staccato figures supporting the ‘oncreeping’ of the ‘scrubby copses’, the ‘bobbing growths’ and the ‘ferns’ that ‘not quite but almost drown’. (Example 14)

Example 14 (‘Summer schemes’)

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Once again, Finzi closely follows the thoughts and intention of the speaker as, for example, in the setting of ‘And we shall trace’. Finzi captures the determined character of this imperative phrase with emphatic crotchet movement, contrary motion and a dramatic crescendo. Yet the resolute mood is brusquely curtailed as the right-hand phrases descend and diminish rapidly in volume and the disjointed, left-hand quaver figures return. To some extent, the accompaniment assumes its own musical identity, becoming increasingly independent of the voice. (Example 15)

**Example 15** (‘Summer schemes’)

In this sense, the music begins to reflect the poem’s divergence between the will of the speaker and the will of fate and, as such, Finzi’s setting beautifully captures the subtle nuances of Hardy’s characteristic irony.

In preparation for the setting of the poem’s final couplet Finzi renews the quaver movement of the opening, but the harmonies are distinctively coloured by tritonal relationships from bar fifty-eight. Initially the interval is alternated with a major sixth within the rippling oscillations of the right-hand piano part, but ultimately the tritone is presented statically, with the sustained G functioning as a dissonance in an ambiguous triad on F# from bar fifty-nine. The lack of any defining third along with further quaver oscillation between F# and E low in the left hand of the piano writing affirms, once more, the barren outlook, particularly as the music is heard directly after the word ‘drown’. (Example 16)
Example 16 (‘Summer schemes’)

As the song draws to its conclusion the uncertain harmony is never resolved, as a succession of extended appoggiaturas and false relations provide an unhappy musical prophecy of precisely ‘what another moon will bring!’ The piano postlude sustains the doubtful mood, with the embryonic rising motif now receiving a quasi-modal treatment in bars sixty-nine and seventy. The result — a succession of dubious cadential figures — not only offers a final musical acknowledgment of the poem’s binarism, but also provides a musical finale that is aurally inconclusive enough to suggest to the listener that the narrative is to be continued in a subsequent song. (Example 17)

Example 17 (‘Summer schemes’)

Only through such close musical analysis can the extent of Finzi’s comprehensive and consummate approach to realising the detail of Hardy’s text be fully appreciated. The musical writing unswervingly respects the structural integrity of the text and draws out the possibilities of Hardy’s words on every interpretative level. Within the proposed narrative cycle structure, ‘Summer schemes’ is followed by ‘The phantom’, and the doubts and fears
for the future expressed in the first song are realized in the second. The worst has happened, and the lovers are parted.

Song two: ‘The phantom’

‘The phantom’ recounts the mysterious customs of a man — now established as the cycle’s protagonist — who, deep in grief and with ‘careworn craze’, ‘gazes’ at the horizon in search of his ‘ghost-girl-rider’. Through his habitual visits to the coastal scene where she once cantered energetically, he seeks to restore his dead lover to life through memory. Although with his third-person poetic voice the speaker immediately distances himself from the ‘man I know’, the reader gradually infers, through the sustained, intimate revelation, that despite appearances the speaker and subject of the poem are one and the same. This idea is also suggested in the poetic structure. Hardy divides his poem into four, nine-line stanzas, which are closely related in design. Each stanza is characterized by a pattern of seven short lines — always between four and five syllables — enclosed by two substantially longer lines (between nine and eleven syllables).

Queer are the ways of a man I know:
    He comes and stands
    In a careworn craze,
    And looks at the sands
    And the seaward haze
    With moveless hands
    And face and gaze;
    Then turns to go…
    And what does he see when he gazes so?

For the first two stanzas, the longer outer lines make syntactic sense in isolation, a feature also supported by the placement of perfect rhymes:

Queer are the ways of a man I know:
    And what does he see when he gazes so?

They say he sees as an instant thing
    A phantom of his own figuring.
These, literally, exterior lines seem to bear an exterior philosophical function. They become external reflections — descriptions of the way in which the ‘man’ is viewed and perceived by those in the outside world from which he has withdrawn. In the same way the shorter, enclosed poetic lines function as a sequence of profound, personal reflection. In the corresponding portion of the second stanza, the lines become a stream of consciousness. Enhanced by sensory language and with few pronouns, the intimate tone begins to suggest that the speaker knows the ‘man’ very closely indeed.

More clear than to-day,
A sweet soft scene
That once was in play
By that briny green;
Yes, notes alway
Warm, real, and keen,
What his back years bring —

However, it is the osmosis of these reflections during stanzas three and four that finally reveal all. In each case, the outer poetic lines become less distinct syntactically, blurring the boundaries between exterior perception and internal reflection and confirming the status of the poem’s speaker as a deeply traumatized, lonely individual who is desperate for his lover to live again.

Of this vision of his they might say more:
Not only there
Does he see this sight,
But everywhere
In his brain — day, night,
As if on the air
It were drawn rose bright –
Yea, far from that shore
Does he carry this vision of heretofore:

A ghost-girl-rider. And though, toil-tried,
He withers daily,
Time touches her not,
But she still rides gaily
In his rapt thought
On that shagged and shaly
Atlantic spot,
And as when first eyed
Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide.
Another striking structural element of Hardy’s dramatic text is the sustained rhythmic impetus of the prosody. Galloping dactyls, interpolated into an otherwise sustained iambic lilt, unconsciously suggest the ghostly canter of the speaker’s phantom horsewoman. The effect is consummately phantasmal, since the image of the ‘ghost-girl-rider’ is not explicitly revealed until the final stanza. Once again, a close analysis of the music reveals how sensitively Finzi brings all these textual dimensions to light. The composer follows Hardy’s pacing precisely, echoing the poet’s rhythms through the compound time signature and persistent dotted-quaver, semiquaver figures. Banfield identifies this motif with the siciliana rhythms of the Interlude for Oboe, which appears to have been composed at around the same time.\(^{254}\) Whilst this description perfectly captures the rhythmic character of the Interlude, in this song the brisk tempo unseats any gracefulness of dance. In ‘The phantom’ the effect of these pulsing rhythms is far more visceral, as much a representation of the speaker’s racing heart, as he waits eagerly and in anticipation, as anything else.

The mystery and ambiguity of the scene is well matched in the curious musical form that Finzi develops for his setting. Broadly speaking, the song divides into four sections, but in terms of obedience to the stanzaic construction Finzi abandons Hardy’s skeleton fairly early on. Indeed the only distinction between Hardy’s stanzas that is recognized within the musical structure is in the composer’s setting of stanzas one (bars one to forty) and two (bars forty-one to sixty-three). Between all of the other stanzas, Finzi’s musical setting blurs and confuscates the poet’s divisions. This certainly has an energetic, driving effect on the quality of the music in general. However, within the context of the proposed narrative cycle structure, the sustained musical impetus supports the developing characterisation of the central figure as his desperation becomes ever more acute and the depth of his grief ever more profound.

After the reluctant F major tonality of the opening phrase, Finzi quickly establishes D minor as his tonal centre for ‘The phantom’. There is a mood of defiance in the driving rhythms and imitative phrases of the first three bars, but this is quickly questioned in bar four when the rate of harmonic change slows and the first inversion, subdominant chord creates a distorted cadential effect. Just as in ‘Summer schemes’, Finzi’s harmonic undulations come to represent the opposition between the hopes, dreams and will of the speaker and the omnipotence of fate. (Example 18)

\(^{254}\) Banfield, Gerlad Finzi: An English Composer, p. 201.
Example 18 (‘The phantom’)

![Examples of music notation for 'The phantom']

However, the propulsive dotted rhythms and compound metre are by far the most striking musical characteristics of the piano introduction, indicating — well before Hardy’s poetry does — the ‘phantom’ presence of the ‘ghost-girl-rider’. From bar nine, the piano writing introduces the principal melodic material for Finzi’s setting of the first stanza. Somewhat uncharacteristically, the vocal line stands apart from the generally homophonic texture of the accompaniment, but the first entry of the singer is abrupt, mirroring the opening adjective ‘Queer’ and interrupting the conclusion of the piano theme. This gesture adds to the listener’s impression of the speaker’s general sense of urgency but becomes more widely representative of the tortuous emotional journey of a man who is unwilling, or unable, to concede the death of his lover. Although it is often said that Finzi’s song melodies are not terribly memorable, the opening vocal line of ‘The phantom’ is characterized by a more conventional contour, which allows for an uncomplicated, direct and heartfelt expression of the moving scene.

(Example 19)

Example 19 (‘The phantom’)

![Examples of music notation for 'The phantom']

Although Finzi generally avoids banal word painting, there are one or two subtle effects in the musical setting of the opening stanza that emphasize the depth and detail of the
composer’s poetic interpretation. For example, the repetition of the vocal melody on ‘looks at the sands’ in the subsequent piano phrase — which is by no means an uncommon procedure in Finzi’s song writing — serves to highlight the central activity of the poem’s scene as a sustained ritual or liturgy. (Example 20)

**Example 20** (‘The phantom’)

![Example 20](image)

Similarly, the cessation of the relentless cantering rhythms for static chords at ‘moveless hands | And face and gaze,’ affords the music a suitably lingering quality. (Example 21)

**Example 21** (‘The phantom’)

![Example 21](image)

However, the composer gives true drama to the closing part of Hardy’s first stanza through the highly expressive, flexible changes in tempo that he indicates from bar twenty-eight. In combination with the reduction in rhythmic pace, and the increasingly low *tessitura*, the speaker’s reluctance ‘to go’ is realized to heart-wrenching effect through the initial *tenuto* and subsequent *ritenuto*. The music moves the speaker into a mode of dreamy contemplation and reflection, but the sudden modulation from D minor to F# minor highlights the alarming
revelation of his vision. The modulation comes about as part of a repeated, two-bar phrase first heard in bars thirty to thirty-one. In the first instance, the material moves modally between D minor, C major and D minor triads. In bars thirty-two to thirty-three Finzi begins to repeat the phrase, but the figure is transformed as the fifth of the D minor triad becomes the third of the subsequent F# minor tonic chord to jarring effect. (Example 22)

**Example 22** (‘The phantom’)

![Example 22](image)

At this point in the poem, Hardy’s speaker poses the final question of the opening stanza: ‘And what does he see when he gazes so?’ Although the question is, somewhat uncertainly, answered in the second stanza Finzi pre-empts this providing his own determined musical response in bar thirty-eight: a defiant and emphatic F# minor figure. (Example 23)

**Example 23** (‘The phantom’)

![Example 23](image)

However, the full significance of the motif is not revealed until part way through the subsequent song of the proposed cycle, ‘The clock of the years’, where a prominent statement of a very closely-related musical idea is featured. Within the context of ‘The clock of the years’, the figure immediately follows the phrase ‘And it was if | She had never been’, and, as
such, becomes intrinsically linked to the acknowledgement of death. Musically, therefore, in ‘The phantom’ Finzi’s placement of the same motif acknowledges that Hardy’s eponymous spectre is precisely that, an imagining, a memory, an apparition. Yet whilst composer and listener may appreciate the unhappy truth, the cycle’s protagonist is unwilling to relinquish the possibility of his lover’s return, and so the sustained F# minor tonic triad of bar thirty-nine is challenged by a marcato repetition of the opening dotted motif. The presentation of the figure around a G major triad conflicts directly with the established tonality in this transition between the setting of the first and second stanzas, once again emphasising the speaker’s internal struggle. (Example 24)

Example 24 (‘The phantom’)

The musical setting of stanza two from bar forty-one is quite different. Marked by a faster, pressing tempo, a 2/4 metre and a persistent, repeated rhythmic figure, the music is characterized by a new sense of urgency. The text from the second stanza and the new musical material coincide with a change in poetic tone. The opening words of the first phrase — ‘They say’ — add a sense of thoughtful distance, temporarily removing speaker, reader and listener away from the immediate present. Indeed, the internal stream of consciousness almost imperceptibly moves to the past tense, and so the description of the ‘sweet soft scene | That once was in play’ becomes a gratifying, sensory memory. It is notable that the music of the piano accompaniment for these words will become the principal thematic material of the proposed final song, ‘Proud songsters’, in which the memory of happier times is a particular focus. (Example 25)
The music itself is something of a transformation of earlier material. Here, the rhythmic emphasis of the opening melody’s dotted figures is transformed to a persistent syncopated figure in the left hand. Whilst opening arpeggic patterns are replaced by starker tonic-dominant pitches, the sighing appoggiaturas in the right hand from bar forty-one transform the mood to one of wistful yearning. However, the sense of repose is momentary and the tranquillity of the speaker’s reverie is soon broken by the threatening semitone movement of the left-hand ostinato figure that emerges in bar fifty-two. (Example 26)

With some musical re-spelling, both enharmonically and rhythmically, bars fifty-seven to fifty-eight recall material explored earlier in the song in preparation for a return to the musical style of the opening and from bar fifty-nine the galloping compound rhythms and metre return (although the music is now in C minor). This musical transition occurs as the penultimate and final lines of stanza two are declaimed, and so Finzi’s setting closely follows Hardy’s shift from interior reflection to external understanding. In short, the musical shift transports the speaker and listener firmly back to present reality. (Example 27)
Example 27 (‘The phantom’)

The overlapping of musical and poetic structures at this point results in a curious elision — a form of musical enjambment, if you will. However, as Finzi’s song structure overtake Hardy’s the effect is dramatic as the music becomes increasingly urgent in character. The piano interlude between successive stanzas is truncated to just two bars (63\textsuperscript{2}-65\textsuperscript{2}) and features a variation on the threatening left-hand ostinato of the previous section, now stated more prominently in the middle of the texture. The harmony also becomes increasingly chromatic from this point, which, combined with surging dynamic contrasts and a rising vocal tessitura, creates significant dramatic tension. The text here provides a direct insight into the speaker’s mind, but Finzi’s setting transforms what, poetically, is an intangible memory to something far more visceral. Through the music, the speaker — and listener — live and experience ‘this sight’ that ‘is everywhere’, ‘In his brain—day, night, | As if on the air | It were drawn rose bright.’ The affretando marking at bar seventy-three particularly intensifies this thrilling witness to the speaker’s intense, emotional journey. The tension gradually eases as Hardy’s phantom is finally identified as ‘A ghost-girl-rider’ in bar eighty-three. To highlight this important point musically, Finzi returns to the thematic material and tonality of the opening section of the song thus confirming for the listener what, unconsciously, they already knew. (Example 28)
The setting of the remainder of stanza four begins to build, once more, towards an energetic musical climax. The withering, ‘toil-tried’ speaker is represented in a striking, chromatically-descending phrase from bar eighty-eight. In contrast, the phantom — ‘as when first eyed’ — is unaltered by the ravages of time and the music reflects this through its newly-emboldened character. A rising vocal line, increasing dynamics, broadly-voiced chords within an active accompaniment and a *piu animato* marking combine, from bar ninety-five, to illustrate Hardy’s majestic image of the woman who ‘rides gaily’, ‘Draws rein and sings to the swing of the tide’.

Despite the joy and enthusiasm of the singer’s final phrases, the piano postlude undermines any confidence that all is well. Interestingly, this seems to depart from the interpretation one might draw reading Hardy’s poem in isolation, where the final memory — gloriously relived — is not entirely despondent. However, this conclusion would make little sense to the narrative structure that Finzi appears to project for this proposed cycle. After all, without a return to the speaker’s rejection of reality the narrative’s trajectory is swiftly arrested. In this sense, Finzi’s triumphant representation of Hardy’s final image, from a dramaturgical perspective, provides the final, painful impetus for the speaker’s necromantic pact in the subsequent song. In its repetition of motivic material from the introduction and neapolitan colouring in the harmony, the music of the postlude quietly restores the speaker’s conflicted and unhappy character in preparation for the next episode of the narrative. In particular, the imposition of the closing motif over the final chord leaves the song dubiously concluded. Indeed, with the last tonic chord essentially established and sustained from bar one hundred and thirteen, the last pitch sounded is the dominant, A. As such, the music sounds very much as if it will continue. (Example 29)
Example 29 (‘The phantom’)

Song three: ‘The clock of the years’

At this point within the narrative cycle Finzi’s protagonist is unwilling to accept the unhappy reality of grief and loneliness. Like ‘The phantom’, ‘The clock of the years’ is a dramatic and absorbing setting, with the sense of drama heightened and intensified by the listener’s awareness of the song within the smaller, proposed cycle structure. As the third of the five potential songs forming this tragic tale, ‘The clock of the years’ becomes the dramatic nucleus of the narrative cycle. It represents the lover’s emotional breaking point as, unable to bear the solitude of his existence, he explores his only remaining option: a deal with the devil. In his setting of the poem, Finzi adopts a highly original approach to musical form. Indeed, the setting is striking in this regard, not only amongst the other songs of *Earth and Air and Rain* particularly, but amongst Finzi’s song repertory more generally. As such, providing a concise and accurate definition of ‘The clock of the years’ within the conventions and vocabulary of song is challenging to say the least. Banfield uses the term cantata, but in its combination of recitative, aria and arioso textures perhaps the most effective point of reference for the song is to be found within the operatic tradition — specifically, the scena. Finzi’s musical ambition is determinedly theatrical, matching the poetry’s dramatic narrative at every turn.

Whilst — aside from the opening epigraph — the six-line stanza structure is consistent throughout the poem, the stanza form itself is strikingly unconventional. Typically, lines one, four, five and six are composed of four or five syllables, whilst lines two and three are substantially longer (between nine and eleven syllables). However, the rhythmic and
metrical patterns are unfixed which, with sporadic enjambment across poetic lines and stanzas, creates a somewhat awkward and stilted textual flow. This mirrors the sophistication and nuance of the poetic voice, which whilst always the speaker’s, is complex in its fluctuation between recollective, reflective and dialogical modes. Yet this alternation of distant memory with subsequent analysis also creates a complex temporal context that fittingly reflects the principal theme of the poem: turning back time. In spite of the internal complexities of the text, the musical development of the song closely reflects the transitions between the five stanzas of poetry.

Finzi’s song opens with a spoken recitation of Hardy’s epigraph, which, in itself, establishes an unsettled mood. The ensuing recitative section, which sets the whole of the first stanza, musically maintains this sense of uncertainty. Poetically, the opening stanza is amongst the most sustained and extensive in its use of dialogical elements, as the initial details of the pact are agreed between speaker and spirit:

"And the Spirit said.  
“I can make the clock of the years go backward,  
But am loth to stop it where you will.”  
And I cried, “Agreed  
To that. Proceed:  
It’s better than dead!”

Whilst the writing in the vocal line is predominantly low in tessitura throughout this opening section of the song, Finzi outlines the distinctions within the poetic voice through melodic shape. The words of the spirit are presented on a monotone, highlighting the authoritative tone of this other-worldly character. The two textual phrases both conclude with a rising fifth followed by a falling minor sixth. (Example 30)

Example 30 (‘The clock of the years’)

"I can make the clock of the years go back-ward,  
But am loth to stop it where you will“....."
In contrast, the grieving speaker voices his assent to the turning back of time within an altogether more active, emotionally-contoured vocal line. Here too rising fifths play a role within the intervallic structure of the vocal line, but to different effect. Within the setting of the Spirit’s claim to ‘make the clock of the years go backward’, the fifths function as jarring, unsettling deviations to the monotonal repetitions the listener comes to expect. However, when voiced within the speaker’s rather more anguished and angular vocal phrase, the same interval assumes a bold, commanding tone that suitably reflects Hardy’s affirmations and imperatives. (Example 31)

Example 31 (‘The clock of the years’)

The song opens in D minor, with a rapid, dramatic rising scale in octaves. The material is certainly well suited to the chilling scene and the piano’s opening flourish further captures the flavour and spirit of accompaniment gestures associated with recitative. However, of even greater significance is the close motivic and tonal relationship shared between the opening of this song and the closing piano postlude of the previous song within the smaller narrative cycle: ‘The phantom’. (Refer to examples 8a and 8b) The shared D minor tonality and use of related musical gestures within the accompaniment contribute to a smooth and logical transition between what would be successive songs within the reduced cycle structure, creating a compelling musical correspondence with the unfolding, tragic narrative.

The musical articulation of Hardy’s dialogical mode in contrasting vocal phrases is given further clarity of expression through the ponderous, densely-voiced but largely static piano chords that accompany them. Harmonically, the music moves through a series of somewhat disparately-related chords — D minor, Bb minor, A minor, C# minor, G minor, D minor — which are only connected by the binding notes repeated in the monotonal declamations of the opening vocal phrases. In this sense the harmony, like the vocal melody, is equally apt in supporting the unsettling words of the spirit. (Example 32)
As the grieving speaker responds through the final three lines of the stanza, these concise poetic phrases are swiftly and succinctly musically resolved through more familiar, albeit imprecise and unconventional, cadential language. The dotted rhythm of the piano accompaniment at the word ‘Proceed’ provides a further motivic link between ensuing songs, recalling, in general terms, the characteristic dactylic impetus of ‘The phantom’ and, perhaps more specifically, the emphatic, rhythmically augmented variation of the figure heard in bar thirty-eight of that song. Within the context of ‘The phantom’ Finzi’s motif offers a musical answer to the question unanswered in Hardy’s poem, becoming symbolic of the protagonist’s dead lover. It’s meaning in ‘The clock of the years’ is made painfully explicit, heard, as it is, immediately before the final phrase of the first stanza: ‘It’s better than dead!’ (Example 33)
Example 33 (‘The clock of the years’)

For the setting of Hardy’s second stanza the music becomes measured and evolves into a more gentle, arioso texture. The passage begins softly in A minor, with the vocal line once again set low in the tessitura as the spirit’s soothing command, ‘Peace’, is briefly quoted within the speaker’s recollective account. Here, the ghostly lover is raised from the dead, ‘as last before’ the speaker, and the clock of the years gradually retreats. Finzi matches the poem’s temporal regression with sustained musical interest. The piano writing is characterized by increasing grandeur with descending, scalic left-hand chords consecutively voiced across the interval of a compound third, heard in contrary motion with a rising, conjunct melody in the right hand. The introduction of consistent quavers within what is a relatively dense piano texture gives further rhythmic momentum appropriate to the poetic subject. (Example 34)

Example 34 (‘The clock of the years’)

Whilst the piano accompaniment is concerned with the subtle illustration of the passing of time, the vocal line remains the exclusive province of the poem’s speaker. Indeed, the presentation of the intense rollercoaster of emotions—from hope and anticipation to the
joy of resurrection — is central to the singer’s role at this point. Finzi sustains Hardy’s enjambment across lines two, three and four of the second stanza, setting the text in increasingly diminutive note values and with ever-ascending *tessitura* and volume to thrilling, breathless effect. Finally, the poetic climax is reached as the ghostly lover is returned to the year the speaker ‘first had known her woman-grown’. Musically, the moment is given due gravitas in the *allargando* marking and sudden shift to an impressive B major chord. Indeed, the piano writing is positively fanfare-like, shadowing the emphatic, declamatory vocal writing in a sequence of consecutive triads with sustained *marcato* articulation. However, the shifting harmonies, with their modal inflections, signal that the speaker’s present joy is but temporary. (Example 35)

**Example 35** (‘The clock of the years’)

From bar ten of the arioso section further motivic recollection from ‘The phantom’ is introduced in the writing. Here, the piano accompaniment recalls, augments and inverts the oscillating, syncopated semitone figure heard from bar fifty-two of ‘The phantom’. (Example 36a and example 36b)

**Example 36a** (‘The phantom’)

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Interestingly, in both songs the motif is heard in conjunction with the poetic evocation of memory: specifically, the protagonist’s idealized imagining of his dead lover. In ‘The phantom’ the speaker, accompanied by this motif, ‘notes always | Warm, real, and keen, | What his back years bring — | A phantom of his own figuring’. Similarly, in ‘The clock of the years’, the motif is heard immediately after the speaker’s love has been restored to the time he first knew her: “Cease! — | Thus far is good — | It is enough — let her stay thus always!” In other places the motif is developed — either through extension or truncation — to punctuate further references to memory. For example, in accompaniment to the final phrase of the opening recitative passage — ‘It’s better than dead!’ — the falling semitone is truncated to a single statement and starkly harmonized to form consecutive fifths. It is, perhaps, with the ironic omniscience of an external observer, that Finzi develops this memory motif — symbolic of the protagonist’s enduring desperation and hope — to become a final, bleak punctuating cadential figure at this point. (See Example 36b)

In the fourteenth measured bar of the song, where the metre changes to 7/8, the motif is developed again, though this time extended and harmonized to form an inexact, but altogether tormented, descending sequence. (Example 37)
Here, the melodic shape is altered to become a more general falling figure, sometimes a semitone, sometimes not. Though rhythmically consistent, the repeated statements of the idea within the irregular metre have a cumulatively unsettling effect. Yet Finzi’s transformation, or corruption, of the motif closely reflects the dramatic progress of the poetic scene, as at this point the idealized memory is itself distorted: ‘No stop was there; | And she waned child-fair, | And to babyhood’. In further reference to the music of ‘The phantom’, Finzi reverts to the 6/8 metre so characteristic of that song. Yet with the slower tempo and emphasis on fluent, even quaver writing in the piano accompaniment, disappointment and lamentation prevail. Regardless, it is notable that Finzi returns to this compound metre in ‘The clock of the years’ at the point at which, poetically, the protagonist’s hopes have been finally dashed, confirming what the listener already knew: that the phantom lover remains just that and that man cannot outmanoeuvre fate.

