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## *Sir Arthur Somervell: designs on the song cycle*

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# SIR ARTHUR SOMERVELL: Designs on the Song Cycle

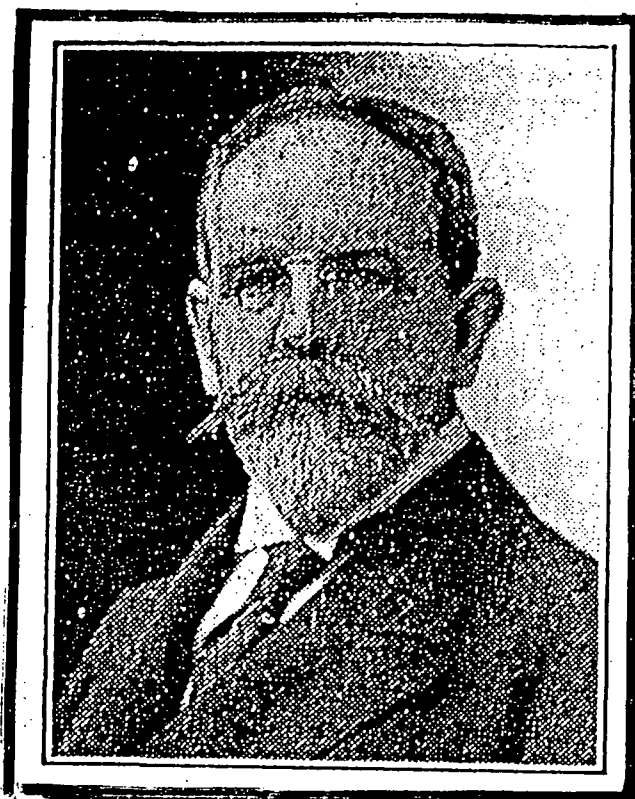
Jennifer Holmes

M.A. thesis, University of Durham, June 2000

## ABSTRACT

The study in the following pages explores Sir Arthur Somervell's fascination with the song cycle. Its appeal drew together two of his favourite passions, that is, songwriting and storytelling. All the cycles are settings of nineteenth-century poets with narratives drawn from single works or contrived from a collection of poems. Although Somervell was looked upon as old-fashioned in his art, in the matter of the song cycle he is seen trying to keep abreast of the times by following trends that were being manifest by his contemporaries and sometimes being innovative from his own inspiration. The theme of experimentation is the line of enquiry that the thesis explores. The six song cycles fall into three groups (of two each) in that process, though not strictly chronologically. *Maud*, the first (1898), from Tennyson's epic drama of obsessive love and tragedy, is placed with *A Shropshire Lad* (1904), Housman's bittersweet chronicle of a young military recruit, although two subsequent cycles intervened, but in style both betray Schumannesque influence. The cycles of 1901 (*Love in Springtime*) and 1903 (*Wind Flowers*), the two least-known in his output of song cycles, show Somervell experimenting with anthology. The last two cycles, *James Lee's Wife*, 1907 and *A Broken Arc*, 1923, though separated by nearly two decades, fall together naturally, united by their lyric source, Robert Browning, and by their more expansive style.

## **SIR ARTHUR SOMERVELL:**



### **Designs on the Song Cycle**

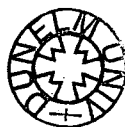
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**Jennifer Holmes**

**M.A. Thesis**

**University of Durham, School of Music**

**June, 2000**



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## PREFACE

My interest in English song began as a piano student. Friends were pursuing vocal technique and asked me to accompany. From practice studios we progressed to concert venues and I became hooked. As music undergraduate I was given the opportunity to choose a music research project and jumped at the chance to discover more about a favourite song composer, Peter Warlock. Later I found myself at Durham University Music School, wanting to continue my fascination with, and enjoyment of, English song. I was not too sure of the direction I should take but it was suggested to me that I might consider research studies into the song cycles of Sir Arthur Somervell, about whom very little is known or written. And so began this thesis.

I had hoped to include a useful chronicle of Arthur Somervell's life and musical career but very little biographical information has come to hand although I am convinced that somewhere there are family papers, perhaps held by a descendant or passed on to other researchers who are unwilling to release details. Chapter 1, therefore, is inevitably piecemeal.

There are six song cycles and it was not until I had looked closely at them all that I realised they were a trial and error process, variations on the nineteenth-century German prototype, showing Somervell's keenness to try new ideas and, along the way, developing his own song-writing style. In examining this process I have placed the six song cycles into three groups of two each. All bear the marks of Schumann's influence but *Maud* (1898) and *A Shropshire Lad* (1904) are most typically Schumannesque and therefore fall into the same group. In the period that separates them Somervell was appointed Inspector for Music Education in Schools (1901) and produced a further two

song cycles, *Love in Springtime* (1901) and *Wind Flowers* (1903), both of which reflect his new preoccupation in their settings of children's verse. Both cycles are anthologies of poems and are placed together as the central group. *Wind Flowers* is the more unusual in that its vocal settings are for different solo and solo groupings. In 1907, Somervell took the song cycle in a new direction by writing an orchestral accompaniment for *James Lee's Wife* (Robert Browning) and which he re-arranged twelve years later, in 1919, for string quartet and piano. The final cycle, *A Broken Arc*, drew, again, on the poems of Robert Browning. Both cycles are linked naturally by their poet and by their broader musical style and are placed in a third group. It is in these three groups that the song cycles are considered in the following pages, exploring the theme of experimentation.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the course of my research for this project, many potential sources of biographical and musical information which, initially, looked promising, led, disappointingly, up blind alleys. But there were also some delightful highspots that rejuvenated the, at times, flagging spirit. Through all the ups and downs, however, was the generosity of so many kind people eager to help and it is to those stalwarts that I would like to pay tribute in this paragraph. I thank Miss Joanna Somervell, Mr. Jonathan de F. Somervell, Mr. R. Somervell, Ms Elizabeth Jane Howard (a grand-daughter), Mrs Frances Richards (a grand-daughter), Mrs Jasmine Hurt of The Performing Rights Society, the Rowe Music Library, King's College, Cambridge, Cambridge University Library and Mr. M. Pilkington, for answering my enquiries and pointing me in other directions. I am grateful also to others who sent information and/or allowed me to use their resources:- Dr. Peter Horton, Librarian, Royal College of Music, Dr. Simon Maguire and Victoria Partington of Messrs Sotheby's, Mrs C. Banks, Curator of Music Manuscripts at The British Library (London) and to British Library staff (Boston Spa), Mr. Adam Flett of BBC Radio Cumbria, Somerset House Record Keeper's Department (Family Division), Dr. J. R. Gurney of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, Mr. Jim Page, Secretary of the Housman Society, Sue Gates of the Tennyson Research Centre (Lincolnshire County Council), Rhiannon Michaelson-Yeates, Assistant Archivist of the Department of Manuscripts and Records at the National Library of Wales, Mrs C. Willshire (the vendor of the *Maud* manuscript purchased by the British Library) and to Hull University Library staff for help with the access of information. I would like to thank especially Mr.

M. Smith (Repertoire Manager) and Ms Angharad Evans (Senior Hire Librarian), both of Boosey and Hawkes for providing study material, cups of tea and willing co-operation whilst at their premises; to Mrs Marny Yates (a grand-daughter) who gave me access to her collection of Sir Arthur's music and for her kindness and hospitality in her home; to Mr. Kenneth Shenton for willingly furnishing copies of his newspaper writings (Centenary tributes to Arthur Somervell) and for some of Somervell's songs; to Isla Tuck (a grand-daughter and Trustee of Sir Arthur's estate) who gave permission to photocopy the music for study purposes and to use as examples in my project and also supplied some interesting memorabilia; to York University Library for the use of their resources during the course of my research; to Roger Norris, Librarian at Durham University Palace Green Library, for computer information and for the gift of a volume of Handel songs arranged by Somervell; and many thanks to my tutor, Dr. Jeremy Dibble, for his invaluable advice, endless patience and encouragement, and for copies of his copyright CD sleeve notes on Parry and Stanford. Last, but not least, I would like to thank Mrs Gwen Rennison who accompanied me on research visits to London and helped with the printing of my work.

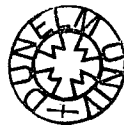
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**Biographical reflections**  
 'A dog let into a field full of rabbits'

The name of Arthur Somervell is one that is today known only to singers and *cognoscenti* of English songs and perhaps to a few senior church musicians familiar with his *Passion of Christ*, once extremely popular and a rival to Stainer's *Crucifixion*. However, at his zenith in the two decades at each side of the turn of the twentieth century, Somervell was a highly respected figure in British music, both as composer and educationist. Indeed, Somervell was an important luminary and pioneer in British musical education for which he is now almost totally forgotten. More importantly, Somervell was Britain's most significant and prolific composer of song cycles, yet his significant position in the canon of English song has yet to be fully appraised. An English composer, born in 1863, he was a prolific writer of songs and produced works in many of the main musical genres. He was also a respected musical educationist in the early twentieth century. Yet Arthur Somervell was unpretentious in life and overlooked in death. His recent ancestors trace a line back to the Somerville family living in the Scottish lowlands. But Arthur's grandfather moved south of the border, changing the spelling of his surname at the same time to Somervell. One may surmise that for some reason he wanted to distance himself from his family and make a fresh start. Whatever the explanation the revised spelling has subsequently been adopted by his English descendants. It was in 1830 that his son, Robert Miller Somervell married Anne Wilson. The couple settled in the Lake District and in 1842 Robert began trading, in Kendal, as a





R. M. SOMERVELL AND HIS SIX SONS, 1886

GORDON ROBERT COLIN TED R.M.S. ARTHUR  
CLIFTON

leather merchant and supplier to shoemakers. A few years later his brother John joined him and so began Somervell Bros. In time the business became the famous K (Kendal) Shoe empire. On 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1863, the youngest of Robert and Anne's nine children, Arthur, was born in Windermere. With so many children to support, finances were sometimes stretched and Arthur's piano lessons came second-hand. The story is told that he would hide himself underneath the table, concealed by its long baize cloth and listen to an older brother's lesson, practising alone afterwards.

Arthur was the only one of the six brothers not to enter the family firm. At the latter end of his schooldays he spent a short period at Uppingham School and afterwards, in 1881, went up to King's College, Cambridge, where he was under the tutelage of C.V. Stanford. He graduated with a B.A. in History (1884) and at Stanford's recommendation he continued his studies in composition and pianoforte in Berlin at the Hochschule für Musik, working under Friedrich Kiel (Stanford's former teacher) and Woldemar Bargiel (1884-5). His two years there were a rich musical experience which he described as 'like being a dog let into a field full of rabbits – opera every night and concerts all the time'. The quotation gives a very small glimpse of the musical world into which Somervell was thrust and his reaction to the opportunities that presented themselves. On his return to England he spent a further two years as a private pupil of Hubert Parry whom he had met at the house of Stanford whilst still an undergraduate at Cambridge. In 1886, after several years of music studies, Arthur Somervell began to earn his living as music teacher and composer. His first published works date from that year and until the late 1880s consist mostly of vocal settings but also include a few small

instrumental pieces. In 1888 came the first of his liturgical settings for the Parish Choir Book.

1890 was the year of his marriage to Edith Collett. Their first home was at 1, Albert Place, off Kensington Square, London, where neighbours included Parry, Plunket Greene and Norman O'Neill (who studied harmony and composition with Somervell). Little is known about their life together. Edith Collett was one of three children of medical missionaries in India. Whilst their parents were overseas the children were left in England and brought up by two genteel ladies, the Ward sisters, whose own upbringing was at the centre of a group who met at their father's house in Somerset, known as 'the Nether Stowey set'. Their number of liberal thinkers, reformers and artists, included the poet Coleridge. As a product of this background it is not difficult to imagine that Edith emerged with an independent and perhaps unorthodox outlook on life and to understand why Arthur's grand-daughter-in-law, Isla Tuck, wrote . . . 'She was into all the "isms" of her day and hopeless with money – how she would have loved all the alternative philosophies and medications of today . . . a mesmerist called to treat the boys when they had whooping cough . . . bailiffs in the hall – something to do with an unpaid bill for an evening dress . . . Arthur Somervell offering local shops sufficient payment to keep the credit going . . . she was thought unusual by her contemporaries as she insisted on the servants having the same fresh fruit as served in the dining room'.<sup>1</sup> Mrs Tuck goes on to say that in spite of economies they lived comfortably, 'with a nanny, a cook and, at one time, a maid' and that 'all her grandchildren spoke of both grandparents with warmth'.

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<sup>1</sup> Isla Tuck, In a letter to the author, dated 13.9.99

In that year of their nuptials and in each subsequent year of the decade song composition flowed steadily. Somervell's love of literature, nurtured and developed from youth in the beautiful Lakeland surroundings and also by the family hymn-reading evenings is demonstrated in the diversity of his song-lyric sources. Wordsworth, naturally, was a favourite, but that source includes many unfamiliar names and some of his songs were also his own literary creations, for example, *When Spring returns*, 1904, and *O, Blackbird*, 1909. During these years Somervell became absorbed with other musical genre beginning, in 1891, with the first two of many choral works, *A Song of Praise*, for solo, chorus and orchestra and a *Mass in C minor* for similar forces. The tribute to the latter work reads: 'Dedicated to my two English masters, Professor C. Villiers Stanford and Dr. C. Hubert Parry, this mass is gratefully dedicated by their pupil'. In the same decade other major choral works were produced for provincial music festivals: *The Forsaken Merman*, a ballad for bass solo, chorus and orchestra (Leeds, 1895); *The Power of Sound*, a cantata for soli, chorus and orchestra (Kendal, 1895); and *Ode to the Sea*, a cantata for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra. There were further contributions to the Parish Choir Book and the beginnings of a repertory of piano music which ranged mostly from studies and teaching pieces to the difficult *Concert Study in C minor* (1897), continuing throughout his career. His steady output to 1894 did not diminish in subsequent years when, in that year, he was appointed to the teaching staff at the Royal College of Music only months before his former tutor, Parry, was appointed as the new Director in succession to Grove. On the contrary, the new challenge probably stimulated inspiration, for in 1898 he published the first example from his song cycle period, a setting of Tennyson's *Maud* which many considered to be his greatest



achievement and almost certainly raised his profile as a musician and composer. He continued also with a series of operettas for children which had begun in 1889 with a production, in Rochester, of *Princess Zara*, in which the young Sybil Thorndike made her debut. During that last decade of the century other creations of a biological nature materialised in the Somervell household. Viola Helen Antonia was born in 1895 followed by Katharine (Kitty) Margaret and in the early 1900s twin boys, Hubert Arthur and Ronald (Ronnie) Arthur. Some of Arthur's teaching pieces were written for his children. In 1901 there were *Little Viola's Gavotte* and *Little Kitty's Mazurka*, both for piano and later *The Twins' Tune Book; Songs and duets by R.L. Stevenson and others*, published in 1910.

The year in which Somervell was appointed Inspector of Music to the Board of Education and the Scottish Board of Education, 1901, was a watershed in his life and will be referred to in more detail in a later chapter, but suffice it to say here that it eclipsed all other events in that year, and indeed, in his life thus far. The demands made upon Somervell in his new post inevitably afforded him less time to compose songs. In the first ten or so years from his appointment his creative instincts were directed mostly towards teaching material – pieces, exercises, studies, graded work for children including, in 1906 his *Fifty Steps in Sight Singing*. There were more dramatic works for children; his first two operettas from the previous decade were followed by a further three, *The Golden Straw* and *King Thrushbeard* (1902) and *The Knave of Hearts* (1908). And there was other music for works of a similar ilk – dramatic ballads and pageant music. Piano music, too, with fanciful titles that would appeal to young people. That he doted on his own children is shown in the music whose titles immortalise them. His

grandchildren also have their fond reminiscences of him. Elizabeth Jane Howard, the novelist, whose mother was Kitty, wrote an amusing account of her relationship with him when, as a child, she was allowed to visit her grandparents' house for Sunday luncheon and met musicians and friends who came to call – names like Professor MacKail, Nicholas Orloff, Henry Ford. After lunch she was allowed to admire interesting objects in the house, such as a strand of Mozart's hair, 'fine and golden, like an angel, which was tied with a piece of pale blue silk framed in a small pinchbeck locket'.<sup>2</sup> She recalled how very old he looked with his white hair and pointed silky beard, a quiet, squeaky voice and a faint smell of sweetbriar. He used to take her on outings to the Zoo where they had rides on the merry-go-round. These sins were their secret and kept from the disapproval of Edith. His childlike sense of fun is endorsed by another granddaughter, Marny Yates, daughter of Antonia, who also remembers outings to the Zoo, the Round Pond and Boosey and Hawkes in Regent Street. They always stopped on the way for Horlicks malted milk or an icecream, eaten out-of-doors ('rather daring in those days'). One of his favourite sayings on such occasions was 'Enough is not as good as a feast'. These instances are recounted here to give a glimpse of his geniality, never happier than when guiding children's musical education or entertaining the younger generations of his family and it is tempting to believe that through working and living with children in their 'never-never-Land,' Somervell was satisfying some deep need within. There were other important activities concerning children's musical growth. These were the competitive music festivals in which he was closely involved with Mary Wakefield and the festival

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Jane Howard, 'Portrait of my Grandfather (s)', in *Encounter* (1956), p.38

that bears her name. And there was his work as an examiner for the Associated Board both in this country and on tour overseas.

A second song cycle, *Love in Springtime*, 1901, was followed closely by two more, *Wind Flowers*, 1903, then *A Shropshire Lad*, 1904. Also in that year (1904) he received his Doctorate in Music from Cambridge University. His graded course in sight-singing, referred to above, was his sole publication in the years 1905-6 but the years had not been entirely fallow for another song cycle was published in 1907, *James Lee's Wife*, and two larger-scale works; these were a *Mass in D Minor* for two tenors and bass and his setting of Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality* for baritone solo, chorus and orchestra, written for the Leeds Festival in that year.

In 1910 Somervell had begun work on a set of variations for piano and orchestra entitled *Normandy*. In a series of letters written by Arthur Somervell and now held in the archives of the National Library of Wales it emerges that he sought the advice of the recipient, Madame Lucie Barbier, a pianist, for her opinion of the work. There is also a reference to Percy Grainger, a friend of Mme. Barbier, whose approval Somervell was keen to have:- 'What about Percy? Has he flung back scorn on my poor little *Normande*?' Somervell would have been greatly relieved by her reply to learn that Grainger had played the work and liked it. Another letter informs that the variations were to receive a first performance at Oxford in February, 1912 – 'surely some kind Frenchman can be found patriotic enough to play it'. In the event Donald Tovey was the soloist with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Sir Arthur Nikisch. The concert also included another of Somervell's larger-scale orchestral works, the sole publication of the following year, 1913, the *Thalassa* symphony. The title, the Greek

word for 'the sea', in effect identifies the British maritime nation with that other great example of a Thalassocracy that Somervell so admired, Ancient Greece. The symphony is headed with an anonymous quotation, 'immortal sea – a world whereon to triumph and be free'. The slow movement is a tribute to Somervell's brother, Gordon, who died on active service. Its descriptive title is:- 'Killed in Action; Near the South Pole; 28<sup>th</sup> March, 1912'. The cor anglais solos a melody of mourning whilst brief orchestral interjections develop into a funeral march, then a contemplation of tragedy and loss. A manuscript arrangement, by Somervell, for two pianos, of some of the symphony's music has an interesting note, in Somervell's hand, on the inside of the front cover which reads:- 'Original form of the Mass in C minor – this copy was sent to Cambridge as my Bachelor's Exercise and rejected by MacFarren, who died immediately afterwards. The other examiner rescinded the verdict – MacFarren's complaint was that the Canon on p.51 was too short'.<sup>3</sup>

Somervell's work as Inspector for Education up to 1911 had been concerned with the training of teachers but after that date he became responsible for standards of teaching in secondary schools. The years concurrent with this shift of focus show a sharp decline in published works and an incline of interest to an orchestral palette which may date from 1907 although he had composed music for orchestra at earlier times, albeit more modest affairs. These indications on the one hand may have been due to an increase of educational work demands and on the other, in time of war and deprivation, song composition may have seemed a lesser priority. There were a few series of sight-reading tests and a small-scale oratorio for church use, *The Passion of Christ*. The most

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<sup>3</sup> London, Royal College of Music, Parry Room, MS 4775

ambitious work of this period was another, larger, choral work, for soprano solo, chorus and orchestra; *To the Vanguard* was Somervell's reaction to the war and is dedicated to all those who suffered its horrific consequences – 'To the first seven divisions, the fallen, the prisoners, the disabled and those still fighting'. Beatrice Brice, who wrote the text, was to pay tribute to Arthur Somervell twenty years later in *The Times* following his death in 1937. She recalled his 'incentive in setting to beautiful music the verses beginning, "O little mighty Force that stood for England . . ." that led to the commemoration of the heroic deeds of the First Seven Divisions . . . Those who felt gratitude at that time would wish to pay tribute to Arthur Somervell'.

In the year following the war's end, published items began to show an increase. The publications of 1919 included two chamber works which may have been due less to artistic prompting than to a need for economy of forces during times of thrift. They were the clarinet quintet and a re-arrangement for string quartet and piano of Somervell's 1907 song cycle, *James Lee's Wife*. Two years later Somervell received a promotion – to Chief Inspector for Music Education. His new responsibilities presumably account for the absence of published work in that year. In the decade of the 1920s more instrumental series, mainly for piano, were produced. Single songs had almost dried up but on a visit to Borwick Hall on the border of Westmorland in 1922, he was inspired to write *Will ye come back home* to words by Gilbert Parker. It is a simple strophic setting with a Scottish lilt reminiscent of the early songs of his output. Borwick Hall was the home of Fuller Maitland, an old friend of Somervell, who had worked at *The Times* as music critic until his retirement in 1911. The Hall had been unoccupied for almost half a century and Fuller Maitland began to restore it to its former glory. There he entertained many guests,

musicians and actors and became very involved in local affairs including the area music festivals and competitions in Morecambe and Kendal with his fellow professionals and friends, Arthur Somervell and Mary Wakefield. He continued to live at the Hall after his wife died for a further five years until his own death in 1936. Following that visit to Borwick Hall Somervell published, in the following year, his last song cycle, *A Broken Arc*, dated 1923. It contains some fine examples of English song but as a cycle is disappointing.

Retirement followed in 1928 whence Somervell's music course, *The Compleat Teacher*, was published. It is a summation of his working experience and provides instruction for children aged 7 to 11 with meticulously planned lessons. For services to the profession he was knighted the following year, in 1929. But the honour was a non-event for Somervell's small granddaughter who complained:- 'I remember . . . shock of disillusion when he was knighted. "He has been made a knight", they said. Steeped in Henry Ford's illustrations I immediately saw him . . . dressed in golden armour on a white steed whose expression was as gentle as his own . . . "Will he have silver armour or gold?", they asked and I knew that they were laughing at me . . . that he would not wear armour at all and that there was simply no point in his becoming a knight'.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout Somervell's composing life his work is scattered with devotional material for church use, from simple hymn tunes, anthems and Anglican services to celebrations of Christmas and Easter in the form of cantata on the models of Bach. Two masses in C minor and D minor date from 1891 and 1907 respectively. Shortly after retirement, in 1931, Somervell was invited to become the first Chairman of the Council of the School of

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<sup>4</sup> E.J. Howard, *op.cit*, pp.40-41

English Church Music (SECM). His anthem, *Let all the World*, was specially composed for one of the Council's choral festivals and dedicated to its founder, Dr. Sydney Nicholson. In time the SECM became the Royal School of Church Music. During the 1930s composing became ever more sparse although Somervell was still producing learning material. In those final years he produced his Violin Concerto, dedicated to and played by at its first performance, Adila Fachiri. The work received a number of performances, including one by Jelly D'Aranyi who played it with the Halle Orchestra conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargeant at the 1935 Mary Wakefield Festival.

Somervell's output ends, as it began, with song. In 1935 his sole and final publication was a group, *Three Songs with Piano*, lovely examples of his art. (One, *Come to me in my dreams*, is alluded to below, in the discussion of *A Broken Arc*). Towards the end of his life Somervell did not enjoy good health. Elizabeth Jane Howard remembered her last visit to him at his London home just before leaving with her family for a holiday in Westmorland in the summer of 1937. He was in bed, tired but sitting upright. A tray of ties lay on the bed which he was making into separate rolls. When questioned what he was doing with them he replied that he liked to leave everything tidy. "Why, are you going away?" The holiday was cut short at the news of his death. 'He died as gently as he lived: slipped unassumingly out, as softly as a candle, and left us in the dark'.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>E.J. Howard, op.cit, p.41

**Arthur Somervell and the Song Cycle**  
 'a fine lyrical gift'

Arthur Somervell probably began a serious study of song composition when a student. His interest would have been encouraged by his English professors, both of whom wrote prodigiously in the genre throughout their careers. Stanford's natural lyrical gift, influenced by the folk music of his Irish homeland, cultivated a simple melodic grace. In setting a poem to music he took great care to capture the poem's essence, matching verbal and musical rhythms and accents. In these areas Somervell, on the whole, has followed his teacher's example. But in the matter of words Stanford went further; the poem must take precedence over the music. For him, the singer was the star; the accompanist's role was supportive and secondary. Parry's art is quite different; vocalist and accompanist are independent and integrated, on equal terms. Parry's accompaniments are works of great artistry. Somervell's also show imaginative interpretation of texts and in this respect his song-writing may have inherited something of Parry's style. But both men were extremely competent pianists and not surprisingly, the piano figured importantly as the other half of the duo. Somervell was a favourite pupil of Parry and 'his fine lyrical gift moved him to admiration', according to his biographer.<sup>1</sup> Parry's taste in poetry was drawn from Shakespeare and classical works but it is shown from Somervell's song output that, like Stanford, he cast the net wider, from seventeenth century texts to contemporary works. A number of Stanford's choices were later set by Somervell.

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<sup>1</sup> C.L.Graves, *Hubert Parry: His Life and Works* (1926), p.295



After Cambridge Somervell pursued his studies in Germany where professors were Kiel and Bargiel, Schumann's brother-in-law. Being so close to Schumann's music through his tutor it is inconceivable that he was not intimately acquainted with the songs and cycles. Somervell's early song publication began in 1886 when studies were over. One of the first was to lines by Robert Burns whom he continued to set over the next fifteen years. His interest in Burns may have been aroused by Schumann's nine settings (to translations by Gerhard) and other contemporary examples, including Stanford, coupled with Somervell's own Scottish ancestry. The German romantic lied may have been Somervell's inspiration but his own songs were very much in the late nineteenth-century English tradition. There are, however, many features in the cycle which suggest the influence of Schumann. This is most strongly demonstrated with reference to the *Dichterliebe* cycle. Although *Dichterliebe* was Schumann's personal response to an estrangement with Clara, its message of hope is spelt in Heine's poems about renewal of life and love, of rebirth in springtime. The music reflects that continuity in the cycle of keys and the use of dominants to suggest endless renewal. It is, perhaps, a generalisation to state that Schumann's songs were essentially piano works with an added voice part but the accompaniments do have an influential role in interpretation of the words and usually an important postlude, a final comment when the voice has finished. This is frequently the case with Somervell. There are other fingerprints, too, and they will be referred to later in the notes that follow. But for harmony and form Somervell may have more in common with Brahms. Brahms, a master of the variation form, employed that gift in his songs as strophic variation, endlessly inventive with the elements of melody, rhythm, phrasing, etc. The modified strophic form is a particular favourite of Somervell which he

uses more than any other and with growing expertise during the course of his cycles. Somervell's full-textured chordal accompaniments also may owe something to the style of Brahms. But it would be unusual for a craftsman of any art not to betray the seal of his mentor and in an elemental way Somervell stands with the rest, but his style, at its best, is his own. In the song cycle genre, of which Somervell produced six, not one is a carbon copy of another although his fundamental compositional method did not alter significantly over the years. With hindsight we can see that the whole series became a developmental theme and variations; the earliest, the archetypal *Maud*, was the starting point for the variants that followed. The Schumann cycles inspired French, Russian and Czech examples in the late nineteenth century. In England Liza Lehmann seems to have been the first with *In a Persian Garden*, 1896, a selection of quatrains from FitzGerald's version of the *Rubayyat of Omar Khayyam* and was set for four soloists (SATB) and piano. Its novelty and popularity may have inspired Somervell to attempt something similar with his *Wind Flowers* in 1903. Her song cycle, *In Memoriam* (1899), from Tennyson's epic poem, was rather overshadowed by Somervell's setting of the poet's *Maud* in the previous year. Elgar's orchestral cycle, *Sea Pictures*, was a seminal work in England which Somervell may have used as his model for the original production of *James Lee's Wife*. After 1900, in the early years of the twentieth century came a flowering of the English song cycle in which there was a move towards settings with a chamber group. A few of the many examples are those by Roger Quilter (*To Julia*), 1905, Vaughan Williams (*On Wenlock Edge*), 1908-9, Somervell himself (a reworking of *James Lee's Wife*), 1919 and later, in the early 1920s, Peter Warlock (*The Curlew*). At the time of Somervell's final song cycle, (*A Broken Arc*), 1923, the genre was in decline.

