Songs by Sir Hubert
Parry

Words by ‘Anon’, William Shakespeare, Richard Lovelace, George Meredith, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Sir John Suckling, Sir Walter Scott and others

STEPHEN VARCOE · CLIFFORD BENSON
The advantage of the song branch of art is that the expressive resources of music are applied for purposes which the words make plain. Where the words are thoroughly musical, and the composer particularly sensitive and skilful, the music fits the lyric at every instant, and makes the words glow with intensified meaning. (The Art of Music, 1893)

Throughout his highly productive life, Hubert Parry constantly returned to the genre of the art song as a creative ‘haven’, or as Sir Alexander Campbell Mackenzie once remarked, ‘as if to seek relief after each strenuous effort’. Mackenzie’s comment may have been true, especially since during Parry’s mature years as a composer he undertook the vicissitudes of producing annually at least one large-scale choral work for Britain’s increasing array of provincial music festivals. The physical as well as mental strain must have been considerable, and additionally there were always the administrative pressures of the Royal College of Music, numerous national committees, public lecturing and, for eight years, the Professorship of Oxford University. Yet, although song as a miniature form had certain advantages in terms of its length and economy of forces, there was never any possibility in Parry’s eyes of considering the genre as an object of light amusement or diversion. To use Charles Larcom Graves’s words, song composition was to him ‘a res severa as well as a verum gaudium’. We know this from the considerable quantity of sketches, drafts, transpositions and various fair copies that have survived in manuscript. Parry often agonized over the perfecting of a song (as Geoffrey Bush has vividly described in his introduction to his edition of selected Parry songs in Musica Britannica xlix). Dissatisfied, he would leave a work unfinished, shelve it and return to it years later when the perspective of time might have changed his view of a harmonic progression, a passage of declamation or a telling postlude. Sometimes he would feel moved to recompose the entire song on account of a few bars that grated, and would assiduously revise even after proofs of the song had come back from the printer. In short, Parry exercised an uncompromising self-criticism in his creative process, so that a song would often pass through several versions before reaching a stage which satisfied him.

Close acquaintance with Parry’s songs soon reveals the intellectual imperative of organicism and, ipso facto, the avoidance of literal repetition. These compositional values were essentially derived from his belief in the superiority of the German aesthetic. To a large extent the thinking process behind so many of Parry’s songs finds its roots in the Lieder of Brahms – he was after all a devoted disciple of Brahms’s music, and a great admirer of his songs. (An instance of this admiration can be gauged by the occasion when Parry first moved into what was to be his permanent London home at 17 Kensington Square in 1886, christening his music room with a
Brahms song sung by his friend Hugh de Fellenberg Montgomery.) The organic ideology espoused by Brahms clearly informs a sizeable proportion of Parry’s song output, not so much in the lyrical content of the vocal material or in the harmonic vocabulary used (though this is sometimes potently evident), but principally in the disciplined manner of thematic growth, motivic coherence and key structure. An understanding of these components in the creation of song is as vital a part of Parry’s method as any other, though the fluency and care with which they are executed has invariably led them to be overlooked. So often the impact of Parry’s songs depends on a subtle phraseological extension, a motivic reworking, an intervallic modification, an elaborated melisma, a registral change or an incisive tonal alteration. On the surface these may be closely allied to and motivated by textual meaning, even the illustration of a single, crucial word, but on a deeper level such moments of legerdemain find their justification within the musical argument of the work. In some of Parry’s songs one even detects that he was prepared to go beyond the Brahmsian conception into a sphere of integration that has more in common with Hugo Wolf’s methods. This can be felt in those essays where voice and piano integrate into a fabric that is thematically indivisible. In developing this technique Parry had clearly learned lessons from Wagner but at the same time had been able to harness the technique to serve the much smaller canvas of the song. Remarkable essays such as Take, O take those lips away, Through the ivory gate and Lay a garland on my hearse are conspicuous illustrations of Parry’s attempt to fuse the roles of singer and accompaniment, and curiously seem to foreshadow those practices of Wolf who so successfully compressed the elements of Wagnerian music drama into a miniature form for voice and keyboard.