As time regresses to the point at which ‘she was nought at all’, so too the falling semitone motif gesture finally fades away. The final statement is heard in the right hand of the piano part immediately before the protagonist confirms ‘it was as if | She had never been’. (Example 38)

**Example 38 (‘The clock of the years’)***

![Example 38](image)

Here again, the musical material of ‘The phantom’ features as the thunderous, B minor chordal statement of the rhythm in bar sixteen of the 6/8 section confounds any of the protagonist’s residual hopes. (Example 39)
Finzi’s careful placement of the motif confirms that, at last, the grieving lover himself is conscious of the unhappy reality indicated, albeit subtly, to the listener in music heard earlier in the song and narrative cycle. After the pause in bar twenty of the 6/8 section, the almost ceaseless, trochaic, crotchet-quaver rhythms that feature in the accompaniment of the compound metre portions of ‘The phantom’ are restored. (Example 40)

Example 40 (‘The clock of the years’)

The text at this point is “‘Better’, I plained, | ‘She were dead as before! The memory of her | had lived in me; but it cannot now!”’. In setting the lines to musical material so closely related to that of the previous song Finzi highlights the protagonist’s new level of understanding within a retrospective context, and this is essential to the cycle’s unfolding narrative. Without firmly establishing the absoluteness of death the narrative cannot move forward to embrace the concepts of acceptance and renewal, which it goes on to do in the final two songs.

Song four: ‘In a churchyard’

The ascendancy of death is resolutely assured in the ‘churchyard’ setting of the subsequent song. Both poetically and musically, ‘In a churchyard’ draws together and echoes
themes of the previous two songs. Once more, the protagonist finds himself engaged in phantasmal discourse, though this time with the mysterious voice of the yew tree. The vocabulary and language of the poetry Finzi sets at this point in the cycle highlights and reflects on the essential components of the narrative: the speaker’s grief for his dead lover — forever memorialized on horseback — and the inexorable progress of time. It is surely no coincidence that the composer chooses to set verse descriptive of how the departed ‘ride their diurnal round’?

“They ride their diurnal round  
Each day-span’s sum of hours  
In peerless ease, without jolt or bound  
Or ache like ours.

Just as for ‘The clock of the years’, Hardy’s verse is irregular in its line lengths and metrical structure, emphasising the conversational style of the poetry. However, here the focus is very much on listening as the predominant poetic account is voiced through the yew. Only in the final stanza does the speaker reflect personally on the ‘strange tale’ that has been offered. With further reference to the progress of time, he finally reaches a reluctant acceptance ‘as the day wore pale’.

Harmonically, the closing A minor chord of ‘The clock of the years’ functions as a dominant, providing a logical, conjunctive transition to the opening D minor tonality of ‘In a churchyard’. As the subject of the latter song is wholly focused on the customs and fortunes of the departed, it is not surprising that Finzi returns to the compound metre and distinctive dotted rhythms that have come to symbolize the speaker’s most cherished memory of his spectral lover: his ‘ghost girl rider’. Whilst the tonality, and characteristic figures of earlier music all prevail, the ponderous slower tempo diminishes the emotional energy of the previous songs, creating an appropriately reflective mood.

Hardy’s somewhat bizarre scene is musically established in the opening seven bars with the principal melodic material positioned to form the lowest part of the texture in the piano accompaniment. Alongside this, disjunct melodic shapes and angular, augmented intervals contribute to the unsettling mood. Broadly-voiced chords, harbouring dissonant harmonies, are anchored by the inverted tonic pedal heard uppermost in the piano accompaniment, which almost appears to sound as a tolling funeral bell. Finzi uses familiar
motive material to musically articulate that the spirit of the ‘ghost girl rider’ lives on even in death, and thus confirms the wisdom and authority of Hardy’s knowing yew. (Example 41)

**Example 41 (‘In a churchyard’)**

```
 Tempo I \( \frac{4}{4} = \frac{5}{3} = 58 \)

Poco ritard. A tempo

\( \text{mp cres.} \)

\( \text{dim.} \)

\( p \)

sad that so many of worth, Still in the flesh,” soughed the yew
```

The rich vocal resonances and colours animated through Finzi’s use of the low baritone *tessitura* give literal voice to the yew’s commanding, if somewhat reproachful, tone:

“*It is sad that so many of worth, Still in the flesh,*” souged the yew,
“*Misjudge their lot whom kindly earth Secludes from view.*”

Reproachful as this may be, it is considerably more charitable than the scolding, closing lines of the previous song:

“*It was your choice To mar the ordained.*”
Yet considered retrospectively, Hardy’s rather cruel, cutting censure at the end of ‘The clock of the years’ is transformed within Finzi’s narrative. Clearly, the speaker is directed by the spirit to consider the consequences of his actions and accept personal responsibility in the most uncompromising terms. Yet through the subsequent voice of the yew, the omniscient spirit world also demonstrates deep compassion. Throughout ‘In a churchyard’, Finzi’s setting gives soft tone to Hardy’s words, which could logically and convincingly have been conveyed with due musical indignance, and it is this contrast in mood — established through Finzi’s organisation of the songs within the cycle structure — that provides the catalyst for the necessary development and progression in the speaker’s emotional journey. The favourable description of the afterlife marks the beginning of the grieving lover’s gradual acceptance of the truth of things. Only through this new understanding and with an honest state of mind can he achieve the state of higher knowledge that will allow him to move forward.

This softening mood is highlighted within the musical structure, as the ominous opening material gradually recedes, giving way to a less melodically distinctive accompaniment. For the setting of Hardy’s second stanza, from bar twelve, Finzi’s music offers a gentle yet continued fluctuation between major and minor tonalities, seemingly echoing the speaker’s shifting emotional consciousness. The song’s initial 6/8 metre is sustained and the rhythm of the accompaniment is once again characterized by constant, trochaic movement, urged onwards by a slight increase in tempo. Although Finzi selects verse that recalls the principal poetic image of the previous song on a dictional level (‘They ride their diurnal rounds’) the familiar canter of the music signals this recollection well before it is made explicit in the singer’s words.

As the restfulness of death is described and the contentment of the departed assured, the poetic voice remains soothing, which Finzi highlights through vocal phrases characterized by sustained lyricism and extended note values. Interestingly, however, the texture at this point is contrapuntal. The repeated right-hand piano pattern has something of the character of a lilting lullaby. Although articulated within legato phrase markings, the figure actually falls across three dotted crotchet beats rather than two (as indicated by the boxed areas in example 42). The rate of harmonic change in the left hand corresponds to the pattern in the right, but here the structure of the phrasing in the accompaniment is at odds with that of the voice. So, although the effects of the musical repetition are soothing overall, the disjuncture between living and dead is still expressed through Finzi’s texture. (Example 42)
In Hardy’s third stanza, the poetic voice becomes ever more persuasive in tone, as the yew now qualifies the descriptive detail of the previous stanza:

‘If the living could but hear
What is heard by my roots as they creep
Round the restful flock, and the things said there,
No one would weep.’

Finzi’s setting of this portion of the poem begins in bar thirty-four where the change of stanza is marked by new musical material. The tempo increases once again, adding a new sense of urgency to the music and highlighting the compelling character of the poetic voice at this point. The effect of this is intensified through the introduction of sustained quaver movement in the right hand of the piano accompaniment. (Example 43)

Whilst Finzi typically avoids overt word painting in his song writing, he does offer a playful response to Hardy’s subterranean imagery of ‘roots’ creeping around ‘the restful flock’ buried below. At this point, the writing for voice and piano is increasingly low in tessitura,
featuring snaking melodic patterns illustrative of creeping roots and chords, timbrally muddied by their close voicing in the lower range, that denote the ‘restful flock’. (Example 44)

Example 44 (‘In a churchyard’)

Having moved from reproach to sympathy, through to gentle then more urgent persuasion, it is Finzi who restores authority to the poetic voice in bar forty-three by returning to a more extended, declamatory texture in his setting of the phrase ‘No one would weep’. The Bb minor conclusion of this phrase is quickly altered to Db major for the text’s fourth stanza, as the contentment of the afterlife is once again declared from bar forty-six. (Example 45)

Example 45 (‘In a churchyard’)

On this occasion Hardy’s yew quotes the departed directly, who ‘truly hope’ that ‘no God trumpet us to rise’. Once again, Finzi’s musical response to the words is illustrative, animating the imagery with a fanfare-style fragment. (Example 46)
Finally, the comforting words begin to bring some sense of peace to the anguished protagonist, and this is marked in the developed restatement of music first heard in the cycle’s opening song, ‘Summer schemes’. (See Example 7b) From the *meno mosso* at bar fifty-five rippling, arpeggiated semiquavers arranged in contrary motion are heard, recalling the principal accompaniment figure of the opening song as, again, Finzi uses motivic recollection and development to articulate his narrative. (Example 47)

In ‘Summer schemes’ the protagonist is apprehensively aware of the fragility of love, life and happiness, and after his tumultuous emotional journey the appeasing words of the yew tree in ‘In a churchyard’ return him to that understanding, though now enlightened by bitter experience.

Finzi’s restatement of musical material is highlighted not only through the gesture of motivic recollection itself, but in the presentation of the music in the key of D major for both songs. Accompanied from bar fifty-five by this music—which within Finzi’s narrative becomes linked to Hardy’s poetic exploration of individual, philosophical reflection — the
The protagonist begins to accept ‘that view of things’. However, in spite of what is said the music indicates that this acceptance ‘of things’ is rather more hesitant and reluctant than the singer would have it. Within the piano postlude, the composer restates melodic material heard in the song’s introduction, and so here, as in other places, the piano part is particularly highlighted as an active voice within the cycle’s complex, polyphonic narrative structure. But the effect of this motivic recollection reaches further still. Within the temporal context of the song itself, day draws on towards twilight invoking all of the connotations of mystery, ambiguity and bewitchment that the hour heralds, and so the listener is reminded of the curious circumstances in which the speaker finds himself and, by extension, returned to the unsettled state in which the song began. (Example 48)

**Example 48** (‘In a churchyard’)

Of course, with any definite conclusion to matters at this stage, the dramatic impetus for the final song of the cycle would be reduced considerably, if not lost altogether. In effect, Finzi maintains suspense and drama within the broader structure of the narrative cycle by way of this deliberate indeterminacy. It is notable that by the end of this fourth song, the music finally evades the dark D minor tonality that has prevailed throughout the dramatic, central portion of the cycle. Rather, ‘In a churchyard’ concludes in B minor, for which the
tonality of the opening passage of the final song of the narrative cycle, ‘Proud songsters’, is matched precisely.

**Song five: ‘Proud songsters’**

In the regenerative spirit often associated with cycle structures, the final song completes the story whilst returning, at least in part, to the mood, setting and philosophical character of the work’s opening. Indeed, Finzi’s conclusion is determinedly metaphysical. ‘Summer schemes’ notwithstanding, all of the preceding songs have a palpable corporeal focus, as Finzi’s protagonist engages in specific activities and is participant in and subject to events that take place. In ‘The phantom’, the listener stands alongside the speaker on the beach as he watches and waits for his ‘ghost girl rider’. ‘The clock of the years’ offers a blow-by-blow account of the activities of the grieving lover in negotiation with the mysterious spirit whilst ‘In a churchyard’ gives literal voice to a conversation that takes place within that setting. However, the concluding song, ‘Proud songsters’, returns to the higher philosophy of the cycle’s opening. There is no great revelation of what has happened to the speaker in literal terms. Rather, Finzi draws on the other essential thematic strand that weaves together his choice of Hardy’s poems, and one is left to suppose that the passing of time has given aid to the healing process. As such, the conclusion of Finzi’s narrative is revealed in the recognition of the protagonist’s emotional progress through acquiescence, renewed understanding and the diminishing grasp of grief.

Finzi’s acute literary perceptiveness and insightful knowledge of Hardy’s poetry is once again highlighted as the composer thoughtfully selects a poem that assimilates, recalls and develops the imagery, setting and diction of the narrative cycle’s opening text. For this final song, the rural idyll and birdsong that open *Earth and Air and Rain* are restored. However, the undefined ‘fifers’ of ‘Summer schemes’ are definitively revealed to be ‘thrushes’, ‘finches’ and ‘nightingales’ who, appropriately, ‘pipe’ in the final song. Unlike the opening song, the activity of singing (within Hardy’s text, at least) remains the exclusive domain of the birds in ‘Proud songsters’. Although the present tense adds an immediacy to the tone, when considered in isolation Hardy’s poem is an eloquent, but almost apathetic miniature touching broadly on issues of nature, time and the cycle of life. Yet its words and meaning become infinitely more profound when considered within the context of Finzi’s grieving central character. Where Hardy is tangential, using nature as a metaphor through
which to explore the trials and tribulations of existence, Finzi is explicit, placing the visceral agonies and ecstasies of human experience at the very centre of his narrative construction to powerful and compelling effect.

Just as in earlier songs, the music itself is central to the process of narration. The first of Hardy’s two stanzas provides a clear description of the scene:

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales
In bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
As if all Time were theirs.

The singer’s statement of the facts presents the essence of that scene, but Finzi’s music, as voiced through the distinctive piano accompaniment, intimates the undercurrent of the protagonist’s ongoing emotional turmoil. It is notable that the introduction to this song is the most extensive passage of solo piano writing within the cycle. Certainly, in pragmatic terms this approach balances the song’s final duration with the brevity of Hardy’s two, short stanzas, but one senses that Finzi’s approach is more profound than this. Rather, the piano becomes an actor within the narrative’s dramatic arena, serving as an emotional conduit for the things that are felt rather than spoken (or sung). Yet the music is already familiar to the listener, as Finzi develops material first stated in bar forty-one of ‘The phantom’. (Example 49)

Example 49 (‘Proud songsters’)

\[ \text{Example 49 (‘Proud songsters’)} \]
Once again, the angular syncopations of the restless accompaniment — jarring and troubling in their constancy — are heard in conjunction with sighing appoggiaturas and uncomfortable dissonances to convey the pangs of sadness and the bitter grief that are still very much present and can, perhaps, never fully be escaped. In bar forty-one of ‘The phantom’ (song two), these musical ideas set the portion of the poem in which the protagonist wistfully reflects on happier times, and the restatement of this material in the opening piano writing of the final song fulfils the same dramatic function by musically calling to mind those ideas.

Interestingly, the composer’s unambiguous restatement of thematic material first heard in ‘The phantom’ is juxtaposed, more abstractly, with the repetition of compositional techniques that are used in the preceding song (number four), ‘In a churchyard’. From bar five of the piano’s introduction in ‘Proud songsters’, the relentless rhythmic repetitions suddenly give way to a series of crotchet chords. Strikingly, the quadruple metre is displaced by phrases, first stated in the right hand then echoed in the left, structured over three crotchet beats. (Example 50)

**Example 50** (‘Proud songsters’)

![Example 50](image)

This is reminiscent of the effect Finzi creates from bar thirteen of song four, ‘In a churchyard’, not only in terms of the trinitarian metrical organisation of phrasing but in the harmonic anchoring of the musical idea around B minor triads. (See example 42) Just as for the former song the sustained pitch repetitions haunt the musical texture as a tolling funeral bell, whilst the metrical imbalance of Finzi’s writing captures the disjuncture between the living and the dead, and it is in these ways — through these techniques of motivic and gestural recollection — that the music of the accompaniment cuts to the very core of the protagonist’s emotional preoccupation before any words have been sung.

When Finzi finally calls upon the singer from bar thirteen, the vocal melody is direct, uncomplicated and very much centred around D major (in terms of the hierarchy of pitches
that unfolds through the shape and contour of the melody). Yet the rhythmic impetus of the vocal line is restless — the dotted rhythms synchronising with the driving syncopations of the piano accompaniment — and the listener becomes increasingly cognisant of the status quo foreshadowed in the piano introduction. Namely, that the protagonist’s stoic reflections are not easily reconciled in practice. (Example 51)

Example 51 (‘Proud songsters’)

Once again, through the music Finzi implies a disparity between what the protagonist says and how he feels. As the setting of the first stanza concludes, it is once again the piano that shapes the listener’s emotional understanding as the accompaniment builds to a stirring climax. The music is characterized by its repetition of emphatic syncopated rhythms, newly intensified by their alternation with pressing groups of three semiquavers. In turn, these figures are presented in the context of ever-broadening range, a sustained crescendo and increasingly prominent dissonances within the harmonic language. The musical response is dramatic to say the least, but it is notable that this intense passage of musical agitation evolves in response to Hardy’s somewhat throwaway line: ‘As if all time were theirs’. (Example 52)
Here again it is the accompaniment that gives distinct emotional resonance to the words. After the stirring climax is finally reached in bar twenty-three, the piano writing gradually regains its sense of composure, receding in *tessitura*, dynamic range and rhythmic freneticism in much the same way as the song’s introduction does. However, rather than supporting an emergent strophic structure, as the listener might reasonably expect, the passage of piano writing functions as a transition to Finzi’s more unexpected setting of Hardy’s closing stanza. The contrast in the musical style and setting of the two stanzas is quite pronounced, and as such Finzi proposes a dichotomy within the poem that is not necessarily identifiable from the text alone. From bar twenty-eight the mood changes significantly to become altogether more soothing, realized through the *A Tempo, ma piu calma* marking, augmented rhythms and more consistent D major tonality. (Example 53)
This conscious musical shift, again, gives distinct, nuanced meaning to the words. In the most reductive terms, Hardy’s phrases, whilst of course highlighting the theme of renewal, speak of evolutionary detail:

These are brand-new birds of twelve-months’ growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales,
Nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
And earth, and air, and rain.

Yet in the context of Finzi’s narrative, and with all that the newly calm musical setting implies, the words emphasize a great deal more than mere biological fact. In song, the passage becomes a declaration of conscious resolution. The repetition of the final, conjunct vocal phrase over a quasi-cadential figure (bars thirty-three to thirty-four) appears to finally confirm that the protagonist has conceded to the will of fate, yet, the brief piano postlude — which immediately restores the key of B minor and reintroduces the syncopated figure that has predominated throughout the rest of the song — equally acknowledges the reluctant nature of this acceptance. The struggle between man and destiny remains, it would seem, uncomfortable and ultimately unresolved. Yet the structure of the song as a whole encapsulates this tension between resistance and acceptance, and the final sense of discomfort with which we are left restores us to where we began. It is notable, therefore, that the closing cadential statement of the song’s prolific syncopated figure in ‘Proud songsters’ is closely related to bars fifty-seven and fifty-eight of ‘The phantom’, at which point the final words of
the phrase ‘Yes, notes alway | Warm, real, and keen | What his back years bring’ are set. (Example 54 and example 55)

**Example 54** (‘The phantom’)

![Example 54](image)

**Example 55** (‘Proud songsters’)

![Example 55](image)

Finzi’s recollective musical treatment of a poetic phrase so apposite to the notion of connecting the present with the past is striking indeed and gives a final note of authority to the composer’s integrated use of motif in developing and supporting a cyclical structure.

The return to the setting and sentiment of the work’s opening signals the end of this difficult tale as understood on a local level, with reference to the cycle’s grieving protagonist. However, there is a strong sense that Finzi’s narrative shares, or perhaps faithfully represents, the inherent, characteristic qualities of Hardy’s writing in exploring and expressing the universal, intangible and philosophical challenges that face mankind through the lens of an individual human experience within an apparently modest frame of reference. Just as the often plain, laconic and provincial exterior of Hardy’s language belies a complex nexus of situation, idea and meaning, so too Finzi’s combination and musical treatment of Hardy’s
poetry within this compact cycle structure engenders manifold strata of nuance, intricately manifested through the polyphonic expression of that narrative in word, music, song and performance.

Conclusion

Given Finzi’s life-long admiration of Hardy’s writing it is, perhaps, of little surprise that *Earth and Air and Rain*, when considered as a condensed, narrative cycle structure, highlights the poet’s most prominent thematic preoccupations: the passing of time, the imposition of fate, the natural world and the power of memory in shaping and defining experience. Are these concepts inescapable when working with Hardy’s verse? What is certain is that Finzi’s esteem for Hardy might more be more adequately described in terms of idolisation, and as such his investment in these texts and the close regard paid to them as a composer (which can really only be fully appreciated through intense, close analysis) should not be underestimated. Vaughan Williams noted that ‘…the sacred spring from which he [Finzi] drank welled up from English poetry, and especially that of Bridges and Hardy. Indeed, in his settings of these two poets he found the exact musical counterpart of the rhythm, the language and the thought of their poetry’. 256

*Earth and Air and Rain* poses some fascinating possibilities in terms of the dynamic potential of its structure as a song cycle. Since it was first composed, performers have successfully and meaningfully rendered the songs of *Earth and Air and Rain* individually, in the published ten-song sequence and in alternative combinations and there is no reason why that should not continue to be. The macroscopic structure of the cycle admirably supports that purpose and, when approached as a work of connected divergence, *Earth and Air and Rain* offers performers great potential for flexibility and an opportunity to reveal new meaning and insight in their presentation and combination of Finzi’s magnificent settings of Hardy’s poetry. However, the commercial and artistic limitations that British composers of the early twentieth century faced — in terms of opportunities for the performance, broadcast and publication of their works — may have had far more profound artistic consequences than previously imagined, particularly in the genre of song cycle and particularly in relation to the structure of those cycles. Rufus Hallmark has already reconsidered Vaughan Williams’s

256 Manning, p. 323.
Songs of Travel in light of its complex publication history and contemporary attitudes to Stevenson’s poetry, and it seems almost certain that other works warrant further examination in this regard.257

For Finzi these circumstances, coupled with his intense sense of self-doubt, combine to create a unique set of conditions and when one considers the structure of Earth and Air and Rain diffractively — non sequentially — the musical and poetic evidence for the foetal form of a rejected narrative cycle concealed by its reordering within the broader, ten-song structure becomes increasingly convincing. Reading the structure of the ten-song sequence diffractively, a cogent, tragic narrative — itself cyclical in its emotional journey from happiness to grief to despair to acceptance — unfolds, consolidated by the connective presence of referential literary elements, such as imagery and diction, within and across the selection of poetry. Considered diffractively, the apparently disparate tonal scheme becomes concise and analogous in the emergent five-song, narrative cycle. Integrating musical ideas, whilst clearly present in the ten-song sequence, assume newly intense levels of relevance, providing clear and compelling aural connections between successive songs of the diffracted, narrative cycle. Yet the effects of this go far beyond that of mere musical cohesion. Indeed, the careful, deliberate placement and restatement of musical materials, the development and deployment of specific compositional techniques and gestures at given moments and the associative use of tonality give rise to a highly integrated work. This compositional approach unquestionably highlights and complements the narrative structure, but most significantly it allows the music itself to operate with distinctive dramatic function within the cycle.

Perhaps even more striking than this is the emergent confidence and command of Finzi’s authorial voice through these procedures, particularly in view of his own modesties. His insightful selection, combination and interpretation of the poetry and direct musical setting unconditionally preserves the structure, nuance and integrity of Hardy’s verse. Yet in the subtle interplay of innovative musical form, sophisticated motivic development and with the piano afforded a storytelling role equal to the singer, Finzi presents and reveals a complex and powerful musical narrative that is all his own. Recognition of the potential, five-song narrative cycle provides musicians with yet another way of approaching the presentation of Earth and Air and Rain, with this powerful and dramatic, five-song narrative cycle unquestionably able to stand alone in performance.

257 Hallmark, ‘Robert Louis Stevenson, Ralph Vaughan Williams and their Songs of Travel’ (pp. 129-156).
Chapter Five

Not all cycles are circles
Paired micro-narratives in Vaughan Williams's On Wenlock Edge

Introduction

Alfred Edward Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad* is a poetic collection with an appeal that appears to have endured. Never having been out of print in the one hundred and twenty or so years since its publication, the work was ‘in every pocket’ by the outbreak of the First World War,\(^{258}\) was ‘immensely popular with the common reader’\(^ {259}\) and has been hailed amongst important literary figures, including Oscar Wilde and Thomas Hardy, across the decades.\(^ {260}\)

The poems forming *A Shropshire Lad* were composed during 1895, one year before their publication with the firm of Kegan Paul at Housman’s own expense.\(^ {261}\) The collection — some sixty-three texts — is richly varied yet also highly unified. Ballad forms are predominant but not exclusive and there is no singular theme, voice, perspective or point of view. Against the sometimes-abstract, sometimes-accurate Shropshire setting,\(^ {262}\) the plights of soldiers, wanderers, farmers and lovers — dead, grieving and rejected — are all explored. Interspersed with generalized reflections on the lives of these anonymous lads and lasses are the trials and tribulations of specific characters. There is Maurice — murdered by his brother — and the morbid poet Terence, to whom the murderer bids his final farewell. Then there is the tragic love triangle that develops after Fred’s untimely death, his living friend now walking out with Rose Harland in his place. Yet despite the range of speakers, subjects and poetic structures, the poetry’s regular undulations of rhythm and rhyme, characteristic diction and bleak, underlying irony engender a cumulative familiarity. The collection is, of course, drawn together by Housman’s unmistakable lyrical voice, but also by a pervasive romantic


\(^{261}\) Graves, p. 111.

\(^{262}\) The poetry of *A Shropshire Lad* often refers to specific landmarks and locations, but these are sometimes represented with poetic licence, as for example poem LXI (‘Hughley Steeple’), which is not at all prominent. In a letter to Laurence Housman, the poet recognised this but ‘had already composed the poem and could not invent another name that sounded so nice.’ See: *The Letters of A.E. Housman Volume I*, ed. by Archie Burnett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 90.
melancholy, nostalgic affection for rural Shropshire and inexorable impulse towards the amelioration of life in death.