## Stories and Songs – In the German Tradition

‘I awoke and behold it was a dream’

### 1

#### Introduction

Stories were an important element in Arthur Somervell’s life both at home and in his craft as a musician. In the many dramatic works he wrote for children he knew where to look for a good story and what would appeal to childlike fantasy. He was also a good raconteur and adept at writing his own creations. Nothing more illustrates his rapport with youngsters than a letter he wrote to his young daughter, Antonia, whilst examining for the Associated Board in Hull. The text is worth reproducing as it reveals, unwittingly, all those traits of character discussed above and of his love of storytelling:

#### *Darling Tomady*

- *and the door of the examination room opened and to my intense surprise I saw a stork walk in with his music under his wing and a bag under the other wing. Mr. Albanesi [the examiner] didn’t seem at all surprized and I sat at the table preparing a mark- sheet for him. He put up the music and then from his bag he produced a squirrel. I couldn’t think what he would do with it, or how he would play the scales for both his feet were on the ground. However he laid the squirrel on the notes and he ran up and down and made the most lovely rippling scales. When the pieces began and we came to a slow*



Darling Tomady

— and the door of the examination room opened & to my intense surprise I saw a stork walk in with his music under his wing, and a bag under the other wing. Mr Albanesi didn't seem at all surprised and I sat at the table preparing a mark-sheet for him. He put up the music & then

" Z

I was just about to say to Mr Albanesi "I think we must divide the mark between the spinal of the stork", when I felt a nudge from him, & heard a whisper - "My dear Tomady take it easy if you like - but don't score!". So I awoke and behold it was a dream...

My love to all

Love you very fondly

A.S.

*movement of Beethoven he tied a bit of band to the squirrel's tail so that it could not run about so fast. The stork then tried to use the pedal and he just kept his beak on the piano and levered up the damper. I was just about to say to Mr. Albanesi "I think we must divide the marks between the squirrel and the stork", when I felt a nudge from him & heard a whisper - "My dear Somervell, take it easy if you like - but don't snore!" . So I awoke and behold it was a dream.*

*My love to all*

*from your loving father*

A. S

The song cycle was a perfect genre to use for a fusion of those two elements, the story and the song, which to a large extent occupied Somervell's interest and creativity. It explains why he wrote six of them, four coming at a time when he had launched into a new career and was absorbed in music educational matters besides teaching, examining and composing other new works. In the 1890s when his first cycle emerged there was no precedent for the English song cycle except, perhaps, the one composed in 1871 by Sir Arthur Sullivan in collaboration with George Grove in an attempt to set up an English *lied* tradition; the words to *The Window or The Loves of the Wrens* were especially written by Tennyson. And so it was to the German romantic cycle that Somervell turned with its stories of love, longing and hope, told in the words of the German poets Heine and Chamisso amongst others and in German folklore from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.

Somervell's settings tell their stories drawn from single Victorian epics or collated from different sources. The stories run the gamut of emotions through light and darkness but the light always prevails in a vision of Victorian optimism of heavenly reward after earthly trial.

SUNG BY  
MR PLUNKET GREENE.

# CYCLE OF SONGS

from

## TENNYSON'S MAUD

- |                                    |                                |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| No 1. I hate the dreadful hollow.  | No 7. I have led her home.     |
| 2. A Voice by the cedar tree.      | 8. Come into the garden, Maud. |
| 3. She came to the Village church. | 9. The fault was mine.         |
| 4. O let the solid ground.         | 10. Dead, long dead.           |
| 5. Birds in the high Hall garden.  | 11. O that 'twere possible.    |
| 6. Go not, happy day.              | 12. My life has crept so long. |

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**MAUD: A Monodrama**

by

**Alfred Lord Tennyson****1. Poet and Poem**

Alfred Tennyson was born in 1809, a middle son of twelve children. His father, Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, a clergyman, had the living at Somersby rectory. Tennyson's grandfather, also Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, favoured his younger son Charles and disinherited the elder brother. Not surprisingly George harboured resentment towards his father and brother. Feelings of bitterness and tension were always present in the home and pressed down upon the young Alfred. With so many children there was no place where he could take refuge. Because he was a middle son he was not sent away to boarding school, instead having a private tutor. But at the age of eighteen in 1827 he made his escape to Cambridge as an undergraduate. By this time his father's rancour at his own situation was manifest in bouts of drunkenness and mental instability. He died in 1831 of typhus. Alfred's mother was a devout Christian and throughout the trauma of life at the Rectory she was forever patient and longsuffering.

The anxiety and stress of his father's personality and plight and the constrictions of living out his youth at Somersby impressed deeply upon Tennyson's nature. At Cambridge, not having found any particular friends and in need of a soul mate, he met in 1829, Arthur Hallam. Their admiration for one another was immediate and the two became firm companions. Like Tennyson, Hallam also had a tendency to dwell upon the



darker side of life and it was perhaps that similarity of persona that drew close their bond. Notwithstanding, Arthur Hallam had fallen in love with Tennyson's sister Emily whom he had hoped to marry but the plans were dashed due to Hallam's tragic early death in 1833. Arthur's demise was an overwhelming blow both for Alfred and Emily. It seemed like the last straw in Tennyson's hapless, uncharitable life. And it followed further recent family quarrels concerning Alfred's grandfather who had settled the manorial home on his favourite son Charles; and an application by that side of the family to re-instate their ancient name of d'Eyncourt and also a hope that the Baronetcy might be returned with it. These events caused a wider rift between Alfred's family and his uncle Charles (the inheritor).

Arthur's death left an aching void in Alfred's life though outwardly he appeared to be pulling through his loss. Very soon he found a focus who would temporarily fill his emotional need in the person of Rosa Baring, a beautiful young woman, rich, living at the nearby Harrington Hall. His passion for Rosa was poured into his poems in which she was the figurative rose queen of the garden. It is a metaphor he uses in *Maud*, though perhaps unconsciously, as we shall see. The match was doomed from the beginning due to their backgrounds. Tennyson was outclassed. Rosa became the wife of Sir Robert Shafto, an arranged match in 1838. Tennyson may thereafter have turned to Sophy Rawnsley, a friend of Rosa, for friendship. It is known that he had a very warm affection for her but those feelings were not thought to be romantically inclined. He delighted in her cheerful, friendly manner, a comfortable contrast to the turbulent feelings aroused by Rosa. The 'Lilian' of the poem *Airy Fairy Lilian*<sup>1</sup> may have been addressed to Sophy

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<sup>1</sup>Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Poems Chiefly Lyrical* (1830)

although she would only have been a young girl at the time of publication but Tennyson had, in fact, known her from birth. 'Lilian' or 'lily' also becomes significant in *Maud*.

But it was Emily Sellwood who stole Alfred's heart. He admired her physical beauty but loved her more for her beauty of mind and spirit. They became 'quasi-engaged' in 1838 but the attachment was broken off in 1840 not only because Alfred had insufficient income and inheritance to support a marriage but also because the Sellwoods were opposed to the match on several grounds.

Tennyson's state of mind became ever more morose. The publication of some of his poems in 1842 brought him stature as a poet rather than financial plenty. Further, a new business deal in which he had staked his capital anticipating a handsome return, failed, losing him his entire financial interest. It seemed that all efforts turned to dust and ashes. The knocks that life had thrown his way made Tennyson heartily sick with the human condition but deep down was his belief that all could be endured for the love of a good woman. Sometime in 1849 due to social intercourse between his brother Charles (who had married, disastrously, Louisa, Emily's sister) and the Sellwoods, Emily and Alfred renewed their association. The heavy financial loss that Alfred had suffered a few years earlier was restored as a result of an insurance return on the death of the business owner, Dr. Matthew Allen, and together with improved finances from the growing sale of his work, Emily and Alfred were able to be married in June 1850. Tennyson said in years to come, "The peace of God came into my life before the altar when I married her". In 1853 Alfred and Emily made their home at Farringford on the Isle of Wight and in the following year *Maud* was completed. It has been necessary to look at these events in some detail because of the parallels they draw in the story of *Maud*. The characters,

relationships, incidents, states-of-mind, are all facets of the kaleidoscope that had been Tennyson's life thus far, re-shaken to give a different formulation, albeit unconsciously, in the poem. Only the names are different.

At the prompting of Richard Monckton Milnes (Lord Broughton), Tennyson submitted a poem to *The Tribute* in 1837. The lines below are taken from a much shortened version which Somervell sets as song no. 12:-

*'O that 'twere possible  
After long grief and pain  
To find the arms of my true love  
Round me once again'!*

It is not entirely clear what prompted Tennyson to produce the original verse but it was written in 1833 just after Arthur Hallam's death. If it is a reference to Arthur Hallam who, it is attested, was simply a very dear friend then how are lines 3 and 4 to be interpreted? The answer may be that the verse is only partly personal. Tennyson was not known to have had a female liaison before his attentions to Rosa Baring in 1834. That leaves the assumption that the verse is based on both reality and imagination. Whatever the explanation the poem was used years later in 1853 as the germ of the poem *Maud*. Again the reasons for its development into Tennyson's epic drama are conflicting. Tennyson's original or later intention may have been to develop the idea later whilst chewing the fat for some years or it may have been suggested by a friend, Sir John Simeon, that Tennyson should write another poem to explain the original. Whether of Tennyson's own or another's motivation this was in fact how the poem grew. The explanatory poem then needed another to clarify it; 'and thus the whole work was written,

as it were, backwards'.<sup>2</sup> Tennyson's original idea for a title was *Maud or the Madness* as the proof sheets show but was first published in 1855 as *Maud*; The qualification, *A Monodrama*, was added in 1875.

The story of *Maud* is told by a speaker who is also one of the two central characters, the 'hero', and so the poem is subjective both in its sources and its perspective. Part 1 begins at the scene of a tragedy, a hollow in a wood behind a manorial hall, where many years ago the hero's father had died, maybe by suicide. The owner of the Hall had been the father's friend but had cheated on him in a risky business deal and fled abroad with his ill-gotten gains taking his family including the baby Maud and leaving the hero's father penniless. The family return many years later with Maud, now a beautiful young woman. The hero espies Maud one day in her carriage but is determined not to be affected by her loveliness. Shortly afterwards, however, a chance meeting with her in the village street kindles a flame of passion. From then he is besotted and his obsession becomes a madness. Madness! Was it not that which drove his father to take his own life? Has ~~he~~ **he**, too, inherited the condition? His thoughts roam over the follies of social ills, the evils of mankind in time of peace – the hardships of the poor, commercial greed and wealth for its own sake, snobbery, vanity; "Why do they prate the blessings of Peace? We have made them a curse, . . ." He meets Maud secretly and soon his thoughts turn to marriage (a union that, he recalled, had been arranged at Maud's birth before the quarrel).

Part 2 parallels Part 1 by opening with a tragedy. Maud's brother and her suitor (a Parliamentary hopeful with a bought title) discover the pair in the Hall garden and

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<sup>2</sup> Hallam Lord Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (1897), p.379

without waiting for an explanation a duel follows in which the brother is grievously injured. But he, on realising his ill-judgement and at the point of death, whispers to the hero, 'The fault was mine, fly!', urging him to flee abroad lest he should be accused. Part 2 continues with the hero overseas. He is now completely deranged with hallucinations and wild thoughts of Maud. He imagines himself dead, lying underground, but can still hear the comings and goings of the living, above, clattering about over his grave. "I thought the dead had peace but it is not so", he despairs. "O me, why have they not buried me deep enough?"

Part 3 brings the transformation of mind. The hero has had a vision of Maud and she has pointed him towards a worthwhile cause, the sacrifice of oneself to fight for compatriots and country. This is his destiny; Death in a noble cause:

*It is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill;  
I have felt with my native land, I am one with my kind.  
I embrace the purpose of God, and the doom assigned*

III, VI, 57-9

Tennyson may not have been consciously aware of the comparisons that posterity, with hindsight, has made between the fictional story of Maud and his own life but the connections are unmistakeable. The more obvious comparisons are outlined below:-

- Maud's stately house nearby the hero's home / Rosa Baring's manorial hall nearby the Tennyson rectory
- The hero's father and his friend in a fraudulent business deal leaving the father penniless / Tennyson's financial interest in his friend's wood-carving business which failed and lost Tennyson his stake.
- The hero's father's madness / Tennyson's father's instability

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- Maud's brother was a snob and her suitor was a Parliamentary candidate with a bought commission / Tennyson's uncle Charles applied to reinstate the old family name hoping that a title would follow and thereby distance himself from his poor relations at Somersby
- Maud's death / Arthur Hallam's death
- Maud was the epitome of Tennyson's three loves; when the hero spoke of her it was Tennyson describing Emily Sellwood. The rose represented Rosa Baring, the lily was Sophy Rawnsley; Emily/Maud, 'Queen lily and rose in one' (Part I, Poem XXII, v.ix).

There are other connections, some of which would take longer to explain. His paternal aunt, Elizabeth Tennyson Russell, on reading the poem, wrote a letter of protest when she recognised the terms in which Tennyson had described her but Tennyson seemed unaware of the association.

## 2. Drama in Song

The length and complexity of *Maud* pose difficult decisions for the composer regarding choice of lines when scaling down a work of its size to the proportions of a song cycle. The Tennyson saga is organised into three parts of uneven dimensions, 28 poems overall of varying length, number of verses and metre. Much of the language is extravagant, spoken throughout by the demented hero whose vacillating states of mind range over issues of death and madness, war and peace, social injustice, God and science and a long encomium of *Maud*. Somervell was faced here with selecting text suitable for setting to music whilst preserving the outline of the drama and at the same time providing contrasts of mood and texture. His choice concentrated largely on the romantic

perspective although the other major themes of the poem, death, madness, war and redemption enter the cycle. Side issues and subsidiary characters are excluded to avoid complication. At one point the order of the poems is changed which will be explained later. It is unavoidable that a major abridgement and weighting towards the love aspect must soften the impact of the drama especially when related through the gentler art of song. It is said of Tennyson that of all his poems he loved most to recite *Maud* and his voice thrilled with intense emotion. And in a letter to Hallam Tennyson (Alfred's son) dated 5<sup>th</sup> May, c.1898, Somervell wrote:- 'thankyou . . .for allowing me to set to music 180 lines of *Maud*, - a poem which I learned from beginning to end by heart when I was 15, and the setting to music of which gave me more pleasure than anything else I have ever written'. The story of *Maud* is full of emotional ups and downs and one of the ways in which music can be made to reflect those contrasts is by injecting colour through tonal variety. The scheme below shows Somervell's juxtapositions of key and chords from one song to the next:-

Tonal Plan of *Maud*

<u>Song No.</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Begins</u>	<u>Ends</u>
<u>Part I</u>			
1 I hate the dreadful hollow	D minor	dominant	tonic
2 A voice by the cedar tree	F major	tonic	tonic
3 She came to the village church	D minor	tonic	tonic major
4 O let the solid ground	C major	tonic	tonic
5 Birds in the high Hall-garden	E flat major	tonic	tonic



*(This Cycle of Songs being designed for continuous performance, no pause should be made between the numbers).*

The fathers of Maud and of the singer (the "I" of the songs) were close friends while the singer was a little boy—so close in fact that at the time of Maud's birth they planned a match between the two children who grew up as intimate playmates, until a crash came. "A vast speculation" failed; the boy's father was beggared, while Maud's father, his supposed friend, became a millionaire. Shortly afterwards the body of the ruined and desperate man was found in the "dreadful hollow behind the little wood," in circumstances that pointed to suicide. The effect of this on his son, still a boy, is shown again and again throughout the poem, specially in the songs Nos. 1 and 6. At the beginning of the poem, Maud, who is now 16, has returned to the Hall after an absence of several years.

#### THE CYCLE.

1. The singer expresses the horror he feels for the "dreadful hollow" where his father's body was found.
  2. He hears Maud singing a battle song in the Hall garden. He tries to shut out the sound, but in the end is fascinated by the beauty of the voice.
  3. He sees Maud in church; their eyes meet, and she blushes.
  4. From that moment he is on fire for love of her.
  5. They meet in the wood.
  6. He goes out at dawn to Maud's garden. The curtained house where she is sleeping suggests to his haunted mind the house of death.
  - 7 and 8. Young love.
  9. There is a dance at the Hall to which the lover is not invited. He stands in the garden listening to the music, and his excitement rises to ecstasy when he hears her coming to the appointed meeting place. (They are surprised by her brother who hates the lover, and strikes him in their quarrel. There follows a duel in the "dreadful hollow," in which Maud's brother is killed).
  10. The lover flies the country, and during his absence
  11. he goes temporarily mad, and Maud dies.
  12. He sings of his longing to hold her once more in his arms
- ÉPILOGUE. He sees her in a vision, when she speaks of "a hope for the world in the coming wars" (in the Crimea). The song ends with self-dedication to his country. He "embraces the purpose of God, and the doom assigned."

A.S.

6	Maud has a garden	B flat major	tonic	tonic minor
7	Go not, happy day	F major	tonic	tonic
8	I have led her home	C major	dominant	tonic
9	Come into the garden, Maud	G major	tonic arpeggio	tonic

### Part II

10	The fault was mine	E flat minor	RH tonic chord above LH dominant pedal	tonic major
11	Dead, long dead	G minor	Diminished 7 <sup>th</sup>	dom. major
12	O that 'twere possible	B major	tonic	tonic

### Part III

Epilogue: My life has crept so long	B flat minor	dominant/tonic	tonic major
-------------------------------------	--------------	----------------	-------------

The Table illustrates how keys are chosen to reflect the mood of the song and to heighten the drama. The minor tonalities describe times of anxiety and darkness. Songs numbered 5 to 9 follow the circle of fifths and their smooth progressions match the hero's happiness in his developing courtship of Maud. The juxtaposition of tonalities is an important element in the musical drama. For example, see the tragic effect created by following the last chord of No. 9, a low tonic chord in G major, with the first of No. 10, a right hand tonic chord in E flat minor above a left hand dominant pedal.

Tennyson's opening quatrain describes the speaker's revulsion against a place/event which claimed the life of his father many years ago. Although the poem is a love story whose heroine is the beautiful young girl, Maud, it is set against this towering horror from the past from which the speaker can find no release. Somervell begins his cycle here too, which is why his programme note on the text is necessary for the listener to

make sense of the unfolding events (See Plate 5). The opening key is D minor and a feeling of repugnance is felt straightaway as the piano rushes in from the dominant with an upward arpeggio pausing on a minor 9<sup>th</sup> then sinking in disjointed figuration on to a low tonic chord (see Ex. 1):-

Ex. 1: *I hate the dreadful hollow*

The musical score for 'I hate the dreadful hollow' is presented in two systems. The first system shows the piano introduction with a dramatic upward arpeggio in the right hand and a low tonic chord in the left hand. The second system shows the vocal line entering with the lyrics 'hate the dreadful hol-low be-hind the lit-tle wood,'. The piano accompaniment continues with a series of chords and arpeggios, creating a somber and repugnant atmosphere.

This dramatic opening dominates the first song, *I hate the dreadful hollow* and Somervell has used it in the manner of a ritornello, as prelude, postlude and interlude, framing the four lines of text and impaling it upon the hearer's memory. A series of tonic-based ponderous chords follows whose bass octaves rise slowly to a dominant pedal at which point the voice enters (see Ex. 1). These two contrasting ideas, the arpeggios and the chords, shape the song's character and Somervell manipulates his material as each new line of horror unfolds. The exaggerated language reveals the narrator's disturbed state of mind. The slow rhythm of the quatrain is due partly to its long lines (iambic hexameter) and also to the deliberate use of alliteration. The rhyme scheme appears to be cross-line

but lines 2 and 4 are an eye-rhyme; consequently the final non-rhyming word, 'Death', strikes a calculated chill:-

*I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,  
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath,  
The red-ribb'd ledges drip with a silent horror of blood,  
And Echo there, whatever is ask'd her, answers 'Death'.*

I, I, 1-4

The speaker of the poem, of course, becomes the vocalist of the songs. The quatrain is one sentence and the song through-composed with the ritornello taking over when the vocalist reaches the end of the line. The accompanist does not merely support the singer but shares in the interpretation and drama of the story. The narrator's vehement outburst at his entrance is captured in the angular melodic line delivered *ff* and leaping down a 5<sup>th</sup> on to a low dominant at end-of-line (see Ex.1) whereupon the piano reiterates its opening music as if to emphasise its significance. This repeated passage is almost identical but in the bar before the vocalist re-enters with his second line of text, the piano chords change direction towards the dominant's (A) dominant (E) indicating that more distasteful facts are about to emerge. Successive lines use the same material but adapt in various ways, for example, the vocal interval, a perfect 5<sup>th</sup> at 'I hate' becomes an augmented 4<sup>th</sup> in the second line at 'Its lips', perhaps representing distortion (see Exx.1 & 2a). In the same two lines, 'hollow', first line, is set to a falling 4<sup>th</sup>, its counterpart in the second line, 'above', is a rising 4<sup>th</sup> (see Exx. 1 & 2b):-

Ex.2a/b: *I hate the dreadful hollow*

(a)

(b)



The third and fourth vocal lines may be a different shape but contain similar rhythmic patterns. The alliterative words 'red ribb'd ledges drip', are set pictorially to descending

mezzo-staccato chords on the piano and above, the vocal line is grim on a monotone (see Ex. 3):-

Ex. 3: *I hate the dreadful hollow*

The piano's ritornello is heard in other tonal contexts as the song progresses, finally on the tonic for the postlude where it echoes the terrifying Death climax (referred to in the fourth line) on the tonic minor 9<sup>th</sup> (see Ex. 4):-

Ex. 4: *I hate the dreadful hollow*

A final word on the song is the surprising, if not indiscriminate, use of dynamics, or lack of them. Volume directions for the vocalist are scant. A *ff* is indicated at his first entry, a *p* at the third line and a *crescendo* at the penultimate bar of the line; that is all. The accompanist's directions also are rudimentary. The first song in a cycle needs to command attention and Somervell has not failed with this powerful miniature which enhances the verse with a deeper intensity

The hero has seen Maud from a distance in poems II to IV. Now, at poem V, he hears her singing. Somervell sets the poem as song number 2, *A voice by the cedar tree*. The gloom and tragedy have disappeared and the key is changed from D minor to its relative

major. The irregularity of line length and metre of the three stanza poem are not conducive to a simple strophic setting so Somervell has split the two long outer verses (of 11 and 12 lines respectively) at the central full stops into two strophes each; the central verse remains as written. A five-strophe song is thus created making the text more manageable as a musical form. Following the tension of the previous number the piano's rhythmic no-nonsense introduction is a welcome emotional relief and also prepares the way for the singer whose beginning melody echoes the piano's opening bar (see Ex. 5a):-

Ex. 5a: *A voice by the cedar tree*

The musical score for 'A voice by the cedar tree' is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal melody in the treble clef and the piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato' and the dynamics are 'mf'. The second system continues the music, with the vocal melody starting with the lyrics 'A voice... by the co - dar'. The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes.

The five verses have a modified strophic plan:- A, A1, A2, B, A3. The vocal melody of verses 1 to 3 and 5 begin with a variation of the fragment from the first bar of introduction. The course of the music of those verses varies subsequently as the text unfolds. As in the first song the piano links the textual breaks into a continuous piece with music taken from the introduction. Maud is encountered singing in the meadow near her home, a song about soldiers in battle and noble war. It is a beautiful day matched only by her own beauty and youth. But the hero insists that he is not moved by her loveliness, only by her singing voice. There are, in this song, two contrasting styles, defined by the accompaniment; one is the hero's description of Maud's martial song, rhythmic and pompous in verses 1 and 2, with mainly primary chords, full-textured and on the beat, see example 5a above; the other comes in verse 3 in which the hero muses

upon Maud's charms. Here the pianist's music is more flowing and even, light and open-textured, an octave higher, appropriately feminine (see example 5b):-

Ex. 5b: *A voice by the cedar tree*

Meno mosso

Maud with her exquisite face, And wild voice pealing up to the sun - ny sky,

For the most part the key remains in F major but when there are references to soldiers and gallantry the tonality moves into A major territory, a higher key for a brighter, more positive sound (see Example 6):-

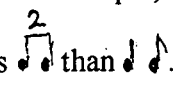

Ex. 6: *A voice by the cedar tree*

grace, Singing of Death, and of Ho - nour that can - not die, Till I

The Death theme is seen in this stanza as a sacrifice of honour in contrast to its horrific starkness in the first number but in both songs Death sounds an E flat; then it was a minor 9<sup>th</sup>, but here it is a less harsh diminished 7<sup>th</sup> chord on the dominant (see Example 7):-

Ex. 7: *A voice by the cedar tree*

March with ban-ner and bug-le and life To the death,.....

The setting demonstrates Somervell's careful observance of speech rhythm matched to musical rhythm not only by using different note values but also by effective use of duplets and triplets to manipulate the text. In song No.1 he had set word syllables to quaver triplets as one means of achieving a slow, leaden articulation. In this song, verses 3 to 5, the piano accompaniment changes from the compound triple of the previous two verses to simple triple whilst the vocal line continues in compound time to accommodate speech patterns (see Ex. 5b); at other times the dotted crotchet unit is replaced by a duplet, to equalise the syllables or maybe to word paint. For example, the word 'languid' (verse 3) sounds more languid when written musically as  than . But at times the word-setting can sound clumsy and in places the melody contrived when notes are repeated. Those two factors are often associated and occur when a line of text is made to fit a pre-conceived rhythm or melody. In all but a few instances every note has a separate word or syllable which becomes tedious and laboured. There are examples in verses 2 and 3, but the line at example 8 below, occurs in the final verse at 'But to move...and adore':-

Ex. 8: *A voice by the cedar tree*



Song number 2 is not one of Somervell's better examples but there are some inspired moments in verses 3 and 4 from 'Till I well . . .' (verse 3) to 'for you' only trouble the mind', (verse 4). Here the military style gives way to freer vocal lines containing appoggiaturas; and the plodding chords are ventilated with rests. Towards the end of verse 3 the hero has become more introspective. His vocal line is broken up and sinks by semitone to a low A on a D major chord from the piano. The piano interlude follows on



with an effective rising arpeggio in D which turns magically on to a sustained G minor chord above which the voice floats with 'Silence' and similarly at 'Be still', in a short quasi recitative passage (see Ex. 9):-

Ex. 9: *A voice by the cedar tree*

These two lines are a very effective contrast and one would like to indulge the feeling of stillness for longer but the remainder of the verse reverts to its former style.

In poem VI the hero had encountered the heroine in the village street where she had given him her hand with a smile. Now he is tormented by those pleasantries. What did they mean? Was it a shallow gesture in order to gain a vote for her brother in the forthcoming Parliamentary election or could it be a genuine personal interest in him?

The obsession takes a step further in song number 3, *She came to the village church*, taken from poem number VIII, a thirteen-line verse of which Somervell sets the first seven lines. When boy meets girl again in the village church all his questionings are there in Somervell's music. The key has reverted to the D minor of song number 1; there its dark sounds were associated with the unanswered questions surrounding his father's death. Now the questions concern Maud's sincerity. Her father had double-crossed his own father; was Maud now trying to deceive himself? These gnawing thoughts are going through his mind as he observes Maud in church. The music reflects those doubts; none of the vocal lines ends on the tonic; five lead to the dominant, one to the supertonic and the final one, surprisingly, to the sub-median. All lines but the last begin on the

dominant. The importance of the dominant and the frequency with which it occurs in the vocal line deny finality and so the listener's doubts remain and propel him onward to the next song. Beneath these dominants the piano's cadences are delayed, like feminine endings, and often the resolution occurs simultaneously with the beginning of the vocalist's next phrase (see the first three lines); the overlapping phrases continue the momentum (see Ex. 10):-

Ex. 10: *She came to the village church*  
Sostenuto

Full-textured Brahmsian-styled chords not only contribute to the hero's emotional turmoil but supply a rich harmonic support for the soloist (see Ex. 11a):-

Ex. 11a/b/c: *She came to the village church*

(a)

(b)

(c)

The chordal accompaniment throughout the song supplies richness and restraint and adds an appropriate dignity to a church setting. Somervell's predilection for a key change at a telling moment in a drama has been remarked upon before. Here that moment occurs when the eyes of the two protagonists meet and the music bursts into light in the relative D major, at 'suddenly', together with a melodic leap of a 4<sup>th</sup> to the upper tonic (see Ex. 11a). But the hero's joy is insecure, like the second inversion of that chord, and his song turns suddenly and surprisingly upwards, coming to rest on a quizzical sub-mediante (see Ex. 11b). The final bars are pure Schumann – the piano finishes the vocal phrase then rounds off the whole with two closing bars (see Ex. 11c). This very effective setting captures the essence of the hero's joy in that brief moment – reflected in the brevity of the song.