It is important to emphasize the purely musical dimension of Parry’s songs because commentators have tended, almost exclusively, to concentrate on the composer’s ability to set words. Plunket Greene is one example:

For Parry the words were everything. I never heard him profess any creed or reveal the foundations of his belief, but his passionate devotion to words cries out in every song he wrote. He knew that a song is a message, that from time immemorial we have given our messages by speech or its symbols, that the more human you make it the better the singer can deliver it, and that music is the torch to read it by. Of all the great song-writers that I know no one has made it easier for the singer; and that is the highest testimony a singer can give.

J A Fuller Maitland considered that Parry was unrivalled among his countrymen owing to his exceptional ‘skill in accentuation, or as it is sometimes called declamation’, a view echoed by R O Morris, H C Colles and Ernest Walker. As a result only one major factor of Parry’s
armoury – that of verbal stress – has received any notable attention. ‘I have often wondered’, Greene wrote, ‘what Parry secretly thought of the solecisms of Brahms’s *Die Mainacht*, in which all the principal accents fall upon prepositions and conjunctions and the like, such as ‘Wann’, ‘Durch’, ‘Und’ – sometimes ‘rubbed in’ for three *sostenuto* beats in slow *tempo*; or of the ineffable banalities of such poems as *Wie bist Du, meine Königin*, or *Wir wandelten* or *Sapphische Ode* which are the nominal inspiration of three of his most lovely melodies.’ Thus an assessment of Parry’s songs was made exclusively on the grounds of his sensitivity to verbal rhythm and appropriate time-values. Of course it is true that Parry’s understanding of verbal accentuation is, for the most part, impeccable. After he had memorized the words of a poem, musical phrases, apposite rhythms and appropriate melodic contours would emerge. (Not unlike Beethoven, he would work from an embryonic sketch to something much more elaborate.) His care in this regard would allow individual syllables, words and whole sentences to flow with the rhythm of the spoken language (a technique on which Finzi was to build), making them wholly sympathetic both to singer and pianist in terms of syntax and meaning. Nevertheless, these surface details, excellent though they may be, do not really account for the broader stylistic consistency of Parry’s songs. As Greene pointed out, the words may have been paramount in Parry’s mind, but it was more than localized verbal stress that gave his songs that air of real distinction. Much more intrinsic to Parry’s innate skill as a songwriter is his understanding of the inherent intonation, scansion and cadence of English, a language so dependent on word order for the conveyance of meaning and emphasis. Indeed it is the very colour of the English language that gives Parry’s songs their characteristic phraseology and spirit which is in turn paralleled in the diversity of musical structures devised to suit each individual poem.

It was surely this appreciation of the nuance of his native tongue, and his capacity to translate it into musical gesture, that motivated Parry in his quest to create the indigenous *English Lyric*, a title exclusive to his song compositions. At the heart of the *English Lyrics* lay the richness of English poetry across the centuries and a conscious awareness of
Britain’s national literary heritage through Shakespeare, the Jacobean, the Metaphysical poets, the Augustans and the Romantics. (One suspects, incidentally, that Parry was well acquainted with Palgrave’s *The Golden Treasury (of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language)*, first published in 1861, for many of the lyrics he chose to set appear there.) But there was also room in Parry’s experience for his minor contemporaries, particularly those who could express the immediacy of his age. One of these was Julian Sturgis, an old Etonian friend, whose words were the source of some of Parry’s greatest creations, but there were others such as Mary Coleridge, Edmund Jones, Alfred Perceval Graves and the American, Langdon Elwyn Mitchell, who also spurred him on to produce songs of great individuality. Much of this poetry is undistinguished, rather giving the lie to the notion that Parry was at his finest only when setting words by the immortals. Parry could, like Brahms, be attracted to banal verse, largely because he detected a kernel of meaning which chimed with his own perception, or somehow articulated the melancholy of his own personal inner loneliness, isolation and insecurity.