Like many composers, Vaughan Williams was attracted to Housman’s poetry, setting a total of fourteen of his texts as songs. These works are collated amongst two song cycles: the eight-song cycle of 1927, Along the field, and the six-song cycle of 1908, On Wenlock Edge. For Along the field, Vaughan Williams selected four poems from A Shropshire Lad and four from the collection Housman published in 1922: Last Poems. However, in On Wenlock Edge the composer sets verse drawn exclusively from A Shropshire Lad to form a song cycle with an unusual, non-linear (in narrative terms) and non-circular structure. Different levels of thematic organisation may be determined within Housman’s poetic sequence for A Shropshire Lad, including a number of consecutive, poetic pairings. Vaughan Williams’s cycle recognizes this pattern in the composer’s choice of texts for the opening two songs, and when the remaining songs of On Wenlock Edge are considered in the same light a structure of three, discrete, paired micro-narratives is revealed.

Shropshire lads in English song

The poetry of A Shropshire Lad seems to have been an almost unending source of musical inspiration throughout the twentieth century, with many notable songs and cycles being produced by celebrated composers such as Vaughan Williams, Butterworth and Ireland to name but a few. However, they were by no means the only musicians inspired by Housman’s poetry. Indeed, amongst proponents of the so-called English Musical Renaissance — that group of British composers credited with leading England back ‘to musical greatness’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries — A Shropshire Lad appears to have held a special appeal. Within the intimate, pedagogical network of this compositional movement — closely linked to the RCM — the musical allurements of Housman’s poetry were evidently en vogue, with some one hundred and seventy six song settings being produced by composers (including Charles Orr, Ivor Gurney, Arthur Somervell, Arthur Bliss

and countless others) between 1904 and 1940.265 Ironically, despite the significant appeal of Housman’s poetry to this group of composers, the songs his words inspired did not appeal greatly to Housman, and his less than favourable reactions to those musical settings he heard and brusque correspondence with a number of composers are well documented. Banfield recounts Herbert Howells’s experience in this regard:

Howells related that on one occasion, dining at Trinity College, Cambridge, he was seated next to Housman. At this date he had made about a dozen unpublished Housman settings. On learning that Howells was a composer, the poet expressed the hope that he was not going to set any of his verses to music, and proceeded to execrate the settings of Butterworth and Vaughan Williams. Just before Howells was released for the dessert, Housman said, quite without provocation, ‘Young man, do you believe in suicide?’ Thankful that he had not published his settings, Howells went home and burnt them.266

Nonetheless, Housman’s poetry, generally, and A Shropshire Lad in particular, has attracted and continues to receive much creative musical attention, as table 14 (Appendix) outlines.

When the reasons as to why such an abundance of song settings have emerged from this poetic repertory are considered, a number of suggestions have been offered. Banfield proposes that the musical qualities of the verse are ‘universally recognised’,267 but other scholars have defined them more specifically. Edwin Evans, for example, identifies the poetry’s ‘rhythmic lilt’ and the ‘phonetic quality of the language’,268 whilst William White highlights the use of ‘musical terminology’, including specific textual references to ‘bells’, ‘drummers’, ‘piping’ and so on.269 Strikingly, these features do not appear to be the primary motivation for the poetic choices made by Vaughan Williams. Of the six poems set in On Wenlock Edge, only ‘Bredon Hill’ — with its recurrent ‘bells’ — and ‘Is my team ploughing’ — with its one reference to the ‘jingle’ of the ‘harness’ — hold any claim to such explicitly musical references. Similarly, the composer’s selection of poetry embraces a variety of textual structures, rhythmic design and patterns of rhyme. Indeed, to a greater extent Vaughan Williams’s choice of poetry appears to be as much dependent on the mood, imagery, tone and poetic voice contributed by each of the texts as to any of the typical reasons cited.

265 Gooch and Thatcher, pp. 365-397.
266 Banfield, Sensibility and English Song, p. 239.
267 Banfield, Sensibility and English Song, p. 239.
On Wenlock Edge history and criticism

*On Wenlock Edge* was composed between 1908 and 1909 after a period of study with Ravel, and French influences are often identified in the textures, colours and vocabulary of Vaughan Williams’s musical language in this cycle. The composer famously dismissed these claims, later recalling that he returned home:

…with a bad attack of French fever and wrote a string quartet which caused a friend to say that I must have been having tea with Debussy, and a song cycle with several atmospheric effects, but I did not succumb to the temptation of writing a piece about a cemetery, and Ravel paid me the compliment of telling me that I was the only pupil who ‘n’écrit pas de ma musique’. 270

These remarks notwithstanding, there is no doubt that the music is profoundly evocative and it does seem likely that the innovative effects of timbre, texture and instrumentation that Vaughan Williams teases out of the chamber ensemble of voice and piano quintet —hitherto unheard in English song271— may have been inspired by his tuition and precedents in the work of French composers, including Chausson, Fauré and Debussy. 272

The striking originality of *On Wenlock Edge’s* sound-world, perhaps unsurprisingly, attracted both censure and praise amongst contemporary critics. On the one hand *On Wenlock Edge* was hailed as ‘one of the outstanding works in modern British music’ by Evans in 1920, 273 yet on the other hand Ernest Newman, commenting in 1918, condemned Vaughan Williams for reducing Housman’s poetry to ‘mere pictorial melodrama’. 274 The, apparently, disproportionate scale and length of the six settings has also been a matter of some consternation. In very approximate terms, the six songs of the cycle form a successive, alternating pattern of long and short (a measure of the song durations rather than the poems set). Amongst other less favourable reviews, this aspect of the work’s structure has been recognized as an ‘unusual feature’ and it seems, in part, to be this apparent imbalance of

271 Henry Walford-Davies’s *Prospice* of 1894 uses string quartet only.
272 Fauré wrote *La Bonne Chanson*, a cycle of nine mélodies for voice and piano, between 1892 and 1894, subsequently creating a version for voice and piano quintet in 1898. Debussy also reworked his 1897 *Chansons de Bilitis*, songs for voice and piano, into incidental music for reciter, two flutes, two harps and celesta in 1900. The version of Chausson’s *Chanson perpétuelle* for voice, piano and string quartet was completed in 1899.
songs that has contributed to complaints of the ‘over-dramatic treatment of Housman’s verses in the first, third and fifth songs’. Indeed, the ‘abnormally long’ setting of ‘Bredon Hill’ has been declared to be more akin to the ‘canticle-type text settings of later composers’.

Given the cycle’s enduring popularity amongst audiences and performers, it is notable that On Wenlock Edge has received relatively little critical attention. In relation to specific issues of the work’s structure, almost nothing substantive has been offered and whilst the piece is most often described as a cycle, assertions as to the sense in which the work hangs together are usually vague. Where commentary does exist it is typically cursory and synoptic, tending towards descriptive analysis of the songs in sequence. Writing in 2012, Jonathan Dove offers this analysis:

The opening song, On Wenlock Edge, sets the pastoral scene, but this is not a calm contemplative landscape…The cycle soon takes a more personal turn with the second song, From Far, From Eve and Morning, as Vaughan Williams adopts a simpler style for the turn towards inward emotions. But simplicity is cast aside for deceit in the third song, Is my team ploughing?, a morbid conversation between the living and the dead. At barely half a minute long, Oh, When I Was In Love With You functions as a brief, nostalgic interlude to the fifth song, Bredon Hill – a chance for Vaughan Williams to revel in a rich symphonic landscape as the accompanying instruments imitate the tolling Bells of Bredon village. Finally, the cycle comes to a quiet, resigned close with Clun.

Percy Young’s commentary of 1953 adopts a similar approach, though including a little more musical detail, such as reference to ‘thematic fragments’ which are classified as ‘diatonic’ and ‘chromatic’. On the more specific issue of structure, Young notes that Vaughan Williams ‘achieves a unity, both formally and spiritually, of words and music which is of high significance’. In spite of the grandiose, even profound, tone of this statement, ultimately Young’s remark is fairly equivocal, offering little specificity on the parameters of the formal and spiritual unity he perceives. Other writers approach the matter of structure by describing how a particular song ‘lightens the atmosphere’ or how the final song ‘summarizes the themes’. However, more definitive suggestions have been made. In her commemorative

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275 Hold, p. 115.
276 Ingham (p. 202).
277 Jonathan Dove, ‘Songs of Innocence and Experience’ CD Liner notes for Ralph Vaughan Williams, On Wenlock Edge, Mark Padmore (Tenor), and members of Britten Sinfonia (Harmonia Mundi, HMU 807566, 2012).
279 Fred Raimi, CD liner notes for Ralph Vaughan Williams, On Wenlock Edge, Steven Tharp (Tenor), Jane Hawkins (Piano), and The Ciompi Quartet (Albany Records, TROY603, 2003).
analytical study of the work from 2013, Lisa Gabriel notes that ‘the selection of verse in itself is somewhat significant’ as it ‘seems to progress in a way similar to Winterreise’. She identifies a clear ‘story’ which she goes on to reconstruct. Yet Trevor Hold, writing in 2005, characterizes the work as ‘a series of operatic scenes rather than a song-cycle’, since the composer’s choice of six poems is ‘clearly too short a sequence to outline any narrative’. On this issue Dove is noncommittal, describing how the ‘symphonic sweep of the cycle conveys a distinct narrative that connects the individual works’. However, the nature of that narrative and in what way or ways it might connect the songs is never specified.

Clearly, even within this small selection of commentary there appears to be a reasonable degree of dissension in relation to issues of narrative and structure, yet several common themes do emerge. Firstly, regardless of the form that the writing takes, the year in which it is written or the readership for which it is intended, the modes of analysis and the general tenor of expression are remarkably similar. Secondly, and most importantly in relation to the issue of structure, underlying all of these assertions — diverse and varied as they are — is an inherent understanding of the work’s shape and form as being linear. Whether describing the musical detail of the cycle’s six songs or proposing an implicit story that develops through those songs, discussions about On Wenlock Edge are based on an understanding of the work, structurally, as an uninterrupted continuum running from beginning to end, with the implication that the songs, in sequence, are somehow consecutively revealing. But when charted against the cycle’s literary structure, this linear progression seems to provide a less than satisfactory reading of the work. Considered in this way, relationships between Vaughan Williams’s chosen poems are apparent in only the most general terms. It is certainly true that the first, fifth and sixth poems reference specific Shropshire locations, that the majority of poems focus on different elements of pastoral experience and that the texts are all rather gloomy, but such statements are insubstantial and generic enough to be said of most song cycles setting poetry from A Shropshire Lad. However, returning to Housman’s original poetic sequence reveals some interesting points of intersection with On Wenlock Edge.

280 Gabriel, p. 37.
281 Hold, p. 113.
Approaching the structure of *On Wenlock Edge*

Table 8 presents a thematic analysis of Housman’s poetic sequence, with texts that are linked by theme and subject denoted by common colour. (Table 8)
**Table 8: A Shropshire Lad: Housman’s sequence - thematic organisation and scansion**

**Notes:**

Text presented in bold type in the ‘Poem’ column identifies poetic titles conferred by Housman.

Song pairings within the sequence are identified by their presentation within more substantially outlined borders within the table.

Where song pairings are designated as a situation and reflection, this is recorded in bold and italic type within the ‘Notes’ column.

Where a poem significantly explores more than one theme, the secondary subject is presented with reference to the table’s colour coding system.

Thematic colour coding is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unrequited love</th>
<th>Passing of life</th>
<th>War</th>
<th>Fred/Rose</th>
<th>Fratricide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Poet’s protest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem</th>
<th>Theme/subject</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Point of view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>1887 From Clee to heaven the beacon burns</strong></td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Patriotism and melancholy</td>
<td>Quatrains (8) Iambic: 8+6 syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Loveliest of trees, the cherry now</td>
<td>Passing of life</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quatrains (3) Iambic 8+8+8 trochaic 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>The Recruit</strong> Leave your home behind, lad</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Patriotism / call to arms</td>
<td>Quatrains (7) Iambic/trochaic 7/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Reveille</strong> Wake: the silver dusk returning</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Call to battle</td>
<td>Quatrains (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Oh see how thick the goldcup flowers</td>
<td>Unrequited love</td>
<td>Lass spurns lad</td>
<td>Octaves (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>When the lad for longing sighs</td>
<td>Unrequited love</td>
<td>Reflection on spurned lad</td>
<td>Quatrains (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>When smoke stood up from Ludlow</td>
<td>Fred/Rose</td>
<td>Fred dies</td>
<td>Quintain (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Farewell to barn and stack and tree</td>
<td>Fratricide</td>
<td>Murderer bides</td>
<td>Quatrain (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>On moonlit heath and lonesome bank</td>
<td>Fratricide</td>
<td>Terence responds</td>
<td>Quatrain (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><strong>March</strong> The Sun at noon to higher air</td>
<td>Unrequited love</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quatrain (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>On your midnight pallet lying</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Going to war / lover leaving</td>
<td>Septets (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>When I watch the living meet</td>
<td>Dead narrator</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Quatrains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>When I was one-and-twenty</td>
<td>Passing of life</td>
<td></td>
<td>Octaves (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Mood</td>
<td>Poetic Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>There pass the careless people</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>Unrequited love</td>
<td>Quatrains (5) Iambic 7+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Look not in my eyes, for fear</td>
<td>Unrequited love</td>
<td>Speaker is alive</td>
<td>Octaves (2) Iambic/trochaic 8/7 variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>It nods and curtseys and recovers</td>
<td>Unrequited love</td>
<td>Died of broken heart</td>
<td>Quatrains (2) Iambic 9+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Twice a week the winter thorough</td>
<td>Grief</td>
<td>Fred/Rose</td>
<td>Quatrains (3) Trochaic 8+7+8+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Oh, when I was in love with you</td>
<td>Unrequited love</td>
<td>Speaker is in denial</td>
<td>Quatrains (2) Iambic 8+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>To an Athlete Dying Young The time you won your town the race</td>
<td>Early death</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quatrains (7) Iambic tetrameter - some variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Oh fair enough are sky and plain</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>Missing home</td>
<td>Quatrains (4) Iambic 8+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Bredon Hill In summertime on Bredon</td>
<td>Dead lovers</td>
<td>She dies</td>
<td>Quintains (7) Iambic 7+6+7+6+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>The street sounds to the soldiers’ tread</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Soldier leaves for war (connection)</td>
<td>Quatrains (3) Iambic 8+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>The lads in their hundreds</td>
<td>War / Early death</td>
<td>Lads at the fair will never return from war</td>
<td>Quatrains (4) Dactylic 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Say, lad, have you things to do</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Courage to go</td>
<td>Quatrains (3) Trochaic 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>This time of year a twelvemonth past</td>
<td>Fred/Rose</td>
<td>Friend's point of view - rivalry with Fred and winning Rose</td>
<td>Quatrains (4) Iambic 8+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Stanzas</td>
<td>Meter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Along the field as we came by</td>
<td>Dead lovers</td>
<td>She has died, but a year ago nature knew</td>
<td>10-line stanzas (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Is my team ploughing</td>
<td>Dead lovers</td>
<td>Dead lovers</td>
<td>Quatrains (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trochaic/iambic/iambic/iambic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Welsh Marches</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Old battles and conquests</td>
<td>Quatrains (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The Welsh Marches</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Old battles and conquests</td>
<td>Quatrains (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>The Lent Lily</td>
<td>Passing of life</td>
<td>'Tis spring; come out to ramble</td>
<td>Quintains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Others, I am not the first</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Cycle of life and experience</td>
<td>Quatrains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>On Wenlock Edge the wood’s in trouble</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Cycle of life and experience</td>
<td>Quatrains (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>From far, from eve and morning</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>Cycle of life / purpose of life</td>
<td>Quatrains (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>If truth in hearts that perish</td>
<td>Dead lovers</td>
<td>She dies - he wishes his love were enough to save her</td>
<td>Quatrains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>The New Mistress</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Rejected lover goes to war</td>
<td>Quatrains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oh, sick I am to see you</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Rejected lover goes to war</td>
<td>Quatrains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unrequited love</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Rejected lover goes to war</td>
<td>Quatrains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>On the idle hill of summer</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Experience of war</td>
<td>Quatrains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>White in the moon the long road lies</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>On a journey - missing home</td>
<td>Quatrains (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>As through the wild green hills of Wyre</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>Leaving home for London</td>
<td>One extended stanza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>The winds out of the west land blow</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>On a journey - missing home</td>
<td>Quatrains (5) Iambic 8+6+8+6`</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>'Tis time, I think, by Wenlock town</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>On a journey - reminiscing about home</td>
<td>Quatrains (3) Iambic 8+6+8+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Into my heart an air that kills</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>Away from home - missing it - cannot return</td>
<td>Quatrains (2) Iambic 8+6+8+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>In my own shire, if I was sad</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>In London, missing home</td>
<td>18-line stanza + 14-line stanza Iambic 8+7 but variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td><strong>The Merry Guide</strong> Once in the wind of morning</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>Impetus for travel - mysticism &amp; enchantment</td>
<td>Quatrains (15) Iambic 7+6+7+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td><strong>The Immortal Part</strong> When I meet the morning beam</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Cycle of life towards death</td>
<td>Quatrains (11) Usually iambic tetrameter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Shot? so quick, so clean an ending</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Young homosexual man commits suicide</td>
<td>Quatrains (7) Variable rhythm and metre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>If it chance your eye offend you</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Conform to society</td>
<td>Quatrains (2) 9+7+9+7 some variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Bring, in this timeless grave to throw</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Death - non-flowering plants</td>
<td>10-line stanzas (2) Variable but generally iambic tetrameter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td><strong>The Carpenter’s Son</strong> Here the hangman stops his cart</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Hangs 'for love' - 'leave ill alone'</td>
<td>Quatrains (7) Trochaic 7 syllable lines (some variation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Be still, my soul, be still</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Isolation from society - injustice. Welcomes death</td>
<td>Quatrains (4) 13/12 syllable lines - variable Rhythm variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Think no more, lad; laugh, be jolly</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Deny your true self</td>
<td>6-line stanza (2) Trochaic 8+7+8+8+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td><strong>Clunton and Clunbury</strong> In valleys of springs of rivers</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>Compares home and London - only death brings escape from troubles</td>
<td>Italicized opening + Quatrains (6) Some dactylic variety 8+7+8+7 but with variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Loitering with a vacant eye</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Deny your true self</td>
<td>10-line stanza + 16-line stanza generally iambic tetrameter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Far in a western brookland</td>
<td>Traveller</td>
<td>Compares home and London</td>
<td>Quatrains (4) Iambic 7+6+7+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td><strong>The True Lover</strong> The lad came to the door at night</td>
<td>Dead lovers</td>
<td>Lover courts with throat cut - horror</td>
<td>Quatrains (9) Iambic 8+6+8+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>With rue my heart is laden</td>
<td>Passing of life</td>
<td>Missing home</td>
<td>Quatrains (2) Iambic 7+6+7+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Westward on the high-hilled plains</td>
<td>Passing of life</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quatrains (4) Trochaic 7 syllables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td><strong>The Day of Battle</strong> Far I hear the bugle blow</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Fear and duty</td>
<td>Quatrains (4) Iambic/trochaic 8/7 variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>You smile upon your friend today</td>
<td>Passing of life</td>
<td>Going to war</td>
<td>Quatrains (2) Iambic 8+7+8+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>When I came last to Ludlow</td>
<td>Death Passing of life Traveller</td>
<td>Traveller returns to Ludlow alone after friends have died</td>
<td>Quatrains (2) Iambic 7+6+7+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td><strong>The Isle of Portland</strong> The star-filled seas are smooth to-night</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Dead soldiers in France - not returning home</td>
<td>Quatrains (3) Iambic 8+7+8+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Now hollow fires burn out to black</td>
<td>War</td>
<td>Leave war</td>
<td>Quatrains (2) Iambic 8+6 but variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hughley Steeple</strong> The vane on Hughley steeple</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Octaves (3) Iambic 7+6 (some variation)</td>
<td>First person - contemplates death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Terence, this is stupid stuff</td>
<td>Poet’s protest</td>
<td>14-line + 28-line + 16-line + 18-line Generally iambic tetrameter</td>
<td>Speaker addresses Terence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I hoed and trenched and weeded</td>
<td>Homoeroticism</td>
<td>Quatrains (4) 7+6+7+6 iambic</td>
<td>First person – melancholy - contemplates death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Accepting the difficulties, limitations, inherent subjectivity, contradictions and overlap that arise from any form of interpretative analysis, several interesting patterns emerge. Firstly, even from this patchwork of colour-coding it is clear that there are distinctive thematic clusters within Housman’s poetic sequence. Three out of the opening four poems (I, III and IV), for example, take the subject of war as their principal occupation and several other ‘war’ clusters can be discerned later within the sequence. Similarly, poems XXXVI-XLII all share common elements of travel, the wanderer and journeying, highlighting the, often unhappy, distinction between home and elsewhere.

Amongst these more substantial thematic clusters, Housman’s sequence is also characterized by a number of consecutive pairings. This method of organisation appears to work in two different ways. Sometimes the pairings are linked specifically by character and situation, as for example in poems VIII and IX, where, in the aftermath of bloody fratricide, the murderer confesses and bids farewell to his friend, inspiring Terence’s subsequent response and reverie ‘On moonlit heath and lonesome bank’. Other pairings, however, function more abstractly as the presentation of a situation and a response to it, as in poems V and VI. In ‘Oh see how thick the goldcup flowers’ a coy lass rejects her lad, with the immediacy of the present tense offering a singularly voyeuristic perspective to the discomfited reader. In the ensuing ‘When the lad for longing sighs’ the omniscient speaker offers a gentle rebuke to the teasing maiden, warning that ‘Lovers’ ills are all to buy’ and that she too ‘can have them for [her] own’. Poems XV (‘Look not in my eyes, for fear’) and XVI (‘It nods and curtseys and recovers’) function as a rather more profound situation and reflection. In poem XV, the sombre, first-person speaker sorrowfully muses upon the agonies of unrequited love, but in poem XVI his gloomy fate is revealed as the newly omniscient poetic voice describes the ‘graves of lovers | That hanged themselves for love’. The ‘jonquil’ of the former poem — symbolic of a desire for affection to be returned — is replaced by the cruel sting of the ‘nettle’ in the latter. Table 9 identifies Vaughan Williams’s selection of texts from A Shropshire Lad (ASL) for On Wenlock Edge (OWE) and outlines some very basic musical detail.
The prevalence of consecutive pairings within Housman’s poetic sequence is particularly relevant to *On Wenlock Edge*, because Vaughan Williams adopts one such pairing in his choice of texts for the first two songs of the cycle (XXXI ‘On Wenlock Edge the wood’s in trouble’ and XXXII ‘From far, from eve and morning’). In this poetic pairing, the contemplation of man’s earthly struggles in poem XXXI is answered in the ethereal, philosophical reflection of poem XXXII. The third song in Vaughan Williams’s cycle sets poem XXVII (‘Is my team ploughing’). However, reading the composer’s sequence of texts in the context of a conventionally-understood, linear cycle structure it is difficult to see a logical and natural progression from the philosophical musings of the second song to the truly agonising and deeply emotional scene that the third song presents. Although incorporating a spectral dialogue, ‘Is my team ploughing’ offers a visceral exploration of circumstances and emotions that are intensely human in origin. Yet if the binary method of organisation made explicit in the selection of consecutive poems for the first two songs of the cycle is pursued, a compelling cycle structure incorporating three paired micro-narratives is revealed. After the high drama of ‘Is my team ploughing’, the young man tragically betrayed in death is given an opportunity to respond to the friend and lover who have forsaken him in Vaughan Williams’s fourth song, ‘Oh when I was in love with you’. In the final pairing — settings of poems XXI and L — the ambiguous fate of Housman’s grieving lover on ‘Bredon Hill’ is revealed in Vaughan Williams’s final song.

It is true that the first two songs are the only pair of poems organized consecutively within Housman’s sequence, with Vaughan Williams coupling texts more abstractly in his selections from across *A Shropshire Lad* for the remaining songs of the cycle. Yet given his views on the
composer’s right to use texts in any way that he saw fit, it is not difficult to imagine that Vaughan Williams would have had little concern for preserving the sequential integrity of the poetic collection where it did not elicit meaningful musical results. Responding to a request from Housman’s publisher to publish letters he had written to the poet regarding his settings of words from *A Shropshire Lad*, Vaughan Williams offered his views on this issue in no uncertain terms:

…the composer has a perfect right artistically to set any portion of a poem he chooses provided he does not actually alter the sense: that makers of anthologies, headed by the late Poet Laureate have done the same thing – I also feel that a poet should be grateful to anyone who fails to perpetuate such lines as:

The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.

As Banfield argues, for Vaughan Williams the crucial issue was that ‘the composer took only what he wanted from the poems, emotional material which provoked a powerful response’. Through this cycle structure of three micro-narratives Vaughan Williams certainly achieves powerful results, and the idea of the composer pairing songs to form complete and concise narratives becomes compelling on a range of literary and musical levels.