Two poems have intervened since the previous song during which time another glimpse of Maud and a wave of her hand have given the speaker fresh hope. But is the horseman seen riding with her a suitor? Will she be lured by title, rank and money? If only he could be a man and stand up to his self-doubt. The words of the fourth song, *O let the solid ground*, are a prayer that he will not be let down in love. A true love of his own would enable him to face any storms of life. Somervell sets both verses of the poem, 7 lines each:-

I

*O let the solid ground  
Not fail beneath my feet  
Before my life has found  
What some have found so sweet;  
Then let come what come may,  
What matter if I go mad,  
I shall have had my day.*

## II

*Let the sweet heavens endure,  
Not close and darken above me  
Before I am quite sure  
That there is one to love me;  
Then let come what come may  
To a life that has been so sad,  
I shall have had my day.*

I, XI, 398-411

In each verse the pattern of text is matching; lines 1 and 3 and 2 and 4 are rhyming; lines 5 to 7 are a quasi refrain. The lines 5 and 7 have the same text and the lines 6 are modified in rhythm but rhyming. For this ordered pattern Somervell provides a straightforward setting. The style of the song contrasts with its predecessor. A continuous stream of arpeggios from the piano, *molto allegro*, and an independent vocal line reflects the hero's exultation and confidence. The C major tonality represents the 'solid ground'. The piano begins on a tonic arpeggio and through the course of two bars introduction moves to a I IV V cadence which resolves when the vocalist enters. The music follows the same pattern for each verse except for textual and rhythmic adjustments and the final words of lines 6 and 7 (verse 2), 'sad' and 'day', are twice as long as their counterparts in verse 1, ending on a triumphant and unequivocal full close. This is the cue for a showy piano postlude, continuing in the same vein as the accompaniment. Somervell's tonal plan for each seven-line verse has a 'solid' foundation:-

Lines 1 and 2; tonic, ending with a cadence in the tonic

Line 3; begins to move to the dominant

Line 4; end of, cadence in dominant

Refrain:-

Lines 5 and 6; returning to tonic

Line 7            cadence in tonic

The dynamics, again, are sketchy and unsatisfactory. A *double forte* is indicated at the beginning but nothing else until verse 2. The speed direction, one only, at the beginning, *Molto Allegro*, raises similar doubts. Even a plain *Allegro* seems too fast. A more appropriate pace might be *Moderato con moto* and would allow a little more elasticity *en route*. In these early songs the matter of performance direction appears to be regarded separately rather than an integral part of construction.

The next poem number XII is also Somervell's next song of which he chooses five from the eight verses, omitting slighting references to Maud's other suitor:-

*Look, a horse at the door,  
And little King Charley snarling,  
Go back, my lord, across the moor,  
You are not her darling.*

I, XIII, 440-3

Song number 5, *Birds in the high Hall garden*, provide yet another contrasting ambience. It is directed to be performed *Andante Grazioso* and indeed the music tries hard to create that background for the poem speaks of calling birds at twilight, of Maud gathering lilies in the woodland, of ringing valleys, of Maud with a posy of daisies, of the hero's kiss on her hand; a charming picture. The key is E flat, the time simple triple and the piano begins with a two-bar introduction built on a bar's-length *motif* in which the tonic chord is followed by an arpeggiated triplet decoration representing birdsong (see Ex. 12a):-

Ex. 12a: *Birds in the high Hall-garden*

Andante grazioso

Voice

Piano

*una corda* *con Pedale*

Birds in the high Hall

This figure repeats in every bar of the first verse with harmonic adjustments in only three bars. Between verses 1 and 2 a staggered descent in 6ths on the piano breaks the motif for two bars whereupon it resumes in verse 2 and the pattern is repeated but varying the tonal levels in lines 2 and 4. Another one-bar-long accompanying idea, still in E flat and syncopated, is introduced for verse 3, Mozartean in style, graceful and incorporating a turn; it does not occur again (see Ex. 12b):-

Ex. 12b: *Birds in the high Hall-garden*

Birds in our wood

And for verse 4 a different figure, chordal with a dotted rhythmic detail, of one bar's length, used in modified sequence beneath the melody (see Ex. 12c):-

Ex. 12c: *Birds in the high Hall-garden*

Just before the singer enters with verse 4 Somervell sidesteps on to F minor harmony as the hero recalls Maud's restraint when he kissed her hand. Following that verse a new

linking idea in the accompaniment, a passage of chordal suspensions moving down by step from one dominant 7<sup>th</sup> (of E flat) to another an octave lower, ushers in the final verse (5) and a return of the first piano *motif*. There is no doubt that the accompanist has the starring role in this song; certainly Somervell uses the piano to suggest the scene evoked by the poetry. Indeed the accompaniment would stand on its own as a pianoforte solo, so varied are its ideas. Upon it Somervell imposes a modified strophic vocal line. Here, as in other songs, the dominant has an important role. Every verse begins and ends on a dominant:-

- verses 1 and 2 begin and end on B flat (dominant of E flat)
- verse 3 begins on B flat but near the end of that verse has moved towards the key of B flat; the final vocal note and bass note of that verse is its dominant (F)
- at verse 4 the music is moving towards F minor and the vocalist's first note is the dominant (C)
- the final vocal interval of that verse falls a 7<sup>th</sup> on to B flat which is the dominant of the key of the final verse
- verse 5 begins and ends on B flat

The final verse of poem XII, quoted above, leads the hero to a castigation of Maud's brother in the following poem, XIII, but walking past him on his estate, concedes that perhaps he does not look such a bad fellow after all. But the brother ogles him insolently with an unresponsive gaze. The hero then concludes that the deceitful nature of Maud's

father has been passed on to her brother whilst Maud herself has inherited only the good qualities of her mother. In the warm glow of love however, he can be magnanimous:-

*Peace, angry spirit, and let him be!  
Has not his sister smiled on me?*

I, XIII, 487-8

Following the above duplet the hero is to be found at the gate to Maud's garden of roses and lilies (Rosa and Sophy?). It is dawn and almost silent save for the sound of a trickling garden stream and waves breaking onto the beach nearby. The household is still sleeping but as he looks upon the drawn white curtains round the house he shivers and thinks of the sleep of Death. Somervell takes his text for song number 6 (*Maud has a garden*) from poem XIV drawing lines from two of the four stanzas which vary widely in length and metre and organises them into a modified strophic design. The first six lines of the eight-line first stanza comprise the first verse of the song. The lines are fairly short and even in length and the main pattern of the verse is anapaestic trimeter which fall musically into three even vocal phrases. Somervell has composed two further verses, 2 and 3, using stanza IV, eleven lines long which he has split into five and six lines respectively. Verse 2 has five uneven lines of two long and two shorter phrases. The six lines of verse 3 are especially variable in line length and range from three to five poetic feet; musically this becomes six phrases of varying lengths, short to long. The vocal music which is adapted to accommodate the text's irregularities is drawn mainly from the first phrase of the first verse ('Maud . . . lawn'). Occasionally a solution to an inconsistency is to insert an extra two beats of accompaniment, bringing in the voice mid-bar rather than at the beginning of it as at 'Or the voice ...' in verse 2. He also uses fragments of rhythm or melody as leitmotifs when there is a similarity of textual meaning



in different places, as at 'bed and bower', verse 1, and 'meant but sleep', verse 3 (see Ex 13a):-

Ex. 13a: *Maud has a garden*

v.1 v.3

and 'prickle my skin', verse 3, with 'shudder'd and thought', verse 3 (see Ex. 13b):-

Ex. 13b: *Maud has a garden*

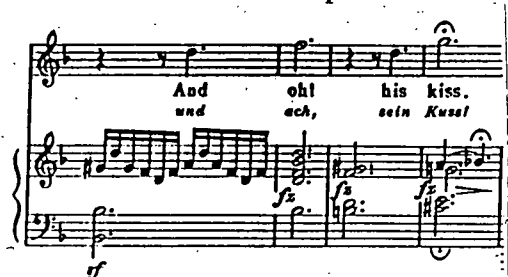
The broken chord accompaniment is in similar style to song number 4 (*O let the solid ground*), but looks back to Schumann, in *Der Nussbaum* for example. The motion stops only when the speaker is reminded of death at the sight of drawn white curtains, ('But I looked'), at the beginning of verse 2 where a single crotchet chord on a dramatic key change to the tonic minor (B flat) is followed by a silence (rests), commanding the attention (see Ex. 14a):-

Ex. 14a: *Maud has a garden*

The moment draws a parallel with similar ones in song number 2 (*A voice from the cedar tree*) at 'Silence' and 'Be still' where Somervell uses the same technique to surprise (see Ex. 9). It also recalls a similar instance in Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade* when the

machine falters and breaks off when the young girl remembers her lover's kiss (see Ex. 14b):-

Ex. 14b: *Gretchen am Spinnrade*



Dynamics are few and vague in the first two verses but in verse 3 are placed thoughtfully to good effect.

In poem XV the brother has left town for a short time and the hero resolves to take this opportunity to speak to Maud of his love, 'I must tell her or I die'. *Go not, happy day*, number 7, is a song of happy anticipation that the hero's declaration of love will be accepted by Maud. The sentiment of the poem is unusually light-hearted with no oppressive undertones and contrasts both in mood and metre with the previous song. However it must be said that some of the lines are not the quality of Tennyson's usual poetic flow:-

*Blush from West to East,  
Blush from East to West,  
Till the West is East,  
Blush it thro' the West.*

I, XVII, 591-4

The mood is similar to song 2, of happy anticipation, and both are set in the key of F major. Poem XVII, one stanza of 28 lines, from which the above extract is taken, has been set as a modified strophic song. Somervell has grouped the lines cleverly into four verses, appropriately dividing the text, the first two and last of 8 lines each and the third,

4 lines; the musical form becomes AABA1. Separated in this way the first and last verses share a refrain. Organisation of text and form is shown below:-

Refrain

Go not, happy day  
From the shining fields,  
Go not, happy day,  
Till the maiden yields.

Rosy is the West,  
Rosy is the South  
Roses are her cheeks,  
And a rose her mouth.

v.1 A

When the happy Yes  
Falters from her lips,  
Pass and blush the news  
Over glowing ships;  
Over blowing seas,  
Over seas at rest,  
Pass the happy news,  
Blush it thro' the West;

Till the red man dance  
By his red cedar-tree,  
And the red man's babe  
Leap, beyond the sea.

v.2 A

Blush from West to East  
Blush from East to West,  
Till the West is East,  
Blush it thro' the West.

Rosy is the West,  
Rosy is the South,  
Roses are her cheeks,  
And a rose her mouth

refrain

v.4 A1

v.3 B

I, XVII, 571-598

The three eight-line verses are set to the same music (see opening bars at Ex. 15):-

Ex. 15: *Go not, happy day*

Allegretto

Voice

Go not, hap - py day,

Piano

*p legato possibile*

Verse 4 is slightly modified whilst the third verse has a new, more interesting melodic line. The verse speaks about news of the hero's happiness being spread abroad and here the tonality begins to rove. Starting from the sub-dominant minor which is approached by the dominant 7<sup>th</sup> it moves briefly through the mediant major, then sidesteps on to the sub-mediant minor, and comes to rest on the leading note. This note (E) then functions as a secondary dominant in order to return to the home key. A short sojourn for the accompaniment in this area ends with the entry of the vocalist on an extended first note whilst the piano adjusts the harmony beneath and the music edges into the tonic key for the final verse (see Ex. 16):-

Ex. 16: *Go not, happy day*

The musical score for 'Go not, happy day' is presented in two systems. The top system features a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment on two staves. The vocal line begins with a melodic phrase, followed by a long note marked '1<sup>st</sup>' with the lyrics 'Blush...' underneath. The piano accompaniment consists of a series of chords and arpeggiated figures. The bottom system continues the piano accompaniment with more complex chordal and counterpoint passages. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is common time (C).

The piano accompaniment is abundant in variety from chordal passages to counterpoint and a blending of the two. The final climax on 'rose' is extended to nearly four bars, an artifice used similarly in song number 4 on 'sad' and in number 5 on 'rosy'. The direction *senza rall* in the accompaniment is not written in the manuscript and must have been added by the publisher.

The hero has become obsessed with Maud. In poem XVIII his head is full of romantic dreams. His love makes him feel impulsive and reckless to the point of imbalance. But beneath his delirium there lurks a doubt. From this lengthy eulogy Somervell sets the first two verses as song number 8, *I have led her home*. The two stanzas are non-matching in rhyme scheme and metre but the second line in the first stanza, 'There is

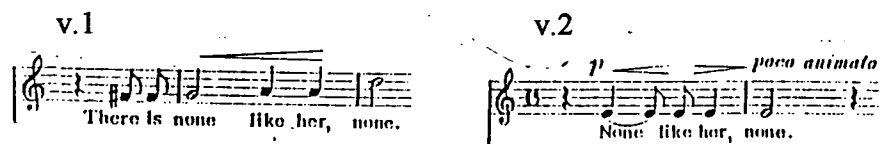
none like her, none', is the truncated first line of the second stanza, 'None like her, none' (Tennyson also uses it similarly to begin the third stanza). Somervell matches the poetic organisation with a complementary musical scheme. Whilst the music for the two verses is different they do have a line of melody in common, a uniting factor. This melody line is set to the first and third lines of verse 1 and to the second line of verse 2 (see Ex. 17):-

Ex. 17: *I have led her home*



The line of text common to both stanzas has a fairly similar musical rhythm but in the second verse it is set on a monotone, presumably to equate 'none' (= not one) with one tone or sound (see Ex. 18):-

Ex. 18: *I have led her home*



Other similarities occur in rhythmic patterns or melodic fragments but have no specific association with one another. For such an impassioned flow of language Somervell's music seems rather dreary. The vocal line is uninspired and no match for Tennyson's glowing poetry. Somervell's one-syllable-per-note style can plod. The lines and setting of:-

*And never yet so warmly ran my blood  
And sweetly, on and on . . .*

is a case in point. Music and sentiment are ill-matched. Although the two lines are conceived as one unbroken musical phrase, there is, in fact, a comma after 'sweetly'

which slightly alters the meaning. A split-second vocal break is required here; 'on and on' is a sub-phrase; and the melodic line sounds dull and pedestrian (see Ex. 19):-

Ex. 19: *I have led her home*



The piano accompaniment is equally banal but contains an expressive fragment, used sequentially, which first appears as the Introduction. It functions as a leitmotif for Maud for whenever the hero refers to her, the motif, or scraps of it, follow the reminiscence. And it serves a double role as prelude, interlude and postlude (see Ex. 20):-

Ex. 20: *I have led her home*



Following his success in the previous song the hero is now intoxicated with love but there is a feeling of unease that he shrugs off:-

*... my heart more blest than heart can tell,  
Blest, but for some dark undercurrent woe  
That seems to draw – but it shall not be so:  
Let all be well, be well.*

I, XVIII, 680-3

The brother is returning home and a grand political dinner and dance is being held at the Hall that evening. The hero is not invited but he intends to wait in Maud's rose garden.

When the ball is over she will come to him. The one-bar piano introduction in G major to song number 9, *Come into the garden Maud*, provides the source of ideas for vocal melody and accompaniment. The first five of its notes are also those of the singer's line. Somervell develops and extends this idea into a piano waltz which provides the background for the vocalist in the first three verses (see Ex. 21a):-

Ex. 21a: *Come into the garden, Maud*

Non troppo allegro

Come in-to the gar - den, Maud, For tho

una corda

The musical score for 'Come into the garden, Maud' is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Non troppo allegro'. The piano part begins with a one-bar introduction in G major, which is the source of ideas for the vocal melody. The vocal line starts with the lyrics 'Come in-to the gar - den, Maud, For tho'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'una corda'.

The idea of using waltz music for piano accompaniment may again look back to *Dichterliebe*, Number IX, *Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen*. Schumann's accompaniment is independent of the vocal line, sweeping blithely through the wedding festivities:-

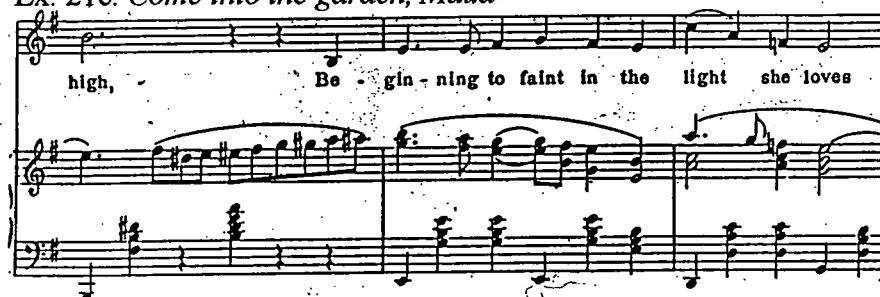
Ex. 21b: *Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen*

*mf*

The flutes and fid - dles are sound - ing,  
Das ist ein Flö - ten und Gei - gen,

The musical score for 'Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen' is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'mf'. The piano part is independent of the vocal line, sweeping blithely through the wedding festivities. The vocal line starts with the lyrics 'The flutes and fid - dles are sound - ing, Das ist ein Flö - ten und Gei - gen,'.

The form of the six verses of the vocal line, ABA1CD(+ a snatch of A)A3, indicates the growing instability of the protagonist. Verse 1 begins with the gay waltz and the hero calling happily for Maud. His song continues in similar mood in verse 2 but with a different melody, but there is a hint of darkness as the relative minor indicates. As he recalls how Venus dies in the light of the sun the vocal line introduces a flattened supertonic (see Ex. 21c):-

Ex. 21c: *Come into the garden, Maud*

His mood recovers in verse 3 as the music of verse 1 returns but the end of the verse is the end of the party. The first line of verse 4 incorporates a bar of compound triple time and the piano ceases its waltz and adopts a single line of broken chords arranged in groups of three, split between the hands. This change of accompaniment no doubt points up the line of text, 'Come hither the dances are done' and maybe indicates the hero's quickening pulse. The key changes abruptly to A flat major at the end of the verse through an interrupted cadence after which the piano continues with broken chords in a six-bar interlude. Concurrent with the new key comes a change to quadruple time, simple time for the voice and compound groupings for the pianist. The setting of simple and compound time simultaneously creates friction. Somervell has done this with intent to match the mounting agitation of the hero as he imagines he hears Maud's footstep in the garden in verse 5. There are some effective rises to high points in phrases on 'near' and 'hear' (see Ex.22a):-

Ex.22a: *Come into the garden, Maud*

and corresponding falls away of the melody from the sympathetic flowers of the garden, the 'white rose' and 'lily' (see Ex. 22b):-

Ex.22b: *Come into the garden, Maud*

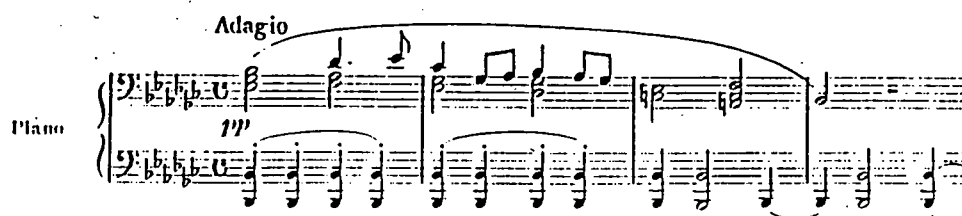


The climax on C flat (see Ex. 22a) gives an opportunity for a tonal move to the minor regions of that key. An enharmonic F sharp in the melody at 'the larkspur' is the signal for the music to return to the tonic major and this is accomplished during the last two lines of the fifth verse. The piano accompaniment pursues this lead with a brief interlude into the home key for the sixth (final) verse in which the vocal melody of verses 1 and 3 returns but here to the broken chord accompaniment of the waltz tune. This 'mix and match' technique mirrors the hero's confusion. The final verse is however not merely a variation of what was heard before but is drawn out into an elaborate climax with new ideas for voice and piano plus a codetta. This is headed *Più mosso*, one of Somervell's rare tempo directions mid-song and contains a further piano interlude and extended postlude framing a re-setting to new material of the final two lines of verse 6. The now frantic hero imagines every sound he hears to be Maud's footfall and declares that he would know her step had he been dead and buried a hundred years. Long held vocal notes, new piano figurations in different right hand and left hand groupings (to illustrate tremble under her feet'), chordal progressions, a new final vocal line, are the means that Somervell has used in his musical depiction of the hero's derangement.

To describe the pianist of this duo as accompanist would do him a great injustice for it is in his part that the drama, excitement and inspiration lies. There are small textual differences. In verse 5 Somervell has 'own' where Tennyson has 'dove'. In verse 5 again, Somervell has 'The white rose', Tennyson, 'And the white rose'. And in verse 6 Somervell has 'Had it lain', Tennyson, 'Had I lain'.

Part II of the work opens in stark contrast to the euphoric climax of Part I. A tragedy has occurred. The hero and Maud were discovered in the garden by her irate brother. A terrible argument took place followed by a fight between the hero and brother in which the latter was mortally wounded. But in his dying gasps he acknowledges his mistake:- 'The fault was mine, fly!' The hero, already unbalanced, ponders the admission but ascribes the guilt to himself. A parallel between poem 1, Part II and poem 1, Part I may now be drawn. Both Acts open with a tragic death. In the first the hero muses upon the ghastly place where his father died, by accident or by his own hand is not known. In the second it is the dying man's words upon which he reflects. However, the utterance is misinterpreted in the song cycle because of the cuts in text and unless the whole poem is read the words, 'the fault was mine', seem to be a confession from the hero. Somervell sets the first five and final two lines of verse one, poem 1, in Part II of the saga into an eight-line song, number 10, *The fault was mine*. It is through-composed, an unusual form in this cycle. The lengthy introduction, a sombre preamble in E flat minor, may be likened to an opera overture, atmospheric, setting the scene. The importance of the pianoforte at this point is paramount, substituting for an orchestra, with diverse effects and maybe a portent of things to come. Beginning *pp* the left hand sounds the deathly drum beat in leaden staccato octaves on a dominant whilst the grim tune of song number 1 (*I hate the dreadful hollow*) is metamorphosed above in the right hand, linking the two tragedies (see Exx. 1 and 23):-

Ex. 23: *The fault was mine*



The drum beat idea also comes from number 1 being a variation of the dotted dominant pedal (see Ex.1). Chilling *sforzando* chords lead to dying appoggiaturas in a sequence combined with a hemiola rhythm whilst the octaves continue inexorably in the bass. All this occurs at an *Adagio* tempo within the dynamic range *p* to *pp*. The singer enters with a spellbinding phrase on the words of the song, 'The fault was mine'. Earlier remarks have suggested that word setting and melodic contour are not always kind to the vocalist but this is a song for the singer to relish; nicely-curving phrases including two-note syllables, a natural unforced melodic line and a good range of dynamics with a dramatic climax towards the end. The dominant is very prominent in both accompaniment and voice creating a sense of stunned suspension of time; most of the lines begin on it. The chromatic chordal accompaniment is a perfect partner for the anguished vocal line (see Ex. 24):-

Ex. 24: *The fault was mine*

The musical score for 'The fault was mine' is presented in two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, written in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The lyrics 'hll? It is this guilt - y hand!' are written below the notes. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature. The piano part features a chromatic chordal accompaniment in the bass and a more active melodic line in the treble. Dynamics markings include *p* (piano) and *pp* (pianissimo).

Racked with guilt and the weight of his burden the hero's final words, 'till I die', end dominant to tonic supported by a final cadence from the piano on a peaceful *terce de picardie*. This setting is sensitive, electrifying. It is Somervell at his very best.

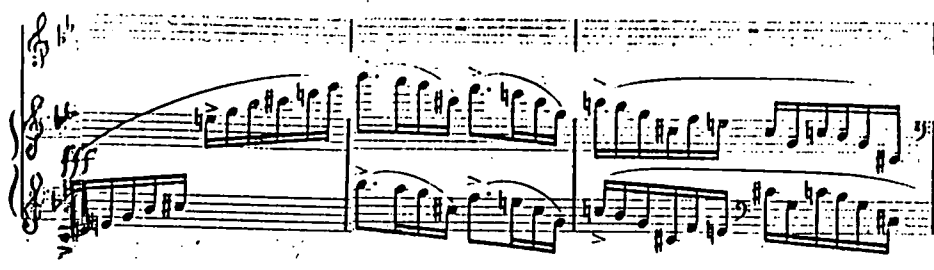
In song number 11, *Dead, long dead*, the hero is completely mental and imagines himself dead, buried in a shallow grave beneath the road where the noises from the living

world, the constant clamour and clatter of horses' hooves and human feet, give him no peace. Somervell has set those turbulent fantasies into the appropriate form of a rhapsody with many changes of mood. But there are links between musical material within the song and with other songs in the cycle, reminiscences. Within the song the recurring musical material is in the right/left hand continuous unison semiquaver groups depicting the ceaseless activity above ground whilst the vocalist hardly pauses for breath. There are two sections of these separated by other material. The first is the four-bar piano introduction, four groups of diminished 7<sup>th</sup>s from which the semiquaver groups are developed. The singer enters on the dominant to the line, 'Dead, long dead', in long notes, sinking an octave. Beneath, the accompaniment interprets 'long dead' in its three-octave descent in octave chords from the dominant. Towards the end of the second semiquaver section the music accelerates into a quasi recitative passage. Patter passages usually serve a comic situation but a smile here would be one of pity (see Ex. 25):-

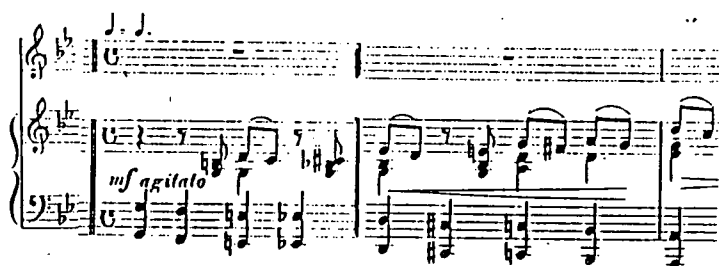
Ex. 25: *Dead, long dead*

The musical score for 'Dead, long dead' is presented in three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting with a piano introduction marked 'molto accel.' and featuring long notes for the lyrics 'go; And then to hear a dead man chat-ter is e-nough to drive one mad..'. The middle staff is the right-hand piano accompaniment, consisting of continuous semiquaver groups. The bottom staff is the left-hand piano accompaniment, featuring a three-octave descent in octave chords marked 'colla voce'. The piece concludes with a triple bar line and a final chord.

The hero's tortured mind leaps from one memory to another and the increased speed leads into a recall of the chromatic horror/death passage of the first song (see Exx. 1 and 26):-

Ex. 26: *Dead, long dead*

This is followed by the dreamy opening motive from song number 8, rising to terror and paired with the menacing descending bass octaves (see Ex. 27):-

Ex. 27: *Dead, long dead*

The two intervening contrasting sections are sober in style. The central one is short and the hero bemoans the fact that there is no peace in the grave. It is a quiet plaintive vocal line with a depressing, sliding octave accompaniment. The final contrasting section is similar in mood to the one just described in which the hero begs to be buried deeper where he can be at peace. The left hand is across a two-bar descending ostinato which sounds nine times and finally becomes a scale leading to a low dominant (see Ex. 28a):-

Ex.28a: *Dead, long dead*

Above, the singer's sinking melody is delivered *pp* as though thinking aloud. The final chord is the dominant major which prepares the way for the key of the next song (see Exx. 28b and 29):-

Ex. 28b: *Dead, long dead*

The musical score for 'Dead, long dead' is written for voice and piano. The voice part is in a single melodic line with lyrics: 'vill come To bu-ry me, bu-ry me Deep-er, e-ver so lit-tle deep'. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves. The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a more rhythmic accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* and *senza rall.* The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4.

Had events in the song cycle progressed in the order in which Tennyson wrote them song number 12, *O that 'twere possible*, would have preceded *Dead long dead*. The lines:-

*O that 'twere possible  
After long grief and pain  
To find the arms of my true love  
Round me once again!*

II, IV, 141-4

are the first quatrain of poem IV Part II and come after the hero's escape to the Breton coast. They are the hero's despairing cry. In poem V his crazed imaginings delude him to believe that he is dead and buried (song number 11 in the cycle). Somervell's reason for the interchange of the two is presumably to bring more coherence to the ending of the cycle in the absence of the full text. In placing *O that 'twere possible* as the penultimate song perhaps the hero's final transformation of mind becomes more credible. The final chord of the previous song has prepared the ear for the transition to B major; the F sharp common to both is at the top of the opening tonic chord (see Ex. 29):-

Ex. 29: *O that 'twere possible*

*Sostenuto*  
*Con molto espressione*

Voice: *pp* O that 'twere pos - si - ble Af - ter long grief and pain

Piano: *pp*

The song is a beautifully judged contrast both in length and mood to its predecessor. The four short lines are set as two vocal phrases then followed by a repeat of the third and fourth lines (second phrase). To conclude, the piano again has the music of the first phrase, this time incorporating the melody line. The form becomes ABB1A1. This song is another of Somervell's deeply-felt miniatures, chordally accompanied, that he captures so well. The contrasting major key and slow expressive delivery encapsulate a brief period of quietness, albeit yearning, for the tormented. In the third line, 'To find the arms of my true love', the climax of the phrase on 'arms', D#, expresses utter joy; when the words are repeated in line 5 the climactic note is subtly altered by a semitone to D and now it expresses utter longing. This semitonal fall, in fact, heightens the earlier climax and becomes the highspot of the song (see Ex. 30): -

Ex. 30: *O that 'twere possible*

line 3

line 5

pain To find the arms of my true love To find the arms of my true love

Somervell has indicated a *Sostenuto* performance marking, with scant other directions, save for his usual hairpins and in this short song those directions seem adequate.