Parry was exposed to solo song from an early age. His father, Thomas Gambier Parry, art collector, philanthropist and wealthy Gloucestershire landowner, enjoyed music as an amateur pursuit (even though he was actively to discourage his son from taking up the musical profession) and, having been a pupil of Sir John Goss at St Paul’s Cathedral, even composed the occasional song himself. At Eton College (1861-1866) the young Hubert’s love of literature and poetry began to develop conspicuously; indeed, on leaving school his list of ‘leaving books’ clearly reveals that, among other interests in history, philosophy and current affairs, his greatest passion (save music) was for poetry with a broad spectrum. At Eton Parry had the opportunity to entertain himself and his friends by singing songs privately and, more importantly, for the College Musical Society. This almost certainly brought him into contact with the Lieder of Mendelssohn, the songs of his great friend and contemporary, Sterndale Bennett (notably the *Sechs Gesänge*, Op 23, and the *Six Songs*, Op 35), and those of other English contemporaries such as John Liptrot Hatton (whose *To Anthea* was hugely popular), George Macfarren and Edward Loder. After three years at Eton, and after he had begun to study with Sir George Elvey at St George’s Chapel, Windsor, Parry began to produce songs of his own. His earliest song, *Fair is my love* (Spenser), dates from 1864 and was followed by at least eight other compositions. Among these were a setting of Thomas Moore’s *Why does azure deck the sky* (published in 1866) – one of the composer’s first published compositions – and several other published items including Thomas Hood’s *Autumn* (1867) and Lord Francis Hervey’s *Angel hosts, sweet love, befriend thee* (1867).
THREE SONGS Op 12

In the summer of 1867, shortly after entering Oxford, Parry studied abroad in Stuttgart with Henry Hugo Pierson, the somewhat idiosyncratic voluntary exile, who had left England permanently in the 1840s. The effect of Pierson’s teaching, besides schooling Parry in techniques of instrumentation, was to disabuse him of Mendelssohn and Handel and instead to introduce him to the merits of Bach and Schumann. Like so many of his native contemporaries, Parry had naturally developed a deference for Handel and Mendelssohn, especially during his studies under Elvey for the Oxford BMus (which he taken before leaving Eton in 1866). The aesthetic of Mendelssohn’s romantic classicism in particular was firmly ingrained in his stylistic output, as is clear from the competent but unadventurous songs of his Eton days and from the colourless exercise, O Lord, Thou hast cast us out, written for his Oxford degree. It was a stylistic mindset that was hard to shake off, but Pierson’s initiation marked the beginning of a new outlook that would eventually reject Mendelssohn in favour of Schumann. This process is clearly underway in the Three Songs, Op 12 (composed in May 1872), where Mendelssohn is still in evidence, but one can also observe a greater harmonic and technical resource (most obviously in the third song) that can only have been gleaned from acquaintance with Schumann’s piano music and songs. A Poet’s Song (track 1), taken from Tennyson’s English Idylls and other Poems (1842), is one such example of a simple, strophic lyric that rises above the banality of the ‘royalty ballad’ (a commercial instrument used so successfully by publishers to advertise their songs through the support of a famous singer). This is largely owing to the effective use of the internal, Chopinesque pedal point (evocative perhaps of the ‘fallen rain’), the touching shift to the flat mediant to capture the rapt moment of the nightingale’s song (‘that made the wild swan pause on her cloud’) and the modified second verse with its sighing coda. More fond than Cushat Dove 2, by Thomas Barham, captures the delight of lovers meeting in secret after dark. Tender and melodious, its language harks back more to Mendelssohn in its harmonic simplicity, feminine cadences and accompanimental figurations, sure evidence that Parry had not yet freed himself from the influences of his youth. However, with Shelley’s highly popular lyric Music 3 (from Posthumous Poems, 1824), Parry was moved to compose his most sophisticated song to date. The second line of the poem (‘Vibrates in the memory’) evidently played a major part in his interpretation since a sizeable portion of the song is preoccupied with imitation of the vocal line by the piano (at varying distances and in different registers). This intercourse between voice and piano gives rise to a much more fluid phraseology which is itself enhanced by the absence of obvious cadential points. In addition, the whole fabric of the song is motivically tauter in conception. This is not only evident in the development of the first vocal figure, but also in the
use of the preludial idea in the left hand of the piano, which, besides heading each verse and closing off the song, appears subtly in augmentation in the voice just before the coda (‘shall slumber on’).