A cycle structure of three, paired micro-narratives

Micro-narrative number one: songs one and two

The cycle’s opening song pairing presents the first of Vaughan Williams’s three micronarratives. In poem XXXI, ‘On Wenlock Edge’, Housman presents a speaker deep in thought contemplating the inherent struggles that life continues to present. The metaphorical ‘gale of life’ is literally paralleled in the Shropshire setting, as the violent storm rages on alongside the speaker’s evolving thoughts. The ‘historical perspective’ that is developed becomes representative of the changelessness of human existence and the speaker’s ‘realization of it’. Yet despite the somewhat abstract nature of these philosophical musings, the text definitely deals in things earthly. The immediacy of the present tense, vigorous verb choices such as ‘heaves’ and ‘threshed’, the alliterative repetition of ‘w’ sounds and persistent sibilance combined with the geographical

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282 Pearsall (p. 42).
284 Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, p. 245.
specificity of ‘Wenlock Edge’, ‘the Wrekin’ and ‘Severn’ leave the reader in no doubt of the speaker’s prevailing situation within the intense, wind-swept melee of the here and now. In the ensuing ‘From far, from eve and morning’ (XXXII) — a poem characterized by its ‘pregnant compression’ — the contemplation moves from present reality towards a more distant, ethereal vantage point. The poem is one of ‘cosmic anguish’, and the issues of existence begun in the previous poem are, here, concentrated through the intimate lens of personal experience. From the first line of the poem the reader and speaker are removed from earthly temporality, whilst the detail of ‘yonder hill’, the ‘English yeoman’ and the ‘Roman and his trouble’ dissipate into the indistinct ‘stuff of life’ through the intangible ‘twelve-winded sky’. Having described the tumultuous cycle of life in poem XXXI, in this subsequent reflection the speaker questions the very purpose of it. The dichotomy of the textual pairing is further emphasized in common imagery and diction. The mysterious, creative agency and supremacy of the wind is essential to both poems. In the former poem, the wind delivers life’s struggles, but the latter confirms that the wind is the creative force behind life itself:

The stuff of life to knit me
Blew hither; here am I.

Related diction — ‘wind’, ‘gale’, ‘blow’ and ‘blew’ — provides the pairing with a final, lexical affinity. Just as these consecutive poems compliment and respond to one another other in theme, imagery and diction, so too musical ideas and compositional gesture create close correspondence between the songs.

Vaughan Williams’s musical treatment of the paired texts is highly evocative. In the opening song, vigorous instrumental textures provide a musical illustration of the poem’s menacing setting. Rapid string tremolandi and oscillating piano semiquavers, expressed with sudden and violent dynamic contrasts, rise and fall with angular melodic contour to musically recall the dramatic effects of the gale as the ‘forest fleece’ is heaved and ‘the leaves’ snow ‘thick on Severn’. In combination with this, overlapping trills and triple-stopped pizzicato chords within the string parts and closely-voiced, fanfare-like chords in the left hand of the piano further characterize the colour, variety and drama of the writing. The declamatory vocal line (much maligned by the composer’s fiercest contemporary critic, Ernest Newman) makes particular use of the perfect fourth around a

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288 Newman (p. 396).
tonal centre of G, which, with its sustained repetition, endows the principal thematic idea with a characteristic stoicism. (Example 56)

**Example 56 (‘On Wenlock Edge’)**

The presentation of the melody within the lowest part of the texture is emphasized by its doubling (an octave lower) in both the cello and piano left hand, perhaps making musically distinct the poetic juxtaposition of grounded earthly contemplation and esoteric reflection.