Entitled *Epilogue*, this final song from Part III of Tennyson's work describes the awakening of the hero to hopes for mankind by changed attitudes and motives. He now views the fatalities of war as death in a noble cause, a necessary antidote to the tyrannies of peace time, an opportunity to re-value one's life, 'The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire'. His conversion is the result of a dream in which he saw Maud 'who spoke of a hope for the world in the coming wars'. This spirit of optimism is reflected in the music of the final song which is like a pastiche, made up of musical quotations from some of the foregoing songs. Part III of the Poem consists of one poem only, with five long-line verses. For this last song Somervell has assembled twenty lines which are cobbled together from the five verses so the musical form reflects, perhaps unintentionally, the patchwork text, besides drawing together the different threads of the narrative. The piano's introduction, in B flat minor, begins with a dotted version of the left hand ostinato from the final section of song number 11; this theme occupies both the accompanist and vocalist for the first three lines of text. Originally the ostinato was the sinister background to the hero's morbid imaginings of himself in the grave and its re-use here recalls that dark time (see Exx.28a and 31):-

Ex. 31: *My life has crept so long*



At the words 'My mood is changed' the music changes key on to G flat major and a rising broken chord crescendos from *pp*. The next four lines are reflective as the hero recalls his dream, matched with a conversational type of vocal line and the chords



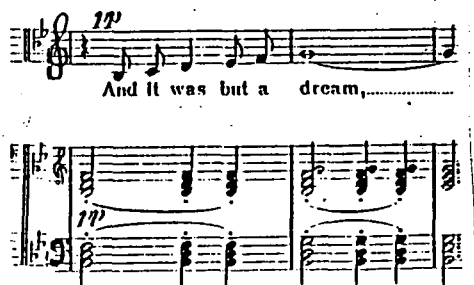
beneath, quasi recitative. The key moves to B flat and the dream brings a strain from the martial music of song number 2 (see Exx. 5a and 32):-

Ex. 32: *My life has crept so long*



Then he remembers his vision of Maud as the piano accompaniment breaks in with the theme from song number 12, *O that 'twere possible*. In his dream the music is heard a semitone lower (see Exx. 29 and 33):-

Ex. 33: *My life has crept so long*



Time and music change again and the martial music returns for the remainder of the song.

The hero now understands the purpose of his earthly existence and elated with the realisation of his destiny he 'embrace(s) the purpose of God, and the doom assign'd' (III, VI, 58-9).

## A SHROPSHIRE LAD

from the poems of

Albert Edward Housman

### 1. The Appeal of the Poetry

All sixty-three of the poems comprising *A Shropshire Lad* but for a very few from earlier dates were written within one year of the publication date in 1896. The background is rural Shropshire, the beauty of nature, the bucolic life; it is a pastoral background. The 'pastoral' of mythology was unreal, it was idealised, yearning, peopled by shepherds and nymphs living in a never-never land. In *A Shropshire Lad*, however, the place names, the characters, their activities, are based on reality. But that reality is beheld through backward vision, through memories that with the passage of time are not always perfectly recalled. In retrospect the memory sees only what it wants to see – it may dim or expunge or enhance so that the looking back to events experienced is unreliable; reality becomes unreality. That is the pastoral of *A Shropshire Lad*, nostalgia, Housman's 'land of lost content'. The Shropshire of the poems is a blend of reality and fiction. Housman grew up in rural Worcestershire; as a youth he remembered oftentimes looking towards Shropshire from one of his favourite beauty spots; he loved country life, his comfortable home and surroundings where he would take long rambles with his family but he liked also to walk alone and it was at those solitary times that he would mull over ideas for poems. Years later when writing *A Shropshire Lad* Housman drew from his own memory of a rural paradise. Those longing gazes towards the Shropshire horizon became the Lad's 'blue remembered hills'.

BOOSEY & HAWKES

ARTHUR SOMERVELL

# A SHROPSHIRE LAD

*Settings of ten poems by A.E. Housman*



The poems are the reminiscences of a dead man looking back to his youth when living in Ludlow. They are randomly recalled experiences with no particular line of progression but a very particular line of thought. That theme, Death, viewed from different angles, as punishment for crime, as murder, its ugliness, its futility in war, its finality, is present starkly or hinted at in much of the text. Housman was not a believer although he had wrestled with a search for the Truth for a number of years. As a boy he had gone along with his mother's devout Christianity but after her death when he was eleven, a shock and incalculable loss to him, he renounced Christian belief but continued to practise its moral precepts. As a presumed Christian Somervell must have found difficulty with Housman's expressed negativity but at the same time being greatly moved by the beauty of the poetry's language and power of nostalgia. With three song cycles behind him Somervell had undoubtedly begun to feel comfortable with the genre. It gave him the scope for a favourite diversion, that is, storytelling, old-fashioned tales with a beginning, middle and happy ending, except that in Somervell's case the happy endings were propagandist, that through despair and self-sacrifice shine the lights of hope and victory. It would have been to Housman's extreme chagrin to learn that Somervell, by careful selection and rearrangement of the poems of *A Shropshire Lad*, had proclaimed an uplifting message, completely antipathetic to his own view, yet drawn, ironically, directly from Housman's own pen. When composing the *Maud* cycle a few years earlier Somervell had been faced with selecting lines from a long work that were suitable for setting to music and of an appropriate length for a song cycle whilst maintaining coherent narrative. For *A Shropshire Lad* those considerations also were pertinent but Housman's work is not a story. Its interest and cohesion lie in interacting topics – the

countryside, the Lad's friends and acquaintances, favourite places, the military – all these are prominent elements but the all-pervading theme is Ironic Death. Somervell, though, by clever contrivance, has avoided the melancholia and ordered a progressive sequence of events that lead through the Lad's earthly existence to the beyond. And there is a goal in this sequence, the goal of triumph through self-sacrifice. Have we not heard this somewhere before? Somervell has led us to the very same victory that Tennyson preached in *Maud* and similarly in *Love in Springtime*.

Taken separately the poems recall unconnected incidents. Not one has an air of positivity. In a study of Housman's pessimism, Robert Hamilton<sup>1</sup> shows how Housman's proclivity is revealed in *A Shropshire Lad* by drawing up a rough classification of the poems' subjects. His categories showed that thirteen were concerned with sexuality, six with war, ten with despair or disillusionment, twenty-five with death (as murder, suicide, capital punishment). The beautiful backcloth was the English landscape, the Shropshire hills, fields and rivers. And it was no doubt that the pastoral element of the poetry, exquisitely described in Housman's verse, the heady imagery combined with perfect scansion, that drew composers to realise its potential for setting to music. In an article in *Music and Letters*<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid White examines the musical qualities of Housman's poetry, what it was and why it compelled so many composers to make so many song settings from *A Shropshire Lad*. Housman was not a lover of music, on the contrary, serious music seemed to fill him with pain, so says P. Withers<sup>3</sup> who recalled an occasion when he and Housman listened to a recording of the poet's own poems set to music by Vaughan

<sup>1</sup> Robert Hamilton, *Housman The Poet* (1953), p.38

<sup>2</sup> Wilfrid White, 'A.E.Housman and Music', XXIV (1943) pp.208-19

<sup>3</sup> Percy Withers, *A Buried Life: Personal Recollections of A.E.Housman* (1940)

Williams (*On Wenlock Edge*). Housman seemed repelled by the experience. When Withers questioned whether there was any other music that he would like to hear Housman replied that everyone talked a lot about Beethoven's fifth symphony. Withers obliged by playing the work but observed Housman's tortured expression during the music although he did appear to be moved in the slow movement. Housman's sister, Katharine Symons, challenged Wilfrid White's accusation of her brother's unmusicality in her letter to the editor of *Music and Letters*.<sup>4</sup> She describes how in their younger days the siblings were used to playing musical games, singing in parts, learning to play instruments. Their stepmother was musical and she and their father both participated in local musical activities which were brought into the home. Furthermore, Housman attended concerts on his visits to London. All this contradicts those who assert Housman's disinterest in music. The answer may be that he took a fringe interest in music but was not a total Philistine unless it concerned the settings of his own poetry which alas, never reached his expectations. His reaction is not surprising, not only because of his extraordinarily fastidious habits and personality, but because it must represent that same apprehension of many a poet who fears his work may be misunderstood by a marriage with music. When approached by composers who sought permission to set his poetry to music he was always compliant, "I always give my consent to all composers, in the hope of becoming immortal somehow"<sup>5</sup> and made no charge, but there were conditions. He would not tolerate the excision of lines from a poem, "How would he like me to cut two bars out of his music",<sup>6</sup> and he would not allow

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<sup>4</sup> In 'Correspondence', XXV (1944), pp.60-61

<sup>5</sup> Henry Maas (Ed.), *The Letters of A.E.Housman* (1971), p.87

<sup>6</sup> R.P.Graves, op.cit p.117

the use of titles to songs if they were different from the poem titles; nor would he permit the printing of the poems in programme notes. But the frequent disregard by composers to comply with one or any of the provisos led to Housman's attitude of frustrated resignation. In her letter to *Music and Letters*, referred to above, Katharine Symons explains:- 'My brother certainly had a great desire that his poems should find musical settings that would catch the popular ear and be remembered in a way that would contribute to immortality. So far as I know no setting has yet been composed'. That letter was written in 1944, forty years after the first *A Shropshire Lad* settings by Arthur Somervell in 1904. The remarks supported the view of Ernest Newman, the music critic, writing in 1918 that 'there is no English composer who can pierce at one to the heart of the poem and capture the real mood'.<sup>7</sup> Is it possible that Katherine Symons and Ernest Newman had never heard or heard of Somervell's *A Shropshire Lad* or even of Somervell himself? It seems unlikely that Mr. Newman, a renowned critic in his day, had not attended any of Somervell's concerts. Arthur Somervell was well-known in musical circles at the time both as a composer and in his position as Inspector of Music Education (since 1901) and in those capacities colleagues and critics would have encountered his work. The first performance of *A Shropshire Lad* took place on 3 February, 1905, in the Aeolian Hall, sung by Harry Plunket Greene. A critic wrote briefly '... We are inclined to think the music is amongst the best Dr. Somervell has written; at any rate the work so pleased that Mr. Plunket Greene announces that he will repeat the cycle on March 9 in the same hall'.<sup>8</sup> It is not known if the hoped-for second performance went ahead but subsequent reviews, if any, have not emerged. It is believed that Somervell's work was

<sup>7</sup> E. Newman, 'Concerning *A Shropshire Lad* and other matters', *Musical Times* (1918), pp.393-8

<sup>8</sup> *The Musical Times*, XLV1, 1905, p.188

not highly-rated by some who considered it to be too conventional. And at the time of his appointment to the Music Inspectorate in 1901 on the retirement of Sir John Stainer there was dissension amongst the Appointments Board. Some felt that Somervell did not possess all the qualities for the job, a fear that proved to be unfounded. These two factors, the latter occurring just three years before publication of Somervell's *A Shropshire Lad* may indicate that Somervell was the victim of prejudice. In any event the silence may be interpreted either as a studied lack of interest in his compositions due to various factors or may simply be the result of an inept publicity machine.

Housman was unable, initially, to find a publisher for *A Shropshire Lad* and eventually, at his own expense, he persuaded Messrs Kegan Paul to launch its first edition in 1896, a cautious issue of five hundred copies. *A Shropshire Lad* remained little known for some years until Housman was approached by Grant Richards, an Australian, who begged the poet to let him have the publishing rights. Richards was confident that he could make money from publication but Housman was adamant that financial success from the poems did not interest him and he insisted that Richards should market future volumes at the same price (2s.6d.) as the original edition. Richards's success was immediate and the poetry ran eventually into many more editions.<sup>9</sup> It was the beginning of a long business association and personal friendship for poet and publisher. But not everyone was enraptured. Some found the preoccupation with death distinctly morbid, including Peter Warlock – 'all that clay and stuff'.

Poets, Housman included, were often angered by musical settings which they felt misrepresented their work and understandably refused to permit the removal of lines

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Maas, op cit., p.46



or verses or emendations of text. Composers usually defended their actions claiming that they were the best judges of what is suitable to set to music. That may be a reasonable point of view but nevertheless composers wielded the power to enhance or understate or even re-interpret the lines they set by the style and colour of their music. In playing down Housman's obsession Somervell fails to capture the essence of *A Shropshire Lad* which may explain why the cycle was bypassed. On those grounds perhaps ignominy was justified. But what of its musical worth? Does Somervell's *A Shropshire Lad* deserve to be cold-shouldered? It is also worth noting that of the numerous settings none has met with unmitigated approval, not Butterworth, Gurney, Orr, Ireland or even Vaughan Williams – he and Housman clashed over *On Wenlock Edge* – and many other composers, too many to mention. But even if Housman was not motivated by financial success, the composers who wanted his poetry would certainly have given an eye to pecuniary reward whilst recognising that songs of unrelieved morbidity were indigestible fare for audiences. On the question of using whatever poetic material was needed Vaughan Williams put the position clearly in a letter to Grant Richards in 1927 on behalf of all composers:- ‘ . . . The composer has a perfect right artistically to set any portion of a poem he chooses provided he does not actually alter the sense . . . ’ The stance was made following Housman's castigation of Vaughan Williams for cutting lines from *Is my team ploughing* (*On Wenlock Edge*). Then, in the same letter, in a tit-for-tat rejoinder Vaughan Williams chastened Housman:- ‘ . . . 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 . ’*

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Maas, op cit., p.46

These exchanges took place after Somervell had composed and published his *A Shropshire Lad* and raise the question of whether Somervell was one of that errant number who failed to seek Housman's approval and permission for setting some of the poems to music and the proposed textual omissions.

## 2. Style in Song

Housman's first poem entitled *1887* sets the period of *A Shropshire Lad*. It was the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. The lines read as a 'tongue-in-cheek' comment on the first line of the national anthem, *God save the Queen*, but Housman denied any intended irony, insisting that they should be understood at face value. However, no composer has attempted to set all or even part of the poem. Somervell began his cycle with Poem number II. The table below illustrates the distribution of song styles and tonal progression:-

<u>Poem no.</u>	<u>Song no.</u>	<u>Title of Song</u>	<u>Style</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Tonal Progression</u>	
II	1	Loveliest of Trees the Cherry now	1	E major	I	
XIII	2	When I was one-and twenty	2	B major	V	
XIV	3	There pass the careless people	3	E minor	i	
XXI	4	In Summer-time on Bredon	1	C major	VI	
XXII	5	The Street sounds to the Soldiers' tread	4	E flat major	VII	v
XXXV	6	On the idle hill of summer	1	B major	V	
XXXVI	7	White in the moon the long road lies	3	B minor	v	
XLIX	8	Think no more, Lad, laugh, be jolly	4	G major	III	
XL	9	Into my heart an air that kills	3	E flat major	VII	v
XXIII	10	The Lads in their hundreds	2	A flat major	III	i

### Key to Style

- 1=pastoral
- 2=lighthearted
- 3=heartache
- 4=military

The tonality of the cycle proceeds from the E major of No.1 through related keys to C major, just approaching mid-way (No. 4). Then at No. 5, which turns on to VII (Eflat), the keys continue in a similar pattern but on the flat side of the tonic, now dominant-based. No.9, also in E flat, makes a melodic connection with No.1, only here, a semitone lower. The E flat becomes the penultimate dominant tonality, which resolves on the key of A flat major for the final song. The progression is symbolic – the major keys of the first few songs reflect happy remembrances but become darker as Death looms in later numbers. The resolution on to a flat key is a sombre comment on the perversity of the Final Reward.

The narrative theme, whilst being a series of related and on the whole, progressive incidents, is not continuous in the manner of a story. In this respect another parallel may be drawn with Schumann whose *Frauenliebe und leben* followed a similar course. The songs follow the progression of the poems as far as No. 8. Nos. 9 and 10 backtrack to provide a suitable ending to the cycle as Somervell had done in *Maud*. No. 1 sets the scene, the Lad's home surroundings. No. 2, advice to a young man (the Lad) from an old one on the snares of love. No. 3, the imprudence of giving one's heart to another. The text of this song is one of Somervell's manipulations to give logic to the order. Housman's lines, 'Here by the road I loiter, How idle and alone' speak through the mouth of a dead man but because Somervell has cut the three verses which are more overtly concerned with death, the two set verses put a different aspect on those lines, meaning simply that the Lad was standing alone at the roadside. Housman would have been displeased but for Somervell's purposes it works. No. 4, the Lad and his girl on Summer Sundays on Bredon Hill; Her death. No. 5, soldiers, young men marching through the

town on the way to battle. No. 6, on a peaceful summer's day the distant sound of drumbeat and marching feet, young men never to return. The Lad decides to be a man and join up. No. 7, on a moonlit night, the Lad, now enlisted, treads the long road to war. No. 8, on the forward road the Lad jokes with his comrades in idle conversation. They are not thinking of what lies ahead. No. 9, the Lad, now presumed to have died on the battlefield, returns in spirit to the scenes of his youth. No. 10, he watches the fun of Ludlow Fair and all the young men who will tread the way he himself went, never to grow old, never to return.

Generally speaking the songs are individually characterised by an overriding style or mood although all contain a variety of feelings but they may be broadly categorised as indicated on the table above. One or two would slot appropriately into other than their designated type. The mood from song to song contrasts, maintaining the audience's interest and providing momentum. In the more detailed discussion of the songs that follows they will be considered in the style/mood groups outlined above.

### **Pastoral**

Three songs belong in this group including the first, *Loveliest of Trees*, which like most beginnings, sets the scene. There are similarities to No.1 of *Dichterliebe*, *Im Wundershönen Monat Mai*; both open their cycles with a May-song and paint it in a flowing style (see examples 34a/b:-

Ex. 34a: *Loveliest of Trees*

Andante con moto. *p*

Love-liest of trees, the cher-ry now is hung with bloom; a - long the bough;

Ex. 34b: *Im Wundershonen Monat Mai*

*p*

'Twas in the love-ly month of May, When  
Im wun der-schö-nen Mo-nat Mai, als

Housman's melodious language inspired a number of composers to write songs and writers and critics praised its musical qualities in choice of words and scansion. The poem is a three-quatrains design, couplet-rhymed, AABB. The metre mirrors perfectly the undulations of speech and in the first two lines, for example, which scan as iambic tetrameter, the first foot is inverted, becoming a trochee, and so the first syllable, 'Love', takes the accent, arresting the attention. The remainder of the line scans regularly in iambs to 'bough'. Somervell matches the poetic stresses by placing them on the naturally musical accented beats in 4/4 time, beats 1 and 3, for example, 'trees', 'cherry', 'bloom', 'bough'. At the end of line 1, in order to avoid a vocal break at 'now', the rhythm that begins line 2 is delayed by using a tied note. Those two lines of text become two musical phrases; one short, containing the trochee, the other longer, encompassing the iambs (see Ex. 34a above).

The keys to the songs may have been chosen for the qualities for which they are often associated whilst also being contained within the overall tonal scheme outlined above. In

this first song E major's warm tones provide the ambience for a soft Spring day and the strophic setting has a graceful melody line. In the poem's second and third stanzas, the Lad, a young man of twenty years old, contemplates the transitoriness of life. His allotted lifespan 'threescore years and ten' (a biblical reference from Psalm 90, verse 10) leaves only another fifty Springs in which to enjoy the cherry blossom. But his uneasiness fails to be mirrored in the music which continues blithely with the same melody. Perhaps Somervell was so captivated by the landscape that he 'couldn't see the wood for the trees', a criticism levelled in general at composers who delighted in the poetry but explaining the reason for Housman's scorn. There is a small concession to the Lad's unease in the extension of the note values in the penultimate bar of verse 3 but it comes too late and sounds like an afterthought. However the reduction in tone to *pp* in the accompaniment's postlude suggests that Somervell was not unaware of the undercurrent. The piano accompaniment provides an equal partner for the soloist. It is harmonically unadventurous but quietly individual whilst being supportive and enhancing the vocal line. Chromatic additions are mildly dissonant and work like a touch of seasoning to very subtly sharpen the sentimentality (see Ex. 35):-

Ex. 35: *Loveliest of Trees*



It was not until the second edition of *A Shropshire Lad* was distributed in 1898 that composers became aware of the collection, an interest fuelled by recent remembrances of the Boer War. Apart from a single song setting by Balfour Gardiner in 1906, to which

reference was made earlier, it was some four to five years after Somervell's cycle was published in 1904 that other composers began their discovery of *A Shropshire Lad*. Vaughan Williams may have become interested in the collection on hearing Somervell's composition at its first performance when it shared the programme with some of his own work. Graham Peel was the next to follow with 'Songs from *A Shropshire Lad*' in 1910 and hard on his heels came George Butterworth with two sets, the first in 1911, 'Six songs from *A Shropshire Lad*' and the second in 1912, '*Bredon Hill* and other songs'. Butterworth's songs were sadly personally prophetic. He died five years later in 1916 at the Battle of the Somme, killed tragically by a single bullet. He was one of Housman's 'Lad's that will never grow old'. As a student at Cambridge he became especially interested in folk song, working with Cecil Sharp and Vaughan Williams. His *A Shropshire Lad* settings are very different from Somervell's (who had little interest in folk song). They are economically scored and their modal melodies betray the influences upon his music. His first set of *A Shropshire Lad* songs also begins with *Loveliest of Trees*. Apart from using the same metre, the only other idea shared with Somervell's is the key (E major). The piano begins with an atmospheric single line of melody, descending two octaves, held by the sustaining pedal and coming to rest on a low supertonic; it is marked *espressivo*. It is a line that could have almost been written by Debussy (see Ex. 36):-

Ex. 36: *Loveliest of Trees* (Butterworth)

Molto moderato, sempre rubato e con espressione

Love - liest of

*p espressivo*

The voice enters with an echo of that line and throughout is declamatory. Accompaniment is sparing. Through-composed, the music of the three verses transmutes constantly, changing and growing from the scant material of the first verse. There are many telling moments, such as the plunging 7<sup>th</sup> from B to C sharp at 'It only leaves me fifty more'. As a curtain-raiser it wins the audience with its pensive simplicity, a contrast to Somervell's lush setting.

Another in this group is Somervell's fourth song, *In Summer-time on Bredon* which follows two intervening, contrasting songs. The words are a joyful celebration of turn-of-the-century English country life. No composer could fail to be charmed by the imagery evoked. The poem is number XXI (*Bredon Hill*) of the collection. Housman's choice of form, the pentain, has a rhyming couplet for lines 2 and 3 which gives a forward thrust of movement. In the poem the Lad recalls Summer Sunday mornings spent happily with his girl in the countryside; from the hilltop, wonderful views as far as the eye can see and distant church bells from neighbouring shires sounding on the air. Somervell's interpretation of the earthly paradise is simple yet effective. The piano accompaniment represents simultaneous peals of bells; the top line, right hand, chimes dominant to tonic on the fourth and first beats respectively; the two inner parts, quaver peals a sixth apart; the bottom line, left hand, is a simple tonic toll. The introspection of the previous song in E minor is broken as the bells of Song no.4 break in suddenly and happily in C major. The song is an exemplar of Somervell's organic treatment of melody. The five lines of verse 1, whilst not exactly the same, have elements of melody or rhythm derived from each other. The chart shows how all the verses of the song become fully integrated. Line *a* is the phrase which links all the verses:-



minore

Verse	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Line 1	<i>a</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>f1</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a3</i>	<i>a</i>
" 2	<i>b</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>g</i>	<i>b1</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>b</i>
" 3	<i>c</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>c</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>a1</i>	<i>h1</i>	<i>c</i>
" 4	<i>d</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>h</i>	<i>b2</i>	<i>h2</i>	<i>d</i>
" 5	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>e</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>a2</i>	<i>h3</i>	<i>e1</i>

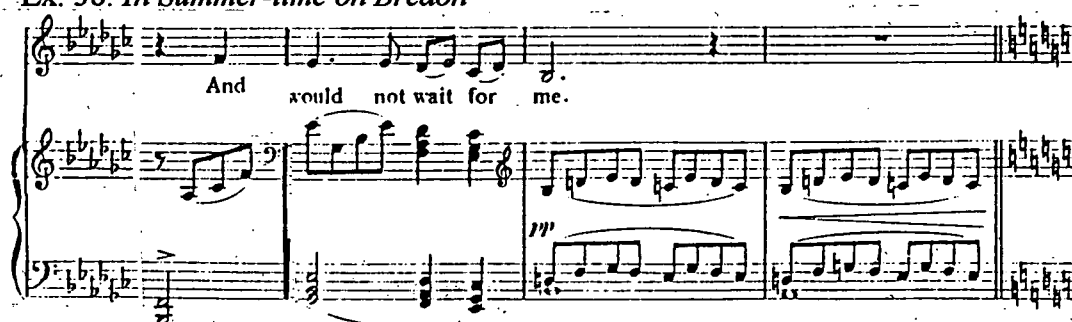
The soloist begins in unison with the upper bell. Verses 1 and 3 and 2 and 4 alternate their music. The two latter begin with melodies in the dominant area but at mid-song repeat line *a* from the two former. Somervell matches the forward impulse of the poetry in the final couplet of each quatrain by treating the two lines as one phrase (see Ex.37):-

Ex. 37: *In Summer-time on Bredon*

At verse 5 the Lad's happiness is shattered as the death of his love is implied. A simple key change here to the relative minor describes winter on Bredon Hill then briefly through the relative major (E flat) into E flat minor for the girl's funeral, verse 6. The bells are still ringing, but sombrely, and the bass strikes the death knell in alternating bars at the fifth on the dominant. At the key change to E flat minor, the line *a* is transposed a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> higher, increasing the anxiety. It is similar to the lines *h1-3* of verse 6 which themselves are variants of line *h*, verse 4. The music is thus very cleverly held together by a system of permutations, seamlessly integrated. The first four verses all ended firmly

with a perfect cadence confirming the carefree mood but verses 5 and 6 close on a low vocal and instrumental dominant which speak tragedy and funereal gloom (see Ex. 38):-

Ex. 38: *In Summer-time on Bredon*



Life appears to have returned to normal in verse 7 as the key of C major is re-established through the two bars of accompaniment following verse 6. The bells are still calling the people to church prompting the grieving Lad's peevish response, 'I hear you, I will come'. Again the meaning is double-edged but time will bring him to church, no matter. Somervell interprets the text with a *forte* and *rallentando* at the Lad's outburst and with a lengthening and downturn of the vocal line in the last two bars. The piano has the final word. Somervell has been criticised for being unable to deal musically with Housman's irony. In this song the charge is one of insensitivity at its end in allowing the bells to peal on joyfully as though nothing had happened. But perhaps Somervell's treatment is, indeed, the ironic reality, that is, that Life just keeps on living and has no mourning period. And he does make reference to the tragedy; the bells slow down their peal and the piece ends on low tonic chords, *pp*. The song which began so joyously ends grimly. Like the previous song, this poem was one of the most frequently set from *A Shropshire Lad* and all of the first flush of composers before the first world war to discover Housman's collection made settings of *Bredon Hill* (except Balfour Gardiner). As the sadness and horror of the great war began to touch lives and consciences more and more composers turned to the poems, drawn to the bittersweet expressions of Housman's verse.

And passion for the poetry continued after hostilities had ceased until years later Constant Lambert suggested drily that it was time *A Shropshire Lad* was laid to rest.