Parry sent his *Three Songs* to Joseph Barnby in the hope that he might recommend them to Novello. But he was to be disillusioned. Barnby could not recommend them. ‘The publication of such music could only benefit you,’ Barnby exclaimed, ‘and at the expense of publishing them at your own cost and giving away the copies in every direction. Forgive me speaking so plainly. Even Sir Sterndale Bennett’s classical works are in a business point of view almost worthless when compared with Brinley Richards and Blumenthal.’ Fortunately Parry was not deterred. The songs were published in 1873 by Lamborn Cock who also took on *A Garland of Shakespearean and Other Old-Fashioned Songs*, Op 21, in 1874.

1 **The Poet’s Song**

The rain had fallen, the Poet arose,  
He pass’d by the town and out of the street,  
A light wind blew from the gates of the sun,  
And waves of the shadow went over the wheat,  
And he sat him down in a lonely place,  
And chanted a melody loud and sweet,  
That made the wild swan pause on her cloud,  
And the lark drop down at his feet.

The swallow stopt as he hunted the bee,  
The snake slipt under the spray,  
The wild hawk stood with the down on his beak,  
And stared with his foot on the prey,  
And the nightingale thought, “I have sung many songs,  
But never one so gay,  
For he sings of what the world will be  
When the years have died away.”

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON (1809-1892)

2 **More fond than Cushat Dove**

There sits a bird on yonder tree,  
More fond than Cushat dove;  
There sits a bird on yonder tree,  
And sings to me of love.  
Oh stoop thee from thine eyrie down,  
And nestle thee near my heart,  
For the moments fly and the hour is nigh,  
When thou and I must part,  
My love! when thou and I must part.

In yonder covert lurks a fawn,  
The pride of sylvan scene:  
In yonder covert lurks a fawn,  
And I am his only queen:  
Oh! bound from thy secret lair,  
For the sun is below the west:  
Nor mortal eye may our meeting spy,  
For all are closed in rest,  
My love! each eye is closed in rest.

Oh! sweet is the breath of morn,  
When the sun’s first beams appear;  
Oh! sweet is the shepherd’s strain,  
When it dies on the list’ning ear.
Oh! sweet the soft voice that speaks
The wanderer’s welcome home;
But sweeter far by yon pale mild star,
With our true love thus to roam,
My dear! with our own true love to roam.

THOMAS BARHAM

Music

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

Rose leaves, when the rose is dead,
Are heap’d for the beloved’s bed;
And so thy thoughts, when thou art gone,
Love itself shall slumber on.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792-1822)

ENGLISH LYRICS

In 1873 Parry began to study with Edward Dannreuther, perhaps one of the most radical musicians in London at the time. With his catholic taste for the old and new, Dannreuther exerted an immense influence on his pupil. At the series of semi-private chamber concerts at 12 Orme Square, Bayswater, Dannreuther’s London home, Parry was exposed both to the wealth of classical and romantic chamber music and to the best of the continental Lieder tradition. It was here, in the hothouse of Dannreuther’s studio, that he came into contact with the song repertoire of Berlioz, Raff, Franz, Goetz, Wagner (his Fünf Gedichte), Liszt, Brahms and Dannreuther’s own Pre-Raphaelite effusions A Golden Guendolen and Love-Lily. Out of this heady maelstrom emerged Parry’s first serious song compositions, inspired primarily by his enthusiasm for Schumann and Brahms. His Four Sonnets by William Shakespeare (with texts in both English and German) were begun in 1873, but continued to be revised until the early 1880s. Written under the supervision of Sir George Macfarren, these songs demonstrate a new-found confidence in the handling of a modern harmonic apparatus. By the time Set I of the English Lyrics was published in 1885 (comprising songs composed between 1881 and 1885), Parry had fully assimilated the organic propensity of Brahms and the harmonic piquancy of Schumann, and he was able to ally these to his own brand of lyrical diatonicism.