Vaughan Williams carefully observes the syntactic organisation of Housman’s poem, preserving the structure of both individual phrases and stanzas through the musical setting, which is organized in a strophic design. However, this distribution of the musical material also allows Vaughan Williams to follow the speaker’s intimate train of thought across time, past and present. Stanzas one and two are set to the same music. As such, the vocal melody and opening theme — with its concave melodic shape moving in parallel, first-inversion chords — become linked to the speaker’s contemplation of present struggles. New musical material is introduced for the setting of stanzas three and four as the speaker’s thoughts turn to times past:

```
Then, ‘twas before my time, the Roman
At yonder heaving hill would stare:
The blood that warms an English yeoman,
   The thoughts that hurt him, they were there.

There, like the wind through woods in riot,
Through him the gale of life blew high;
The tree of man was never quiet:
Then ‘twas the Roman, now ‘tis I.
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The retrospective reverie is heralded by a suitably mystical pentatonic scale in bar thirty-one.

(Example 57)
The initial, hushed vocal line — monotonal in design and set low in the register — is accompanied by brooding, chromatic string movement as Vaughan Williams skilfully evokes the ghostly presence of inhabitants past. The composer maintains the concave melodic shape through the various musical fragments that combine to form the accompaniment, which enhances the ongoing sense of motivic integrity as well as providing a modest text painting opportunity on the phrase ‘heaving hill’. (Example 58)

At yon-der heaving hill would stare:
For the final stanza, Vaughan Williams combines elements of all this musical material. The poetic return to the present is musically signalled in the restatement — in very slightly modified form — of the opening theme, heard in the piano between bars fifty-five and fifty-seven. As the closing vocal phrase concludes, the violins and viola, triggered by the poetic recurrence of ‘the Roman’, revive the chromatic material heard in the setting of the third and fourth stanzas, which is heard in counterpoint with the piano and cello statement of the characteristic rising fourth interval of the opening vocal melody as a bass line. (Example 59)

**Example 59** (‘On Wenlock Edge’)

In combining and developing this material — now imbued with symbolic meaning — Vaughan Williams, musically, draws together the strands of past and present experience and unifies them with the poem’s principal metaphor: the storm. This method very much mirrors Housman’s own summation in the closing stanza of his poem which is also achieved through repetition, though of phrase and imagery:

The gale, it plies the saplings double,
It blows so hard, ‘twill soon be gone:
To-day the Roman and his trouble
Are ashes under Uricon.
Just as the ‘Roman and his trouble’ are reduced to ashes, so too the principal thematic material forming the song’s opening vocal melody is slowly fragmented through the instrumental writing, ultimately diminished to a repeated rising fourth between D and G. Whilst the cadential quality of the interval provides a sense of aural closure, the lack of accompanying harmony allows for an unexpected shift in tonality for the ensuing partner song, ‘From far, from eve and morning’. Whilst tonal structures are often developed to achieve musical unity in song cycles, here Vaughan Williams consciously uses disparate tonalities to highlight the poetic transition from mortal to ethereal realms. However, familiarity of motif, texture and gesture is sustained to link the two songs musically and confirm the structure of a paired micronarrative.

The feverish sextuplets, which provide dramatic instrumental representation of the gale in the former song, are reduced to a persistent arpeggiation in the latter with the rolling piano chords evoking the second poem’s gentler ‘twelve-winded sky’. The presence of the rippling musical texture, however, is common to both songs. (Example 60 & example 61)

**Example 60** (‘On Wenlock Edge’)

![Example 60](image)

**Example 61** (‘From far, from eve and morning’)

![Example 61](image)

Similarly, Vaughan Williams achieves motivic familiarity between the two songs, as the concave principal theme of ‘On Wenlock Edge’ is recalled in the opening harmonic sequence of ‘From far, from eve and morning’. The bustling triplets of the former song are augmented to pensive minims.
in the latter, but the melodic shape and modal progressions of the harmonic language are those established in the cycle’s opening song. (Example 62 & example 63)

**Example 62** (‘On Wenlock Edge’)

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\[ \text{\textbf{Example 62}} \quad (\text{‘On Wenlock Edge’}) \]
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**Example 63** (‘From far, from eve and morning’)

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\[ \text{\textbf{Example 63}} \quad (\text{‘From far, from eve and morning’}) \]
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As such, the unusual shift in tonality to E major illuminates a different aspect of the textual relationship: the change in setting and perspective from visceral, earthly experience to a distant, ethereal contemplation. Through the modulation to a higher, brighter key, the development of thematic material and the reduction in instrumental texture, Vaughan Williams — without losing sight of the abating storm below — introduces the newly celestial setting through the music.

In this second song, Vaughan Williams moves away from the syntactic structure of Housman’s text, adopting a disproportionate ternary form that is at odds with the stanzaic organisation of the latter part of the poem. The opening stanza forms the first part of the song, the transcendental mood achieved through the hushed dynamics and repeated harmonic progression in the piano as the speaker describes the mystery of creation. The vocal line, although measured, is slow-paced and deliberate with a deal of rhythmic freedom which allows for a consummate focus on the declamation of the words. As such, the setting captures the very essence of Housman’s first-person text in its innate focus on individual experience. The unanticipated C sharp major triad at the words ‘here am I’ functions as a musical herald, boldly announcing the speaker’s presence before both song and poem move forward.

Where Housman separates the second and third stanzas, Vaughan Williams draws them together, setting lines five to ten as the central section of the song. In this portion of the text Housman’s speaker develops an increasingly urgent tone, marked in the use of imperative phrases — ‘Take my hand quick’ and ‘Speak now’ — as well as parenthetical delineations which create
efficiency in the simultaneous consideration of matters internal and external. Vaughan Williams notes this shift in rhetorical mode and highlights it musically in the *colla voce* string writing, increased tempo, marked dynamic contrasts and dramatic recitative-style vocal line. This passage (from bar twelve to bar twenty-one) is also notable for its increased rate of harmonic change. The C# major triad that concludes the setting of the first stanza in bar eleven allows Vaughan Williams to move swiftly through a progression — albeit coloured with modal inflections — of more and less closely related keys: F# minor, A major, F# major, B minor, G major, E major and B minor. As such, the harmonic structure of the song at this point further supports the more urgent poetic character of the text and creates a sense of moving towards the higher understanding that is sought. Yet just as Housman’s speaker returns to where he began in the midst of the ‘wind’s twelve quarters’, so too Vaughan Williams returns to the evocative piano sequence heard at the opening of the song and it is clear that the imponderable mysteries of the universe remain unsolved. The two songs vigorously animate the diametric oppositions that Housman’s consecutive pair of poems propose — present experience with distanced contemplation, the violence of human existence with the tranquillity of creation, historical epochs with eternal realms, answers with questions — and in doing so formulates a philosophical micronarrative that draws together the existential and historical themes highlighted in Housman’s consecutive ordering within *A Shropshire Lad*.

Micro-narrative number two: songs three and four

Songs three and four are settings of poem XXVII ‘Is my team ploughing’ and poem XVIII ‘Oh, when I was in love with you’, which Vaughan Williams brings together to create a second, powerful and pointed micro-narrative of his own. Within Housman’s collection, ‘Is my team ploughing’ forms part of the unhappy love triangle concerning Rose, Fred and his living friend. Although it has been somewhat speculatively proposed that the poem is part of a much longer and more general biography for *A Shropshire Lad’s* mysterious persona, Terence Hearsay,289 the combination of poems VII, XXV and XXVII seem to provide a more concise, ordered and compelling narrative for this particular tale. However, Vaughan Williams removes the poem from this context altogether by partnering it with poem XVIII, and in so doing once again gives voice to Fred from beyond the grave.

Amongst the most striking formal aspects of poem XXVII (‘Is my team ploughing’) are the dialogical mode and the juxtaposition of poetic voices, those of the deceased Fred and his living

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friend. The challenges of musically setting such a poem to be rendered in performance by an individual singer are highly attractive to the composer of song, and Vaughan Williams’s response achieves these distinctions particularly effectively. The composer omits stanzas three and four of Housman’s text — a revision that, famously, did not meet with the poet’s approval. Vaughan Williams and Housman had met on friendly terms at one time, but some years later the poet discovered that the composer had cut out a portion of his poem, ‘Is my team ploughing’, and his feelings on the matter were unequivocal. Referring to the incident, he remarked upon how ‘composers in some cases have mutilated my poems’ and wondered how ‘he [Vaughan Williams] would like me to cut two bars out of his music’. When a friend of the poet unwittingly played him some gramophone records of Vaughan Williams’s cycle he ‘was surprised to see the author sitting bolt upright in his chair, his face flushed with anger’. Aside from this controversial (at least according to Housman) change, the structure of the song closely follows that of the remaining poem. Vaughan Williams writes suitably contrasting music for each question and response, leaving the listener in no doubt as to which poetic voice is speaking. As the dead man poses his questions, Vaughan Williams develops mysterious instrumental timbres in the gently syncopated con sordino upper strings, which sustain a D minor triad. The vocal line, in its conjunct intervals, limited melodic range and quasi de lontano direction, also implies a suitably distant lethargy. Erik Grey notes the ‘forcibly simplified world’ that Housman’s faulty parallelism in the dead man’s opening stanza creates. Vaughan Williams matches this lexical effect in the simple folk style of the vocal melody, which musically affords the benign questions a characteristic innocence. (Example 64)

290 Graves, p. 117.
In contrast, the responses offered by the deceased’s ‘hearty’ friend are made at a substantially louder dynamic level and brisker tempo. Yet in the persistent piano triplets, which move in harmonic sympathy with the soaring chromatic cello line and angular vocal melody, the music presents a constant, underlying agitation and this marks a notable departure between composer and poet. Where the bleak irony of the situation is revealed only in the closing lines of Housman’s poem, Vaughan Williams’s song builds suggestively towards this dramatic conclusion from the outset. The cumulative effect of the slowly and subtly modified strophic musical structure is extremely powerful. To introduce the song’s second verse (Housman’s stanzas five and six), Vaughan Williams restates the material of the instrumental introduction but with fiercer dynamic contrasts and a four-part string texture from bar nineteen. It is notable, however, that the cello writing remains distinct from the upper strings underlining the repetition of the ghostly musical motif with a dissonant, G natural pedal note. (Example 65)
In this way Vaughan Williams uses the cello symbolically, transcending the innocent limits of Housman’s poetic conversation to signal the dead man’s growing realisation as the music builds towards the song’s dramatic climax.

In the final section of the song (Housman’s stanzas seven and eight) Vaughan Williams, musically, alters the dead speaker’s poetic tone. Rather than innocently inhabiting the hushed, low tessitura of the earlier strophes, the vocal line, now at a forte marking, is set in the highest, most thrilling register of the tenor range. The musical line becomes increasingly anguished in character with a new urgency in the affretando direction and the melodic material itself is altered. This development of the musical material is matched in the instrumental scoring, with the upper strings — now unmuted and presented in ever higher tessitura — forming tremolando chords with the piano with even more dramatic dynamic contrasts. Thus, when the dead man asks his final question —‘And has he found to sleep in | A better bed than mine?’ — it is clear, at least in Vaughan Williams’s setting, that he already knows the answer. Nevertheless, there is no respite from the drama as the living friend gives his reply. From bar forty-five the music assumes a new level of feverishness in its complex rhythmic texture, which combines quaver triplets, semiquaver septuplets and three-note syncopated patterns within duple beat divisions. Another increase in tempo, further upward extension of the instrumental and vocal tessituras and sustained forte and fortissimo dynamic levels accompany the living friend’s final confession: that he ‘cheer[s] a dead man’s sweetheart’. Vaughan Williams uses the instrumental postlude to restore the other-worldly realm that he so evocatively illustrates in the song’s opening, by returning to those motivic materials that
the listener has come to associate with the ghost’s declamations. Although the song’s closing passage begins relatively vigorously from bar fifty-five with its markings of *fortissimo* and *animato*, the urgent mood is soon defeated as the composer restores the initial sparse, three-part texture of muted strings, now supremely dismal in its presentation an octave lower.

This interpretation of the poem provides the basis for a progressively dramatic musical realisation but does somewhat alter Housman’s pacing towards the poem’s pivotal point of revelation. Yet Vaughan Williams’s strategy becomes clearer when one considers this response to the text in relation to the ensuing partner song, ‘Oh, when I was in love with you’ (XVIII). Tellingly, song four (‘Oh when I was in love with you’) begins in the same D minor tonality that song three (‘Is my team ploughing’) ends in. It also recalls motivic material from that song, once again presenting musical connections that highlight the cycle’s structure of paired micronarratives as the composer gives Housman’s ghost a chance to respond to those who have betrayed him from beyond the grave.

In this setting of Housman’s ‘wry’ text, the music is at its most acerbic. Vaughan Williams translates the versification — two ballad stanzas — into a brief, through-composed song highlighting the ideas of ‘temporality…and inevitable change’ that the poem explores. The pointed syllabic setting of the vocal line, with its detached *leggiero* style, gives knowing emphasis to Housman’s many monosyllabic words, and the poet’s clipped phrases are well answered in the rhythmic, arpeggiated piano figure and *pizzicato* string chords that accompany. The declamatory vocal line endows Housman’s phrases with a brusque bitterness, and as such the text’s inherent irony is brought to life musically. Yet the irony is twofold. Isolated within Housman’s collection the poem seems to present a fickle lad with little care for true love. This is, of course, the disposition that Vaughan Williams’s dead man wishes to assume as, having angrily understood the gravity of his friend’s betrayal, he attempts to preserve some sense of dignity. However, heard in the context of the composer’s overly-assured musical setting, it becomes clear to the listener that this sardonic response is in fact a fragile emotional façade. In song, Housman’s indifferent speaker is transformed becoming a dejected, heartbroken voice from beyond the grave. In the context of *On Wenlock Edge*, this is confirmed in a final ironic twist, as the poem’s closing phrase becomes loaded with new significance:

And miles around they’ll say that I
Am quite myself again.

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Just as Housman’s dead man sinks quietly back into the oblivion of eternity at the end of ‘Is my team ploughing’, so too the protagonist of Vaughan Williams’s second micro-narrative, after the briefest of protests, is similarly restored to death.

Of course, the capacity for the genre of song and cycle to offer multi-layered narratives with several interpretative strands is well known. Schumann, for example, achieves much the same effect in *Dichterliebe* with the song ‘Ich grolle nicht’ (‘I bear no grudge’) where his protagonist also tries to dismiss the sharp wounds of unrequited love. In this and Vaughan Williams’s song, the composers’ settings direct the listener to a different level of understanding, highlighting the powerful effects that can be achieved when the music itself functions as a narrative voice. In terms of narrative cohesion, Vaughan Williams’s pairing of poems XXVII and XVIII presents the rather satisfying idea that the dead man is able, to some extent, to save face, but there are also a number of musical elements that suggest parity between the two songs and confirm the ongoing structure of micronarratives within the cycle. Firstly, the D minor tonality that is shared throughout both songs allows for a completely seamless transition. Secondly, the general compositional approach in ‘Oh when I was in love with you’ extends some of the techniques of writing first heard in ‘Is my team ploughing’, particularly in relation to the music used to set the words of the dead man. In the shorter, second song the composer exercises a distinct lightness of touch, texturally speaking, in the extensive use of gentle *pizzicato* timbres, solo motivic statements and with the dynamic level never much exceeding *piano*. As such, the compositional method sounds and feels closely aligned to the distant, muted musical materials the listener has come to associate with the ghost during the previous song, and so Vaughan Williams’s setting helps to direct the listener’s identification of the poetic speaker. This effect is further emphasized in the composer’s development of motivic familiarity. The distinctive two-note patterns incorporating a falling minor 3rd that characterize the ghost’s music in the first song (Example 66) feature prominently in the vocal melody of the second, used to set the closing words of each of the two stanzas (bars seven and seventeen). The same motif is emphasized by its repetition in solo string presentations after each sung statement, with the closing postlude further highlighting the figure through repetition. (Example 67)
Example 66 (‘Is my team ploughing’)

Example 67 (‘Oh when I was in love with you’)

The fourth song, ‘Oh when I was in love with you’, concludes with a rising D major arpeggio figure in the piano part, which ultimately comes to rest on its dominant, A. The effects of this slightly quirky ending speak on both metaphorical and pragmatic levels. In relation to the micronarrative formed by the paring of songs three and four, this embellished tierce de Picardie lends the forsaken
voice from the dead a bright complacency and tone of assurance, as any sense of emotional injury is hastily dismissed. Yet for the listener, the culmination of the music melodically away from the tonic note provides just enough tonal equivocation to understand the speaker’s remarks in light of Vaughan Williams’s ironic musical presentation. This effect is emphasized in the mathematically engineered rallentando, achieved by means of rhythmic augmentation and rest placement. (Example 68)

**Example 68** (‘Oh when I was in love with you’)

On a purely pragmatic level, the lack of full tonal closure also signals that there are more songs to come, and so the cycle’s closing micronarrative formed from the final song pairing (songs five and six) begins.

**Micro-narrative number three: songs five and six**

In relation to his comprehensive survey of English song, Banfield has persuasively noted the significant dramatic and emotional scope of Housman’s poetry:
Despite the look of his verse on the page, Housman was no miniaturist: he had no concern with small ideas or small feelings.\textsuperscript{284}

There are certainly no small ideas or feelings in the third and final micro-narrative of \textit{On Wenlock Edge}, for which Vaughan Williams pairs poem XXI ‘\textit{Bredon Hill}’ and poem L, which the composer entitles ‘Clun’. Referring specifically to ‘\textit{Bredon Hill}’ Banfield summarizes the issues at hand:

\begin{quote}
The subject-matter encompasses nature, geographical and temporal distance, sex, marriage, difference and antagonism between the sexes (the bells ring to call her, suggesting a chauvinistic antagonism in the lad and a detaining of the lass against her will or at least her conscience), divine punishment, death, human self-righteousness and sinfulness (the ‘good people’ in the final stanza is doubly ironic), and human frailty…\textsuperscript{295}
\end{quote}

Where Housman’s ‘\textit{Bredon Hill}’ leaves the consequences of human frailty unanswered, Vaughan Williams provides a more definitive response. In this third and final micro-narrative of the cycle, the ambiguous fate of Housman’s speaker in song five is revealed in the closing song, ‘Clun’, with the tribulations of love and loss transformed to a quest for eternal peace.

In selecting ‘\textit{Bredon Hill}’ Vaughan Williams turns, for the first time, to a narrative-driven poem. In this tragic tale, the full spectrum of human experience is explored as the speaker descriptively moves through serenity, joy, love and despair, concluding in the agonies of grief. Although the unfolding drama is revealed gradually across Housman’s seven stanzas, the cumbersome quintains undermine the lyricism of the verse and the masculine endings that characterize the closing phrases of successive stanzas soon begin to suggest an irrevocable sense of finality. Yet whilst impending misfortune is implied in the structure of Housman’s poem from the outset, Vaughan Williams’s musical setting develops in accordance with the detail of the narrative. In this, the longest song of the cycle by far, the composer fully exploits instrumental textures to support the progression of the drama.

In the extended instrumental introduction, the poem’s setting is evocatively suggested. Sustained, \textit{con sordino} strings in octaves recall the hazy distance of the summer hilltop and the ‘hum’ of the steeples.\textsuperscript{296} The repeated falling patterns in the hushed strings from bar five move consistently in minor thirds, perfect fourths and fifths and minor sevenths across the parts, gradually evolving into a musical foreshadowing of the opening vocal theme from bar nine. This material is heard in a quasi-contrapuntal texture with the piano’s oscillating, densely-voiced chords pitted in

\textsuperscript{284} Banfield, \textit{Sensibility and English Song}, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{295} Banfield, \textit{Sensibility and English Song}, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{296} Barbara Docherty, ‘\textit{English Song and the German Lied 1904-1934’}, \textit{Tempo}, 161/162 (1987), 75-83 (p. 80).
contrary motion. This idea, similarly, transmutes to become the poem’s pealing bells from bar sixteen. (Example 69)

**Example 69 (‘Bredon Hill’)**

The music’s development, like the narrative’s, is progressively organic with one idea and gesture growing and moving into the next. This includes the first entry of the singer, which emerges entirely without fanfare and as a natural consequence of the musical texture. The opening of ‘Bredon Hill’ perhaps sees Vaughan Williams’s use of instruments and voice at its most egalitarian with the performers deployed as a genuine ensemble, equally and unanimously engaged in establishing the setting and introducing the narrative of Housman’s poem.

The first two stanzas of the poem are set strophically to a simple folk-style melody, with the melismatic gestures on ‘ring’ (bar twenty-nine) and ‘coloured’ (bar forty-three) providing particularly effective textual illustrations. As the narrative develops through the third stanza, so too does the music. The speaker’s shift to a more specific memory — ‘The bells [which] would ring to call her’ — is marked by a modulation and a change in instrumental texture as the repeated triplet figures of the piano accompaniment persistently ‘peal’ and ‘chime’. (Example 70)
Example 70 (‘Bredon Hill’)

Where Housman separates stanzas three and four Vaughan Williams elides them, disregarding the punctuation entirely. Indeed, by repeating the same musical phrase to set consecutive lines — ‘But here my love would stay. | And I would turn and answer’ — without any break, Vaughan Williams creates a somewhat effusive tone. Through the use of imitative musical gesture, the composer’s speaker cherishes and preserves every moment of the shared hopes and dreams that he recalls, a technique that fully attunes the listener with the speaker’s disposition. Yet in engendering a deeper empathetic bond between listener and speaker, the ensuing tragedy becomes more profound for all.

Vaughan Williams’s musical response to the final three stanzas is vivid, affecting and entirely synchronous with the unfolding narrative. The sinister foreboding of the symbolic ‘snows at Christmas’ is suggested in the bleak perfect fifths sustained by the strings and the unsettling dissonant chords, with their persistent syncopation, in the piano writing. The low vocal line, now in the minor mode, moves conjunctly but returns almost magnetically to the tonic, G. (Example 71)
These musical motifs slowly evolve to become a ponderous funeral march and single, tolling bell. In the context of Housman’s poem, the speaker’s description of proceedings is relatively perfunctory — one might even say apathetic — but in Vaughan Williams’s song, the music contributes a powerful and poignant emotional dimension. The listener becomes intimately engaged in the tragedy, present with the mourners and utterly attuned to the anguished lover’s unbearable grief. The song’s musical climax begins to build from bar one hundred and twenty-two as the ‘noisy bells’ build unbearably to the point where the speaker can no longer ignore their call. The musical materials Vaughan Williams ultimately uses to effect this surrender are, in themselves, relatively straightforward: sustained tremolando chords along with a conjunct, falling triplet figure and shimmering piano semiquavers high in tessitura. But the power of their impact is achieved through their relentless repetition as ostinato figures, ideas perhaps cast, consciously or unconsciously, in the shadow of Ravel’s tutelage? (Example 72)

Interestingly, although the writing for ensemble at the opening of the song is highly unified in order to best realize the scene and sentiment of the poetry, here the ensemble is quite deliberately set apart for dramatic effect. At this point, the composer authorizes the ‘voice part to be sung quite freely – irrespective of the accompaniment – provided that the end of the phrase in the voice part comes before the Tempo alla I’, an effect which only heightens the power of poetic and musical expression.

The concluding stanza of Housman’s ‘Bredon Hill’ is somewhat ambiguous. Eventually the grieving lover agrees to come to church, but the caesura that precedes this declaration is hesitative, leaving the reader to question precisely what is meant by ‘I hear you, I will come’. Is this a proclamation of renewed faith or an indication of suicidal tendencies? In the ensuing partner song, Vaughan Williams provides a more definitive answer to conclude this final micronarrative. Poem L offers the philosophical musings of a lonely wanderer, who has attempted to escape his ‘troubles’ at
home in ‘Knighton’ by moving to ‘London, the town built ill’. Older and wiser, he finally understands that only in the eternity of death will he find a place to ‘set down’ his ‘griefs’. In this final pairing, then, Vaughan Williams reveals the mysterious fate of ‘Bredon Hill’s’ grieving speaker.

The composer does not set the opening epigraphical stanza of Housman’s poem, presumably on account of its less focused summarising qualities as well as its rather jarring consonance:

Clunton and Clunbury,
Clungunford and Clun,
Are the quietest places
Under the sun.

The compositional approach in this final song contrasts quite significantly from its preceding partner. Rather than chronologically paralleling the evolving poetic scene and detail, Vaughan Williams provides an omniscient overview developing a series of persistent musical gestures — a falling three-note figure which develops chromatically and alternating minim piano chords — which are combined within a largely strophic musical design to more broadly suggest the world-wearyed outlook of the speaker who finally resolves to die. (Example 73)

Example 73 (‘Clun’)

Andante tranquillo

senza sord.

p

senza sord.

p

senza sord.

p

Andante tranquillo
Rivers are central to the poem’s imagery, used not only as a symbol that allows the speaker’s contemplation to move between town and country, but also as a metaphor for the meandering journey of life. These rivers are ever-present in the musical texture as rippling piano arpeggios. (Example 74)

Example 74 (‘Clun’)

Once again, the composer makes full use of the element of repetition inherent in the strophic structure, within which stanzas are paired, to build and heighten the musical drama. Housman’s fifth stanza finally articulates the question the speaker has been deliberating since the poem’s opening lines:

Where shall I halt to deliver
This luggage I’d lief set down?

and this point marks a change in Vaughan Williams’s musical setting. However, the motivic materials are not new. The composer returns to the song’s opening idea but transforms the falling three-note crotchet figure by means of extension and intensive chromatic colouring and through its presentation in an increasingly dense texture. (Example 75)
Amidst the chromatic inflections of the song’s restless harmony, the tonality has, essentially, been minor. However, as the speaker’s thoughts ultimately move towards death in the final stanza, the musical language is imbued with renewed optimism and tranquillity. From bar fifty-seven the vocal line, now major and almost entirely diatonic, is stable in both its triadic melodic shape and phrase structure. The piano chords, which accompany plaintive string phrases, slowly rise in tessitura and diminish in volume until the song and cycle closes with a polarized A major triad, as the speaker finally finds an ethereal peace. In the closing bars of the final song, the speaker finally answers the call of the bells ‘On Bredon Hill’ and ‘will come’ to church, providing closure to this troubled micronarrative.

Conclusion

In literary and musical terms, the concept of reading the structure of On Wenlock Edge as a collection of three micro-narratives is compelling. Considered as paired responses the song settings are mutually revealing, forming concise and complete narrative partnerships from texts that make
very little sense understood as a continuum. Transitions in tonality become either logical or meaningful and relationships of motif and musical gesture assume new levels of relevance. The criticism levelled at Vaughan Williams for his overly-dramatic treatment of Housman’s texts (which has most often been made in reference to the more extensive settings of songs one, three and five) and the resultant problematic, alternating pattern of long and short song durations has already been described earlier in this chapter. Yet, of course, if those relative durations of long-short, long-short, long-short are considered in relation to a structure of three micronarratives, a balance and symmetry of formal design emerges. (Table 10)

**Table 10: On Wenlock Edge song durations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>On Wenlock Edge</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From far, from eve and morning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is my team ploughing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oh when I was in love with you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bredon Hill</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This pattern of situation and response, addressed through partnerships formed from extended and concise song settings, underlines the essential dynamic fluctuation between climax and repose that provides vital space for contemplation of the narratives that the structure generates. Most striking of all is that this musical architecture evolves as a consequence of the cycle’s literary structure, developing and extending the binary organisation of paired texts that is apparent within Housman’s published sequence. Vaughan Williams’s formal organisation of the poetry and music of *On Wenlock Edge* appears to challenge the sequential, linear model that typifies much of the song cycle repertoire. Yet upon reflection, one is impelled to consider whether the weight of song cycle criticism, which, by and large, is based on an underlying assumption of linear progression, has not engendered latent expectations with regard to song cycle design. In this sense, *On Wenlock Edge* inspires the possibility for more flexible musicological approaches to the possible structures that the
words and music of a cycle may give shape to and the revisiting of familiar cycles with fresh ideas and understanding, which may, in turn, inspire performers to direct their interpretative energies in ways not previously considered.
Chapter Six

The editorial practices of John Ireland

*Mother and Child*

**Introduction**

The work of all composers might be understood to be inspired by their personal experiences to some degree, but in the case of John Ireland memories and experiences of people, places and events are integral to his compositions, to the extent that it could be argued he wrote few works without a personal context. In many cases such contexts are made explicit through words, whether inscriptions, dedications or literary quotations. But personal experience also speaks through the music itself, with symbolic motives and musical gesture articulating personal experiences, people and places in specific moments or as reminiscences through a web of musically-intertextual quotation and allusion. Ireland’s love of literature was as deeply held as his love of music, so the genre of song provided a uniquely powerful mode of expression. As a gay man living in the early twentieth century, who therefore had to suppress public knowledge of his sexuality, Ireland was unsurprisingly intensely private; he nevertheless harboured an ardent admiration for beautiful young men. Unable to live out his desires, his encoded music gave voice to an unspoken personal world.

These characteristics, of the man and the composer, are completely inextricable. As such, this study of Ireland’s song cycle of 1918, *Mother and Child*, attempts a holistic analysis of the work as the only method able to do justice to the constellation of musical, personal and aesthetic forces that constitute it. Given the innate connectedness of Ireland’s life and work, the composer’s editorial practice of retitling songs from their poetic texts is of particular interest as another iteration of self-expression, and emphasis is given to this important aspect of his work with song within the methodological framework.

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298 The restrictions of contemporary society meant that, like John Ireland, Housman also had to conceal his homosexuality. Writing in the early 2000s, Efrati notes how the ‘interface between Housman’s poetry and his homosexuality has clearly begun to be considered academically’, p. 14. It is notable that Housman was a poet Ireland chose to set in song and cycle, and it seems likely that the homoerotic undercurrents of the verse contributed to the composer’s interest in using it. In relation to the *On Wenlock Edge* case study in this thesis, it is the intersection between the ordering of Housman’s poetic collection and Vaughan Williams’s cycle structure that is of central interest, rather than the poet’s homosexuality or any expression of it though his verse. However, in the case of John Ireland, the composer’s homosexuality is of central importance to the study, providing an explanation for his practice of secretly encoding experience in music and thus justifying the framework of the methodological approach developed for analysis of *Mother and Child*. 

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John Ireland and literature

As already described, Ireland had a life-long love and fascination for literature, and the importance of this influence on the composer’s music is profound. Ireland was born into something of a literary dynasty. His father was involved in the management and publication of the *Manchester Examiner* during the 1840s and his mother, Annie, was an author and critic from a family of scholars and academics. Growing up in a household with writing and writers at its centre, it is perhaps no surprise that literature grew to become ‘as important to him as music was’. This is, of course, borne out in his extensive song output, now anthologized over five volumes, but also in his choral and church music, with both repertories demonstrating the breadth of his literary tastes and interests. As Fiona Richards notes:

He read widely and drew on many fine poems for inspiration. His output of some seventy songs uses poetry that is nearly always finely crafted: there are settings of Thomas Hardy, A.E. Housman, John Masefield, Arthur Symons and several Elizabethan sonneteers. Often he set newly published poems by contemporary writers, and there are also signs of eclectic and idiosyncratic literary tastes, such as his favouring of now little-known poets such as James Vila Blake.

Yet Ireland’s engagement with literature is by no means limited to genres explicitly combining words and music. Literary terms and forms punctuate his orchestral and instrumental works, as in the *Orchestral Poem in A Minor* of 1903-1904 and the *Soliloquy* for solo piano, composed in 1922. Similarly, many of Ireland’s piano works are prefaced by literary quotations, such as *Sarnia: An Island Sequence* (composed between 1940 and 1941) in which each of the three movements is prefaced by a literary passage or phrase drawn from historical writing, prose and poetry, respectively. The process of bestowing and revising titles is another important element of Ireland’s musico-literary practice. The composer gave extremely careful consideration to his titles, as the manuscript to his *Three Pastels*, with its numerous revisions, scribblings and faint markings, attests. Yet there appears to be even more substance to this process, as Richards describes:

…nearly every work bears a descriptive title: only the handful of works with generic titles such as Sonata, Sonatina and Rhapsody do not. Ireland himself left various clues that his titles were intended to carry some weight. There are many letters in which he talked of the specific connections between certain pieces and a place or person. He also wrote in more general terms that his titles ‘give some idea of the emotions involved’, and that personal

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experiences often instigated a composition…The fact that a piece does not have a graphic title does not mean that it is not inherently programmatic.\footnote{Richards, The Music of John Ireland, p. 31.}

As noted above, some would argue that the works of all composers are, to a greater or lesser extent, imbued with personal experiences and connections, but in the case of John Ireland the degree to which this concept is so explicitly acknowledged by the composer himself, those who knew him and in the extra-musical dimension of his works marks a significant point of departure, musicologically speaking. The encoded nature of Ireland’s compositions and working practices necessarily invites a range of hermeneutical approaches, and as a result scholarship exploring the composer’s output often seems to be somewhat speculative, characterized by a complex, fragmentary, unfixed ambiguity. Yet any and all discussions about his work inevitably return to the inextricable trinity of people, places and literature that appear to be as fundamental to the music as the notes and rhythms. Literature was an incredibly important part of Ireland’s deeper, personal consciousness, providing a focus and reference point through which he could reflect his thoughts, feelings and sentiments. It is no surprise, therefore, that where words and music coalesce in Ireland’s compositional output, works are characterized by the very deepest levels of expressive intensity. As such, his practice of bestowing and revising titles offers a particularly fascinating frame of reference through which to consider his songs.

\textbf{Ireland the composer of song}

Songs are a highly celebrated element of Ireland’s compositional output and he has been credited with making ‘one of the most important contributions to the genre of English Romantic Song’.\footnote{Hold, p. 185.} Unlike many of his contemporaries, Ireland continued to compose songs after the First World War as Trevor Hold notes:

Of the English songwriters who established themselves before the First World War, Ireland was one of the few who continued to make songwriting a major part of his creativity. After the war, Frank Bridge wrote very few songs, Vaughan Williams’s output was intermittent (he was busy with large-scale works), Bax’s main songwriting period was over by the mid-1920s, whilst Quilter’s post-war songs show no significant development on those he wrote between 1905 and 1914.\footnote{Hold, p. 185.}
However, Ireland’s engagement with the genre was not really sustained beyond 1938 after he had completed his *Five XViIIth Century Poems*. Banfield notes that the compositional technique he established by the age of thirty-four ‘served him without radical change for the rest of his creative life’,\(^{305}\) but this is in no way indicative of a limited creative approach to the genre of song. Indeed, the breadth of Ireland’s musical style and poetic interest is significant. Hold observes that his output includes ‘tuneful songs with a popular flavour’, like *I have twelve oxen* (1918), as well as ‘songs of uncompromising seriousness’, like the *Five Poems by Thomas Hardy* (1926),\(^{306}\) and these works duly demonstrate the significant variety of compositional approaches one encounters within Ireland’s song repertory. In *I have twelve oxen*, the composer mirrors the regular verse, with its repeated closing refrain, by framing the text in a simple strophic structure to an engaging, folk-like melody. The piano accompaniment closely shadows the vocal line with occasional variations in articulation and accompaniment figures. In contrast, the *Five Poems by Thomas Hardy* represent an altogether more modernist approach, expressed through a compositional voice that is almost unrecognisable from that heard in *I have twelve oxen*. In the second of the songs, ‘In my sage moments’, dense piano chords operate asynchronously with the vocal line, navigating a complex tonal trajectory within the through-composed structure. The musical effect is profoundly disconcerting and the mood grim. Interestingly, this variety in musical approach does not appear to be dictated by poet or date of composition (though, unquestionably, later songs tend to be characterized by their use of increasingly complex harmonic language). Rather, the text itself is always at the centre of Ireland’s musical response, further emphasising the essential importance of words to the composer.

It has been suggested that Ireland’s song output, in particular, ‘represents a considerable canon of consistent self-expression’.\(^{307}\) In the introduction to his analytical summary of a selection of Ireland’s better-known songs, Charles Markes, a life-long friend and confidante of John Ireland, describes the composer’s approach to working with poems:

> When a poem aroused an emotional response in him, Ireland would read and reread it, become immersed in it and ultimately, it would seem, assume the identity of the poet or of the characters in the poem; in this sense he became a participant, seldom a spectator, such was his dedication to his art.\(^{308}\)

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\(^{305}\) Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, p. 161.

\(^{306}\) Hold, p. 185.


In spite of Markes’s unquestionable insight into Ireland’s compositional methods, this particular observation is, perhaps, not entirely accurate. It is not that Ireland assumes the identity of the poet or characters to which he is drawn, but rather that the situations, emotions and characters with which he identifies are claimed, subsumed and refocused to reflect something of his own internal consciousness. Ireland’s practice of retitling the poetic texts that he set is especially indicative of this process, as he frames the poetic situations, characters and emotions that resonate so powerfully with him through the lens of his own deeply personal experience.

**Ireland’s retitling of songs**

Of the seventy or so songs composed by John Ireland, well over half are retitled from their poetic originals. Whether or not living poets whose texts were renamed endorsed the composer’s custom is unclear, but there are no documented expressions of disapproval (as there are between Housman and Vaughan Williams, for example). Whilst the concept of retitling poetry when set as song is not entirely without precedent, it is not particularly commonplace either. Neither Schumann nor Mahler, for example, gave new titles to songs drawn from larger poetic collections and although amongst English, twentieth-century composers occasional instances of individual songs being retitled can be found, the process is almost never applied to whole cycles or collections. So the extent to which this practice formed such an important and meaningful part of John Ireland’s work with song, and more particularly his work with song cycles, is both unique and significant.

The history of poetic titles is a long, complex and fascinating one, which Anne Ferry has chronicled. It is notable that in the earliest historical stages of printing, titles were often conferred by someone other than the poet, perhaps the copyist, editor, translator, publisher or some other party. However, Ben Jonson was amongst the earliest English poets to reclaim the role of titler and ‘consider titles for short poems as an appropriate and important object of attention for the poet’. This history is, of course, inextricably linked to the deeper philosophical concerns that underly the very concept of poetic titles, as Ferry outlines:

> By its very nature, then, a title has certain inescapable attributes that bring into play some fundamental assumptions. To begin with, because it is situated to be read first, the title’s presence presupposes a reader: if only the author were to see the poem, it would be a redundant gesture for the poet to put wording above it telling something about it not yet known. This means that a title inevitably involves the poem in a kind of public interchange, a presentation of it by the titler to an actual or hypothetical reader. Because the title purports to say something *about* the poem, it is not taken to be wording *of* the poem; and because it

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310 Ferry, p. 42.
This idea of ‘interpretive authority’ is central to John Ireland’s song titles because they often appear to be a long way removed from the title conferred by the poet. In the case of ‘The Salley Gardens’ from Songs Sacred and Profane, Ireland’s revision of the title to omit Yeats’s prefacing ‘Down by’ might be considered to be a form of truncation: essentially a functional, streamlining process where the retitling abridges the poetic title or adds grace and simplicity to what would otherwise be a clunky, cumbersome alternative. Yet the composer’s treatment of the opening song of his cycle Songs of a Wayfarer suggests that even this may be an over-simplification. In this case, Ireland reduces Blake’s title — ‘Memory hither come’ — simply to ‘Memory’. Whilst this could, of course, be a straightforward truncation, the composer’s intervention also alters the title from imperative to substantive, perhaps suggesting a more profound transformation. However, the majority of retitled songs are the subject of more considerable alteration, with newly-bestowed titles sometimes derived directly from the poems themselves, sometimes from auxiliary literary or personal references and sometimes from the creative depths of the composer’s imagination. In the Two Songs to Poems by Rupert Brookes (1917/1918), for example, Ireland abandons Brookes’s poetic title — ‘The dead’— and retitles the song according to the poem’s opening line: ‘Blow out you bugles’. Although the new title is drawn from within the text, Ireland’s revision effects a considerable, indeed transformative shift in focus. The composer’s title highlights patriotism and valour as the principal poetic themes — unmistakably realized in the Holstian march-figures and blazing chords of the song’s accompaniment — whilst the poet’s exploration of youthful sacrifice is very much relegated to become a matter of secondary concern. It is notable that, other than the occasional repetition of a poetic line in setting, Ireland seldom made any other textual revisions to the poetic texts he selected. As such, the editorial practice of retitling is a highly significant aspect of the composer’s work and provides a unique methodological framework within which to contemplate and analyse his songs and cycles in particular. Given the deeply complex and personal nature of Ireland’s compositions and their inextricable dependencies across genre and extra-musical media, his song titles provide a semiotic trajectory directing the listener towards a greater awareness of what is often a unique but always very personal response to the texts that he so carefully selected. Details of Ireland’s songs and their titles are presented in table 11.

311 Ferry, pp. 2-3.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of comp. (song)</th>
<th>Ireland’s title</th>
<th>Original poetic title where different</th>
<th>Poet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1903-1911</strong></td>
<td><em>Songs of a Wayfarer</em>&lt;br&gt;1. Memory&lt;br&gt;2. When daffodils begin to peer&lt;br&gt;3. English May&lt;br&gt;4. I was not sorrowful&lt;br&gt;5. I will walk on the earth</td>
<td>Memory, hither come Spleen [No title]</td>
<td>William Blake Shakespeare D.G. Rossetti Ernest Dowson James Vila Blake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Hope the hornblower</td>
<td></td>
<td>Henry Newbolt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>When lights go rolling round the sky</td>
<td></td>
<td>James Vila Blake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Sea fever</td>
<td></td>
<td>John Masefield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Song from o’er the hill</td>
<td></td>
<td>P.J. O’Reilly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Bed in summer</td>
<td></td>
<td>R.L. Stevenson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Great things</td>
<td></td>
<td>Thomas Hardy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1916</strong></td>
<td><em>Two Songs</em>&lt;br&gt;1. Blind&lt;br&gt;2. The cost</td>
<td></td>
<td>E. Thirkell Cooper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>The heart’s desire</td>
<td>March</td>
<td>A.E. Housman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1917/1918</strong></td>
<td><em>Two Songs to Poems by Rupert Brookes</em>&lt;br&gt;1. The soldier&lt;br&gt;2. Blow out you bugles</td>
<td>The dead</td>
<td>Rupert Brookes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>The bells of San Marie</td>
<td>St. Mary’s bells</td>
<td>John Masefield</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of comp. (song)</td>
<td>Ireland’s title</td>
<td>Original poetic title where different</td>
<td>Poet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1918                | *Mother and Child*  
1. Newborn  
2. The only child  
3. Hope  
4. Skylark and nightingale  
5. The blind boy  
6. Baby  
7. Death-parting  
8. The garland | Your brother has a falcon  
Crying my little one  
I dug and dug amongst the snow  
When a mounting skylark sings  
Blind from my birth  
Love me – I love you  
Goodbye in fear  
Roses blushing red and white | Christina Rossetti |
| 1918                | The sacred flame | Song | Mary Coleridge |
| 1918                | Remember | Not yet | Mary Coleridge |
| 1918                | Earth’s call: A sylvan rhapsody | [Stanza VII] from Weekend | Harold Monro |
| 1918                | Spring sorrow | Song | Rupert Brooke |
| 1918                | I have twelve oxen | (early English) | |
| 1918                | If there were dreams to sell | Dream-pedlary | T. Lovell Beddoes |
| 1919                | *Three Songs*  
1. The adoration  
2. The rat  
3. Rest | | Arthur Symons |
| 1919                | Hawthorn time | ‘Tis time I think, by Wenlock | A.E. Housman |
| 1920                | *Two Songs*  
The trellis  
My true love hath my heart | | Aldous Huxley  
Sir Philip Sidney |
<p>| 1920                | The three ravens | (Trad.) | |
| 1920                | The journey | | Ernest Blake |
| 1920                | The East Riding | | Eric Chilman |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of comp. (song)</th>
<th>Ireland’s title</th>
<th>Original poetic title where different</th>
<th>Poet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1921                | *The Land of Lost Content*  
1. The Lent Lily  
2. Ladslove  
3. Goal and wicket  
4. The vain desire  
5. The encounter  
6. Epilogue | Look not in my eyes for fear  
Two a week the winter thorough  
If truth in hearts that perish  
The street sounds to the soldiers’ tread  
You smile upon your friend today | A.E. Housman |
| 1921                | The merry month of May | | Thomas Dekker |
| 1922                | Vagabond | | John Masefield |
| 1924                | When I am dead my dearest | Song | Christina Rossetti |
| 1924                | What art thou thinking of? | | Christina Rossetti |
| 1925                | Santa Chiara | Palm Sunday: Naples | Arthur Symons |
| 1925                | *Three Songs to Poems by Thomas Hardy*  
1. Summer schemes  
2. Her song  
3. Weathers | | Thomas Hardy |
| 1926                | *Five Poems by Thomas Hardy*  
1. Beckon to me to come  
2. In my sage moments  
3. It was what you bore with you, woman  
4. The tragedy of that moment  
5. Dear, think not that they will forget you | | Thomas Hardy |
| 1926                | *Three Songs*  
Love and friendship  
Friendship in misfortune  
The one hope | Give me the depth of love  
Vain longing, the one hope | Emily Brontë  
(Anon)  
D.G. Rossetti |
| 1927                | *Two Poems by A.E. Housman*  
1. We’ll to the woods no more  
2. In boyhood  
3. Spring will not wait  
[Piano solo] | When I would muse in boyhood  
[Quote from ‘Tis time, I think] | A.E. Housman |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of comp. (song)</th>
<th>Ireland’s title</th>
<th>Original poetic title where different</th>
<th>Poet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td><em>Two Songs</em></td>
<td>Tryst</td>
<td>Arthur Symons D.G. Rossetti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>During music</td>
<td>In Fountain Court</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>If we must part</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ernest Dowson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td><em>Songs Sacred &amp; Profane</em></td>
<td>The Advent</td>
<td>Alice Meynell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hymn for a child</td>
<td>Sylvia Townsend Warner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>My fair</td>
<td>Alice Meynell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Salley Gardens</td>
<td>W.B. Yeats</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The soldier’s return</td>
<td>Sylvia Townsend Warner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The scapegoat</td>
<td>Sylvia Townsend Warner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advent meditation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Song</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Down by the Salley Gardens</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jump through the hedge, lass!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>See the scapegoat, happy beast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Tutto e Sciolto</td>
<td></td>
<td>James Joyce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td><em>Five XVIIth Century Poems</em></td>
<td>A thanksgiving</td>
<td>Bassus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All in a garden green</td>
<td>Thomas Howell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>An aside</td>
<td>Henry VIII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A report song</td>
<td>Nicholas Breton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The sweet season</td>
<td>Richard Edwardes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pleasure it is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Country song</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Edwards’ MAY</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 11 chronologically lists Ireland’s song output and details the composer’s revision of poetic titles. The survey provides some revealing insights into this aspect of Ireland’s editorial practice. It becomes apparent, for example, that the composer really only began to engage in the process of significantly retitling poetry from 1918 (although, of course, this point in time marks a more active and sustained engagement with the genre of song). Indeed, aside from *I have twelve oxen* and ‘The soldier’ from *Two Songs to Poems by Rupert Brooke* all of the poetic titles set during this year are the subject of meaningful revision. It is also clear that Ireland was inclined to retitle texts by some poets more than others. Housman’s poetry, for example, appears to have received particularly special attention with all but two of Ireland’s settings being retitled with significant alteration from the poetic source.\(^{312}\) Yet in contrast, all nine of his Hardy songs retain the titles their author endowed.

In the context of Ireland’s song cycles two works in particular stand out: his Rossetti cycle of 1918, *Mother and Child*, and his Housman cycle of 1921, *The Land of Lost Content*. Both works set poems drawn from a single volume of verse by one poet, but more importantly the texts selected for each cycle are almost entirely retitled. Ireland’s imposition of nomenclature functions as a meaningful process of personal reflection, providing a unique insight into what he considered to be the principal effect of each poem. In combination with the words and music this factor closely informs the broader structure of each work, suggesting ways in which listeners might navigate and understand the cycles. Analysing the works in these terms reveals a number of shared formal features between the two cycles. For example, in both *Mother and Child* and *The Land of Lost Content* Ireland avoids developing specific narrative constructs. Rather, he forms cycles that synthesize and explore elements of personal experience. It is also apparent that in both cycles, Ireland uses the closing songs to summarize the issues explored in those preceding. In *The Land of Lost Content* this function is overtly realized in Ireland’s new title: ‘Epilogue’. In *Mother and Child*, Ireland’s retitling of the final song to ‘The garland’ is itself metaphorically suggestive of the cycle’s textual variety. Yet words drawn directly from the poem — ‘delight’, ‘love’, ‘hope’, ‘memory’ and ‘death’— reflect the mood, expression, and, in some cases, the newly conferred titles of the cycle’s earlier songs.

\(^{312}\) Both ‘The Lent Lily’ from *The Land of Lost Content* and ‘We’ll to the woods no more’ from *Two Poems by A.E. Housman* retain their original poetic titles.
Ireland, mothers and children

Whether devotional or secular, from the earliest periods of human history the fundamental relationship between mother and child has been an inspiration for artists of every kind. Within the repertory of nineteenth-century Western art song there are countless examples of works that explore this theme from a variety of perspectives. Brahms’s *Wiegenlied* is a peaceful lullaby, Richard Strauss’s *Muttertändelei* captures an excited mother’s pride and adoration and Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und Leben* touches on the joys of motherhood within the broader context of female experience. Of course, in each case the theme is presented through the eyes of a male composer. The subject is much less represented in English song, and, interestingly, Ireland appears to be fairly unique amongst his contemporary early twentieth-century composers, both male and female, in drawing on this trope.

It is notable that Ireland’s own childhood appears, on the whole, to have been an unhappy one. His letters give accounts of being ‘shut in dark rooms with no food or water, for 24 hours, for the slightest offence’, suggesting a complex relationship with his parents and older siblings. Yet it is also noted that his mother was supportive of his musical ambition, giving him his first piano lessons and settling a modest sum of money on him when she realized he would pursue a musical future. As the last of five children, Ireland’s father was seventy and his mother forty when he was born and both had died within a year of his enrolment at the RCM aged fourteen. He enjoyed a closer relationship with the youngest of his three sisters, Ethel, and she, and subsequently her sons, were the only close family members with whom he remained in contact. Ireland was not a parent himself, but in his capacity as organist at St Luke’s Church, Chelsea he worked closely with the choirboys and the friendships he formed with several of these choristers would be amongst the most important and meaningful of his life. To what extent these relationships represented paternal instinct or paedo-erotic desires is unclear and the sensitivities surrounding this aspect of the composer’s personal history are, of course, thrown into sharp relief in a contemporary, retrospective analysis, such as this —perhaps even more so in this context, given the Church’s complicated legacy of historic abuse. However, Ireland’s concern for the boys’ welfare, his interest in their musical education and development and his affection appear to have been genuine and well-intentioned, and his friendship with one of the boys was

sustained well into old age. The complexities and contrasts in the composer’s experiences from the perspective of pseudo-parent and child provide a fascinating context for considering his engagement with Rossetti’s poetry, particularly as framed by the new titles he composes.

Rossetti’s sequence

Rossetti’s Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book, comprising one hundred and twenty poems, was published in 1872 to great critical acclaim. Rossetti dedicated Sing-Song to the nephew of the suitor she rejected: Charles Cayley. The poet never married or had children and it has been suggested that this is an important aspect of this collection:

...in her biography of Rossetti, Jan Marsh persuasively argues that the childless Rossetti was really writing for her ‘lost’ children, or, more likely, for the child she had once been: ‘The melodious speaking voice of the volume is that of the adult self “mothering” the child within; imaginatively, therefore, the baby to whom the book was dedicated may thus also be Christina’s own infant self.”

The collection is diverse in terms of the variety of poetic structures and themes that are explored, perhaps a result of the broad range of literary influences to which Rossetti was exposed. The poems range in their scope and content, moving between depictions of animals and countryside scenes to nonsense verse and riddles, from didactic, moralising and proverbial texts to representations of infant death. In line with her profound religious convictions, Rossetti also incorporates biblical material and references, as in poem number seventeen — ‘Hope is like a harebell’ — which paraphrases the well-known passage from 1 Corinthians 13:13. An analysis of the original published ordering of Rossetti’s sequence of poems suggests some interesting levels of organisation. It has been proposed that Rossetti’s sequence of poetry is structured in temporal terms:

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316 Barbara Garlitz, ‘Christina Rossetti’s Sing-Song and Nineteenth-Century Children’s Poetry’, PMLA, 70 (1955), 539-543.
318 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. ... But the greatest of these is love.
Unfolding a narrative from cradle to grave, from winter to fall, from sunrise to sunset, Sing-Song invites readers to understand life as an ordered totality. However, it is also possible to read the ordering and grouping of texts in terms of their connections through genre, imagery and theme. The opening six poems of Sing-Song, which share associations of symbolism, theme and imagery, are interesting in this regard.

The first four poems — ‘Angels at the foot’, ‘Love me – I love you’, ‘My baby has a father and a mother’ and ‘Our little baby fell asleep’ — are very clearly all representations, joyful and tragic, of infancy. Poem number six — ‘Baby cry’ — also highlights the theme of infancy, though within a more specifically domestic context. Yet within this sequence Rossetti includes as the fifth poem ‘Kookoorookoo’, a lively farmyard scene filled with the delightfully vibrant sounds of the crowing cockerel. Sharon Smulders describes this opening sequence as a ‘fugue containing poems about the newly born child and the newly born day’, yet the rich biblical allusions running throughout this group of poems appear to outline a much more devotional framework. The imagery of ‘Angels at the foot’ and ‘head’ of the ‘babe in bed’ in the first poem and the rapturous expression of unconditional love in the second poem recall both the scenes and wider message of the Nativity. Similarly, the baby that has a ‘father and a mother’ in the third poem may be understood to be spiritually ‘rich’ in contrast to the ‘fatherless, motherless’ child who is an orphan in faith. The representation of infancy in the fourth poem appears to mirror Christ’s death and resurrection:

Our little baby fell asleep  
and may not wake again,  
For days and days and weeks and weeks;  
But then he’ll wake again,  
And come with his own pretty look,  
And kiss Mamma again.

In this light the fifth poem, ‘Kookoorookoo’, may be read with much greater gravity than its colourful language suggests, the image of the crowing cock symbolic of Christ’s betrayal rather than a charming, rustic evocation. The sixth poem of the opening sequence — ‘Baby

319 Sharon Smulders, ‘Sound, Sense and Structure in Christina Rossetti’s Sing-Song’, Children’s Literature, 22 (1994), 3-26 (p. 3).
320 Smulders (p. 4).
cry’ — seems to sustain the Passiontide imagery as the sick child instructed to ‘gulp’ the ‘physic in the cup’ parallels the offering of vinegar to Christ on the cross. Given the devout nature of her Anglo-Catholic faith, it is perhaps no great surprise that Rossetti might choose to begin her anthology by reflecting on the ultimate story of childhood.

In contrast, poems forty-four to forty-seven may be seen to be grouped together according to genre. All four texts — ‘One and one are two’, ‘How many seconds in a minute?’, ‘What will you give me for my pound?’ and ‘January cold desolate’ — are didactic, offering instruction in counting and recalling the order and characteristics of the months of the year. In the same way, poems fifty-eight through to sixty-one all focus on the features and characteristics of animals in domestic and natural settings: ‘When fishes set umbrellas up’, ‘The peacock has a score of eyes’, ‘Pussy has a whiskered face’ and ‘The dog lies in his kennel’.

Ireland’s selection of eight texts for *Mother and Child* is drawn from across the collection and completely reordered as compared to Rossetti’s chronology. That said, aside from a poem from near the beginning of the collection and one from near the end — numbers two and one hundred and sixteen within the poet’s sequence — Ireland’s remaining selections are relatively closely grouped, as he includes numbers eleven, thirteen and nineteen and numbers eighty-three, eighty-five and eighty-nine. These are, however, non-sequential within and without their nearer groupings as table 12 makes clear.

**Table 12: Ireland’s ordering of Rossetti’s sequence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Ireland’s sequence</th>
<th>Rossetti’s sequence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newborn</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The only child</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skylark and nightingale</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The blind boy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death-parting</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The garland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first three poems that Ireland selects fall, in Rossetti’s volume, within a sequence of texts in which the juxtaposition of domestic comfort with external hardship is a central thematic feature of the poetry. In poem number nine, for example, clothes ‘soft and warm’ distinguish the fortunate child from ‘the poor | Out in the cold’, for whom they are ‘sorry’. Although punctuated by occasional sundry riddles and biblical verses, the sequence of poems from number seven, ‘Eight ‘o clock’, through to number nineteen, ‘Crying, my little one’, sustain this important theme of contrast. Sometimes the concepts of comfort and hardship are explored through human experience and sometimes they are framed within the natural world, but there is typically an emphasis on seasons and weather with the imagery of ‘snow’, ‘wind’ and ‘rain’ supporting notions of warmth or coldness. The second group of poems that Ireland selects (from amongst the eighties in Rossetti’s sequence) appear to be more disparately arranged. This portion of the collection is rather more characterized by pairings, with poems eighty-six and eighty-seven, for example, taking weddings and brides as their inspiration. Of the texts Ireland selects to set, only poem number eighty-nine, ‘When a mounting skylark sings’ bears any relationship to its neighbour (number ninety, ‘Who has seen the wind?’), which Ireland does not include in his cycle. However, the poetic connection is made through theme and metaphor rather than specific imagery. In poem ninety, not being able to see the wind but feeling and observing its effects in nature affirms notions of the intangibility of faith, just as the speaker of poem eighty-nine knows from the nightingale’s song ‘not if earth is merely earth | Only that heaven is heaven’. Otherwise, Ireland’s remaining poems, numbers eighty-three and eighty-five, stand very much alone in their content and ideas at this point in Rossetti’s sequence.

Rossetti’s Sing-Song presents one further semiotic complexity, in that it is an illustrated anthology and the imagery was integral to the author’s conception of the work. The artist Arthur Hughes was commissioned to provide the illustrations for publication, which he based on Rossetti’s own sketches culminating in something of a shared artistic and moral vision. Lorraine Janzen Kooistra writes:

Like Songs of Innocence and Experience, Sing-Song was conceived by its author as a composite of image and text in which the meaning of the verses was to be illuminated, extended, and completed by the pictures which accompanied them. Christina Rossetti did not, of course, produce and print both picture and verse for her nursery rhymes in the manner of the unique poet/painter/printer William Blake. But she did prepare a
fair copy of her poems for publication with a headnote sketch by her own hand over each lyric.\textsuperscript{321}

To what extent \textit{Sing-Song}'s imagery may have influenced Ireland's selection, handling and retitling of the poems provides another very interesting point of consideration, though it is not central to this study.

\textbf{Ireland's song cycle \textit{Mother and Child}}

Ireland composed his cycle, \textit{Mother and Child}, in 1918 and the work is dedicated to his sister. The songs are characterized by their musical simplicity. Very few significant, technical demands are made of the pianist, with accompaniments tending to either feature a single musical idea independent of the voice — as in the persistent quaver motif of 'Newborn' — or simply shadowing, homophonically, the vocal line, as in 'The only child'. Indeed, the uncomplicated vocal melodies, simple structures and limited harmonic palette of this cycle appear to have little in common with some of the other songs Ireland composed during 1918, the dramatic, musically-complex setting of \textit{Earth's call: A sylvan rhapsody} being the most obvious example. In this sense, Ireland’s musical response is always sympathetic to Rossetti’s direct language and the nursery context of each poem. The songs of the cycle reflect on different experiences and relationships between mothers and their children, as Ireland’s title for the work suggests. Yet interestingly, not all of the poems make specific reference to mothers or children. Indeed, the third, fourth and fifth songs — 'Hope', 'Skylark and nightingale' and 'The blind boy' — predominantly feature imagery relating to the natural world, which is in itself significant when the composer’s code of musical symbolism is taken into account. However, when understood within Ireland’s sequence and considered in the light of his retitling, the poems become imbued with new meaning and function as intense, emotional reflections. When one overlays the emerging textual architecture with musical detail, the potential structure of the cycle begins to be suggested.

\textsuperscript{321} Kooistra (p. 466).
Songs one and two: ‘Newborn’ and ‘The only child’

The first two songs of the cycle appear to work, textually, as a diametric pair, but elements of musical parity unify them. The first poem exudes familial warmth, as a mother, surrounded by all of her children, nurses her new baby ‘born within an hour’. She blissfully contemplates her child’s future delights and interests identifying the prized possessions — ‘falcon’ and ‘flower’ — of the newborn’s siblings whilst wondering ‘what is left for mannikin?’ The second poem is far removed from the gentle, domestic bliss of the first. Quite possibly inspired by Rossetti’s charitable work with fallen women (as many victims of sexual abuse, poverty and other desperate circumstances were labelled during the nineteenth century),

the scene is set on a snow-filled ‘winter night dreary’ as mother and child ‘tramp on’ determinedly through the physical and metaphorical struggles that lie before them. In spite of the contrasts of setting and imagery, in both poems the conflation of first- and second-person pronouns and the endearing terms of address — ‘mannikin’, ‘darling’ and ‘little one’ — highlight the symbiotic relationship between mother and child.

In many ways, Ireland’s retitling brings these features sharply into focus but to what extent should this editorial gesture be considered significant? After all, Ireland’s intervention streamlines Rossetti’s opening lines, and even though the title of the first song — ‘Newborn’ — is not drawn from the text it comes to name, it does unequivocally identify the imagery, setting and situation suggested by the poem. However, Ireland’s title for the second song — ‘The only child’ — is not nearly so obviously concluded from Rossetti’s text, but when the two song titles are considered in combination the effect becomes symbolic indeed and Ireland’s new titles establish a dyadic interdependence. It is clear from the poetry that both texts explore ideas of maternal love and affection, albeit within very different contexts. As read, the two poems juxtapose a child born into the warmth, comfort and care of a home and family with a child that has nobody but their wearied mother to rely upon. Irrespective of the difference in circumstances, the enduring bond of maternal love brings an egalitarian quality to these portraits of childhood. However, Ireland’s new titles and musical treatment of the poetry turns these ideas on their head by highlighting ideas of vulnerability and dependence, in respect to the child, that are inherent to both poems. In this sense the songs cast a strong and important autobiographical shadow, and, in their pairing, the songs form the first representation of personal experience within the broader structure of the song cycle.