Poem XXXV, Song number 6, has been included in the Pastoral group because of its first two lines of text:-

*On the idle hill of summer  
Sleepy with the flow of streams*

A Garden of Eden: but the intoxicating vision deceives us. Its perfection is unreal as is Pastoral. In the remainder of the poem Housman shows that those Elysian fields are not all they seem for they are pastures of Death, past and future. That is the reality. Some critics thought that Housman's graphic descriptions, for example, verse 3, was in bad taste:-

*East and west on fields forgotten  
Bleach the bones of comrades slain,  
Lovely lads and dead and rotten;  
None that go return again.*

Had the poem's opening two lines not preceded what follows, any composer setting the verses must necessarily have wrestled with its severity. But Somervell has grasped the perfect opportunity in accordance with his Creed to deflect Housman's grittiness and has given us a hushed, almost reverential, setting. The drumbeat, omnipresent (except for the third verse and postlude) but not prominent, is the single idea of the opening two bars. The rap of the drumstick on skin is interpreted by a grace note phrased to a staccato quaver. In the introduction it sounds on the first and third beats of two bars in triple time but subsequently it occurs always on the second offbeat, always E sharp to F sharp, the dominant (see Ex. 39):-

Ex. 39: *On the idle hill of Summer*

The form of the song is AABA1, a much-used design. The vocal melody for the first two lines is an inspired evocation of the idyll, undulating, steadily flowing. The premature placing of the word 'Sleepy' which carries it over the barline gives length to the double vowel on an otherwise unaccented beat emphasising the drowsy atmosphere (see Example 39 above). From the second half of verse 1 the poetry dwells on soldiers and death and that the music of verse 2 continues to paint an Arcadian scene may seem inappropriate when the text turns to sombre reflection. But the ponderous accompaniment, which mimics snatches of the vocal line, is highly effective. The dynamics surge and subside but always from a *pp* starting point. The material that serves the blissfully unreal in verse 1 transfers befittingly to the melancholia that follows. At the close of the interlude following verse 2 the bass note moves to the submediant and verse 3 begins on an interrupted cadence. The sideways shift of focus interprets a more global scene and the simple chords beneath the reflective vocal line are anchored by the piano's dominants. Somervell interprets the sad/grim spectacle (verse 3 quoted above) by the simple technique of naturalising the sharps of the B major key (see Ex. 40):-

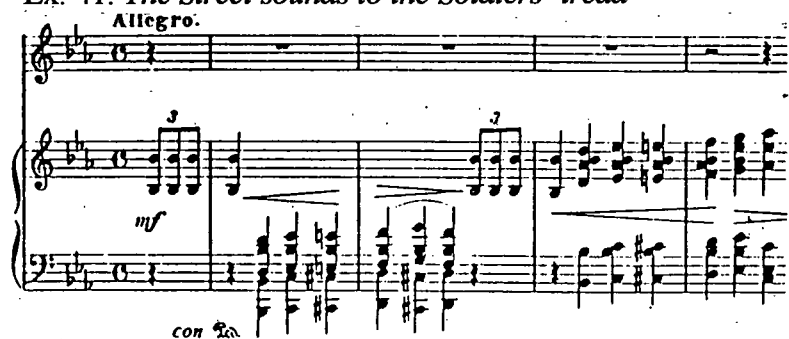
Ex. 40: *On the idle hill of Summer*

All the verses 1 to 3 are performed at a very soft volume and the accompaniment is placed in a low range, in fact much of it is written in the bass clef. Thereafter the dynamics increase quickly to *ff* at the sound of the calling bugle. Negative thoughts turn to positive. The Lad puts memories behind him to follow the call. The piano's lengthy march takes off at *double forte* increasing to *fff* and is scored at higher range, suggesting determination and pride.

### Military

Many of the poems contain references to soldiers and battle and Somervell has made the military an important ingredient in his cycle setting two songs in an undeniably martial style. Song No. 5, *The Street sounds to the Soldiers' tread*, is one of the few poems (number XXII) to have a strongly singular theme in which the Lad watches the redcoats march through his home town; he muses that their paths are likely never to cross again (without a double meaning here), but whatever their circumstances he mentally wishes them well. The military theme and rhythmic music have echoes of some of the Music Hall songs which were at the height of their popularity just before the turn of the century. The piano's brisk quasi march opening begins resolutely with an octave triplet, right hand, followed by rising bass octave chords, a prominent accompanimental feature throughout (see Ex.41):-

Ex. 41: *The Street sounds to the Soldiers' tread*



Apart from a brief move to related keys B flat major and C minor mid-song starting at the words 'Such leagues apart the world's ends are', the key remains unequivocally in E flat major. The relentless march of soldiers has been given a through-composed setting. Vocal ends-of-line are on notes other than the tonic and the piano continues the music at mid-verse pauses and ends of strophes, giving the impression of continuing forward motion. The unifying element is the piano's steady crotchets, occasionally dotted, and rat-tat-tat triplets. In the last stanza Somervell errs again by repeating text, the penultimate line, 'Dead or living, drunk or dry'. It is all part of his scheme of dynamic. The song begins quietly, increasing to *mf* mid-way; the last two lines reach *ff* and the piano continues with a fairly long solo march as the regiment troops past and out of sight to a gradually reducing dynamic. When the volume has reached *pp* the voice enters softly with part of the last line, 'I wish you well'. This extremely effective dramatic idea, however, seems to add another dimension to the face value farewell, a presentiment of tragedy. Is this a case of Somervell upstaging Housman?

At Song number 8, *Think no more, Lad, laugh, be jolly*, the Lad has followed through his intention (Song number 5). He is an enlisted soldier, on the march. The music, in G major, is breezy and blustering and the lads make a lot of noise, laughing and joking to suppress the fears that lurk within. Musical strength comes from the supporting accompaniment in unison double octaves and double thirds and full tone. There are many pictorial details, for example:- piano trills for the drumroll; at 'falling sky' the vocal line plunges almost two octaves (see Ex. 42a):-

Ex. 42a: *Think no more, Lad*

Bears the fall - ing sky.

And under the influence of alcohol a 'revolving' vocal line and turn in the accompaniment (see Ex.42b):-

Ex.42b: *Think no more, Lad*

Spins the hea - - vy world a - round.

The word 'laugh' is accented, off beat and held over the barline to suggest defiance, a technique used similarly in Song No. 6 (see Ex. 42c):-

Ex. 42c: *Think no more, Lad*

Think no more, lad; laugh, ... be jol-ly;

Verse 2 begins in the relative minor (E). At the words 'If young hearts were not so clever', etc., the irony is very effectively captured by repeating the previous two lines, transposed a tone lower. And the word 'ever' is subtly caught by an octave leap. The final two lines of this verse are marked *ff molto rit.* If Somervell intended the *ff* to apply to the whole line then a brazen challenge to Death is suggested; but perhaps a drastic

reduction in tone from 'tis only thinking . . .' would point up the irony more accurately (see Ex. 43):-

Ex. 43: *Think no more, Lad*

*molto rit.*

Think no more: 'tis on-ly thinking Lays lads un-der-ground.

*colla voce.*

*a tempo*

The poem has only two stanzas of which the final two lines, see Example 43, contain the customary sting in the tail. The reader of the poem is left with a bitter taste. But Somervell again dilutes the essence, here repeating the whole of the first stanza to give an ABA form; it injects a 'Be of good courage' spirit and demonstrates again Somervell's discomfort with Housman's atheism.

### Heartache

Of the three songs whose prominent mood is a yearning, Song number 3, *There pass the careless people* (Poem XIV), is a miniature and sets only two of the five stanzas of the poem. Somervell has cut the three stanzas whose reference to death is more overt. In the remaining two strophes, if read *per se*, the two lines from verse 1,

*Here by the road I loiter,  
How idle and alone.*

do not assume that inference, either stated or implied; it is another example of manipulation for reasons of textual coherence. Somervell runs the two short stanzas together in the manner of a through-composed reflection. The music, however, is not entirely through-composed although it is continuous. The lines of verse 1 are in the



pattern ABAB. It has a timeless, static, musical quality reflecting the key words of its text, 'careless', 'souls', 'loiter', 'idle', 'alone'. Verse 2 contrasts as the Lad's indignation rises. The melody is new throughout; musical and verbal rhythms correspond (see Ex. 44):-

Ex. 44: *There pass the careless people*



In the final line the lengthened rhythm and falling melody on 'heart' and 'soul' and 'away' is full of regret (see Ex. 45):-

Ex. 45: *There pass the careless people*



Reference was made in the previous song under discussion to Somervell's use of unison thirds. That idea is conspicuous in this song, see Example 45, above. And the right hand's rising sequence of thirds between the verses' lines towards the beginning is a quasi throw-away motive, a careless action for 'the careless people' (see Ex. 46):-

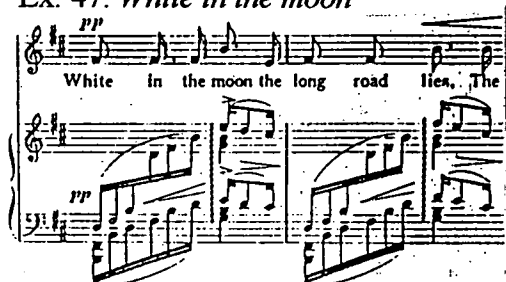
Ex. 46: *There pass the careless people*



The piano's introduction in right hand thirds begins with a gentle lilt and a strong scent of Brahmsian harmony – right hand chromatic thirds above bass chords I and VI. The simple accompaniment sets off the introspective vocal melody. The song is a quiet musing on the folly of being blinded by romantic love. Perhaps also the lines are a personal reflection of Housman's own sadness through an unrequited infatuation.

*White in the moon the long road lies*, the title of the seventh song, is a wonderful evocation of silvery fields, breathless air, noiseless, dark yet clear; there is something magical, unreal about moonlight. Such beauty makes the trudge along the long road to war, every step taking him further away from his love, full of heartache for the Lad: Somervell captures the scene in the piano accompaniment with a one-bar arpeggiated figure, the 'long road', rising slowly from a low bass to the climax, a spread chord, falling away (see Example 47):-

Ex. 47: *White in the moon*



The idea, used in verses 1, 2 and 4, comes from the accompaniment's three-bar introduction which closes on a cliffhanging chord, an appoggiatura falling to a diminished 7<sup>th</sup> which resolves on the following tonic chord when the voice enters. These three ideas, the arpeggio, the appoggiatura and the diminished 7<sup>th</sup> are the unresolving building blocks of the music, the unfulfillment which catch the poem's longing mood further enhanced by the tonality of B minor. Verses 1 and 2 end on the dominant (F sharp); at the close of verse 2 Somervell uses the F sharp as a pivot to cross to other key

areas in verse 3. The stanza speaks of the 'round world' and of 'travellers' and the vocal line is appropriately free. At the words:-

*Trudge on, trudge on, 'twill all be well,  
The way will guide one back.*

the piano's bass line descends the scale towards the dominant of the home key, resolving on the tonic for the final verse. Fond memories of his love in the last line cause the temperature to rise by a semitone – Somervell sharpens the G's in the piano chords beneath the vocal line and the accompaniment slips into the relative major for its postlude.

The last of this group is Song number 9, *Into my heart an air that kills* (Poem XL). We have to presume now that the Lad has died in action and as a spirit he returns to his beloved Shropshire seeing again the places that were once so dear. Then the Lad was very much alive and his mood carefree; now deceased, he looks wistfully through the mist of time to his beloved former homeland. The music reflects the changed circumstances in a downward perspective – the tempo slows solemnly (*Andante Sostemuto*), the key drops a semitone to E flat major and by the use of a powerful recall technique we hear again the music from Song number 1, *Loveliest of Trees*, only this time it has a haunting quality. The link is the melody line (see Ex. 1) which is now heard in the accompaniment and above the vocalist intones on the dominant the whole of the first (of two) stanza and see Example 48a:-

*Into my heart an air that kills  
From yon far country blows:  
What are those blue remember'd hills,  
What spires, what farms are those?*

Ex. 48a: *Into my heart*

Andante sostenuto. *pp*

In-to my heart an air that kills

The second verse is to be even more heartfelt, *Con molto espressione* and the soloist takes again the original melody (see Ex.48b):-

Ex. 48b: *Into my heart*

*Con molto espressione.*

That is the land of lost content.

The whole piece is performed at *double piano*. The lyricism of both the poem and the music now perceived through the eyes of Death, that is, the lowered tonality, the more restrained tempo, the hushed dynamic, make this song a poignant moment in the cycle. Somervell had used this linking method in the *Maud* cycle in similar circumstances when the happiness of love, eulogised in *O that 'twere possible* is recalled in a dream in *My life has crept so long*. This song is one of the last two that Somervell placed out of Housman's order.

### Lighthearted

In the final group are two songs, numbered 2 and 10, one each at the extremes of the cycle. The word 'lighthearted' is used as a general description. Neither is free from irony. Song number 2, *When I was one-and-twenty* sets both stanzas of Poem XIII. The

key to interpretation, of course, is the way in which one understands the text. The Lad is telling how an old man once advised him against trusting a woman's love; now, a year later, he realises that he had been well-advised. But how did the Lad receive that advice? That is the nub. Did he wail, 'And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true', with a wink and a smile or did he show pain and regret? The former reaction is the lighthearted, superficial response; we know the Lad is a lad and will forget his unhappy experience. But the latter is deeply felt; the Lad will not be in a hurry to be hurt again.

Somervell's music was frowned upon in his day because his style belonged to an age gone by. His song-writing style was conventional in form and harmony. But at the turn of the century others were experimenting with new forms of expression in sound, not least a sensational use of chromaticism to depict emotion. But although Somervell does use chromatic notes to add colour he uses that colour sparingly, within the confines of the style he knew and admired, the style of Schumann and Brahms. There is plenty of scope in Housman for a composer to paint dark feelings but it would be anachronistic for Somervell to be excessive. In Song number 2 his response to the text may seem lighthearted but there are touches here and there in the harmony, in performance direction, that indicate Somervell's sensitive response to what Housman is saying, within his own boundary. The point to make in the music in this song is the difference between being one-and-twenty and two-and twenty with the experience of a broken romance between the two birthdays. Somervell achieves that by brief modulations to other keys using pivot notes to move to different tonal areas. In verse 1 the Lad is yet one-and-twenty; he doesn't need advice from anyone. That arrogance is made clear at 'But I was

one-and-twenty' by sideslipping from an E major tonic chord at 'But' (temporary tonal area) to a secondary dominant on D sharp major at 'I' (see Ex. 49):-

Ex. 49: *When I was one-and-twenty*

A *ritard*, a short pause, a sudden change of volume to *p* and a return to the home key at *No use to talk to me*, interpret the Lad's regret of his conceit (see Ex. 49). The two verses are set strophically but modified harmonically at verse 2 because the Lad at two-and-twenty is older and wiser (see Ex. 50):-

Ex. 50: *When I was one-and-twenty*

The terse piano conclusion is a wry comment.

Somervell ends his cycle in the lighthearted vein with *The Lads in their hundreds* at Song number 10; the poem backtracks to number XXIII. There are four stanzas in identical, unvarying rhythm. The poem recalls a Ludlow Fair and the Lad, now deceased, watches unobserved the comings and goings of young people. He would like to be friendly, slap them on the back and wish them well as they pursue the way that he trod before them. He knows it is a way that they will not retrace but what a glorious sacrifice to make. Housman makes much in his poem of the crowds of people, lads, men and

chaps, coming to the Fair from all walks of life. This poem has the distinction of being the sole example of the 63 in the collection to be written in anapaestic pentameter, an uncommon metre. Somervell uses a 15/8 time signature to set the long lines and 1,2,3 rhythm, matching the five beats of Housman's metre. The spirit is caught in the piano's introduction (see Ex. 51):-

Ex. 51: *The Lads in their hundreds*



The four lines of each stanza continue without pause in the music catching the busy Fair atmosphere and throng of fairgoers. The song has a modified strophic setting. The music of verse 3 is varied and there are changes in time signature but the idiom is the same. The happiness and sadness of the occasion is acknowledged from the outset in the tempo marking, *Allegretto ma con molto espressione*. Apart from a brief piano interlude in a minor key between verses 3 and 4 following the lines 'And watch them depart on the way that they will not return' elsewhere the notes on the page continue busily as though oblivious to the hints of future tragedy. But it is not disregarded for it is in mode of performance that meaning is given to the notes, the directions for speed, feeling, volume, and it is the performers, the vocalist and accompanist who are responsible for drawing out the nuances of the poem. The cycle ends on a victorious note with a loud piano postlude. The finale could, of course, have been quite different, reflective, focusing on the tragedy of fallen heroes. But the evidence from the two earlier cycles is Somervell's predilection for optimistic endings. The lines of this poem allow him to do just that.

**New Beginnings . . . new ideas**  
**'simple and absolutely wholesome music'**

## 1

**Introduction**

The year 1901 was a year of challenge, not only for Somervell but on wider scales, national and universal. 1901 was the dawn of a new century of new hope for all nations and for England, in spite of the shadows of the Boer War, there was a new spirit of optimism in the birth of a new monarchy. For Somervell, in addition, it was the beginning of a new career. His appointment as Inspector of Music to the Board of Education and the Scottish Board of Education on the retirement of Sir John Stainer came as a complete surprise, if not to himself, then to everyone else. The reasoning behind the selection committee's choice was, to contemporary onlookers, hard to fathom. Somervell possessed scant practical experience in schools as teacher and none as administrator. What he did have, though, was a keen interest in the wholeness of children's education and strong views about how it should be accomplished. His steady production of music/music coursework for children in the previous decade which continued long past his retirement, testify to a confidence in his own beliefs. Whether Somervell had grasped the opportunity to effect his vision by offering his services to music education, whether he had been recommended by another, and whether other candidates were on the short list, is not known. The public reacted to the committee's choice with incredulity,



especially Dr. W.G. McNaught, Stainer's assistant for nineteen years, who assumed his right to the job would be unchallenged. McNaught resigned, outraged, and made his retreat with a sour commentary in the *School Music Review* of October 1901. A report in the *Musical Times* of the same date judged the appointment to be 'an act of insanity'. Somervell must have felt extremely hurt at such harsh and public criticism but behind that mild and gentle exterior lay stronger qualities of character. Undeterred, he set about re-organising music education in schools and training colleges. Somervell's ideas, though far-reaching in practice, looked back to the ancient Greeks in stressing the importance of musical training for an individual's growth and development for citizenship; and that music awakens aesthetic experience which in turn leads to correct moral evaluations. His views were in agreement with the educationist, Mary Boole, whose progressive ideas included the importance of rhythm in learning. Somervell's wife, too, was a fervent disciple of Mary Boole's methods and wrote a notable book for teachers of maths, *A Rhythmic Approach to Mathematics*, 1906. (Edith Somervell's fringe interests, referred to above, may also have been influenced by Mary Boole's taste for Indian mysticism, western science and the occult). Somervell was convinced that these ideas could be brought to fruition when harnessed to the teaching and learning of national songs that he had observed to be the case, for example, in Germany. The following extract is taken from a manuscript prepared by Somervell in 1917:- 'For generations the German was soaked from early childhood in the songs of his race, irrespective of class – soaked in folk-songs and old chorales, simple and absolutely wholesome music . . .' He went on to explain that the German example had shown him the way forward:- 'I saw and understood the wonderful passage in the IIIrd book of the

*Republic of Plato* . . . We had got to educate all the children of the country, children of every class, in their own great song literature so that in time we might produce the right atmosphere in which our composers could breathe to live'.<sup>1</sup> The training ground was the singing class, not as merely recreational but as an opportunity to teach musical awareness skills in rhythm and sight-reading. To that end Somervell published various series of graded tests, for example, *One Thousand Exercises* to accompany *Fifty Steps in Sight-Singing* (1911-12) and *Marches, Dances and Traditional Airs suitable for marching exercises, for use in schools* (1909). He also worked on various editions of national songs. In collaboration with C.V.Stanford and H.Boulton *The National Song Book* eventually became part of the 'rhythmic series'. Unfortunately there was a clash of opinion involving Cecil Sharp over the term, 'national song'. Sharp maintained that there was a difference between the song that was composed with, for example, a historical theme, to one which has a spontaneous folk origin, but Somervell's interpretation was more eclectic. He explained his view in the *School Music Review*, 1906, as follows:- 'I purposely choose songs of every class and period . . . I think it is time to revert in principle . . . to the wide catholicity of Germany whence we have borrowed the term folk-song . . . Germans recognise the fact that any song, by whomsoever made, which obtains wide national acceptance and survives the test of time is in its essence a song of the German people . . .' The disagreement was the subject of correspondence between Somervell and Sharp and was even aired in the newspapers.

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Cox, *Westminster Studies in Education*, Vol. 14 (1991), pp.69-82

## LOVE IN SPRINGTIME

an anthology of poems

### 1. Poems of Mood and Mystery

The year 1901 also saw the publication of Somervell's second song cycle, *Love in Springtime*, a very different work from the first, *Maud*, three years earlier, in subject, atmosphere, impact and structure. It uses the idea of anthology, itself a well-tried approach in the history of the song cycle, but a new challenge for Somervell and in his only second song cycle, perhaps shows a keen-ness to be flexible, a search for new ideas. In later years he reverted to single poet works which, perhaps, was the only satisfactory option for storytelling. *Love in Springtime* received its first performance at a concert of Arthur Somervell's compositions on 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1901, in St. James's Hall, London. The *Musical Times* carried a report of the event on the following 1<sup>st</sup> April. The programme also included a rendition of *Maud* by H. Plunket Greene. Of *Love in Springtime* the critic wrote that 'the new cycle seemed inferior to the older one in respect of expressiveness, though replete with charm. It is . . . only a cycle in the sense that its component parts have been joined together by the composer'. Agnes Nicholls was the soloist.

Arthur Somervell began composing songs in a small way whilst still a student in the mid-1880s and in 1888 set his first song by Christina Rossetti (*When I am dead, my dearest*). There were no further Rossetti settings until the cycle of 1901, *Love in Springtime*, which comprises seven songs drawn from four poets of which Rossetti is the main contributor (three settings). The cycle reflects not only Somervell's love affair with

the landscape but also speaks of its more profound secrets than a surface appreciation reveals. His choice of poems seems to convey an underlying message of hope; that through the allegory of Spring's awakening, in spite of life's uncertainties and hollow vanities, in spite of the winter of death, the world keeps on turning, bringing new life and love in the promise of Spring. Such thoughts reveal the deeply spiritual side of Somervell's nature. Undoubtedly he had a religious upbringing and his settings of sacred texts on and off during his lifetime indicate that he continued to ponder the deep issues of the spirit. Some of his sacred works were mentioned earlier. Most were on a modest scale, written with amateur musicians in mind such as church choirs who felt unequal to the demands of big choral works. In addition to the three Rossetti poems the other contributing poets to *Love in Springtime* are Charles Kingsley, two poems, Alfred Lord Tennyson, one poem, and E.S. (Ethel Speare or Edith Somervell perhaps – only the initials appear in the 1901 score), also one poem. At the time of this cycle Somervell was already acquainted with the poetry of at least three of his four poets. An early Rossetti setting has been mentioned above and Ethel Speare's poetry became a frequent lyric source from 1896. Tennyson's *Maud* has already been discussed but Somervell had drawn on poems from *The Princess* for many earlier settings. Only Charles Kingsley was a new association; Somervell set two poems in his cycle. Later in the decade Kingsley's work, *Earl Haldan's Daughter*, was the source for a dramatic ballad (1909). Each of the poets came from ecclesiastical or intellectual backgrounds; Kingsley was a clergyman with a strong social conscience, Tennyson the son of a clergyman, Rossetti the daughter of a scholar/poet and herself deeply religious. Somervell was undoubtedly drawn to those writers who pondered the mysteries of earthly existence.

A wordfinder<sup>2</sup> definition of 'cycle' includes in its list, 'a series of songs, poems, etc., usually on a single theme'. In a first reading or hearing of *Love in Springtime* the theme may not be readily grasped. One may question the link between the poems, both with one another and the title. It is true that two of the poems, *Dream Love* and *Spring is here*, speak about 'love' and 'Spring' but the others have no immediate discernible connection. So can there be a coherent line of reasoning in the order of the poems or were the numbers put together randomly and if the latter is the case why is it described as a cycle; and did Somervell pluck an arbitrary title from this odd collection, are incipient questions. Writing about the song cycle in Grove's dictionary, Luise Eitel Peake observes that the English song cycle at the turn of the nineteenth century appears to be based on a combination of elements, ' . . . from Liza Lehmann's *In a Persian Garden* (1896) to Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge* (1908-9) and the works of Somervell and Warlock'.<sup>3</sup> Those elements look back to the Schumann cycles whose *Liederkreis*, Opp. 24 and 39 and *Myrthen*, Op.25 (all 1840) 'are unified by mood rather than narrative'. The title, *Love in Springtime*, is deceptive. The cycle is not a beguilement; these are not superficial songs of romance. One must meditate the deeper levels of the poems to discover their message. With that knowledge comes the realisation that it is mood or theme that links the numbers into a circle, here, a symbol of the ceaseless round of life and death which are at the very marrow of that theme. The song cycle seems to be the perfect vehicle in which to expound those introspections and the tabulation below

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<sup>2</sup> Sara Tulloch (Ed), *Complete Wordfinder* (1993), p.355

<sup>3</sup> Stanley Sadie (Ed), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980), pp.521-523

charts the tonal progress of the circuit:-

<u>Song no.</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Poet</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Moods of Life and Death</u>
1	I cannot tell what you say	Kingsley	A maj	questioning
2	Dainty Little Maidens	Tennyson	F maj	innocence
3	Dream Love	Rossetti	B flat maj	serenity
4	Underneath the growing grass	Rossetti	B flat min	coldness
5	O what comes over the sea	Rossetti	B maj	loneliness
6	The Night Bird	Kingsley	G maj	perseverance
7	Spring is Here	E.S.	C maj	triumph

All the keys are major (except no.4, *Underneath the growing grass*) which Somervell may have equated with the hope of Spring. Signs of life and flora are spoken of in the first two songs. But as there is death in life, so the reverse is true; the central songs present three perspectives of Death. At the heart is song no. 4 and its chill face is given a minor setting. But at song no.5 the key turns upward a semitone from B flat minor to B major which cuts a new tonal course and a sign, perhaps, that Death moves onward into Life. It also eases the move to G major, now V, for the penultimate song that speaks of persistence and optimism. At this tonal standpoint Somervell effects his *coup de grace*, a dominant/new tonic resolution and revelation in C major for the coming of new Life, song no. 7, *Spring is Here*.



# LOVE IN SPRING-TIME

Cycle of Seven Songs.

WRITTEN BY

LORD TENNYSON.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI.

AND

CHARLES KINGSLEY.

Set to Music

by

ARTHUR SOMERVELL.

PRICE 5/- NET

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*Arthur Somervell*

## 2. Spirit in Song

Poems 1 to 6 all contain either questions or uncertainties which are somehow resolved in the joyous outburst of poem 7 (*Spring is here*). The lines of poem 3 (*Dream Love*) tell of Young Love lying amongst the beautiful spring flowers attended by lambs and doves. Young Love is asleep, dreaming . . . of what? Poem 7 cries rapturously "For Spring is come . . . To tell me my love is here . . . For ah! he is come, he is here". On the face of it, the cycle seems to be about a young person dreaming of a lover who materialises in the springtime. *Young Love lies sleeping* was one of the two songs from the cycle to be published separately (in 1904). Taken out of context it was no doubt sold and bought as a romantic love air. But to label the whole cycle in those terms, on the popularity of that one song, without studying the other poems would miss the point and misjudge Somervell's work as a closer look at the poems and their sequence will show.

Poem 1, *I cannot tell what you say* (Kingsley), speaks of the signs of Spring, the green leaves, the rosy rocks, the brown streams. The poet asks what the tokens are trying to tell us. They are allegorical symbols of young love. Nature will burst forth, in due course, with bud and blossom, like a Spring bride, *The World's Answer* (final stanza). Of the four poetic stanzas three are quatrains plus the final seven-line verse (tercet plus quatrain). The opening key is A major and for this first song Somervell uses what by now has become his favourite approach to writing a song. The 7-liner is split into two sections of 3 and 4 lines respectively. The former remains around the minor key and returns to the tonic major for the final quatrain. This arrangement gives the song five verses, each separated by a few bars of accompaniment. But their separation is not overt as a final tonic chord/note, or a pause in the music, or by an identically recurring piano



interlude, would indicate. Rather the verses are treated as different stages of the whole poem and although the above-mentioned elements are there they are not usually sacrosanct; the last note of a verse may not be the tonic, the piano interlude familiar but different in some way, the tonality may move. It is a formula that Somervell falls back on time and again as will be shown later in the cycle. But the grand finale to a double *forte* in the final two lines does not seem to be an appropriate response to the text - . . .

‘And you shall know what . . . the whispering woodlands say’ (see Ex.1):-

Ex. 1: *I cannot tell what you say*

The musical score for Ex. 1 is written for voice and piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#), indicating F major. The time signature is 4/4. The vocal line starts with a 'rall.' (ritardando) marking. The lyrics are: 'you shall know what the rocks and streams And the whis - per-ing wood-lands say.' The piano accompaniment also begins with a 'rall.' marking and includes a 'ff' (fortissimo) dynamic marking. The piece concludes with an 'accel.' (accelerando) marking.

Poem 2, *Dainty Little Maidens*, is about a child's love. Where is the child going? The little girl replies that she is going far away from home in the town to find the place where beautiful spring flowers grow, implying a search inspired by love. The musical material in F major, is a recurring two-bar single-line phrase, decorated with grace notes, used throughout and with small modifications. The motive conjures up a picture of a child in a pretty frock tripping happily through flowery meadows. As in the previous song the melody line is introduced in the piano's preamble (see Ex. 2):-

Ex.2: *Dainty Little Maidens*

At the words 'far and away' the melody line moves to more distant key areas. The two verses are identically set, simple and delicate like the 'dainty little maiden'. The poem is an oddity in the cycle because, unlike the others, it is free from ambiguity. It was written originally by Tennyson for *The Princess*, but rejected, and later (1880), included as one of *Two Child Songs*.