Take, O take those lips away

Set II of the English Lyrics was published by Stanley Lucas, Weber in 1886 and was devoted exclusively to the poetry of Shakespeare. The entire set was dedicated to Parry’s wife, Maude (née Herbert), sister of the 13th Earl of Pembroke. Take, O take those lips away, sung by A Boy
(to Mariana) in Measure for Measure (Act IV Scene 1), was completed in the autumn of 1881 and taken to Dannreuther for perusal. It received its first performance at Orme Square on 1 December that year along with My true love hath my heart (eventually destined for Set I) and one of the Four Sonnets, And wilt thou leave me thus. The singer was Anna Williams (soprano) with Dannreuther at the piano. As mentioned already, Parry’s song looks forward to the interactive sophistication of Wolf; indeed its aphoristic conciseness (covering but one page of music) seems uncannily to have much in common with Wolf’s late songs, notably those of the Italienisches Liederbuch. Parry’s miniature is an enchanting study in sensuousness. The welling up of desire is captured by the opening piano arpeggiation, while the metrical uncertainty of the singer’s opening statement captures something of the faltering passion implicit in Shakespeare’s lines. Yet more sensuous is the modulation to the flat mediant, marvellously initiated by the piano (‘But my kisses bring again seals of love, but sealed in vain’) and the splendid climax, while the sense of regret is poignantly captured in the conclusion where the piano is left to resolve the open-ended vocal line.

Take, O take those lips away,
That so sweetly were forsworn;
And those eyes, the break of day,
  Lights that do mislead the morn:
But my kisses bring again,
  Bring again;
Seals of love, but seal’d in vain,
  Sealed in vain.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616) (Measure for Measure IV:1)

5 No longer mourn for me

No longer mourn for me, a setting of Shakespeare’s Sonnet LXXI, dates from 1874 and was composed at the same as the settings that were published in the Four Sonnets. The conception of the song was very definitely inspired by the English words even though Parry did consider a German version (the manuscript has German words added in pencil). Yet one suspects that the greater appropriateness of the English probably led to its being discarded from the bilingual scheme of the Four Sonnets, a fate which also befell another (unpublished) sonnet setting of If thou survive my well-contented day, also of 1874. The predominant influence in No longer mourn is that of Brahms, most particularly in the way the platitude of the cadence is avoided. The constant reiteration of the dominant (often as a pedal point) has the effect of maintaining the
sense of agitation and insistence that haunts Shakespeare’s text, and is used with particular adroitness at the end of the final rhyming couplet (‘after I am gone’) to express a deeper sense of anguish.

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Then you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to dwell:
Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe.
O, if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I perchance compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse;
But let your love e’en with my life decay:
Lest the wise world should look into your moan,
And mock you with me after I am gone.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616) Sonnet LXXI

6 To Lucasta, on going to the wars

It was not until 1895 that Set III of the English Lyrics was published. Its dedicatee, Harry Plunket Greene, was the most sought-after baritone in Britain, having made his name in 1892 with the role of Job in Parry’s hugely successful oratorio (recorded on Hyperion CDA67025). A few years later he was also to become Parry’s son-in-law, marrying Gwendolen, the composer’s younger daughter. Set III was the first collection of songs in which lyrics by recognized masters were mixed with poetry by Parry’s immediate contemporaries. The two poems by Richard Lovelace appear to have been written as a result of incarceration during the English Civil War – To Althea in 1642 after he was thrown into the Gatehouse prison, and To Lucasta, on going to the wars in 1648, after being jailed as a prominent Cavalier by the Parliamentarians. To Lucasta is all about the greater imperative of honour in the face of war. The sentiment elicited a sturdy response from Parry in which his distinctive use of diatonic appoggiaturas and robust suspensions (redolent of Blest Pair of Sirens) are conspicuous.
Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind, 
That from the nunnery 
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind 
To war and arms I fly.

True, a new mistress now I chase, 
The first foe in the field; 
And with a stronger faith embrace 
A sword, a horse, a shield.

Yet this inconstancy is such 
As you too shall adore; 
I could not love thee, dear, so much, 
Lov’d I not honour more.