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322 Kooistra (p. 476).
In Rossetti’s text and Hughes’s illustration for the first song, the birth of the baby is considered in light of the existing family group, which is significant to the composer’s interpretation of the poem. As the last of five children Ireland was considerably younger than his siblings and this formed a notable part of his estrangement with them. His new title for the song, ‘Newborn’, highlights the distinction between the baby and the established family unit, almost casting the infant as an interloper. When considered in this light, the poem’s question ‘But what is left for mannikin | Born within an hour?’ becomes direct rather than rhetorical, and the phrase ‘My least little one’ is transformed from a term of endearment to a literal, withering description, seeming to encapsulate the complexities and unhappiness of Ireland’s own early experiences. Understood in this way, the composer’s retitling of the cycle’s second poem to ‘The only child’ becomes distinctly less abstract, with the loneliness, isolation and difficulties of his own childhood, perhaps, causing him to identify with this circumstance in spite of his siblings. The accompanying image to this poem depicts a mother and child swathed in a dark cloak, struggling through a bleak, snow-filled landscape, suitably representing the sense of maternal determination to comfort and protect the child suggested in Rossetti’s words. Yet Ireland’s new title redirects focus to the child, and so the dreary setting functions as a metaphorical representation of emotional deficit. Through Ireland’s retitling, the song becomes an elegy for the loving relationships that he should have known during childhood.

The interdependence of the two songs as intimate childhood reflections is also projected in Ireland’s music. ‘Newborn’ and ‘The only child’ are very clearly different songs, yet they share a characteristic wistfulness and yearning quality as well as other subtle musical gestures that connect them and establish their pairing within the cycle’s structure. ‘Newborn’ opens in C major, with the musical material of the vocal melody growing embryonically from the opening left-hand piano figure, which Ireland presents within the middle of the texture. (Example 76)

Example 76 (‘Newborn’)
The theme is uncomplicated, with the limited melodic range and brevity of the musical idea appearing to mirror the innocence and fragility of the newborn child. Ireland’s setting of Rossetti’s text is observant of the grammatical structure with only one exception, which further highlights the concept of maternal adoration: the repetition of the poem’s closing two lines ‘I’ll rock you, rock you, in my arms, | My least little one’. The textual imbalance that this repetition creates is countered musically in the four-bar piano postlude, in which the song’s principal thematic idea is restated in increasingly low tessitura and with reduced dynamic range to bring the music setting this gentle scene to its gentle conclusion.

The other significant musical idea within the song is the persistent motif heard in the right-hand of the piano accompaniment. (Example 77)

Example 77 (‘Newborn’)

With its almost ceaseless arch-shaped movement in quavers, the gesture becomes hypnotic in its repetition and characterizes ‘Newborn’ as a rocking song. Yet this is a restless lullaby, and the sustained rhythmic movement of the motif is matched in Ireland’s surprisingly unsettled harmonies. There is continued movement between first inversion and seventh chords, which, when overlaid with the vocal line, form a series of appoggiaturas, suspensions and resolutions that combine to maintain a sense of constant change and momentum within the harmonic structure. (Example 78)

Example 78 (‘Newborn’)

brother has a falcon, Your
Cadences are somewhat elusive, and where they occur within the piano accompaniment they do not necessarily coordinate with the vocal phrasing. The song’s first decisive perfect cadence in A minor, for example, is formed across bb. 7-8 of the piano accompaniment, yet this is two bars ahead of the conclusion of the vocal phrase that the writing supports. (Example 79)

**Example 79 (‘Newborn’)**

However, it is notable that this cadence falls at the word ‘mannikin’ and the unequivocal arrival at a minor key emphasizes the sense of the infant’s misfortune alluded to through Ireland’s title. The asynchrony of the cadence with the vocal phrase also provides musical illustration of the question posed in Rossetti’s poem, with the continued harmonic movement of the accompaniment offering no firm answer.

It is only in the setting of the final vocal phrase (bb. 23-24) that the vocal line and accompaniment converge to conclusively form a perfect cadence in the song’s home key of C major. (Example 80)
In one sense the phrase brings the song to a clear and somewhat triumphant conclusion, with the rising piano chords briefly lending a fanfare-like character to the music. Yet given the shifting harmony, albeit within a clear and uncomplicated diatonic framework, and the darker potential of Ireland’s interpretation of the poetry, it is also possible to consider the phrase as a sardonic musical response: an ironic ‘ta-da’ in which the term ‘least little one’ assumes a more acutely pejorative tone.

As the song develops the vocal line becomes increasingly intense once again emphasising the theme of maternal affection, whether palpable or wanting. The writing explores the higher tessitura of the soprano voice to thrilling effect, most notably on the yearning minor 6th between bars 13 and 14. This marks the largest rising interval of the song and, as such, Ireland loads the poetic phrase — ‘My own little son’ — with musical significance. (Example 81)

The second song, ‘The only child’, is equally evocative of the scene suggested by its poetic text. Musically, it contrasts with the preceding song in several ways. The harmony, for example, is characterized by more persistent passing chromaticism, supporting the ‘colder’, ‘dreary’ setting suggested in the poem’s imagery. (Example 82)
Example 82 (‘The only child’)

There are also regular cadences which are formed in combination with the vocal line, resulting in an altogether more laboured sense of momentum. Although each of the phrases culminates in a major chord, these phrase endings provide fleeting harmonic brightness in what is otherwise, like the poetic setting, a rather bleak landscape. In terms of texture, the piano accompaniment for ‘The only child’ is much more closely related to the vocal line, shadowing the writing rhythmically and melodically throughout. The regular combination of minims and crotchets within the song’s rhythmic structure bring to life, musically, the mother’s trudging footsteps through the snow and contribute to a more reserved musical effect. (Example 83)

Example 83 (‘The only child’)

Yet in spite of these contrasts in compositional approach, there are a number of features that suggest musical parity between the cycle’s opening two songs. Both songs, for example, are structured in a 2/2 metre and Ireland indicates a Moderato performance at similar tempi: 54 minim bpm and 58 minim bpm, respectively. Whilst on the surface these points may seem to be analytically insubstantial, in performance the aural correlation that these features produce becomes significantly more compelling. There are also similarities in the thematic material of the two songs. Indeed, the opening vocal phrase of the second song
is, essentially, an inversion of the opening vocal phrase of the first. (Example 84 & example 85)

**Example 84** (‘Newborn’)

**Example 85** (‘The only child’)

The vocal compass for each song is also strikingly similar — D⁴-F⁵ in ‘Newborn’ and E⁴-F⁵ in ‘The only child’ — and the distinctive rising minor 6th interval heard in ‘Newborn’ also features prominently in the melodic material of ‘The only child’. In the second song, the gesture occurs twice within the strophic structure, firstly setting the phrase ‘warm on my shoulder’ across bb. 6-7 and then again across bb. 22-3. Just as in ‘Newborn’ the upper compass of the interval marks the highest note demanded of the singer, but it is Ireland’s setting of the motif within the same harmonic framework that creates one of the most striking aural connections between the two songs. (Example 86 & example 87)

**Example 86** (‘Newborn’)

**Example 87** (‘The only child’)

The second iteration of the motif in ‘The only child’ (bb. 22-23) is harmonically modified, with the F minor chord adding ominous colour to the setting of the word ‘trouble’. Yet this is but a passing shadow, as the phrase resolves to a soothing, but questioning dominant seventh chord in bar 24 at the word ‘treasure’. (Example 88)
On each occasion, Ireland associates this musical gesture — the rising minor sixth — with first-person poetic phrases that identify the abiding maternal bond, thus musically and textually unifying the songs through this symbolic focus. Yet taken in conjunction with the songs’ new titles, it is the yearning quality of this prominent interval that is preeminent, speaking to the sense of familial disillusionment that lies at the heart of the composer’s response to the poetry. Interestingly, Ireland uses this characteristic interval to similar effect in a later Rossetti setting: his part song *Twilight night* composed in 1922. Here (example 89) the rising minor sixth (in the soprano line) sets the words ‘as close’, which form part of a longer poetic phrase concerning the dissolution of a relationship:

We clasped hands close and fast,
As close as oak and ivy stand;
But it is past:
A rising minor sixth also features in the opening vocal phrase of the second of his *Three Songs* of 1926, ‘Friendship in misfortune’ (Example 90), used to set the words ‘of love’ within a poetic phrase similarly exploring a breakdown:

Give me the depth of love that springs
From friendship in misfortune grown,

Finally, although ‘The only child’ opens on a D minor triad, this is in no way suggestive of the song’s tonal centre. What is significant is that the relatively swift harmonic rhythm — generally two chords per bar— continues the pattern established in the previous song and the music ends firmly in C major, just as ‘Newborn’ does. As such, Ireland’s apparently simple music achieves a highly sophisticated objective, managing to unite — through theme, motif, harmony and tempo — two songs that still retain their own distinctive musical and poetic characters. The musical connections Ireland establishes across the songs
unite the poetic texts within the cycle’s structure, but the new song titles he bestows reframe Rossetti’s gentle, heart-warming depictions of the mother-child relationship as unsettling, intimate recollections of a more troubled childhood.

**Songs three, four and five: ‘Hope’, ‘Skylark and nightingale’ and ‘The blind boy’**

The social unacceptability of Ireland’s homosexuality at the turn of the twentieth century lies at the heart of the enshrouded nature of his work, yet as Fiona Richards notes ‘…there has never been any truly open discussion of Ireland’s personal life. In particular, there has been little written about his religious convictions or sexuality’, and Richards identifies the composer’s association with the church as ‘one of the most obvious ways in which his attraction to the beauty of youth could find an outlet’. Banfield considers the undiscussed ‘paederastic side of Ireland’s nature’ essential to any contemplation of the composer’s song output, positing that ‘if we ignore it we cannot fully understand the songs, which must surely be seen as a personal testament’. In 1904, at the age of twenty-five, Ireland was appointed organist and choirmaster at St Luke’s Church, Chelsea. He remained in post until 1926 and during this time he formed important relationships with three choirboys: Charles Markes, Bobby Glassby and Arthur Miller. Markes joined the choir in 1908, aged eight, becoming Ireland’s deputy at the organ when his voice broke. His musical opinion was important to Ireland, and he would comment and advise on the composer’s work throughout what would become a life-long friendship. Charlie’s friend, Bobby Glassby, joined the choir in 1911, aged eleven, and it is widely thought that Ireland’s well-known work ‘The Holy Boy’ was inspired by the chorister. Interestingly, this third piece in the set of four piano Preludes (1913-1915) was arranged between movements called ‘Obsession’ and ‘Fire of Spring’, adding further weight to the idea that Ireland’s titles direct understanding of their personal significance and importance. Finally, the composer enjoyed a very close companionship with Arthur Miller, who joined the choir in around 1915, aged ten.

All three boys played an active and integral role in the music of the church at the time Ireland wrote *Mother and Child* and it is notable that the three poems — set as songs three, four and five — stand apart from the opening song pairing (‘Newborn’ and ‘The only child’)

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to form the emotional core of the cycle. It is not at all clear that the songs are specific musical portraits or dedications to any or all of these three children, though the idea of a symbolic connection between a trio of songs and the trio of choristers is an appealing one. Yet the absence of overt maternal and infant imagery and the emphasis on natural world settings in all three texts does seem significant, and the exclusively first-person poetic voice of each text obfuscates, to some extent, both speaker and point of view within a process that appears to conceal or distance the potential emotional landscape that the songs may inhabit. There is also a sense of fleetingness in the effect of the progression from past to present to future through indications of phrase and tense in successive poems. Yet for all these distancing effects, the words and music also suggest some more direct links to Arthur Miller, the child (and later, young man) that seems to have been so incredibly important to John Ireland. When all of this is considered in combination with the composer’s retitling of the texts, the imagery of the poems and the musical material used to set them—on a variety of levels—becomes suggestive of the composer’s very personal response to each text.

(Song three): ‘Hope’

The first song in this group of three moves the poem a long way from the context implied in Rossetti’s original publication. In Sing-Song, ‘I dug and dug amongst the snow’ is presented amongst a group of poems (numbers eight to eleven) that contrast scenes of interior domesticity and comfort with the stark reality of the outside world through their shared winter imagery. None of these four poems bear any clear textual references to either mothers or children. The illustration that accompanies ‘I dug and dug’ does depict a young girl holding a spade in what appears, fundamentally, to be a horticultural scene, but this is certainly not the text’s enduring projection in Ireland’s cycle. The composer’s retitling of the poem to ‘Hope’ is particularly interesting, since it seems to be significantly at odds with the bleak connotations of burial and death that the verb ‘dug’ and the desolate imagery of ‘snow’ imply. Where Rossetti’s words capture a sense of futility, Ireland’s title highlights possibility and potential. In a letter of 1943, the composer wrote to his friend Father Kenneth Thompson on this very subject:

Life without romance is really dull – one lives only on memories, and even these are marred by the fact that one did not make the most of one’s opportunities. “Gather ye
rosebuds while ye may” is a maxim to be instilled into the young – though I know this to be contrary to ecclesiastical principles!\(^{325}\)

Father Kenneth Thompson was the correspondent with whom Ireland shared details of the most intimate aspects of his life, including his homosexuality (as the veiled reference in this letter suggests). Precisely which memories of missed opportunities the composer is referring to here can never be known, but it is striking, even in what may simply be a passing remark, that the poetic phrase he quotes — from Robert Herrick’s *To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time* written in 1648 — in relation to life, romance and missed opportunity, draws on metaphor and imagery linked to blooming and flowers. Of course landscapes and the natural world are a central and recurring theme in all of Ireland’s work, but flowers feature prominently in some of the composer’s most personal and intimate songs and most particularly in those connected with Arthur Miller. For example, in Ireland’s setting of Aldous Huxley’s ‘The trellis’, from *Two Songs* of 1920, a couple ‘lie rosily bowered’ by a ‘thick-flowered’ trellis where they are protected ‘from prying eyes of malice’. This song was composed in what Richards describes as ‘a year of personal rapture’ and embodies ‘his positive musical declarations of love’. Ireland later quoted a passage from the song in his Cello Sonata of 1923, which was a year of close involvement with Arthur Miller, thus connecting both the song and instrumental work with Ireland’s deeply held affection for Miller. Flowers also feature in ‘Love and friendship’ from the *Three Songs* composed in 1926. Here sustained references to the ‘rosebriar’ whose ‘summer blossoms scent the air’ allow the composer to explore the poem’s comparison of the transitory nature of love with the constancy of friendship. This song is also closely connected to Arthur Miller, being retrospectively headed with the dedication ‘for February 22, 1926’: Miller’s birthday. Clearly these songs — ‘The trellis’ and ‘Love and friendship’ — post-date *Mother and Child* (1918) but given the interdependence of musical and literary symbolism across Ireland’s output it is worth considering what the content and imagery of these later songs may reveal about their forebears.

Song number three, ‘Hope’, opens on a monotone A in the right hand of the piano accompaniment and this note comes to assume an important harmonic function, sounding as

\(^{325}\) Richards, ‘An anthology of Friendship: The Letters from John Ireland to Father Kenneth Thompson’ (p. 245).
an uncompromising pedal throughout. Notably, Ireland uses this musical device to similar effect in works dedicated or connected to Arthur Miller. For example, in the opening song from *We’ll to the woods no more*, which shares its name with the cycle’s title, repeated Gs toll consistently through the opening seven bars. This particular work was written in 1927, a mere two months after Ireland’s brief, disastrous, and unconsummated marriage to Dorothy Phillips, who was aged just seventeen, had taken place and fallen apart. In its manuscript copy, it is inscribed ‘To Arthur: in memory of the darkest days’. (Example 91)

**Example 91 (‘We’ll to the woods no more’)**

Similarly, albeit within a far more sophisticated thematic and harmonic framework, the opening section of the song ‘Love and friendship’, composed in 1926, is also characterized
by repetition of the note A, where it is heard on every beat of the first six bars and, indeed, sustainedly in a number of other passages within the song. (Example 92)

**Example 92 (‘Love and friendship’)**

Pedal points function unambiguously as harmonic anchors, and the potential for this device to operate symbolically in Ireland’s songs as an emotional representation of unwavering love and affection is self-evident. The fact that this musical idea features prominently in these songs specifically dedicated to Arthur Miller gives reasonable grounds to consider its presence in the third song of *Mother and Child* — ‘Hope’ — in the same regard.

In ‘Hope’ the repeated pitch, A, moves vertically across the texture throughout the song. It sometimes appears as the lowest sounding note, sometimes forms an inner pedal and sometimes an inverted one, but it is virtually unyielding. Indeed, there are only two beats in the song where the note A is not present in the harmony: b. 6\(^2\) and b. 9\(^2\). The idea that the note A, so important in this and other songs, is symbolically linked to Miller — ‘A’ for Arthur — is highly attractive.
In terms of rhythm, persistent crotchet-quaver units dominate the musical structure of ‘Hope’. They are, of course, indicative of the familiar skipping rhythms associated with nursery rhymes and might also be seen to recall the regular movements associated with digging. Yet Ireland creates a sense of urgency in the ceaseless and entirely conjoined vocal phrases, which drive the song determinedly onward. The vocal line is highly repetitive and melodically stunted, being almost entirely derived from a two-bar melodic cell comprising four notes, which only span the compass of a perfect fourth. (Example 93)

**Example 93 (‘Hope’)**

![Example 93](image)

I dug and dug amongst the snow,

Just as the harmonic and melodic range of the song is limited, Ireland adds expressive detail in muted tones with dynamics and articulation drawn from a minimal palette. The opening piano figure, marked *mezzo forte*, is subject to an immediate *diminuendo* to correspond with the singer’s first entry. Only at the beginning of the text’s second stanza is the initial dynamic restored, with the *mezzo forte* mark reinforcing the imperative of Rossetti’s text: ‘Melt, O snow!’, but this too is short-lived. In line with the diminishing hopes expressed in the text — ‘But all the winds from ev’ry land | Will rear no blossom from the sand’ — the dynamics continue to reduce to the understated *piano* that closes the song. Marks of articulation are similarly restrained, with most of the music falling into *legato* phrases.

However, there are a few instances where there is variation in this regard, and the articulation at these moments either highlights important motivic material or adds poignancy to the text being set. For example, the opening monotonal piano theme is written with both a slur and *staccato* figures creating a marked effect that announces its presence to the listener throughout the setting of Rossetti’s first stanza, further emphasising its symbolic importance (as a pedal note on the pitch A) within Ireland’s musical lexicon. (Example 94)
Occasional tenuto markings also interrupt the otherwise legato setting. The first is placed on the opening left-hand chord of the piano accompaniment in bar eight, coinciding specifically with the word ‘still’ in the poetic phrase ‘And still no green thing came to hand’. The second occurs in the right hand of the piano accompaniment of bar fifteen, coinciding specifically with the word ‘ev’ry’ in the poetic phrase ‘But all the winds from ev’ry land | Will rear no blossom from the sand.’ In both cases the tenuto marking is applied to extended chords, creating harmonic dissonance and adding emotional weight and resonance to the words declaimed in those moments.

In combination, the repeated rhythms, the driving but limited vocal line and harmonic stasis contribute to the sense of determination that Ireland’s title encapsulates. But placing these determined musical characteristics in counterpoint with the more despondent effects of the dynamics and articulation effectively captures the tension between optimism and futility that the song explores. Ultimately, though, Ireland gives the song the title ‘Hope’ and this idea receives the final musical word, being affirmed in the brightness of the closing tierce de Picardie.

(Song four): ‘Skylark and nightingale’

This fourth song of the cycle is marked by its lively optimism, with Ireland’s title giving specific focus to the two birds that the poem imagines. Birds can be symbolic of flight and freedom, but the skylark and nightingale are, of course, two of the finest songbirds and the idea that Ireland’s title might associate the poetic imagery with the clear, lofty treble voices of his beloved choristers is an immensely attractive one. Like the other songs of Mother and Child, the accompaniment introduces a single small idea from which a simple vocal melody develops organically. In this case, it is a rising three-note figure. (Example 95)
**Example 95** (‘Skylark and nightingale’)

![Example 95](image)

The mood of the music is carefree and graceful, with the bright Eb major tonality providing a stark contrast to the minor mode of the previous song.

Harmonically, Ireland’s writing is at its most sensuous, with a brief chromatic sequence voiced in relatively dense chords adding notable colour to bars seven and eight. (Example 96)

**Example 96** (‘Skylark and nightingale’)

![Example 96](image)

This falling quaver figure bears a passing resemblance to Ireland’s so-called ‘Passion motif’: a leitmotif that would reach its full musical and symbolic development in the 1920s. (Example 97)
Example 97 (Passion motif as identified in ‘The trellis’, No. 1 of Two Songs 1920)

Fiona Richards observes that in later works, the ‘Passion motif’ ‘is always associated with love, and usually occurs only once within a piece, at a moment of great intensity’. Its presence in music dedicated to or associated with Arthur Miller is striking, but the germs of the motif can be traced through a number of earlier works where related but embryonic versions feature in less complex forms. In ‘Skylark and nightingale’ the embryonic iteration of this musical idea — the Passion motif — in bars seven and eight highlights a poetic phrase that links the beauty of the birdsong with heaven, thus potentially linking Arthur Miller to the idea of rapture if not the divine. The poetic phrase following — ‘And on earth are fields of corn’ — provides immediate terrestrial contrast and this is reflected musically in a return to diatonic harmonies, longer note values and a reduction in tessitura and dynamics. Just as in the previous song, ‘Hope’, ‘Skylark and nightingale’ seems to reflect on the tension between longing and reality.

Although all of the songs in Mother and Child are effectively miniatures, ‘Skylark and nightingale’ adopts a slightly unusual and somewhat sophisticated form falling somewhere between being strophic and through-composed. Whilst the vocal melody setting the second half of this eight-line poem certainly evolves from the opening, it’s development by means of rhythmic augmentation, which alters the harmonic rhythm of the quaver accompaniment, sets it familiarly apart. (Example 98)

326 Richards, The Music of John Ireland, p. 149.
This modification of the musical material with its extended declamation adds to the sense of wistful dreaminess evoked in Rossetti’s ‘nightingale’, who ‘sings In the moonlit summer even’. The poem’s binary contrasts — ‘morn’ and ‘even’, ‘earth’ and ‘heaven’ — are well matched in Ireland’s porous form and evolving motif, sustainedly highlighting the distinction between imagination and actuality that is so essential both to this song and this central portion of the broader cycle structure. However, it is the binary imagery of ‘skylark’ and ‘nightingale’ that the song’s title finally directs attention to. The specific identification of these innocent, beautiful songbirds marks a central point of personal reflection on Ireland’s ardent admiration for the beauty of youth and Arthur Miller most particularly.

(Song five): ‘The blind boy’

The music returns abruptly to A minor for the fifth song of the cycle, creating a symmetry in the tritonal disjunction that characterizes the movement between song three, ‘Hope’, and song four, ‘Skylark and nightingale’. Ireland’s retitling of the text, though apparently a neat reduction of Rossetti’s opening line, is in fact more significant than it seems. In naming the song ‘The blind boy’, Ireland provides a human, infantile focus — albeit vague and anonymous — that is otherwise absent from the poem itself (which, fittingly, appears in Rossetti’s publication without accompanying illustration). Again, the setting and imagery belong to the natural world with the poetic voice functioning as an internal stream of consciousness in the same way as the preceding two songs. Yet an even more direct link is established between ‘The blind boy’ and its antecedent through the shared diction and imagery of the ‘lark’ in consecutive poems. The texts also share references to heaven. In ‘Skylark and nightingale’ it is overtly declaimed, but in ‘The blind boy’ heaven is implied in
the consolations of a world of colour, beauty and happiness ‘Where all Joy Bells are ringing’. The poetic references to ‘springing’ and ‘beautiful flowers’ in this fifth song form a final retrospective connection with song four, ‘Hope’.

In the context of Rossetti’s text the poem’s speaker is the child, offering a direct insight rather than one that must be inferred. But that is less straightforward in Ireland’s song setting, with the poetic voice appearing to assume a more immediate, personal resonance when considered within this smaller grouping of three songs. Similarly, although blindness is an established theme in Victorian children’s poetry³²⁷ and was an increasingly prominent disability in the aftermath of World War One, within the context of Ireland’s cycle the concept is better understood as a metaphor for isolation and loneliness. With its irregular line lengths and fractured rhyme scheme Rossetti’s monostanzaic poem certainly has the structural potential for an unsettling reading, but Ireland’s setting avoids menace and instead projects sadness and solitude as its principal emotions.

The music is pensive, with laborious repeated crotchets at a steady tempo coaxing the music steadily forwards. Just as in song two, ‘The only child’ — which also explores notions of loneliness — the piano shadows the vocal melody closely, but the dense, block chords of the right hand add a distinct heavi ness to the musical texture in this case. The music is set firmly in the key of A minor, which, within the cycle’s broader tonal scheme, aligns it with song number three — ‘Hope’ — and highlights their textual and musical parallelisms within the broader cycle structure. The emphasis on bare fourths and fifths within the voicing of chords and modal inflections add to the solemn mood, and there is little solace to be found in the often awkward contour of the rather plain vocal line. Yet within what is, essentially, a limited modal palette, progressions of inverted seventh, ninth and thirteenth chords, with their resulting appoggiaturas, capture the sense of longing in the phrase ‘Till some day I shall see | Beautiful flowers | And birds in bowers’. The reorganisation of the vocal phrases into anacrusic units and the sighing character of the falling melodic shapes further emphasize this effect. (Example 99)

³²⁷ Garlitz (p. 541).
At the one place where the poetry provides a definite opportunity for levity — ‘joybells are ringing’ — Ireland indulges in some mild word-painting by accompanying the vocal line with movement in consecutive fifths and dense, accented seventh chords that vaguely recall the qualities of a peal. (Example 100)

However, the effect is generally more stark than joyful, and in concluding the song with the same four-note figure heard in the opening bars Ireland musically returns to the sentiments of the poem’s rather gloomy first phrase: ‘Blind from my birth’. As such, the composer’s setting ultimately emphasizes ideas of loneliness and isolation. Yet the closing tierce da Picardie to form an A major chord adds a final brightness and provides a further musical and interpretative connection with the third song, ‘Hope’. There is, of course, thematic recollection in the juxtaposition of dreamy possibility in the face of adversity, but the
repetition of this distinctive harmonic feature musically punctuates the triptych shape of this portion of the song cycle.

This sequence of three reflections — songs three, four and five — is all the more distinctive within the cycle’s structure because of the absence of tonal cohesion. Although tritonal relationships are not typically noted to be a particular expressive feature of Ireland’s music, as they are for example with Britten, the composer does employ this dissonance to similar symbolic effect in other songs. In particular his cycle of 1921, *The Land of Lost Content*, features two prominent examples. In the fourth song — ‘The vain desire’, Ireland combines the very same keys — A minor and Eb major — though here as synchronous tonalities within a single song. Interestingly, the circumstances of the poetry are similarly forlorn, with sentiments of isolation and loneliness expressed as a consequence of unrequited love (though undoubtedly romantic in this context). In the fifth song of the same cycle, ‘The encounter’, Ireland also uses the tritone in the construction of the prominent, opening, martial figure heard in the left-hand of the piano accompaniment. Here too Ireland’s song highlights the frustration of impossible love and cruelty of fate, though, again, within a definite homoerotic framework.

In *Mother and Child*, songs three, four and five — ‘Hope’, ‘Skylark and nightingale’ and ‘The blind boy’ — form a triptych within the broader cycle structure, sharing direct poetic and musical connections with and across each other through common diction, imagery (implied and literal) and musical gesture. In their recollection of motivic material and compositional techniques associated with Ireland’s code of musical symbolism, the songs begin to demonstrate how the composer’s personal experiences become intimately and integrally bound to his responses to poetry, which are in turn evoked through a distinct and meaningful musical language. Within the broader harmonic structure of the cycle, the tonality of the three songs, somewhat counterintuitively, is brought together aurally and symbolically by their tritonal disjunction. The optimistic Eb major of the lively central song, ‘Skylark and nightingale’, forms a tonal centre point for the imagined freedom of a song-filled heaven which is blunted in the earthly reality of the framing A minor songs. The hopes and complexities of Ireland’s relationships with children and young men are very much in focus in this portion of the cycle, though the parental perspective is less clear. Ireland’s titles hone these ideas by highlighting concepts of ‘Hope’ for the possibility of love and disappointment in the complexities of hidden affection (‘The blind boy’), perhaps within the context of his cherished choristers, (‘Skylark and nightingale’).
Songs six and seven: ‘Baby’ and ‘Death-parting’

In song number six, Ireland returns to poetry that bears explicit reference to mothers and children. Just as in the opening of the cycle, here the listener bears witness to the emerging scene as presented in the present tense of Rossetti’s poetry. The text very clearly offers the mother’s point of view:

Love me, - I love you,
Love me, my baby;
Sing it high, sing it low,
Sing it as may be.

Mother’s arms under you,
Her eyes above you;
Sing it high, sing it low,
Love me – I love you.

Yet once again Ireland turns this idea on its head, shifting the emphasis from focalizer to focalized in his own title, ‘Baby’.

Although the return to texts with a more overt poetic emphasis on mothers and children marks a new point within the song cycle’s structure, the musical transition is smooth with Ireland preparing the listener through a series of tonal and motivic gestures. Firstly, the final A major tierce da Picardie of song number five —‘The blind boy’ — becomes the dominant for the new D major tonality of song six. Secondly, Ireland introduces the motivic material of song six in the closing bars of song number five. The left hand of the piano accompaniment from bar thirty of ‘The blind boy’ introduces a repeated falling fourth, in octaves, (Example 101) which outlines the principal pitches of the accompaniment’s central musical idea in song six. As well as emphasising the notes D and A in the left hand, the chords played in the right hand also follow a pattern of falling and rising fourths. (Example 102)

Example 101 (‘The blind boy’)          Example 102 (‘Baby’)

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\begin{array}{c}
\text{Example 101 (‘The blind boy’)} \\
\text{Example 102 (‘Baby’)}
\end{array}
\]
The poem projects the ideals of motherhood, as the adoring parent cradles and comforts her baby. With its ardent phrases — ‘Love me, I love you | Love me my baby’ — the text emphasizes an all-embracing, unconditional love and this is well matched in Ireland’s music. With its hypnotic, repeated phrases which rarely move far from D major, the setting provides a sustained air of serenity, the gentle crotchet movement in contrary motion always suggestive of the rocking motion. In many ways the vocal line is indistinct, filtering comfortably into the ebb and flow of the accompaniment in the manner of an instinctive, spontaneous, whispered lullaby. The scant development and, essentially, unremarkable music create an enduringly peaceful mood. Notably, the only definite harmonic shift coincides with the phrase ‘Mother’s arms under you, | Her eyes above you;’, where the music moves briefly to the subdominant key of G major. Although this transition is hardly harmonically contentious, in the midst of otherwise continuous repetition of the tonic the effect is striking, adding something of a questioning tone to the phrase being sung. Aside from this, occasional modal inflections add passing colour, but Alan Rowlands identifies this idea — a four-note, descending figure — as another of Ireland’s musical fingerprints:

This [motif] consists of four notes descending scale-wise from the tonic, with either sharpened or flattened seventh…In the modal form it is often in yearning mood.

It is in the ‘yearning mood’ that the idea features in the vocal line of ‘Baby’, which includes three iterations of the figure, at bars five, nine and eighteen. At bar nine, the melody sets the words ‘Sing it as may be’. (Example 103)