The Rossetti poems are at the heart of *Love in Springtime*. All are meditations upon eternity and each focuses on one of the 'B' keys. Perhaps Somervell's perception of the deep mystery was linked to that area of tonality. *Young Love lies sleeping*, or *Dream Love*, is the first of the three, in its entirety, eight, 8-line stanzas. Each stanza scans in the same way, that is, regularly irregular, but with small line variations. The rhyme scheme, too, is unusual; each stanza falls naturally into two quatrains of the pattern *abcd ebfd*. The soporific language of the poetry contains many examples of alliteration, for example, 'Lilies, lapped', and 'fading fingers', and of forward consonants, *d* and *t*, as in 'forest tips' and 'And a dove'. These factors, collectively, cause the poem to be read slowly and thoughtfully. *Young Love lies sleeping* in an idyllic springtime pastoral but of what is *Young Love* dreaming? At face value the poem seems to describe a love-struck swain, lying on the grass, dreaming of his beloved. But

in fact, Young love is a personification of the Eternal Sleep. Presumably due to the length of the poem Somervell cut five stanzas and set only the first and the third which questions, 'And who shall tell the dream', and the eighth (final). The key of B flat hosts this wonderfully peaceful song and with its gently undulating melody, unruffled rhythm and unhurried tempo, the music is equally opiate. The rich low-pitched accompaniment has the Brahmsian touch. The accompaniment figure is essentially an elaborate decoration of the tonic note (see Ex. 3a):-

Ex. 3a: *Young Love lies sleeping*

Andante sostenuto. *pp*

Young Love lies sleep - ing In...

It is a technique used similarly in the music of Brahms. The example (3b) is from Op. 117:-

Ex 3b: No. 1 from *Drei Intermezzi*

Andante moderato *p dolce*

Verse 3 introduces a change from the two previous identical strophes. Without intervening piano music the song proceeds from the dominant chord with a varied half verse; touching F major and E flat major the music then moves through G major and following a vocal pause on the dominant the song resumes its strophic course. The

addition of the three lines from verse 1 to the last verse cleverly rounds and concludes the text and is matched by a valedictory musical treatment; the final 'Young Love lies sleeping' descends the scale to the tonic (see Ex. 4a):-

Ex. 4a: *Young Love lies sleeping*



And the following final line links both text and music to that of the first verse (see Exx. 4b (below) and 3a):-

Ex. 4b: *Young Love lies sleeping*

The essence of *Dream Love* is more distilled in the next, central Rossetti poem, *Underneath the growing grass* (number 4), two pentains with matching rhyme scheme. The poem, *per se*, is a sombre reflection upon the finitude of life and that Life's most prized conditions, youth, health and beauty are worthless in the grave. Michael Pilkington,<sup>4</sup> in his explanation of the text rather jumps the gun in his reference to rebirth

<sup>4</sup> Michael Pilkington, *English Solo Song: guides to the Repertoire* (1993), pp.62-63

although it is implied in the poems that follow. This text is simply a dark reflection upon mortality and goes no further. Musically it is a miniature gem and although its subject continues the thought of the previous song it provides a contrasting sober mood. The musical construction is unusual; the accompaniment is based entirely on two two-bar phrases of which the first is the main musical material and the second is essentially pre-cadential and cadential (see Ex. 5a):-

Ex. 5a: *Underneath the growing grass*

Adagio.  
*pp*  
 Un-der-neath the grow-ing grass, Un-der-neath the liv-ing flow'rs,  
*pp*

The musical score for Ex. 5a is in 2/4 time, marked Adagio. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and consists of a single phrase: "Un-der-neath the grow-ing grass, Un-der-neath the liv-ing flow'rs,". The piano accompaniment also begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and consists of two phrases. The first phrase is a two-bar pattern of chords and eighth notes, and the second phrase is a two-bar pattern of chords and eighth notes, which is essentially pre-cadential and cadential.

In the five lines of the first stanza the first two lines of text are supported by the two phrases; in the following three lines a sequence is created from the first phrase for the fourth line; the third line is set to the second phrase, modified to cadence on the dominant. In verse 2 the first line is set to a right hand variation of phrase 1 underpinned by a left hand tonic pedal (see Exx. 5a and 5b):-

Ex. 5b: *Underneath the growing grass*

*mf*  
 Youth and health will be but vain, Beauty reckoned of no worth:

The musical score for Ex. 5b is in 2/4 time, marked *mf*. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line consists of a single phrase: "Youth and health will be but vain, Beauty reckoned of no worth:". The piano accompaniment consists of two phrases. The first phrase is a two-bar pattern of chords and eighth notes, and the second phrase is a two-bar pattern of chords and eighth notes, which is essentially pre-cadential and cadential.

Thereafter the pattern is similar as for verse 1. The melodic line is a single controlled phrase, like an intonation, its first seven notes a monotone. The direction of every phrase, both vocal and accompaniment, is forever downward and the final chord with the dominant in the melody line, is major. Melodic movement is downwards from the tonic, within the range of an octave and by step except for an octave leap from low to upper tonic towards the end of the first verse, a magic moment (see Ex. 5c):-

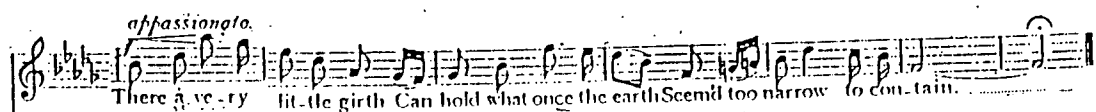
Ex. 5c: *Underneath the growing grass*

The second verse begins with another melodic octave leap, to the upper dominant. The line is constructed similarly with melodic and rhythmic patterns but it is dominant based and its melody lies in the octave above that of verse 1. The soloist's melody line in this song ranges just under two octaves from a low B flat to a high A flat. Unfortunately, at times, the verbal and musical rhythms are incompatible and bring clumsiness into an otherwise beautiful melodic line, see Ex 5d:-

Ex. 5d: *Underneath the growing grass*

This second Rossetti poem is also the second B key – B flat minor, a ‘deep’ key for a ‘deep’ poem. At number 4 it is also at the heart of *Love in Springtime*. An unusual unifying constructional plan between the two performers is in the sharing of the essential material. The accompaniment’s opening two phrases, described above, which become extended in lines 3 to 5 have a melodic line which Somervell gives to the vocalist almost identically at the same place in verse 2 (see Exx. 5a (above) and 5e):-

Ex. 5e: *Underneath the growing grass*



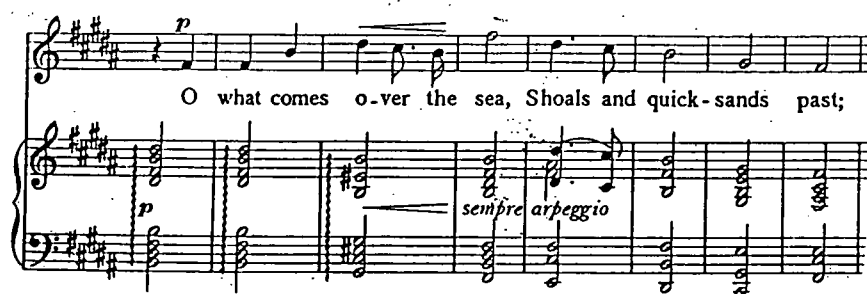
This small-scale song is thus very concentrated and tightly-knit and an emotionally powerful centrepiece. Its brevity and impact bear comparison with *O that 'twere possible* from the *Maud* cycle.

Song number 5, *O what comes over the sea*, the third in the trilogy of Rossetti poems, implies the loneliness and emptiness of death through its image of the sea. The singer muses that the tide cycles propel quicksands and shoals of fish homeward and the wind blows towards land ‘but nothing comes home by sail to me’. The final stanza is an indifferent acceptance of fate. The key of the fifth song is raised by a semitone to B major (the third B tonality) and perhaps bespeaks a glimmer of optimism somewhere in the words of the first verse. The wavy lines placed before the chords of the piano accompaniment indicating a spread of notes no doubt represent the rolling wave. They are indicated arbitrarily to bar 11 but at bar 12 the direction *sempre arpeggio* is given. However, more wavy lines appear erratically then disappear altogether. The three-stanza



poem has a modified strophic setting. At verse 2 the tonic key drops its sharps at 'At a moan' and moves into G major. From thence the key hovers over its relative, E minor, and during the interval between the second and third verses returns to G major for the first line of the final verse; then, at the realisation that there is no hope, nothing will change, retreats to the home key for the remainder. The chordal accompaniment is maintained throughout, mostly one minim chord per bar creating a passive, timeless atmosphere (see Ex. 6):-

Ex. 6: *O what comes over the sea*



The watery linking theme continues in poem 6, *The Night Bird*, by Charles Kingsley. What is the Night Bird and where does it come from? His nocturnal song is heard by the lone sailor in difficulty on the Sea of Life. He asks the bird to sing up the daybreak and to whistle up the wind. The night bird replies that he (the sailor) must keep pressing on and those things for which he longs will come in due course. Times of darkness, fear and loneliness are temporary and temporal and will be swept away with the current when the dawn breaks. It is a metaphoric illustration of the allusion to the coming of Spring and by extension, to the newness of life. The bird's song is a message of comfort and optimism. Somervell continues his depiction of the sea's swell with two contrasting passages of



gentle movement which alternate in a rocking 6/8 metre as the boat bobs on the water.

The first idea is a simple, single line rising arpeggio (see Ex. 7a):-

Ex. 7a: *The Night Bird*

The second is of paired two-note chords, each pair a fourth and fifth apart, each containing a suspension and moving harmony note in slow downward movement. Above this the vocalist's line has an independent, undulating lilt, the melody of the Night Bird in the key of G (see Ex. 7b):-

Ex. 7b: *The Night Bird*

Similar pairings were used in the very early years of Somervell's song writing in a collection published in 1889, *Four Songs of Innocence*, from the poems of William Blake. The set was re-published in 1910 with an extra song, as *Five Songs of Innocence*. In the *Nurse's Song* the paired chords serve the playful, untroubled naivety of children (see Ex. 7c):-

Ex. 7c: *The Nurse's Song (Four Songs of Innocence)*



The five verses of *The Night Bird* are strophic in form which Somervell varies in his preferred way of moving to the relative key (minor here) somewhere in the centre or towards the end (here in verses 3 and 4) and returning to the tonic key for verse 5. Although in strophic form none of the verses ends with a perfect cadence nor does the vocal line end on the tonic. And the short piano interludes between the verses keep the music continuous reflecting the sailor's voyage across the Sea of Life

The seventh song of the cycle, *Spring is here*, is the denouement in Somervell's series of brooding ambiguities. It is a song of praise for the beauty and joy and renewal in nature and for the coming of Love. The song contrasts not only in mood and outlook with the foregoing numbers but also in other ways. By virtue of its importance as the last song of the cycle it needs to convey the impression of 'having arrived' and does so unequivocally, see Ex. 8:-

Ex. 8: *Spring is Here*

The musical score for 'Spring is Here' consists of a vocal melody and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a single staff with a treble clef. It begins with a 'molto rall.' tempo marking and a 'ff' dynamic. The lyrics 'he is come, he is here!' are written below the notes. The piano accompaniment is written in two staves (treble and bass clefs). It also begins with a 'molto rall.' tempo marking and a 'ff' dynamic. The tempo changes to 'a tempo' in the final measure. The score is in C major and 4/4 time.

But it is, perhaps, in the quality of its poetry that *Spring is Here* seems to be a misfit in the collection and this example by Ethel Spense (or Edith Somervell) is in a different class from Somervell's other selections. It presents as a Victorian love song and, indeed, was published separately in a range of keys in its day. That the poet's name is omitted from the title page of the song cycle may indicate its perceived unimportance. But this poem is confident and Somervell has responded with a positive setting in C major. Somervell has shown in the other cycles a tendency to associate a mood of confidence with the C major tonality. In *Maud* it was no.4, *O let the solid ground* and no.8, *I have led her home*; and in *A Shropshire Lad* it was no.4, *In Summer-time on Bredon*, all situations of self-assurance. The vocal line is strong and the accompaniment is busy with lots of triplets and showy chords at the end. Somervell's predilections for continuous music, avoidance of cadences, of beginning and ending lines/verses on notes other than the tonic, are all there, but in this final number the music's feet are more firmly on the ground. Following the nebulous unreality of songs 1 to 6 and in spite of being an ill-match, *Spring is here* makes a reassuring and refreshing conclusion to the cycle.

11.3/2648



# WIND FLOWERS

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## WIND FLOWERS

an anthology of poems:  
settings for solo quartet with solo ensembles

## 1. Poems for Daydreams

In the 1903 publication entitled *Wind Flowers*, Somervell is seen to continue his interest in pursuing new ideas. The work is described on the title page as a song cycle - but there is nothing new in that. The novelty, however, lies in the presentation, a lead almost exclusively forged in England by a colleague of Somervell, Liza Lehmann. In 1896 she published her first song cycle of quartets for solo voices, *In a Persian Garden*. It was maybe due to her initiative that Somervell's former teacher, Stanford, followed her example in 1898 with his one-only song cycle of nine quartets for solo voices, to settings of poems from Tennyson's *The Princess*. But there was another linking source; Robert Schumann's *Spanisches Liederspiel* (1849), is a song cycle for different combinations of solo voices of which Liza Lehmann, a former singing student of Clara Schumann on the interpretation of her husband's songs, must have been aware. Arthur Somervell's link with Robert Schumann was referred to earlier. But it was her 1902 cycle, *The Daisy Chain*, subtitled *Twelve Songs of Childhood*, that probably inspired *Wind Flowers* in the following year. Somervell's cycle, also, sets mostly children's verse and like his previous anthological cycle, draws heavily on the writings of Christina Rossetti. There are nine songs of which four of the five Rossetti settings come from the *Sing Song, Nursery Rhyme* collection and are spread through the sequence; the one by Sydney Dobell is the song from the poem *Sailor's Return*; there is one from P.B.Shelley, usually

known by its first line, *Music, when soft voices die*, but in fact its enigmatic title is *To —*, published by Mrs Shelley after her husband's death; and two from R.L.Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verse*. The sequence is shown in the table below (The poets' initials follow the song titles):-

<u>Song no.</u>	<u>Song title</u>	<u>Poet</u>	<u>Key</u>	<u>Ensemble/Solo</u>
1	Twist me a crown of Windflowers	CR	G maj	SATB
2	High over the Breakers	SD	G maj	SATB+Tenor solo
3	The Wind has such a rainy sound	CR	D min	Contralto solo
4	Hope is like a Harebell	CR	D maj	SATB
5	Two Doves on the self-same branch	CR	F maj	Duet – Sop/Alt
6	Music, when soft voices die	PBS	B flat maj	SATB
7	When a mounting skylark sings	CR	E flat maj	Ten solo/SATB
8	Going to Bed	RLS	E min	SATB
9	Windy Nights (Finale)	RLS	G min E min	Bass solo/SATB SATB

As in *Love in Springtime*, a mere passing acquaintance with the poem sequence may not, at once, give up its line of thought and, indeed, one may need to use a little mental invention to detect Somervell's reasoning behind the order. A possible explanation may begin with the title, *Wind Flowers*, and by examining its nature as described in botanical tomes. The Windflower is better known as the Anemone, translated as 'Daughter of the Wind'. Alice Coats, in her book tracing the development of species of flora<sup>1</sup> quotes botanist Martyn Miller who further explains that 'it has the Italian name, *Pulsatilla*, from

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<sup>1</sup> Alice M.Coats, *Flowers and their Histories* (1956), p22



Twist me a crown of wind-flowers ;  
That I may fly away  
To hear the singers at their song,  
And players at their play.

Put on your crown of wind-flowers :  
But whither would you go?  
Beyond the surging of the sea  
And the storms that blow.

Alas! your crown of wind-flowers  
Can never make you fly :  
I twist them in a crown to-day,  
And to-night they die.

the downey seed being beaten about by the wind; and again from the same volume, 'the floure never openeth it selfe, but when the wynde bloweth', so says William Turner (c.1508-68), also called 'The Father of British Botany'. The quotations disclose the characteristics of the Windflower which propagates and reveals itself by the wafting breezes. And thus, the song, *Twist me a crown of Wind-flowers*, at the head of the cycle, spreads its influence and essence throughout the sequence. The wind carries the seed where it will, just like a roving imagination in the songs that follow No. 1. At this juncture in his life, Somervell, in his work with children, may have written the cycle expressly to appeal to, or stretch, the imagination of youngsters. The selections from children's verse and the artless nature of the music must have been a combination designed to interest younger people, but its presentation, as a quartet of solo voices with solos and duets, may have had a doubtful appeal to a child's imagination. In the use of soloists with quartet, Somervell had gone a step further than Liza Lehmann and the design of the work might be described more accurately as a cantata. That said, Lehmann's works, written within a few years either side of *Wind Flowers*, were reputedly extremely popular and may have prompted Somervell (and Stanford) to try their hands. It is not known if Somervell's cycle was well received but both *Love in Springtime* and *Wind Flowers* are the least known of the six cycles.

## 2. Simplicity in Song

The *Wind Flowers* cycle is attractively written and belongs to that world of make-believe in which Somervell was so engrossed. The songs have a simple charm and most are of the varied strophic type. Contrasting moods are provided from song to song and



the piano accompaniment is descriptive. Vocal harmonisations are kept simple. These are, of course, generalisations, but to describe the songs in more detail would not add anything new to what has already been said about Somervell's work. A brief synopsis of the cycle follows plus a closer look at one or two songs which stand out from the rest. The use of solo voices with the quartet introduces variety in texture and timbre and Somervell has appropriately matched the vocal colours to the words being set. The crown of windflowers of song No. 1 allows the wearer to roam freely by day, borne on the wind. But beware, for when night falls, the flowers and the magic die. Set for quartet, the soprano line soars upward as though carried on the supporting breeze and the piano music flows smoothly. Song No. 2, *High over the breakers*, also for quartet, has arpeggiated, rolling-sea-like accompaniment; verse 3, for tenor solo, introduces a new melody line. Most of the songs in the collection are in major keys but No. 3, *The Wind has such a rainy sound*, uses D minor to describe the words of the title. It is set for contralto solo and the pictorial melody line captures the spirit of the words (see Exx. 9a/b/c):-

Ex. 9a: *The Wind has such a rainy sound*

The musical score for 'The Wind has such a rainy sound' is presented in two systems. The first system contains the vocal melody and piano accompaniment for the first two measures of the song. The vocal line is in D minor, starting with a half rest followed by a quarter note G4, then a half note A4, and a quarter note B4. The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal melody and piano accompaniment for the next two measures. The vocal line continues with a half note C5, a quarter note D5, and a half note E5. The piano accompaniment maintains the same rhythmic pattern. The score is written for a contralto solo voice and piano accompaniment.



The wind has such a rainy sound  
Moaning through the town,  
The sea has such a windy sound,  
Will the ships go down?

The apples in the orchard  
Tumble from their tree, --  
Oh, will the ships go down, go down,  
In the windy sea?

Ex. 9b: *The Wind has such a rainy sound* ('the apples . . . tumble')

ap - ples in the or - chard Tum - ble

This musical score is for a piano accompaniment. It features a treble and bass staff. The melody is in the treble staff, starting with a half note 'ap', followed by eighth notes 'ples', 'in', 'the', 'or', 'chard', and ending with a half note 'Tum - ble'. The piano accompaniment in the bass staff consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a more complex pattern in the right hand, including chords and moving lines.

Ex. 9c: *The Wind has such a rainy sound* ('the ships go down')

Oh, will the ships go down, go down, go down

This musical score is for a piano accompaniment. It features a treble and bass staff. The melody is in the treble staff, starting with a half note 'Oh, will the', followed by eighth notes 'ships', 'go', 'down,', 'go', 'down,', and ending with a half note 'go down'. The piano accompaniment in the bass staff consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a more complex pattern in the right hand, including chords and moving lines.

Song No.4, *Hope is like a Harebell*, in a change of mood, is lighthearted. The key modulates from the D minor of song 3 to its relative major. *Two Doves on the self-same Branch*, No.5, is neatly captured in a duet for Soprano and Contralto and the lines observe that in the happiness of daylight the night is dismissed from thought. It is set in the style of a canon to reflect 'togetherness' (see Ex. 10):-

Ex. 10: *Two Doves on the self-same Branch*

Two doves..... up- on the self - same branch, Two li -

Two doves..... up- on the self - same

This musical score is for a duet for Soprano and Contralto. It features two vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The Soprano part starts with a half note 'Two doves.....', followed by eighth notes 'up- on the', and ends with a half note 'Two li -'. The Contralto part starts with a half note 'Two doves.....', followed by eighth notes 'up- on the', and ends with a half note 'self - same'. The piano accompaniment in the bass staff consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the left hand and a more complex pattern in the right hand, including chords and moving lines.

Song Nos. 6 and 7 are marked, *Con espressione*. The first of these, *Music, when soft voices die*, for quartet, is hardly a child's poem but speaks of flowers and of lingering memories, so perhaps there is a loose connection with the cycle's mood. No.7, *When a Mounting Skylark sings*, likewise, is reflective. The tenor soloist appropriately sings the line about the nightingale's evening song. These two numbers seem to be a preparation for the final songs about the night. When night comes, the Windflowers die, daydreams are over. In songs Nos. 8 and 9 a child goes to bed, terrified by the blackness and the grotesque moving shadows in which he imagines a galloping horse and rider outside in the howling wind. *Going to Bed*, in E minor, is followed by *Windy Nights*, in G minor, which has a Finale that is simply a repeat of *Going to Bed* but with a more climactic ending. The contrasting minor keys, associated with the wind, are a loose link with song No. 3, *The Wind has such a rainy sound*. The two songs thus become an ABA form. The A sections, set for quartet, are sung in unison which gives power to the night (fear) theme. The B section, set mainly for bass soloist (whose dark voice matches the night), with brief sections for quartet, has a dotted 6/8 rhythm to represent the galloping horse together with a lively tempo. The modified ending of section A is a build-up of quasi-fugal entries to a long-sustained final chord (see Ex. 11):-

Ex. 11: *Windy Nights*

The musical score for 'Windy Nights' consists of four vocal staves and a piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are in unison, with lyrics: 'O - ver head o - ver head', 'And the black night o - ver head', and 'And the black night o - ver head'. The piano part features a dotted 6/8 rhythm and a build-up of quasi-fugal entries. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *cresc poco*, *mp*, *cresc poco a poco*, *p*, and *ff*. The tempo is marked *cresc poco a poco*.

**Robert Browning: a broader canvas**  
 'An exquisitely beautiful work'

## 1

## Introduction

Somervell's output of works to 1907 shows his growing experience of writing in a variety of genres, both vocal and instrumental, separately or concerted, as solo, group, choral and orchestral and his use of different textures for the song cycle indicates a trial and error process, not only self-revelatory, but also striking new ground for the form itself. We do not know whether satisfaction or frustration with his efforts caused him to abandon the form after 1907 for some sixteen years, following, until then, a succession of five song cycles at an average of about one every two years. His first cycle, from Tennyson's *Maud*, with its closed numbers and piano postludes, had looked back to the models of Schumann, but in ensuing years Somervell seemed to have been experimenting with different ideas of presenting the form. The second cycle of 1901, *Love in Springtime*, is an assemblage of poems from a number of poets, but with a nucleus of Christina Rossetti, very tenuously connected by poetic subject, but without musical links. The *Wind Flowers* cycle of 1903 also borrows the idea of anthology, but is innovative in its settings for varied groups of voices – solos, duet, quartets. In the following year, 1904, he returned to the single-poet cycle with the publication of *A Shropshire Lad*. Somervell was probably the first composer to set some of Housman's poems to music

(the work had been published only a few years earlier in 1896). Somervell's choice of Robert Browning for his next cycle seems to be something of a watershed in his output, at least in the area of his song cycles. A casual reader of Robert Browning may find the terrain heavy-going in places and it may account for the reluctance of composers to set Browning to music. Not only the suitability of poetic form and metre needs to be considered but also the question of whether the language of a speech form will convert into and communicate through song. Somervell may have taken an interest in Browning's poetry through hearing the two settings of *Prospice*, one by his teacher Stanford and the other by Henry Walford Davies, a contemporary of Somervell and a colleague – they were both on the staff at the Royal College of Music from the mid-1890s. Stanford's work may have influenced both men. The subject matter would certainly have appealed to Somervell as a product of a Victorian upbringing, the prospect ('prospice') of divine reward in return for human endeavour, prompting him to become more acquainted with Browning's work.

In *James Lee's Wife* Somervell sets himself a new challenge with the subject matter, entertained in a series of poems, each a sombre reflection on the disintegration of a marriage, pondered regretfully by James Lee's wife. She is the sole character of the meditation; Browning does not tell us her name. Her thoughts, as loneliness, sadness, anger, longing, frustration, the whole range of emotions, are expressed from her point of view in a series of scene paintings which focus on everyday activities, but in all of them her thoughts are drawn to her marriage. She remembers the happiness at the beginning though their home was humble. In spite of the flaws in her husband's character, her love for him endured whilst his for her grew cold and could not be rekindled. In setting from

five of the nine poems Somervell's considerations concerned the cycle's length and its single troubled theme. His solution in choosing four deliberations and a 'redemption through love' ending is a typical Somervellian formula but unfortunately misses completely James Lee's wife's final desperation and passion and her agonising decision in the last poem to set sail from France and leave James Lee's unbearable indifference:-

*You might turn myself –  
Should I know or care  
When I should be dead of joy, James Lee?*

IX,viii,371-2

Stephen Banfield<sup>1</sup> has suggested that Somervell's cuts in the text from the works he set were made because he felt unequal to the challenge of reproducing a musical equivalent of the emotions/drama. That may or may not be true. The poems in *James Lee's Wife* are reflective but in Somervell's defence they are not all perceived as the same colour, 'grey', as Banfield puts it. The greyness may be in James Lee's wife's heart but in Somervell's songs her broodings are imaged in strong primary colours, as song number 2, *By the Fireside*, discussed below, illustrates. It was perhaps due to the lack of scope for colour afforded by the poem's theme that Somervell set his cycle for contralto solo with orchestral accompaniment – or so states the title page of the pianoforte arrangement. Unfortunately the latter is all that exists in print and the orchestral score, until recently, was thought to be lost, when during the course of this project, it came to light in the bowels of Boosey and Hawkes library archives. A footnote on the piano score states that 'Applications for the full score and Band Parts are to be made to the Publishers'. Unfortunately, however, the whereabouts of the Band Parts remains unknown. The only

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Banfield, *op.cit*, pp.58-59

7

[illegible]



other known extant manuscripts are the piano and string quartet versions held in the Royal College of Music library. The arrangement for string quartet and piano, published in 1919, may have gestated for some years after hearing Vaughan Williams's song cycle *On Wenlock Edge* from 1908/9, two years after *James Lee's Wife* was published. Although orchestral/chamber group writing was, by this time, commonplace, for Somervell it was an unusual departure in scoring for a song cycle, though he had already experimented in this idiom by making arrangements of some of his earlier songs. Two examples published in the same year as *James Lee's Wife* are from *Maud* – *Birds in the High Hall Garden* and *Go not, Happy Day*, for strings and voice, arranged from the piano score, Somervell's usual working method.

Somervell's title, *James Lee's Wife*, might have added a qualifying clause in small print, for example, 'Five studies on *Andante*'; each of the five songs' tempo rubric indicates a different shade of *Andante*:-

1 James Lee's Wife Speaks at the Window	Andante Sostenuto
2 By the Fireside	Poco Andante
3 In the Doorway	Andante Commodo
4 On the Cliff	Andante Sostenuto
5 Among the Rocks	Andante

Tabulated in this prosaic way the sequence looks rather drab and lifeless but the songs, though linked by an ostensibly monochrome atmosphere of sadness, are astonishingly varied and individual. In previous cycles Somervell's use of song forms has been seen to demonstrate a modicum of flexibility but in *James Lee's Wife* a truly unique style emerges, a confidence in his own technique. This may be illustrated by discussing in detail the first two songs of the cycle and later, looking at their significance in the greater design.

*James Lee's Wife*

*(Brewing)*

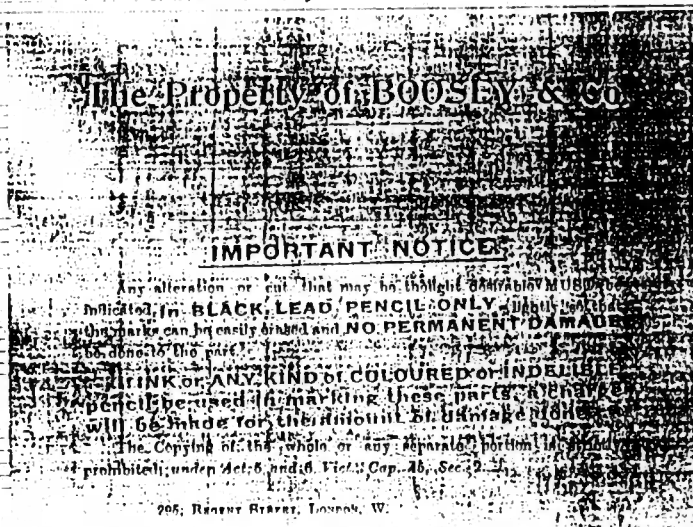
*Song Cycle for Contralto*

*with orchestral accompaniment*

*Set to music*

*by*

*Arthur Somervell.*



## 2

**JAMES LEE'S WIFE****1. Two Songs Examined***James Lee's Wife Speaks at the Window*

This is a setting of the whole of Browning's first poem, the first of the five *Andante* songs – this one *Andante Sostenuto*. The poem is a seven-line form, rhyming *ababcba*, reading in verses 1 and 3 as a quatrain plus a tercet and in verse 2 as a tercet plus a quatrain; it is line *b* that links the constituent parts. Somervell uses an ABA1 form for the three verses. The seven lines are interestingly and effectively related by common musical material and permutations which work out rather like family relationships. In verse 1 Somervell's response to the rhyming pattern is to set line pairs to one similar phrase. The last, odd, line is a contrasting single-line phrase which neatly captures the text; the music is new but links to the long phrase, 3, by its end rhyme, 'dropped'; the music of the line ending 'dropped' is a variant of lines *a*, thus the long and short phrases are linked by extension. The diagram below illustrates the connections:-

Poetic Form	Rhymes	Verse 1	Phrase
q	[ a b ]	Ah, Love, but a day	1 long
u		And the world has changed	
a	[ a b ]	The sun's away	2 long
t		And the bird estranged	
r	[ c b c ]	The wind has dropped,	3 long
a		And the sky's deranged;	
i		Summer has stopped.	4 short
n			
t			
e			
r			
c			
e			
t			

Although the seven lines fall naturally into the two simpler forms due to their rhyming patterns they become conjoined using shared musical material but changed by melody, rhythm and pitch; compare lines 1-2 (quatrain) and 5-6 (tercet) at examples 1a and 1b respectively, below:-

Ex. 1a: *James Lee's wife speaks at the window*

Ah, Love, but a day... And the world has chang'd

Ex. 1b: *James Lee's wife speaks at the window*

The wind has dropp'd, And the sky's de-rang'd:

James Lee's wife observes the signs of the receding year, the fading sun, the bird migrating to warmer climes. The pensive mood is caught in the short orchestral opening on bassoons, horns and strings. Her anxiety is reflected in lines 1 and 2 of the first verse, in the accompaniment's syncopated tonic pedal on cello and bass and rising chromatic harmony on the upper strings; in lines 3 and 4, at 'bird estranged', there is a move towards B flat minor – the key is suspended on its dominant bass line – and G flats are added to the melody line and texture. Falling intervals, a perfect 4<sup>th</sup> at 'has dropped', and a minor 7<sup>th</sup> at 'sky's deranged', and the generally middle to low range of the vocal line, contribute collectively to the joyless atmosphere. At the words of the last line of this verse, 'Summer has stopped', the resolution to B flat minor is avoided when James Lee's wife questions whether, like the changing year, her husband is constant. But her thoughts of him lift her mood and the key turns to F major with a serene and melodious one-bar *motif* shared alternately by flutes and oboes, whilst clarinets and bassoon have a counter melody. Example 2 demonstrates a refinement of Somevell's technique of moving subtly to another verse as though it were a continuous piece of prose. The upward turn of key at the beginning of verse 2 when James Lee's wife directly addresses her husband, 'Look in my eyes', and her entry half way through the *motif* on the submediant, all convey a sense of continuation that denies the division into verses. In verse 2 the vocal music is new, arranged in a similar way to verse 1. Here the tercet precedes the quatrain and the two forms are linked by the musical rhythm of their lines, initiated in each case by a pair of semiquavers. The rhythmic patterns show an awareness of prosody, uninhibited by regular phraseology:-

tercet

a

b

(a

(b

quatrain

c

b

c

The *motif* is a transmutation of the first half of verse 1's main vocal phrase (see

Example 1a above and Example 2):-

Ex. 2: *James Lee's wife speaks at the window*

It is a brief moment when James Lee's wife desperately wants her husband to deny what she knows to be true. But she cannot suppress the doubts and at the end of verse 2 the *motif* sounds those misgivings. In a confident handling of tonal colour, it slips through F minor and D flat minor, then into the home key for the last verse. In a joyful climax, when she recalls her husband's embrace there is an extended cadence –

*Me to bend above, Me to hold embrac'd*

Ic ----- V ----- I -----

in which the tonic (A flat) is recovered. The music of the introduction is a sombre conclusion. Dynamics are plentifully included, a matter which was regarded

perfunctorily in earlier cycles. This beautiful song is a sensitive response to James Lee's Wife's torment. Somervell's adroit manipulation of material and tonal practice together with a subtlety and restraint, demonstrate his growing mastery of the song-writing technique.

*By the Fireside*

In the second poem (and song no. 2) James Lee's wife is brooding by her fireside. She ponders the source of the firewood, the broken remains of shipwrecks that foundered on the French coast long ago and makes a bitter comparison of their destruction to the breakdown of her marriage. She decides to leave her husband:-

*Poor sailors took their chance:  
I take mine.*

II,ii,28-9

In the four strophes of the poem she identifies her situation with the plight of the sailors. Somervell again found the modified strophic form served his purpose for the scenario and set the first three of four strophes. His decision not to set the final strophe is surprising. James Lee's wife's emotive lash is a perfect opportunity to give full rein to the orchestra but perhaps it is too extreme for the, in general, gentle climate of the cycle.

The four strophes of the poem have an unusual rhyme scheme, *abaccddb*, with line metres of iambic tetrameter and trochaic dimeter, as follows:-

## Line no. rhymes

1	a = it
2	b = td
3	a = it
4	c = td
5	c = td
6	d = it
7	d = it
8	b = td

The brackets linking the rhyming lines also indicate vocal motivic links; for example, compare lines 2 and 8 (first verse), rhyming *b*, in example 3 below:-

Ex. 3: *By the Fireside*

line 2

line 8

The music grows from the two main ideas stated at the outset. One is the first terse fragment of introduction, begun by the strings and cadenced by bassoons and horns; it also links the verses as interlude material (see Example 4a):-

Ex. 4a: *By the Fireside*

*Poco Andante.*

The fragment is immediately reshaped to complete the introduction. Example 4b shows how Somervell develops his material:-



Ex. 4b: *By the Fireside*

At the close of verse 2 those first three notes (of Ex. 4a) are further extended into four bars of accompaniment and in the final verse take over both vocal line and accompaniment (see Example 4c):-

Ex. 4c: *By the Fireside*

The triplet figures in verse 2 are a diminution of that process; see the following extract:-

Ex. 4d: *By the Fireside*

Somervell's management of the text is illustrated in his other musical idea, the vocal line that sets the first two lines of the poem's first strophe. The text is given herewith, followed by Example 5a :-

*Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,  
Oak and pine?  
Oh, for the ills half-understood,  
The dim dead woe  
Long ago  
Befallen this bitter coast of France!  
Well, poor sailors took their chance;  
I take mine.*

Ex. 5a: *By the Fireside*

Is all our fire of ship - wreck wood, Oak and pine?

It is a complete musical phrase but within its construction has the potential for extracting melodic and rhythmic germs. This is the essence of Somervell's technique with the modified strophic form and he makes full use of it in this song. For example, line 3a, Example 5b below, is developed from line 1a – see Example 5a above. The thirds of the accompaniment are given to two clarinets:-

Ex. 5b: *By the Fireside*

Oh, for the ills half un - der - stood.

The two following lines, 4 and 5 (trochaic dimeter), are a modification of the first germ of line 1; compare Example 5a with Examples 5c and 5d below; Example 5d is, in effect, an echo of 5c:-

Exx. 5c/d/e: *By the Fireside*

The musical score shows three examples of music for the poem 'By the Fireside'. Above the staves, the lines are labeled: 'line 4' above '5c', 'line 5' above '5d', and 'line 6' above '5e'. The lyrics are written below the vocal line: 'The dim dead woe Long a - go Be-fall'n this bit-ter coast of France!'. The music is in a key with two flats (B-flat and E-flat) and a common time signature. Examples 5c and 5d are short phrases, while 5e is a longer phrase that incorporates the rhythms of the previous two.

The music of examples 5c/d (lines 4 and 5) grows into line 6 as one phrase making a new vocal line of iambic tetrameter but containing rhythmic groupings from the original idea (see Example 5e above). This process of development indicates that Somervell was thinking in orchestral terms rather than arranging from a piano score and the orchestral score shows a felicitous handling of the instrumentation. At the end of this verse in the two contrasting metrical lines he takes the opportunity to point up the drama; line 7 leaps dramatically to the verse's highest note at James Lee's Wife's desperate cry, then plunges to the lower tonic for her terse decision. The dotted rhythm links with line 2. Example 6 below, illustrates the point:-

Ex. 6: *By the Fireside*

The musical score for Example 6 shows a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'Well, poor sai - - lone took the chance; I take mine.' The music is in a key with two flats and common time. The piano part features a strong, rhythmic accompaniment with a dotted rhythm in the vocal line. The vocal line starts with a forte (ff) dynamic and ends with a piano (p) dynamic.

Somervell takes the same approach in the following verses but with different configurations. It is in verse 2 that the introductory material acquires a substantial growth, albeit in sparing texture, of menacing octaves, given to the body of strings and reinforced by brass and timpani, underscoring the text to which they are set. But this is not the material's first post-introduction appearance. The initial fragment (Example 4a) had appeared similarly and surreptitiously in diminution in verse 1 as accompaniment to line 7, see Example 6 above. As interlude between the second and third (final) verses it launched verse 3 to a climactic moment for the voice. The accompaniment has now transformed into triplet figuration:-

Ex. 7a: *By the Fireside*

ff con fuoco.

God help you,

f con fuoco.

It springs from a similar dramatic situation in verse 2:-

Ex. 7b: *By the Fireside*

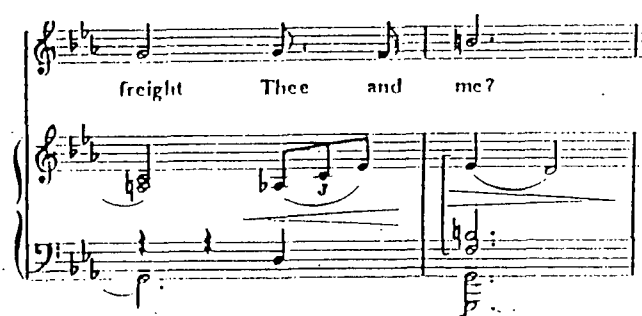
mute, Drenclid and stark, From their bark, -

f

At verse 3, the vocal line's first fragment above the piano's storm is reduced to its basic melodic skeleton. Compare verse 1, Example 5a above with the vocal line of verse 3 at Example 7a.

With his perceptibly maturing style Somervell, however, does not abandon practices used in the earlier song cycles that identify his work. In *By the Fireside* his idiomatic streams of piano thirds are still being used for accompaniment, see Example 5a. His predilection for ending a line or verse on a dominant chord to deny a sense of finality, amply employed in *Maud* and subsequent cycles, is wonderfully illustrated here at the end of verse 2, capturing James Lee's wife's irony. In earlier cycles it was shown how avoidance of a full close at a vocal line end is resolved subsequently by the piano. The Schumannesque example (10 b/c, Chapter 3) from the *Maud* cycle, quoted on p.35, is a case in point. Here, the resolution does not come; the concern remains. The questioning vocal 7<sup>th</sup> on 'me' is emphasised by the accompaniment's appoggiatura, given to clarinet and violin; the rolling drum enhances the atmosphere (see Example 8):-

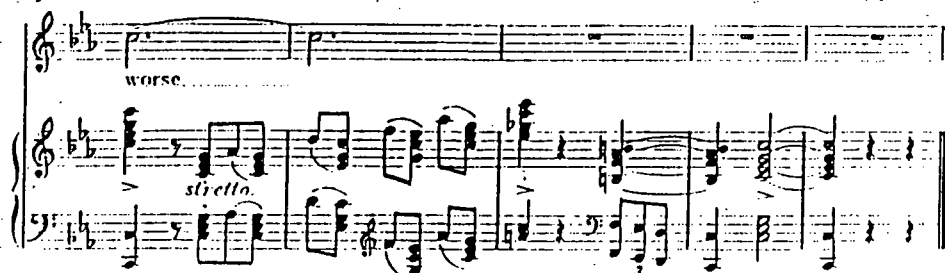
Ex. 8: *By the Fireside*



After a brief silence, winds and strings re-enter in turn in stark effect, leading to another dominant just before verse 3. James Lee's wife's cry at the final cadence, 'That is worse', is a thrilling moment; the string section's upward *glissando* to a suspended tonic

6/4 has the drama and weight of the full orchestra to the dramatic resolution. The postlude is a reminder of the two main themes:-

Ex. 9: *By the Fireside*



## 2. A Cyclic Structure

In two of his other song cycles, *Maud* and *A Shropshire Lad* Somervell had re-used themes as a 'recall' technique, linking specific events. But in *James Lee's Wife* musical references between songs appear haphazard and have more to do with identity or union. It is the thematic material of songs 1 and 2 discussed above that re-appears subsequently, emerging overall almost as an arch form. The music of the introduction to song number 1, *James Lee's Wife Speaks at the Window*, is recalled from brief and transmuted fragments in the other odd-numbered songs plus number 4; and the opening vocal line of song 2, *By the Fireside*, is re-used in the other even-numbered song. The tonal scheme is fundamental with the odd-numbered songs being in major keys (numbers 1 and 5 are in the same key but number 5 ends in B major) and the even-numbered songs in minor keys, but any other key relationship, if intended, is not apparent. The following diagram is a summary:-

### Thematic Connections and Tonal Scheme

Song	Theme		Key
	Song 1	Song 2	
1. James Lee's Wife Speaks at The Window	*		A flat major
2. By the Fireside		*	C minor
3. In the Doorway	*		F major
4. On the Cliff	*	*	Bmin/Bmaj Eflat maj/Bmaj/ Eflat maj/Bmaj/ Gmaj(orchestral Interlude)/ Bmin(Gmaj)/Bmaj
5. Among the Rocks	*		A flat major

The most frequently recalled music is taken from the introduction to number 1 and also used for the brief postlude:-

Ex. 10a: *James Lee's Wife speaks at the Window*



Its next appearance, though not immediately obvious, is in the introduction to song 3; only the first phrase of five notes has been extracted. In rhythm and melodic progression it is a hybrid but the general shape and sound is familiar. Compare the original phrase, Example 10a above, with its transformation at Example 10b:-

Ex. 10b: *In the Doorway*



Ex. 11b: *Among the rocks*

knows. If you loved

*mf*

The link between the even-numbered songs is the vocal line of song 2, *By the Fireside*, see Example 5a above, set to accompanying thirds. Somervell re-uses the melody later in song 4, *On the Cliff*, as introduction, which is a chord stream of double thirds played by two clarinets and two bassoons:-

Ex. 12a: *On the cliff*

*Andante sostenuto.*

The theme is used subsequently in the song as accompanying material in many modifications, for example:-

Ex. 12b: *On the cliff*

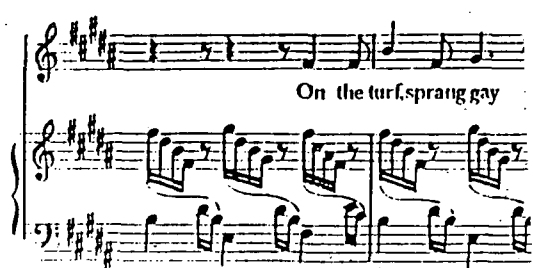
mock: Dead to the roots, so deep was done The work of the sum-mer

*mf*

*p*

The vocal line of section B (verse 3) may have its incipience in the theme's first few notes. Compare Example 13 below with Example 12a:-

Ex. 13: *On the cliff*



The song is the longest of the cycle, setting all five strophes. The musical material is economically written with passages of quasi-recitative. There are minor alterations in the text which has been observed in other poem settings, in this and other cycles, but Somervell was known to memorise poetry so the differences may be due to slips in recall. This could have happened in verse 2 where the words are transposed – ‘of a shell, of a weed’ should read ‘of a weed, of a shell’. But in verse 5 the alteration may be deliberate; the substitution of ‘lives’ for ‘minds’ would more aptly convey Somervell’s vicarious message. The sections B, verses 3 and 4, contrast in style and mood from the verses that frame them and the delicate arpeggios of the accompaniment complement the tiny creatures they describe. Somervell’s partiality for single-line rippling accompaniment looks back to the *Maud* cycle. But here it incorporates a one-bar, three-note ostinato, almost unbroken for two verses, adumbrating the approaching verse 5, see Example 13 above. When the style changes at verse 5, the ostinato begins the vocal line, modified at the first interval and thus the two sections are linked:-

Ex. 14: *On the cliff*

Somervell's many key changes in the song and in the B sections in particular (see diagram above) demonstrate his conception of colour. Here the key changes describe the vibrant colours of red and blue, in the wings of cricket and butterfly, sparkling in the sunlight against the flat rocks. But the imagination, aided by a magician, transforms them into warhorse and fairy. Somervell fragments the semiquaver figuration between wind and strings and adds pizzicato chords at cadence points in the B sections.

Marie Brema, the singer for whom and to whom *James Lee's Wife* is dedicated, wrote to Somervell in January, 1907, thanking him for 'entrusting such an exquisitely beautiful work to me' but Stephen Banfield<sup>2</sup> considers *James Lee's Wife* to be the least successful of Somervell's four main song cycles. Performances at the Royal College of Music are noted without comment in the *College Journal*. Since Somervell's death, *James Lee's Wife*, like his other song cycles, has suffered unjust neglect, but a recent revival of the string quartet version has been recorded by Collins Classics on compact disc in their *Series of English Song*.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Banfield, op.cit, p.58

## A BROKEN ARC

### 1. The Narrative Considered

The poetry for Somervell's second Browning cycle is drawn from a variety of the poet's works. No. 1, *Such a Starved Bank of Moss*, is the introductory poem to *The Two Poets of Croisic* of 1878; No. 2, *Meeting at Night*, and No. 4, *Nay, but you who do not love her*, are from *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, 1845; No. 3, *My Star*, and No. 6, *After*, are from *Men and Women*, 1855. In Browning's latter work, the poem *After* (the duel) is preceded by *Before* which, in its context, makes sense of why the confrontation occurred. No. 5, *The Worst of It*, comes from *Dramatis Personae*, 1864. No. 7, From 'Easter Day', is one partial stanza from *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, 1850. The final song, No. 8, *The Year's at the Spring*, is Browning's celebrated song lyric from his play, *Pippa Passes*, 1841. The table below is a summary:-

#### Browning's Lyrics

<u>Text</u>	<u>Source</u>
1 Such a Starved Bank of Moss	The Two Poets of Croisic (1878)
2 Meeting at Night	Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845)
3 My Star	Men and Women (1855)
4 Nay, but you who do not love her	Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845)
5 The Worst of it	Dramatis Personae (1864)
6 After	Men and Women (1855)
7 From 'Easter Day'	Christmas Eve and Easter Day (1850)
8 The Year's at the Spring	Pippa Passes (1841)

Dedicated to  
THE SOCIETY OF ENGLISH SINGERS.

# A BROKEN ARC

SONG CYCLE

THE POEMS BY

ROBERT BROWNING

SET TO MUSIC

BY

ARTHUR SOMERVELL.

PRICE 5/- NET

BOOSEY & C<sup>o</sup>  
295 REGENT STREET LONDON W  
AND  
3 EAST SEVENTH STREET NEW YORK

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The success of a narrative rests on a convincing storyline. When that story is related in a song cycle of generally not more than twelve songs of about thirty minutes duration in total, it is necessary that each song focuses on an important and relevant piece of information that propels the listener onward logically to the next number and thence to a plausible conclusion. It is disappointing that *A Broken Arc* fails on both those counts. When a story is put together from different unrelated sources, the elements, coming from different surroundings and situations, are not fully compatible in idea or language. But the basic idea, with more careful selections of verse, could have produced an entertaining scenario. It is a pity that Somervell did not write an explanatory preamble to assist the listener as he had done in *Maud*. Although the publication date of the cycle is 1923 it seems unlikely that the cycle was written in total at just before that time. The idea of *A Broken Arc* may have germinated when Somervell had written his first Browning cycle, *James Lee's Wife*, in 1907. Perhaps in setting one or two individual songs that caught his eye he had seen the possibility of forming another cycle. The project may have evolved during many years, interrupted perhaps by the first world war. It is also possible that during the war years he had re-worked *James Lee's Wife* for string quartet, published in 1919, which rekindled the idea of *A Broken Arc*, published four years later. It is all supposition, of course, but it does seem likely that *A Broken Arc* resulted from a long process of evolution. Somervell was eager to promote his new work as a letter to Mr. Boosey, the publisher, dated 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1923, reveals:- 'I am most anxious that this new cycle of mine . . . should have every chance given to it. I notice that whenever a new work is coming out, by one of the new English school for example, there is always a paragraph about it in the papers a few days in advance. The cycle will be sung for the

first time on Thursday aft(ernoon) June 14<sup>th</sup> at 3 o'clock in the Wigmore Hall by Mr. Gilbert Bailey . . . Could you send some such notice . . . embodying these points, to the papers?"<sup>1</sup>

Stephen Banfield<sup>2</sup> considers *A Broken Arc* to be Somervell's best cycle. He, also, suggests that the songs may have been composed earlier than the publication date and assembled later as a cycle. The uncertainty about their dates prompts the question of whether *A Broken Arc* really was the last in the line of Somervell's song cycles, a later work demonstrating his mature style, or was it simply a compilation of earlier Browning settings from which Somervell contrived a narrative? The answer to the riddle remains elusive, but nevertheless it must be said that the narrative result is flawed and unsatisfactory. It begins promisingly with Nos. 1 and 2 describing the hero's joy when the beloved entered and transformed his dreary life. Secret nocturnal assignations followed in which the hero crossed water and land to keep their rendez-vous. The narrative is put on hold here whilst in songs 3 and 4 the hero is euphoric on the object of his affections – she is his 'star'; there is nothing in the world with which to compare her. At this point there is an unexpected hiatus in the plot. Following the two ecstatic love songs we learn in song 5 that his 'star', his mistress of 'pure gold', shines less brilliantly than he had enthused, with the shocking revelation that she has betrayed her unsuspecting suitor with his friend. We are not told when this happened or for how long she had been false but in song 5 the deed has been done. This gap in our knowledge is a weakness in the story, like a missing piece from a jigsaw or a chapter from a book. An explanatory

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis Foreman, *From Parry to Britten: British Music in Letters* (1987), p.127

<sup>2</sup>Stephen Banfield, *op.cit.*, p.60

song here would have smoothed the progression, maybe a substitute, dare one say, for one of the two laudatory songs (Nos. 3 or 4), giving a more even balance to the narrative. At song No. 6, another surprise; the cad is dead without our foreknowledge of the duel that has taken place between the two rivals. Again, the gap is too large to bridge. We learn in this song that the hero had taken his revenge but in the previous song there was no inkling in his mild reproof of the beloved, that he felt inflamed enough to take such extreme action. Here the plot, such as it was, ends. The last two songs, Nos. 7 and 8, are the obligatory Somervellian conclusion. In No. 7 the hero prays that God will see him through his grief to a 'Better Land' and No. 8 is the final reassurance that everything in God's world is beautiful and happening just as He planned.

The feebleness of the storyline does not, unfortunately, prove whether it came together by accident or design but perhaps the music holds clues, stylistically and tonally, to show that the eight songs of *A Broken Arc* were a predetermined unit and these factors will be examined later in more detail. However, a blanket view of the question of 'key' suggests that whilst there may be key links between some of the songs, there is no organised pattern. The first four are carefree love songs, all in major keys, with mediant and subdominant links. Songs 5 to 7 speak of betrayal, remonstrance, tragedy, all negatively angled circumstances, and are in Somervell's dark, minor, keys. All the songs have tonic endings but the final B flat major chord of the penultimate number 'resolves' on to the final song, No. 8 in F major, as a sign of reassurance. The table below shows the tonal progression:-



<u>Song no.</u>	<u>Title</u>		<u>Key</u> <u>Begins</u>
1	Such a starved bank of moss	love	[ E major C major E flat major A flat major/dom
2	Meeting at night		
3	My Star		
4	Nay, but you who do not love her		
5	The worst of it	tribulation ↓ hope	[ E flat minor B minor/dom F# B flat minor
6	After		
7	Easter Day		
8	The Year's at the Spring		F major

The word 'group' is used deliberately and may be significant for there does seem to be an unmarked division between songs 1 to 4 and 5 to 8. At the final analysis the observation may not shed any further light on the songs' chronology and we may simply note that the distinction between the groups is one of mood —the first is happy and optimistic and the second mostly sad and philosophical.

There is, however, an important difference in the status of the songs of the two groups which is more to do with style. Although in *A Broken Arc* songs 1 to 4 are the preamble to the main drama, they would separate very well as a group of four Browning love songs; indeed, the breakdown might be carried further for each song is complete in itself and therefore suitable for single rendition or within other groups without loss of meaning. By contrast, the second group, songs 5 to 8, by nature of their individual roles in the drama, are meaningless without, and dependent upon, each other — but perhaps No. 8 may be detached from the others as a 'stand alone'. Generally speaking, each song is perceived as through-composed, that is, the separate strophes are not clear-cut. The approach is towards the orchestral style of cycle and if Somervell's other cycles may be distinguished by a certain style then *A Broken Arc* should be placed beside *James Lee's*

*Wife*. The setting of texts to an orchestral accompaniment in *James Lee's Wife* marked a maturing of Somervell's style. Not only did the kaleidoscope of varied instrumental timbres inject colour and life into interpretation but expanded his vision of a song and song cycle beyond the hereto parochial boundaries. That process continues in *A Broken Arc*. Being set for pianoforte accompaniment, its potential for colour and texture is somewhat circumscribed, but the considerable development in the piano writing, suggesting the emulation of an orchestra, indicates that Somervell's conception of the song cycle had moved from a nineteenth-century intimate form, into something of a more substantial nature. But it is not only *James Lee's Wife's* orchestral style that puts *A Broken Arc* in the same niche. The two Browning cycles focus upon very common causes for the breakup of human relationships, indifference (*James Lee's Wife*) and infidelity (*A Broken Arc*). The immediate details of *A Broken Arc* perhaps typecast the 'plot' as historical romantic fiction but the very nub of the drama, betrayal, viewed from a longer perspective, interprets its essence to a modern audience. Regarded in that way in could be considered topical – or would be if it were not for the Victorian, 'Better Land', ending. *The Betrayal* might have been a better title, as preparation for the startling breach in the storyline.

## 2. Songs of Contrast

### Four Songs of Sweetness (1 to 4)

When a composer looks for a lyric for an individual song he would surely select a poem that he could use in its entirety, not too long and without the necessity for cuts. The first four songs of *A Broken Arc* are all love songs and generally conform to that dictum; they are self-contained and may be sung individually without poetic or musical detriment. No.

2, *Meeting at Night*, does have action but would not suffer from being taken out of context. The first of the quartet, *Such a Starved Bank of Moss*, describes in metaphoric language the transformation of the narrator's life when he fell in love. In many ways this opening song, tastefully restrained, is similar stylistically to the first song of *James Lee's Wife* and the modified strophic form is skilfully shaped. Mood painting is achieved mostly by dynamics and harmonic sideslips and compare how the music of line 3, verse 1, is re-used but remodelled as line 1, verse 3, in Examples 15a/b below. The lowered registral level and modification of interval at 'walled' (1b) infuses a new meaning:-

Ex.15a: *Such a starved bank of moss*

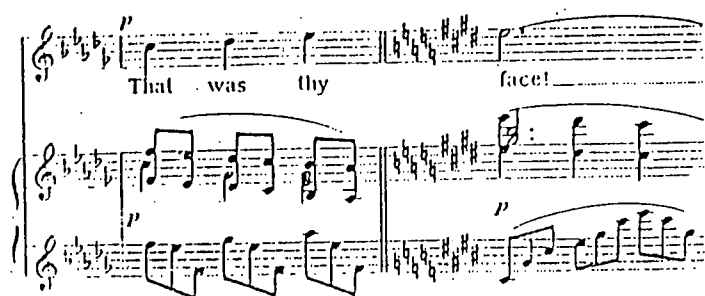
Ex.15b: *Such a starved bank of moss*

The same example (15b) shows an effective use of dissonance in the piano chords, underlining the negativity of 'walled' and '(dis)grace'. The first four notes of the vocal melody at Ex. 15b (modified by interval) lead the song similarly to its final, exquisite, revelation but in inversion, both of direction and dynamic. The progression towards an

expected perfect cadence on D flat at 'That was thy face', is artfully and aptly foiled.