**Example 103 (‘Baby’)***
But in its two other statements, the figure is associated with the poetic phrase ‘Love me, my baby’, rhythmically augmented in its final presentation to add particular emphasis to the imperative ‘Love me’. So whilst Rossetti’s text highlights a mother’s disquiet for returned affection in the bond with her child, Ireland’s title and setting appear to invert this idea to reflect the ‘Baby’, whose desire for unconditional love is equal.

Song number seven is a woeful valediction between mother and child. Although the illustration accompanying Rossetti’s poem — an adult hand clasping a child’s — does not make explicit who is bidding farewell to whom, the affectionate term of address ‘my dear’ is suggestive of a grieving mother in sorrowful conference with her dead child in the worst of all maternal experiences. Yet grim reality is diminished, to a degree, through the poem’s tender language and the speaker’s hopeful contemplation of an eternal reunion. The opening chords of the song are formed around a pedal B, to some extent concealing the song’s true E minor tonality. The initial aural implication is a move to the relative minor key from song six, but as the music progresses the primitive effect of the modulation comes to light. Musically, ‘Death-parting’ has a number of features in common with the cycle’s third song, ‘Hope’. The shared compound time signature of 6/8, with all its connotations of nursery and lullaby in ironic treatment, is immediately discernible. More strikingly, however, both songs open with the same distinctive, anacrusis rhythm, which is presented as a harmonic pedal point in each case. (Example 104 & example 105)

Example 104 (‘Hope’)

Example 105 (‘Death-parting’)

It might be assumed that shared musical features are indicative of a shared poetic interpretation projecting sentiments of hope across both songs, but Ireland’s retitling is stark and unequivocal with his choice of ‘Death-parting’ clarifying the poetic context with no softening of the blow. As the music and title of ‘Hope’ appear to encode Ireland’s affection for Arthur Miller, it becomes possible that the title conferred to this seventh song — ‘Death-parting’ — ultimately highlights the futility of these feelings. Yet however bleak the context
and sentiments may be, the music is characterized by a good deal of expressive detail in comparison with many of the other songs of the cycle.

Flexibility of tempo, broadly ranging dynamics and carefully considered marks of articulation afford both singer and pianist expressive freedom in characterizing the lamentable circumstances. In the preceding song number six, Ireland’s title, ‘Baby’, inverts the focalisation of Rossetti’s poem from mother to child and it is possible to see that as the case in the seventh song as well. After a difficult childhood marred by complex parental relationships, Ireland’s mother died when he was aged just fourteen and his father a year later. By this time, though, he had already left home for the RCM of his own volition creating a familial disunion of sorts. From the maturity of adulthood, the title of this song, ‘Death-parting’, makes explicit and final the separation between mother and child. Yet it must also be remembered that in 1918 (when this song and cycle were composed) in the shadow of World War One, countless parents and children experienced death-parting and it seems both possible and reasonable that all of these strands of experience — Ireland losing his own parents at a young age, the hollow hope of his affection for Miller and the loss experienced by parents and children on an incomprehensible scale at this time — would have been in the composer’s consciousness as he composed the song.

It is also notable how this pairing of songs six and seven mirrors, in structure and sentiment, the opening two songs of Mother and Child within the wider structure of the cycle. Just as the first song, ‘Newborn’, questions the warmth of the family scene depicted, song six, ‘Baby’, challenges the trope of unconditional parental love. Similarly, as song two, ‘The only child’, highlights feelings of isolation, song seven, ‘Death-parting’, brings notions of the ultimate separation to the fore.

**Song eight: ‘The garland’**

The eighth and final song fulfils a summarising role, drawing together and reflecting on the cycle’s emotional journey. Rossetti’s text bears no reference to mothers or children, but rather it identifies a variety of flowers with their symbolic meanings. The so-called language of flowers was a very important aspect of Victorian culture, and decorative books, which codified flowers and the sentiments attached to them, were abundant and in common
circulation during the nineteenth century. Given Ireland’s impulse for embedding symbolic motives and gestures in his music, it is not difficult to see why the figurative mode of expression explored in this poem appealed to him. His retitling of Rossetti’s poem to ‘The garland’ is significant on a variety of levels. Of course in literal terms it highlights the principal floral imagery of the poem. However, the new title also offers a symbolic allusion to the idea of remembrance (of mothers, children, World War One and, more specifically, the earlier songs of Mother and Child), which becomes indicative of this song’s structural, recollective function within the cycle. In ‘The garland’, Ireland’s choice of text is highly encoded, as the poem’s floral references allude to and reaffirm the sentiments and emotional landscapes of the preceding songs. In some cases this is effected through a process of more abstract symbolism, but in other cases through direct textual quotation:

Roses blushing red and white,
For delight;
Honeysuckle wreaths above,
For love;
Dim sweet-scented heliotrope,
For hope;
Shining lilies tall and straight,
For royal state;
Dusky pansies, let them be
For memory;
With violets of fragrant breath,
For death.

The opening image of the rose, with its well-established connotations of love, highlights not only the concept of love between parents and children, which is at stake throughout the cycle, but also the notion of romantic admiration that permeates the central portion — songs three, four and five — of Mother and Child. However, ‘The garland’ specifically presents ‘Roses blushing red and white’ and the symbolic juxtaposition of these colours speaks more directly to the poetic settings and emotional sentiments of the cycle’s two song pairings: numbers one and two (‘Newborn’ and ‘The only child’) and numbers six and seven (‘Baby’ and ‘Death-parting’). In songs one and two, the warmth and comfort of interior domesticity is contrasted with the cold, external landscape of a ‘winter night dreary’, a contrast which seems well matched in the distinction between red and white. The same is true for songs six and seven,

though here red is symbolic of the expressions of love in ‘Baby’ and the theme of death in ‘Death-parting’. In another sense the colour white highlights the idea of infantile fragility, which is a persistent theme throughout all of the songs in this cycle.

The second line of ‘The garland’ describes the rambling, untamed ‘honesuckle’ symbolic of devoted affection, a disposition which seems particularly relevant to the sentiments expressed through the Miller songs (numbers three, four and five), but also provides a fitting recollection of the mother in Rossetti’s second text, who comforts and nurses her child as she trudges determinedly through the harsh ‘winter night’. Whilst Ireland’s new title for the second song, ‘The only child’, casts a gloomy irony on the depiction of love, it is the idea of love and devotion, where lacking in the composer’s own experience of childhood, that the song deals with.

The biblical symbolism of ‘lilies tall and straight’, recalled in the fourth phrase of ‘The garland’ is multi-layered. Lilies, often referenced in the bible and other Christian texts, are thought to have sprung from the ground where Christ’s blood and tears fell during the crucifixion and have come to be associated with ideas of rebirth, renewal, purity and innocence. In one sense, then, the lilies emphasize the enduring idea of the purity and innocence of children in much the same way as the white roses of the poem’s opening line. However, with its references to the growth of flowers, song three (‘Hope’) deals more specifically with ideas of renewal and rebirth relating to the Passion (though it is perhaps that Ireland’s songs recontextualize the word’s meaning in terms of devoted ardour). But in a broader sense, lilies, as a Christian motif, pick up on the idea of heaven explored in ‘Skylark and nightingale’ and ‘The blind boy’ and further reflect the composer’s association with children through the church.

Whilst the symbolic connections between the language of flowers expressed in ‘The garland’ and the preceding songs of Mother and Child already described are, to some extent, abstract, there are also closer and indeed explicit links between this poem and the earlier songs. For example, the third poetic phrase — ‘Dim sweet-scented heliotrope, | For hope’ — directly quotes Ireland’s new title for song number three (‘Hope’). But the connection runs even more deeply than this, as the links between ‘heliotrope’ and the sun are particularly appropriate to a song that demands the ‘thaw’ of ‘flowers’ and melting of ‘snow’. As such, this network of specific and metaphorical allusions comes together to reflect the very essence of Ireland’s exploration of continued hope against all adversity in the cycle’s third song. In
the same way, ‘violets of fragrant breath | For death’ makes an explicit link with Ireland’s new title for song number seven: ‘Death-parting’. Although not identified specifically in title or poetic diction, the ‘Dusky pansies….For memory’ link directly to the cycle’s closing song, highlighting its recollective function within *Mother and Child* as, like a garland, it draws together the people, emotions and experiences that inform the songs in this very personal work.

Musically ‘The garland’ is straightforward, with the accompaniment closely shadowing and supporting the folk-style music of the singer’s melody. Vocal phrases are uncomplicated and syllabically set, allowing for absolute clarity in projection of the words. One of the song’s most significant musical features is the incorporation of a short, musical quotation from *Spring sorrow*, another song that Ireland composed during 1918. (Example 106 & example 107)

**Example 106** (‘The garland’) **Example 107** (*Spring sorrow*)

Although the harmonisation varies a little, the statement of the melody in F major and within very similar textural presentation is striking. Quotation is, of course, a well-known feature of Ireland’s composition and this is not the only example of self-referential musical quotation or allusion in the cycle, but the musical reference here is particularly significant because of the ‘input’ Charles Markes, one of the choristers Ireland maintained a close and lasting relationship with, had in the composition of *Spring Sorrow*.329 Like Ireland, Markes also had a difficult childhood. He lived in poverty and his father was an alcoholic, which became problematic to the extent that his mother left with him and his brother to make a home with their spinster aunt. It seems likely that this shared experience of struggle in childhood informed their connection. The idea that Ireland provided a father figure to Markes is often

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 mooted and Ireland himself spoke of a ‘stifled paternal instinct’.\footnote{Richards, ‘An Anthology of Friendship: The Letters from John Ireland to Father Kenneth Thompson’ (p. 256).} Yet Ireland must surely have admired Mrs Markes for her courage and fortitude, acting in the best interests of her children despite the hardship and social condemnation her actions may have attracted. Undoubtedly, all of these lived experiences play their part in Ireland’s perceptions of the poetry as reflected in the songs.

In terms of tonality, ‘The garland’ moves somewhat unexpectedly to a bright F major, and, aurally speaking, this shift sets the song apart from those directly preceding it. (Table 13)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song no.</th>
<th>Song title</th>
<th>Tonality</th>
<th>Song title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Newborn</td>
<td>C major</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The only child</td>
<td>A minor (C major)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>Hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Eb major</td>
<td>Skylark &amp; nightingale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>A minor</td>
<td>The blind boy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Baby</td>
<td>D major (B minor) E minor (E major)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Death-parting</td>
<td>F major</td>
<td>The garland</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Essentially, Ireland’s tonal scheme for *Mother and Child* supports an aurally satisfactory progression through the songs. Other than the conscious tritonal disjunction between songs three, four and five, the remaining songs enjoy relatively close tonal relationships except for song eight, ‘The garland’, and this serves to highlight its structural function as an epilogue. Interestingly, the final song of Ireland’s song cycle of 1921, *The Land of Lost Content*, functions in the same way. Here its purpose is explicitly revealed through the composer’s new title: ‘Epilogue’. In this later cycle, the closing song does not allude directly to the earlier songs through specific theme, diction or imagery as happens in ‘The garland’. Rather, ‘Epilogue’ synthesizes the issues (all bound in personal memory and experience) raised in the
songs that precede it, in a text that speaks clearly and directly to the homoerotic undercurrents of the rest of the cycle:

You smile upon your friend to-day,
   To-day his ills are over;
You hearken to the lover’s say,
   And happy is the lover.

‘Tis late to hearken, late to smile,
   But better late than never:
I shall have lived a little while
   Before I die for ever.

Conclusion

For John Ireland, the song cycle appears to have provided a special vehicle for expression of the most deeply-felt personal experiences and emotions. Unsurprisingly, *Mother and Child* draws on the experiences of his own difficult and complex childhood, exploring the sense of isolation he felt from the rest of his family. This is most strikingly alluded to in the first two songs of the cycle. In combination with the musical setting, Ireland’s new titles emphasise this theme by highlighting the separation of children, mothers and siblings. This idea is, of course, more explicitly rendered in the title of the second song, ‘The only child’. Yet in songs three, four and five, *Mother and Child* also reflects on Ireland’s own experience with children as an adult: a kind of para-parental perspective suffused with paedo-erotic leanings.

His poetic choices for this portion of the cycle are notable for their absence of references to mothers or children, serving to conceal and obfuscate the complex ethical dimension the songs present. But his new titles begin to direct meaning back towards these inclinations and the choristers that he developed close relationships with during his time at St Luke’s Church, Chelsea: most notably, Arthur Miller. With its somewhat bleak musical setting, the title Ireland gives the cycle’s third song, ‘Hope’, encapsulates the tension between the imagined possibility of love and stark reality that imbues much of Ireland’s work. In the fourth song, the composer’s new title, ‘Skylark and nightingale’, draws specific focus to the poem’s heavenly songbirds offering a more pointed allusion to his most favoured chorister. Finally, in song five, ‘The blind boy’, the composer’s title gives person to an otherwise anonymous poetic voice, but here the state of blindness functions as a metaphor for
disappointment in love and concealed affection. The songs are linked by shared poetic diction and imagery and a fractured tonal scheme, with symbolically associative motivic material and musical gesture further supporting the connections that Ireland’s titles offer.

In songs six and seven, Ireland’s titles invert the focus of Rossetti’s poems to offer a final personal reflection. Where, in song six, the poet captures the emotional anxieties of a mother, the composer’s title, ‘Baby’, reframes the text to present the worries of an unloved child. In song seven, a similar process reverses a mother’s sorrowful farewell to her child to become a reflection from the infant’s point of view. However, the uncompromising veracity of the composer’s stark title, ‘Death-parting’, is indicative of an adult retrospection as Ireland, perhaps, acknowledges the early loss of his own mother. There is a symmetry between this final song pairing and the opening pair of songs, ‘Newborn’ and ‘The only child’, where the disjunction of the parent-child bond is given similar attention through titles that invert the suggestion of Rossetti’s poetry. All of these encounters, experiences, emotions and relationships are revisited and summarized in the floral codification of the final song, ‘The garland’, with the cycle’s tonal scheme articulating the emerging song groupings.

It is notable that Ireland often turned to Rossetti’s poetry when inspired by mothers and children. In January 1919, the composer set Rossetti’s *May flowers* after the death of Lillian Dunhill, niece of fellow composer Thomas Dunhill, who died of pneumonia aged twelve. Similarly, Ireland’s 1921 setting of Rossetti’s ‘When I am dead my dearest’ was written after a visit to Cerne Abbas in Dorset with chorister Arthur Miller, then aged sixteen. Finally, Ireland’s song *What art thou thinking of* (1924) sets a Rossetti poem in which mother and child are in dialogue:

“What art thou thinking of,” said the mother.  
“What art thou thinking of, my child?”  
“I am thinking of heaven,” he answered her,  
And looked up in her face and smiled.

“And what didst thou think of heaven?” she said:  
“Tell me, my little one.”  
“Oh I thought that there the flowers never fade,  
That there never sets the sun.”

“And wouldst thou love to go thither, my child,  
Thither wouldst thou love to go,  
And leave the pretty flowers that wither,  
And the sun that sets below?”
“Oh I would be glad to go there, mother,
To go and live there now;
And I would pray for thy coming, mother;
My mother wouldst not thou? wouldst not thou?”

Like ‘Newborn’, ‘Baby’ and ‘Death-parting’ this song explores the reciprocation of love between mother and child in life and death. And like all of those songs in Mother and Child, this song expresses the same sense of doubt. For undisclosed ‘personal reasons’, Ireland never published What art thou thinking of.331

In many ways the title of Ireland’s cycle, Mother and Child, is not as specific as it may seem. There are, of course, plenty of poems that feature mothers in reference to their children, but Ireland’s interpretation of those poems as expressed through his new titles is more often indicative of a concern for child in reference to mother. Similarly, the triptych of songs three, four and five are more closely linked to Ireland’s own relationships with children, but all of the songs draw deeply on personal experience. To what extent Ireland’s relationship with his own mother may have influenced the cycle is unclear. When Charles Markes’s mother died in 1956, Ireland wrote to express his sympathies:

When my own mother died I was only just 14 (she being only 50) so I was hardly old enough to feel very deeply about it. But if a loved parent has survived until a son has reached your age, then the loss must be very painful.332

Whether Ireland is providing an accurate assessment of his feelings can never be known, but it is notable that the work is dedicated to ‘To my sister’. Presumably this is the youngest of his sisters, Ethel, with whom he lived whilst studying at the RCM. Fiona Richards describes how ‘Ireland and his sister were left in the charge of a guardian’ with the years after their parents died seeing them ‘moving frequently from lodgings to lodgings’ 333 In a sense this dedication emphasizes the broader sense in which the cycle’s title, Mother and Child, should be understood, with Ireland’s responses to the selected Rossetti poems exploring ideas of childhood and parenthood in all their forms and complexities.

Yet richly imbued with deeper personal consciousness Mother and Child assumes an almost biographical status, which gives rise to a cycle structure that is decidedly

331 Banfield, Sensibility and English Song, p. 166.
unconventional. Two consecutively formed song pairings (songs one and two, ‘Newborn’ and ‘The only child’, and songs six and seven, ‘Baby’ and ‘Death-parting’) are separated by a central triptych (songs three, four and five). Yet they are all brought together by the work’s final song, ‘The garland’, which manages to synthesize the poetry, themes and musical symbolism of the songs it follows whilst also standing apart from them. As such, the structure of *Mother and Child* is characterized by an asymmetric linearity, with song groupings perhaps comparable to chapters in a book and each chapter (song grouping) reflecting on childhood and parenthood from a different, but highly personal, point of view.
Chapter Seven

Completing the cycle

Conclusions

The inherent critical and aesthetic complexities that underpin the genre of song cycle continue to stimulate scholarly activity, but most often this is in relation to the nineteenth-century German tradition. Finzi, Vaughan Williams and Ireland were all highly familiar compositional figures within the early twentieth-century English musical establishment, and all three made a substantial contribution to the repertory of song cycles from this period. Although Ireland’s *Mother and Child* is perhaps more obscure, *Earth and Air and Rain* and *On Wenlock Edge* are well-known works that are performed regularly in the United Kingdom and across the world, yet very little close attention has been given to these works, particularly in relation to their cyclical nature. Indeed, only a relatively small number of books and volumes have even been dedicated to contemplation of the genre of song cycle, and within this limited body of research only passing mention, if any, is given to English cycles composed during the early part of the twentieth century. One of the aims of this thesis was to redress this balance, and the fact that it has been possible to begin this work without venturing outside of the mainstream of composers and works is notable.

The consideration of structure in all three of the song cycles examined in this thesis has been shaped by an interest in exploring the relationship between words and music on a range of structural levels. In support of my contention — that the inherent intermediality of the song cycle demands equal attention to its constituent musical and literary elements through analysis that is provisional and dynamic — the discussion of the cycles by Finzi, Ireland and Vaughan Williams moves freely between contemplation of words and music, singularly and in combination. These principles contribute directly to another of the significant findings of the thesis: the varied morphology of song cycles.

The works forming the focus of close analysis in this study present three very different kinds of song cycle, which were produced by composers with unique concerns (in terms of the relationship between music and poetry), idiosyncratic working methods and diverse musical styles. As such, only individual, bespoke methodological approaches can do


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full justice to the range of issues that each song cycle raises, as outlined in the ‘Manifesto’ offered in chapter two. In relation to *Earth and Air and Rain*, Finzi’s abiding lack of confidence in the quality of his works, and a tendency to abandon grander plans in light of those concerns, shapes an approach that does not privilege the final song sequence as it ultimately came to be presented. As discussed in chapter three, contemporary publication practices further justify this stance, since there appears to have been a limited market for, and therefore interest in, publishing song groupings (however they may have been conceived by their authors). For *On Wenlock Edge*, criticism influenced by underlying conceptions of narrative and unity in song cycles has directed understanding of the work’s structure as a linear narrative revealed through the consecutive performance of the work’s six songs. Yet this progression provides a highly unsatisfactory story, if indeed it even qualifies as such. Attempts to shoehorn *On Wenlock Edge* in this way have led to judgement and criticism about the relative quality of songs and their unequal durations. Yet a thematic analysis of Housman’s original poetic sequence reveals poetic pairings as a feature of the collection’s organisation, which Vaughan Williams may be seen to adopt. Understood as three micro-narratives formed from song pairings, *On Wenlock Edge*’s cyclical structure assumes musical and narrative cohesion and symmetry in the balance of song durations. Memory, emotion and personal experience are the unifying characteristics for John Ireland’s *Mother and Child*. Deeply encoded with musical and literary symbolism, the composer’s editorial practice of retitling poetry provides a semiotic key with which to unlock and tease out the potential contexts for the cycle’s songs. Drawing on Ireland’s own childhood and pseudo-parental/paedo-erotic experiences, three discrete song groupings emerge: a pairing, a triptych and another pairing, which are revisited and summarized in the unifying eighth and final song.

Bespoke methodologies provide one possible solution to the heterogeneity one encounters within the song cycle repertory, but their formulation inevitably places the analyst at the centre of the process. As such, this approach to working with song cycles is inherently idiosyncratic, subjective and driven by the principal contextual influences as determined by the researcher. That said, can the frame of research ever be objectively detached from the researcher? On the other hand, the freedom and flexibility of such an approach offers exciting possibilities in terms of replicability. It would, for example, be possible for different researchers to follow the same process and draw quite different conclusions. Moreover, as a researcher selects the circumstances and conditions they deem to be most apposite when
devising their methodological approach, it seems almost certain that the process will result in a broad spectrum of readings in which the highlighting of different priorities offers novel insights. It is difficult to imagine how new, innovative contributions to the literature on song cycles could be an unwelcome advancement, particularly if it promotes lesser-known works and repertories or provides a way forward for thinking about works with unique characteristics that do not sit easily in other critical models. The concept of bespoke methodologies is also highly translatable, capable of being applied across repertories, languages, national traditions, cultures and historical contexts to similar, innovative effect.

In chapter two of this study, I drew on Bingham’s conceptual narrative shapes for song cycles of the early nineteenth century, and now extend this idea to propose how the cycle structures of the twentieth-century English works by Finzi, Vaughan Williams and Ireland considered in this thesis might be graphically represented. The dynamic structure of *Earth and Air and Rain* is indicated in figure 4.

Fig. 4 – *Earth and Air and Rain*

![Diagram of Earth and Air and Rain cycle structure](image)

On the one hand, the cycle’s structure might be read as the diverse, ten-song sequence that ultimately came to be published in 1936. However, it may also be understood as a five-song narrative cycle, with consecutive songs (linked by poetic theme) revealing a coherent story underpinned by a unifying tonal scheme and supported by motivic recollection.

The structure of three paired micro-narratives informing the design of *On Wenlock Edge* is represented in figure 5.
Here, song pairings form three, concise narratives which are not necessarily interdependent. The structure of *Mother and Child*, represented in figure 6, is slightly different in this regard.

Discrete song groupings are suggested by the process of retitling (which often inverts first impressions of the poetic setting and situation) and supported by connective musical detail, whether that takes the form of tempo, texture, tonality or motive. The personal context of each song grouping is further suggested in Ireland’s unique self-referential method of quotation and allusion — both musical and literary — that characterizes all of his work but, perhaps, finds its most profound expression through his songs. As is the case with some of his other song cycles, Ireland uses the closing song to draw together and reflect on the different strands of experience that the cycle journeys through.

Of all the cycle structures represented in figures 4, 5 and 6 only that for *Mother and Child* bears any resemblance to the shapes Bingham identifies, perhaps recalling the spoked wheel cycle where songs at different points in the circle are connected (potentially in different ways) by their relationship to the central point. Here the encompassing circle is the
composer’s lived and imagined experiences, which inform the nature and content of each of the songs. In its reflection on and drawing together of all those songs that precede it, the final song (number eight) forms the spoked point to which these accounts of childhood, adulthood and parenthood return. The representations of structure suggested for *Earth and Air and Rain* and *On Wenlock Edge* are certainly less orthodox but offer exciting possibilities for reconsidering the ways in which these works have, on the whole, been understood. It is, for example, possible to imagine Finzi’s *Earth and Air and Rain* being performed as the original ten-song sequence or as the smaller, five-song narrative cycle. In the same way, I suggest that the independence of *On Wenlock Edge*’s three micro-narratives would potentially allow for convincing renditions of the song pairings to be offered individually or in combination in performance.

The claims for the possibility of alternative shapes and structures — the morphology of song cycles — is of central importance to this thesis. The three case studies offered propose unconventional accounts of cycle structure that are often far removed from traditional conceptions of the circular. Song cycle scholarship continues to be preoccupied with trying to establish the parameters of the genre so as to determine which works may be legitimately included for consideration and which are coherent and successful on those terms. Yet all too often, rogue features (even within revered canonical works) unsettle and challenge these taxonomic hierarchies. So perhaps it is time to turn the problem on its head and posit that rather than narrowing the defining boundaries of song cycle we expand its morphological range, acknowledging the problematic inheritance of the terminology of cycle and finding ways to understand and value those works that do not conform to expectations.

Whilst I hope this thesis offers plenty of new ideas about critical approaches to song cycle scholarship and introduces some of the specific factors that influenced English composers of song cycle during the early twentieth century, it does so through just three composers and works. There are so many other composers who made important contributions to the repertoire, such as Arthur Somervell, Charles Orr, Ivor Gurney and George Butterworth to name a few. The prolific efforts of Liza Lehmann also deserve much more attention than they have received, and exploring the full range of her song cycles (beyond *In a Persian Garden*) will be essential in achieving the fullest possible account and understanding of the English song cycle during this period. Although *On Wenlock Edge* makes use of a chamber ensemble, the two other cycles are composed for voice and piano accompaniment. Yet amongst the twentieth-century English repertory there are a number of
orchestral song cycles, including those by Elgar and Britten. Yet alongside these, works by less well-known composers, like Granville Bantock and Thomas Dunhill, also offer fascinating research material.

In terms of broader research approaches, I suggested, in chapter one, that translation and adaptation offered potential critical frameworks for future research, and Ivor Gurney’s *Ludlow and Teme* as an adaptation of Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge* presents one example of how this might be developed. Vaughan Williams’s cycle is often identified as Gurney’s model because he chooses to set poems from *A Shropshire Lad* using the same instrumental forces as Vaughan Williams. However, these kinds of comparisons (which are fairly typical) inevitably place the works and their composers in a vertical hierarchy of mentor/student, model/replica that inevitably generates distracting and unhelpful value judgements. An analysis framed in the spirit of adaptation perhaps allows for comparative consideration in a horizontal alignment, recognising each work in its own right as its own thing.

As described in chapter one, Kofi Agawu issues a challenge: ‘the problems of song analysis cannot be left to music historians’, and he is right. But nor can it be exclusively left to theorists, musicologists or literary experts. Song inhabits two disciplinary worlds and engages with two semiotic systems — answers will not be found in one place, if indeed conclusive answers can ever be found at all. It may be necessary to concede that we will forever strive towards solving the problems of song analysis. My own research, like any other scholarship, is not and cannot be entirely unproblematic, but working towards analytical parity and advocating free oscillation in the contemplation of words and music takes one step forward towards analysis that attempts to fully embrace both elements.

Taking song cycles on their own terms and thinking about them in relation to the unique contexts from which they sprang can reveal new and innovative understandings of their design. Composers re-‘cycle’ poetry through their literary and musical engagement, which are fundamentally — indeed, inextricably — interdependent, and only by recognising the essential parity of words and music in intermedial genres can the very fullest range of their possibilities be accessed. Analysis unfettered by dominant preconceptions of the cyclical and a fresh flexibility in acknowledging the potential variety of shapes and structures that song cycles may take is essential, because clearly not all cycles are circles.
## Appendix

**Table 14: Solo songs and cycles setting texts from Housman’s *A Shropshire Lad* 1900-1940**

Note: Where the composer retitles, Housman’s original is presented in brackets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Work/poems set</th>
<th>Year of composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adams, Stephen</td>
<td>[XIII] When I was one and twenty</td>
<td>1904 (pub.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ainsworth, Robert</td>
<td>[XXXV] On the idle hill of summer</td>
<td>1939 (pub.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armstrong, Thomas</td>
<td><em>Five Short Songs</em> (additional songs set other poets)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• [XL] Into my heart an air that kills</td>
<td>1920 (pub.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atherton, Percy B.</td>
<td>[LIV] With rue my heart is laden</td>
<td>Pre-1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balfour Gardiner, H.</td>
<td><em>Two Lyrics</em> (other text by Shelley)</td>
<td>1908 (pub.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• [XIII] When I was one and twenty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barber, Samuel</td>
<td>[LIV] With rue my heart is laden</td>
<td>1928 (MS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bax, Arnold</td>
<td>[LII] Far in a western brookland</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[XIII] When I was one and twenty</td>
<td>1918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilger, H.L.</td>
<td>[XIII] When I was one and twenty</td>
<td>Pre-1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bliss, Arthur</td>
<td>[XXXIX] Wenlock Edge (‘Tis time, I think, by Wenlock town)</td>
<td>1914</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[XIII] When I was one and twenty</td>
<td>1924 (pub.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boughton, Rutland</td>
<td>[XXII] The street sounds to the soldiers’ tread</td>
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<td>Branson, David</td>
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<td>[XXXIX] The unseen spring (‘Tis time, I think, by Wenlock town)</td>
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335 This is not a definitive list but summarises all the settings I am aware of at this time. More recent song cycles setting texts from *A Shropshire Lad* include *Songs of Eternity and Sorrow* composed by Ian Venables in 2004.

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<th>Year of composition</th>
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<td>- [XXI] Bredon Hill</td>
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**The Western Playland**

- [IV] *Reveille*
- [II] *Loveliest of trees*
- [LIV] *Golden friends (With rue my heart is laden)*
- [XVII] *Twice a week*
- [XXVI] *The aspens (Along the field as we came by)*
- [XXVII] *Is my team ploughing*
- [XL] *The far country (Into my heart an air that kills)*
- [X] *March (The sun at noon to higher air)*

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<td>- [XXXI] On Wenlock Edge</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- [XXXII] From far, from eve and morning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- [XXVII] Is my team ploughing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- [XVIII] Oh when I was in love with you</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- [XXI] Bredon Hill</td>
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<td>- [L] Clun (<em>Clunton and Clunbury</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Woolley, Charles</td>
<td>[II] Loveliest of trees</td>
<td>1934 (pub.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[XIII] When I was one and twenty</td>
<td>1938 (pub.)</td>
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<td>Young, Dalhousie</td>
<td>[XXI] Bredon Hill</td>
<td>1905</td>
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