Examples 16 and 15b show Somervell's self-assurance in handling tonal manoeuvres:-

Ex. 16: *Such a starved bank of moss*



The constant throb of the triplet accompaniment, at times combined with paired quavers, as at Ex. 16 above and between verses 2 and 3, gives forward impulse and continuity:-

Ex. 17: *Such a starved bank of moss*



The song's tempo, *Andante con moto*, looks back again to *James Lee's Wife*. Michael Pilkington<sup>3</sup> thinks the song is 'rather staid' and for an opening number it does tend towards reserve but its easy flow, unaffected melody and co-ordination of the vocal and piano lines create an atmosphere of relaxed charm.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Pilkington, op.cit, p.72

In earlier songs Somervell was seen to approach the key of a new song obliquely, perhaps beginning with dominant harmony that does not cadence until some time later but in *Meeting at Night*, Song no. 2, the C major tonality is established from the outset with an unequivocal bass tonic chord although its impact is softened due to the lowered dynamic. Again, the tempo, *Andantino*, is on the same lines as the previous number, but the song's subject prompts a contrasting programmatic approach. Its language is atmospheric, 'grey sea', 'long black land', 'yellow half moon, large and low', etc. Musical descriptions of the sea occur in previous song cycles – *The Night Bird* and *O, What comes over the sea* from *Love in Springtime* and *High over the breakers* from *Wind Flowers*. Works in other genres on a nautical theme include the orchestral *Ode to the Sea* and *Thalassa* Symphony. His piano accompaniment here represents the sea's ebb and flow in ostinato-like figurations. See, for example, the piano introduction at Ex. 18a and the movement of the waves in 'fiery ringlets' at Ex. 18b below:-

Ex. 18a: *Meeting at night*

Andantino.

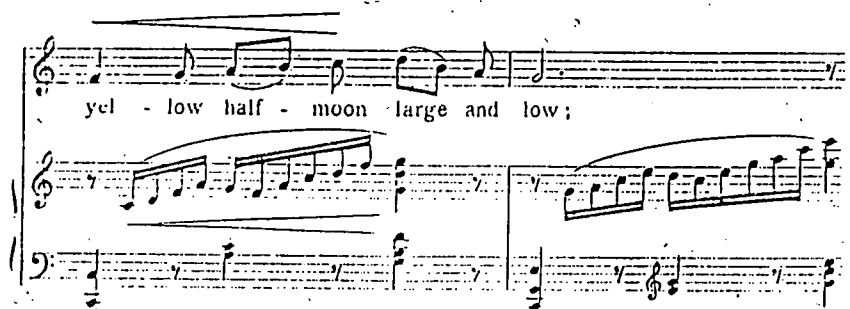
The

Ex. 18b: *Meeting at night*

leap In fie - ry ring - lets

The quietness of night and secret adventure is portrayed in the slow compound rhythm of the smoothly moving vocal lines (see Example 18c). Examples 18b/c also show the freedom of vocal and instrumental lines, an increasing feature of Somervell's late style and of the songs of, especially, *A Broken Arc*:-

Ex. 18c: *Meeting at night*



The young man's excitement grows as he lands the boat and the accompaniment echoes his heartbeat. As he approaches his rendez-vous, tonal shifts describe the long journey's changes of scene. The tone increases gradually towards his goal and finally united with his beloved, the music is triumphant in C major, closing on a sustained vocal tonic, supported by undulating instrumental arpeggios related to the 'sea' ostinato of the first verse.

In contrast to the final *ff* triumph of the lovers' meeting, the quietness and delicacy of the third love song, *My Star*, at first sight looks back to *Dainty Little Maidens*, the second song from the second cycle, *Love in Springtime*. In the earlier song Somervell had captured the idea of daintiness with arpeggiated grace-notes attached to the piano's melodic line in a two-bar quasi-ostinato. And Somervell has taken that idea for *My Star* (the suitor's metaphor for his beloved) in an almost identical way. Perhaps he equated the youthful sparkle and honesty of Browning's 'star' with the daintiness and innocence

of the little girl. In both songs the ostinato's beginning melody shadows the vocal line, see Examples 19a/b, but in *My Star* the lines become freer as the song continues:-

Ex. 19a: *Dainty Little Maidens*

Ex. 19b: *My Star*

In *My Star* the ostinato moves to G flat major and B flat major chords at reference in the text to the star's darts of red and blue (see Example 20a below). The idea is not dissimilar to the figuration in *On the cliff (James Lee's Wife)*, describing the blue and red colours of the cricket and butterfly (see Example 20b):-

Ex. 20a: *My Star*

Ex. 20b: *On the cliff*

The text of *Dainty Little Maidens*, two strophes identical in form and metre are ideal material to use with a limiting ostinato. But the Browning poem with its irregularities of line and metre bring difficulties with word setting. The poetic form of *My Star* is an unusual thirteen lines which separate metrically into two units of nine and four lines. The nine lines comprise two quatrains, enjambed, rhyming *abab cdcd* in lines of iambic and anapaestic dimeter plus a ninth line in Alexandrine style, rhyming *d* (but here the metre has only four feet). This oddly (different) rhythmic line links with the remaining four lines which continue with four-beat lines. The final, thirteenth, line is also Alexandrine in character (in trochaic hexameter) which, through its irregularity and position, link it with line nine. The text, reproduced below, illustrates the poetic links:-

*My Star*

9	a	<i>All I know</i>		
	b	<i>Of a certain star</i>		
	a	<i>Is, it can throw</i>		
	b	<i>(Like the angled spar)</i>		
	c	<i>Now a dart of red,</i>		
	d	<i>Now a dart of blue;</i>		
	c	<i>Till my friends have said</i>		
	d	<i>They would fain see, too,</i>	links by rhyme	
	d	<i>My star that dartles the red and the blue.</i>	links by metre	
4	e	<i>Then it stops like a bird; like a flower hangs furl'd:</i>		
	f	<i>They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.</i>		
	e	<i>What matter to me if their star is a world?</i>		
	f	<i>Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.</i>		

Somervell's response is to use the ostinato and vocal line with freedom, setting the text close to speech articulation, with some word repetition, in even and dotted rhythms and triplets, whilst the ostinato continues to repeat, with variations, as necessary (see Example 21 below):-



Ex. 21: *My Star*

Mine has opened its soul to me; Mine has opened its soul to me;

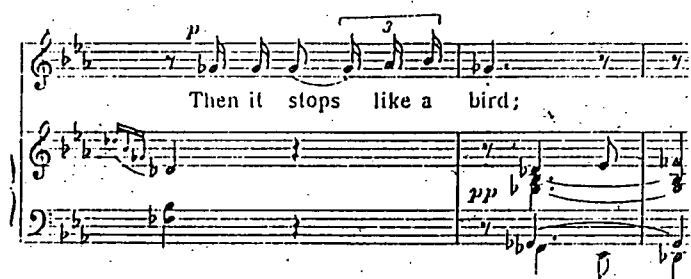
This treatment is on a higher and more mature level of sophistication than seen in the earlier song but, of course, the simple strophic design of *Dainty Little Maidens* matches the simplicity of its theme. Some twenty years on, however, the endings are similarly concise (see Examples 22a/b):-

Ex. 22a: *Dainty Little Maidens*

Ex. 22b: *My Star*

love it,

Somervell does not like to miss an opportunity for word-painting and the cessation of the relentless ostinato at 'Then it stops like a bird' is both dramatic and effective. It is the only time in the music when the voice is unsupported (see Example 23a):-

Ex. 23a: *My Star*

A similar instance occurs in the previous song, *Meeting at Night*, when in an otherwise continuous legato vocal line, a short break in the motion at 'a tap' and the rhythm at 'quick, sharp', helps to relieve, briefly, what might have become a wearisome melody (see Example 23b):-

Ex. 23b: *Meeting at night*

Following the tonic chordal ending, E flat, of *My Star*, the fourth song, in A flat major, begins on its dominant, E flat, thus maintaining the sense of continuing sound and movement and the song itself continues that momentum. The poem, *Nay, but you who do not love her*, is a monologue addressed to the listener who is entreated to agree that the Beloved is the most adorable creature on earth. The two regularly metrical stanzas which Somervell sets through-composed has a break in the vocal line between the two strophes to allow the suitor to catch his breath. Neither rhythm, nor melody, nor phrase length has formality and syncopation denies the predictable. The accompaniment is a rapid

succession of arpeggios on unstable harmony which does not settle until towards the end of the last line on an extended full close (see Example 24a):-

Ex. 24a: *Nay, but you who do not love her*



Pictorial touches here and there happen so quickly that they are almost subliminal, such as the interval's drop at 'fall' (see Example 24b):-

Ex. 24b: *Nay but you who do not love her*

*Allegro Vivace*



The beloved's flowing locks of hair are depicted in streams of arpeggios and long vocal notes and the music is swept along by the adoring suitor's infatuation, brought to an elated climax with an unequivocal tonic ending. *Nay but you who do not love her* would be a very suitable conclusion to the four love songs if they were sung as a group.

### Three Songs of Sorrow (5 to 7)

The style of songs 5 to 7 sets them apart from the four that precedes them, lending weight to the possibility that they were composed at different times. With their drama, tragedy and declamation combined with a broader perspective, their style is operatic and would be more effectively performed on stage with orchestra than in a salon or concert room. Somervell's orchestral song cycle, *James Lee's Wife*, had undoubtedly expanded his vision of the combination of music and drama in song. For Somervell, it was a rediscovery of an incipient interest that began with the dramatic *Maud* cycle a quarter of a century earlier. His period of the song cycle had come full circle.

As a final song of the previous group not only does the climactic ending of No. 4 effect a catharsis for performers and audience alike but also as a centrepiece it creates a false sense of happy expectancy. Unless the programme notes carry the text of the songs or a *résumé* of events there is no preparation or logic for the devastating unfoldment of song 5, *The Worst of It*, although the extreme contrasts of emotion in the two songs make stunning drama. Unlike the foregoing quartet which were without musical links, songs 5 to 7 contain thematic couplings whose source is song No. 5. A book by R. W. Butterfield<sup>4</sup> is his study of the life and work of the American poet, Hart Crane, whose emotional frame of mind vacillated from low moods of blackness and despair to ones of euphoria. His perception of hell was the mundanity of everyday living which he attempted to transcend with drug-taking and immoral activity. For him there was no medial plane of existence. The book's title was *The Broken Arc*, an 'arc' being Butterfield's symbol for the span of life, broken in Crane's case because he was unable

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<sup>4</sup> R.W.Butterfield, *The Broken Arc* (1969)

to bridge the two extremes. It is assumed that the duplicity revealed in song 5 is the 'broken arc' of Somervell's title; an arc or rainbow of love and trust, ruptured by the transgressor, perhaps. The complete poem, nineteen stanzas in which the suitor, whilst acknowledging the unfaithfull's fall from grace, takes the blame upon himself and urges her to repent in a life of virtue. Somervell selects the most part of three strophes, avoiding the diatribe of inquisition and self-rebuke. The key of *The Worst of It*, E flat minor, is the dominant minor of the previous song; its manner of performance is *Sostenuto*. The piano gives sparing chordal support to a declamatory-like vocal line where, at times, Somervell sets the ample word flow to triplet rhythm as he had done in *My Star* (see Example 25):-

Ex. 25: *The worst of it*



The style of the first six lines, which is also the first poetic stanza, is largely quasi-recitative but punctuated with melodic segments, as the suitor, although addressing the Beloved is, in fact, thinking aloud, incredulous and trying to reconcile himself with the unthinkable. The next four lines from stanza 5 entreat her to ask God's pardon; nevertheless this earth is not worthy of her but heaven may be more deserving. The suitor's remarkable forbearance can be understood only through his interpretation of the falsehood. He perceives her action to be a sin, not against himself, but God, and Somervell responds to that forgiveness with a section of emotional vocal melody,

concluding with a poignant tritone leap on to A (sharp) which also has enharmonic significance (the publishers have failed to insert an editorial sharpening of the vocal A in the printed score; without a manuscript we do not know if the omission was Somervell's, but it is clearly a mistake). The vocal A sharp, a pivot, becomes the piano's B flat which initiates a slowly rising arpeggio to an atmospheric appoggiatura, resolving in the final strophe on the tonic chord (see Example 26 below):-

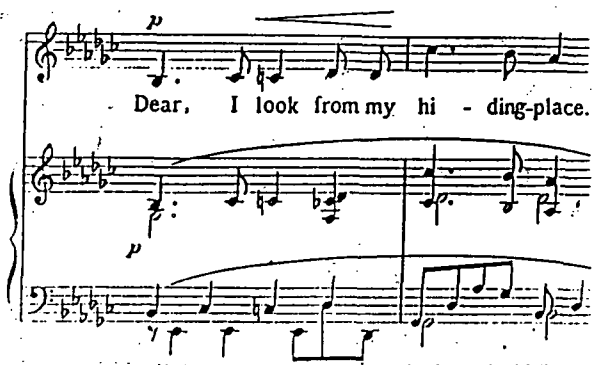
Ex. 26: *The worst of it*

Banfield<sup>5</sup> has called this arpeggio the 'sadness' motive. Its origins are in the spread piano chords of verse 1 (see Example 27):-

Ex. 27: *The worst of it*

The final verse comes into its own, opening out the fragment of introduction (see Example 27, above, and example 28):-

<sup>5</sup>Stephen Banfield, op.cit, p.63

Ex. 28: *The worst of it*

Declamation, melody, chromatic harmony, together make an unforgettable centrepiece. Stephen Banfield thinks it is Somervell's best song. Somervell himself liked it enough to use the setting of the third strophe verbatim in *Come to me in my dreams*, but a semitone higher, which he published with two other songs in 1935 as *Three Songs with Piano*.

The narrative continues, with gaps explained above, in the sixth song, *After* (the duel). Another enharmonic pivot transports the key into B minor through a G flat in the final chord of the previous song. This becomes the F sharp dominant of the new key from where Somervell begins his disjointed piano introduction as preparation for the grim scene. It is in stark contrast to the spent emotion in *The Worst of It*, as the betrayed looks on dispassionately at the corpse of his false friend. But this song is in similar style to the others and especially the previous one. Somervell sets the whole poem; a couplet at both beginning and end frames two inner stanzas, of eight and six lines respectively. The two terse couplets are set appropriately in recitative style. The first is followed by a bleak piano ostinato above which the free vocal line is angular, solemn and *adagio* (see Example 29):-

Ex. 29: *After*

Ex. 29: *After*. This musical score is for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "worst!" (p), "How he lies in his rights of a man!" (p), and "Dea" (mf). The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, treble and bass, in the same key and time. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note bass line. Dynamics include piano (p) and mezzo-forte (mf).

The tension is relieved by the suitor's remembrance of times past when the dead man and he were boyhood friends. Somervell recalls the memory with a poignant vocal line above an accompaniment whose melody quotes verbatim a similar section of nostalgia from his own *Intimations of Immortality* at the entry of the bass soloist (see examples 30a/b):-

Ex. 30a: *After*

Ex. 30a: *After*. This musical score is for a vocal and piano piece. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "I would we were boys as of old In the field, by the fold:" (p). The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, treble and bass, in the same key and time. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note bass line. Dynamics include piano (p).

Ex. 30b: *Intimations of Immortality*

Ex. 30b: *Intimations of Immortality*. This musical score is for a bass solo and piano piece. The bass line is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It begins with the tempo marking "Andante sostenuto." and the instruction "BASS SOLO." followed by the lyrics "There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream," (pp). The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, treble and bass, in the same key and time. The right hand plays a series of chords, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note bass line. Dynamics include piano (pp).



The piano interlude preceding that section of fond memories (*After*) also incorporates a familiar fragment from the accompaniment of the previous song, *The worst of it*, where the suitor is in a forgiving mood for old times' sake (see Exx.31a/b respectively):-

Ex. 31a: *After*



Ex. 31b: *The worst of it*



The final brusque order, 'Cover the face', follows a chromatic sequence of piano chords, related in pattern to those of the piano introduction to song 5 (*The worst of it*), perhaps underlining sadness at the loss of two dear friends due to their treachery (see example 32 and example 27 above):-

Ex. 32: *After*



The piano ostinato noted above at example 29 concludes, rendered even more stark by right hand intervallic chords (see Example 32).

The third of the theme-linked songs, No. 7 in the sequence, is all but the first line of stanza 31 from *Easter Day*. The poem is a dramatic monologue in which the speaker wrestles with the issues of God's love for mankind, of man's unworthiness and the hope of salvation because of the Resurrection:-

*Thank God, no paradise stands barred  
To entry, and, I find it hard  
To be a Christian . . .  
. . . But Easter-Day breaks! But  
Christ rises! Mercy every way  
Is Infinite . . .*

*From 'Easter Day', XXXIII, 1029-31 & 1038-40*

The problems of drawing poetic material from different sources to create something new has already been touched upon. That Browning's struggle with the wider questions of life and death in thirty-three stanzas should be reduced to a mere twelve lines for inclusion in a narrative about romantic infidelity is a case of composers' licence. However, although the graft may be to a less noble situation, the victim rises above the desire to seek revenge, riding life's storms with whatever strength he can muster and one day, hopefully, reach a 'Better Land'.

The tonality slips downwards a semitone to B flat minor. In this and the previous song, *After*, in B minor, Somervell again finds that the 'B' tonalities correspond to the various angles on Death, as he had done with the three Rossetti songs in *Love in Springtime* (see discussion on pp.96-102). The stealth of moving semitonally from key to key also adds another dimension to the mood that is being created. The tempo is *molto sostenuto*. Somervell sets the lines as a prayer, a desperate plea for a crumb of hope. The

song begins with an arpeggio rising two-and-a-half octaves to a pregnant pause on the vocal entry note and the soloist's anguished cry, directed to be performed *ad lib*, begins like recitative. This dramatic opening sets the tone for the most part of the song. The vocal cry is based on the ostinato from the previous song (see example 29 above and example 33):-

Ex. 33: *From 'Easter Day'*

Molto sostenuto. *ad lib.*  
Thou love of God! Or let me die.  
*colla voce.*

Though through-composed Somervell has perceived the text in two distinct sections. In the first, as far as the words 'Be all the earth a wilderness', the tonality remains within the B flat minor boundary. The piano accompaniment is driven mostly by the turbulent arpeggios and sequences which are linked to song 5; compare passages from the two songs at example 31 above and example 34 below:-

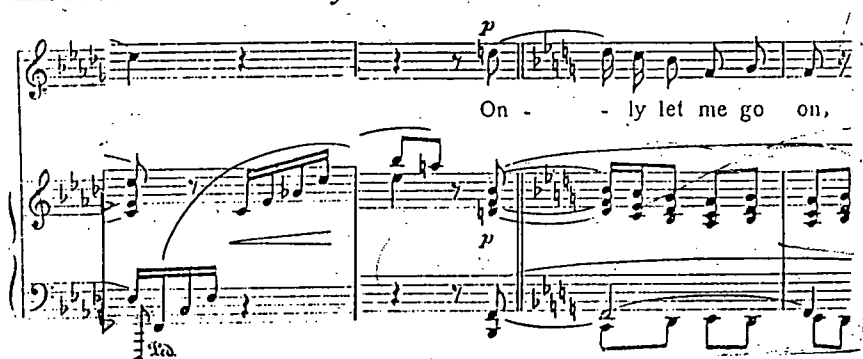
Ex. 34: *From 'Easter Day'*

*poco agitato.*  
With darkness, hunger, toil, dis-tress:  
*colla voce*

Above the demanding piano accompaniment is a vacillating solo line, chromatic, tortured, dramatic. At the section's end the piano sounds the 'sadness' motive from song

no.5. In the last three lines of the poem there is a ray of hope. The suitor is mustering courage to face the future and the key reflects that optimism as it shifts subtly upward into the tonic major (B flat). The music returns to the opening vocal line, now, together with the piano ostinato, in a very different shade, referred to above at example 33 and see example 35:-

Ex. 35: From '*Easter Day*'



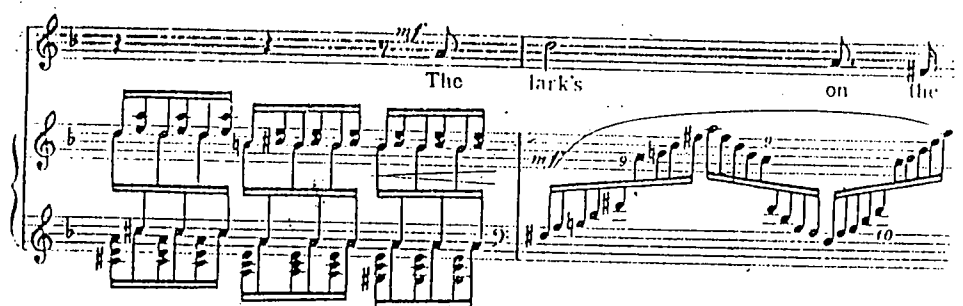
The second section is contrasting – broader, stable and calm with full chords in Somervell's '*Better Land*' style in which there are remembrances from the vocal line of example 35.

### A Song of Solace (8)

The final chord of *Easter Day* (song 7) is the sub-dominant of the key of the next, final, song, *The Year's at the Spring*, which begins on the tonic chord of F major with an added sixth, functioning as an appoggiatura; in effect, therefore, the penultimate song resolves on to the final number as a plagal cadence. This move sharp may be interpreted as a sign of optimism. The eight lines of the song from Browning's play are regular in metre and rhyme, *abcdabcd* and Somervell repeats the first four lines to create three strophes. Verses 1 and 2 are very similar but the second modulates briefly to the mediant (A major). The piano accompaniment shimmers in a rocking motion of split chords

giving an effect of undefined sound (and would sound very effective on orchestral strings). Above, the simple vocal line has an air of spontaneity but in fact, keeps close to the piano's harmony. In the third verse beginning 'The Lark's on the Wing', the accompaniment takes off with rippling arpeggios. The vocal line has a different melody in this final verse but as in the first two strophes, stays with the underlying harmony. The arpeggiated accompaniment, of which there are many more-modest examples in Somervell's earlier song output, in this last cycle are scaled up considerably in difficulty. The advancement in piano technique and final chord and key connection with its predecessor, referred to above, are indications that the last song was written with the three that preceded it or is a product of his more mature style. But the unrelated material may be a clue to its being a separate creation. The example below illustrates the piano accompaniment; the split chords, ostinato-like of verses 1 and 2 and arpeggios for verse 3 (see example 36 below):-

Ex. 36: *The Year's at the Spring*



The end is drawn out with word repetition in a mounting vocal climax to an extended dominant, before resolution, together with an impressive piano display, demonstrating that:-

*God's in His heaven –  
All's right with the world*

## APPENDIX A

### The Manuscript Sources:

#### A Comparison of the two *Maud* Manuscripts

London, Royal College of Music, Parry Room:-

MS 4772, *Maud*, Autograph

MS 4773, *A Shropshire Lad*, Autograph

MS 4788, *James Lee's Wife*, for Contralto Solo, String Quartet and Piano

MS 4789, *James Lee's Wife*, 4 string parts and arranged for Voice and Piano

London, British Library:-

MS 71212, *Maud*,

London, Boosey & Hawkes (Hire Library):-

Unnumbered MS, *James Lee's Wife*, for Contralto Solo and Orchestra (incorrectly catalogued as *James Lee's Suite*)

The manuscript of *Maud* held by the Royal College of Music, London, is a late draft and may indeed be the final copy from which Boosey and Co. prepared their first edition of 12 songs (see Plate 3, between pages 18-19). Dated 1898, it is a complete set of 13 songs in the order in which they were published in 1907. It is inscribed, 'To Edie', presumably Somervell's wife whose name was Edith. In a few of the songs the score shows occasional minor differences, both musical and textual. Song number 6 (*Maud has a garden*) was not included in the original publication, 1898, of 12 songs although it was conceived along with the others as the manuscript shows. For some reason Somervell extracted it and re-numbered the songs from 6 to 12. In the second edition of 1907 containing 13 songs (12 plus an 'Epilogue') the song was re-instated to its former

position. (The word 'Epilogue' does not appear in the manuscript but that title is used in Somervell's programme note to the score, see Plate 5, between pages 27-28). Slotted into the manuscript behind the original number 6, *Maud has a garden*, is another loose manuscript of the song which has the vocal line pitched an octave lower in the bass clef. In nearly all other respects the two manuscripts are the same. The crossings out through the introductory bars of song number 9 (*Come into the garden Maud*) indicate that Somervell had misgivings about the opening. There are two ideas for a piano introduction. One, eight bars long, is deleted with an explanatory note, also crossed through. The song had been written originally without introduction and the speed *non-troppo allegro* marked at the beginning over the vocal line, then crossed out. That direction also appears above the one-bar introduction. In the printed editions, both 1898 and the revision of 1907 it is the one-bar introduction that precedes the song.

A second manuscript of *Maud* that has come to light during the course of this project is retained by the British Library, London. It is doubtful whether there are others in private ownership but nevertheless it is a possibility as the emergence of this one illustrates. The British Library acquired their manuscript in 1993 when it was auctioned at Sotheby's in London for £850. It had been put up for sale by a private individual, Mrs C. Willshire. In her letter to me dated 28.4.97 she explained that the manuscript was given to her in 1964 by a music teacher who said that she could use the empty pages at the back to scribble on! Fortunately, realising that it might be something important, she did no such thing. Instead she wrapped it up and put it in a drawer where it had lain for 30 years. It is inscribed on the fly leaf, 'H. Entwistle Bury from Arthur Somervell, a small return for many kindnesses'. The British Library manuscript is the earlier of the

two. The first song is dated '15 Dec.1897' and the second song 'Dec. 21/97'; the other songs are undated. The set is incomplete and there are numerous differences in all the existing songs of rhythm, note values, notation, text and especially performance directions. It appears that originally a complete set of songs existed numbered through I to XIII but later number VI was withdrawn. The original number VII is re-numbered VI. The songs that follow are newly numbered from this point, not re-numbered which suggests that when Somervell decided to exclude number VI (assumed to be *Maud has a garden of roses*) he did so before writing the songs from VII upwards; in other words, he did not change his mind after the completion of the cycle which indicates that the progression of keys from one song to the next was carefully planned. The reason for removing the song is not known but perhaps at that time Somervell felt that two 'garden' songs were one too many. But there are other conundrums associated with the numbering. The consecutive numbering is from I through IX (*O that 'twere possible*'). The next song, numbered XIII, but deleted, is *My life has crept*. The songs *I have led her home*, *The fault was mine*, and *Dead, long dead* are missing. All this may be more comprehensible by looking at the following chart in which the manuscript's numbers are compared with the published numbers of 1907. It also shows that one of the missing songs, *I have led her home* was later repositioned (assuming that it is one of the missing numbers). The title *Epilogue* (Song X111) does not appear in either manuscript.



British Library MS.Boosey & Co. (1907)

Song no.                      Songs I to V are identically numbered

<i>VI</i>	<i>Go not happy day</i>	<i>Maud has a garden</i>
<i>VII</i>	<i>Come into the garden Maud</i>	<i>Go not happy day</i>
<i>VIII</i>	<i>The fault was mine</i>	<i>I have led her home</i>
<i>IX</i>	<i>O that 'twere possible</i>	<i>Come into the garden Maud</i>
<i>X</i>	<i>missing</i>	<i>The fault was mine</i>
<i>XI</i>	<i>missing</i>	<i>Dead, long dead</i>
<i>XII</i>	<i>missing</i>	<i>O that 'twere possible</i>
<i>XIII</i>	<i>My life has crept</i>	<i>Epilogue – My life has crept</i>

The British Library manuscript is written throughout with a vocal bass clef although at song number I a treble clef has been drawn, but deleted, and the bass clef substituted. And could it be that the number VI bass clef loose insertion in the Royal College of Music's manuscript is the missing number VI from the British Library set? It seems to be a strong possibility but would require a close inspection of the two, side by side.

One further interesting fact about the British Library manuscript is that the song number VII (*Come into the garden Maud*) was written in the key of A flat (RCM manuscript and printed editions are in key G). It has some unfinished sections and may have been an early draft. The manuscript seems to have miscopied from a worksheet for at a certain passage the accompaniment and vocal line are one bar out of step. And there are also textual omissions. Just after the beginning of verse 4 when there is a change of metre, a comparison with the printed edition shows this to occur one bar earlier indicating that Somervell had a rethink about the placing of natural word/musical accents. But it begs the question of why Somervell transposed the song down a semitone in the printed

edition. It was originally placed between *Go not happy day*, in F major and *The fault was mine*, in E flat minor. Bearing in mind the mood of the songs on either side, the key of A flat would have been a suitable mediator. Transposed into G and in its new position between *I have led her home*, in C major and *The fault was mine* (E flat minor), the transplant seems to be a well thought out operation.

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