RICHARD LOVELACE (1618-1658)

If thou would’st ease thine heart
Thomas Lovell Beddoes’ play *Death’s Jest Book* (published 1850), and more specifically the ‘Dirge’ from Act II Scene 1, sung over the dead body of Wolfram, was the source of *If thou would’st ease thine heart*. This is a fine example of one of Parry’s numerous modified strophic designs where both verses share some of the same material, yet an appreciable proportion of the variegational process is dictated by the changing sentiment of the lyric. The text recommends sleep as a comfort to the suffering of love, but only death is the true remedy. For such an anguished scene Parry makes much play on the contrast of poignant appoggiaturas in the piano with a more languorous melody in the voice.

If thou would’st ease thine heart
Of love and all its smart, 
Then sleep, dear, sleep; 
And not a sorrow
Hang any tear on thine eyelashes; 
Lie still and deep; 
Sad soul, until the seawave washes 
The rim of the sun tomorrow, 
In eastern sky.

But would’st thou cure thine heart
Of love and all its smart, 
Then die, dear, die; 
’Tis deeper, sweeter, 
Than on a rose bank to lie dreaming 
With tranced eye; 
And then alone, amid the beaming 
Of Love’s stars, thou’lt greet her 
In eastern sky.

THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES (1803-1849)
from *Death’s Jest Book*
8 To Althea, from prison

Even more resolute than *To Lucasta* is *To Althea*, where Parry sets three (of the four) verses of Lovelace’s lyric in ABA form. This structural decision enabled the last verse, with its familiar words ‘Stone walls do not a prison make, Nor iron bars a cage’ (marked, somewhat characteristically, *meno mosso* and *largamente*), to have as much musical and literary impact as possible. This is also very much enhanced by the distinctive preludial material that punctuates the verses.

When Love with unconfined wings
Hovers within my gates;
And my divine Althea brings
To whisper at the grates:
When I lie tangled in her hair,
Or fettered to her eye;
The gods, that wanton in the air,
Know no such liberty.

When flowing cups run swiftly round
With no allaying Thames,
Our careless heads with roses crowned,
Our hearts with loyal flames;
When thirsty grief in wine we steep,
And healths and draughts go free,
Fishes, that tipple in the deep,
Know no such liberty.

[When (like committed linnets) I
With shriller throat shall sing
The sweetness, mercy, majesty,
And glories of my king;
When I shall voice aloud how good
He is, how great should be,
Enlarged winds, that curl the flood,
Know no such liberty.]

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage;
If I have freedom in my love,
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone that soar above,
Enjoy such liberty.

RICHARD LOVELACE (1618-1658)

9 Why so pale and wan?

*Why so pale and wan?* (which, perhaps significantly, appears almost immediately after *To Althea* in Palgrave’s anthology) underwent at least two other versions before Parry settled on this lively interpretation. Taken from Act IV Scene 1 of *Aglaura* (1638), a play by the Cavalier poet Sir John Suckling, the text is sung by the character Orsames who describes the song as ‘A little foolish counsel, madam, I gave a friend of mine four or five years ago, when he was falling into consumption.’

Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prithee, why so pale?
Will, when looking well can’t move her,
Looking ill prevail?
Prithee, why so pale?

Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
Prithee why so mute?
Will, when speaking well can’t win her,
Saying nothing do’t?
Prithee, why so mute?
Quit, quit for shame, this will not move,
This cannot take her;
If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her;
The devil take her.

SIR JOHN SUCKLING (1609-1642)

**Through the Ivory Gate**

*Through the Ivory Gate* was almost certainly written as a result of the appearance of Julian Sturgis’s *A Book of Song* in 1894, a year before Set III was published. It is without doubt one of Parry’s most original creations for, in essence, it is more of a miniature *scena* rather than a song. From the narrative of Sturgis’s poem, which recounts in a dream an encounter with a dead friend, Parry constructs a dialogue between voice and piano. The style is part declamatory, part arioso where the piano often provides the thematic continuity as if it were an orchestra *manqué*. Particularly fine is the material that follows the piano’s impassioned climax (‘Then answer had I made’) where the sense of tonal control, the tangential restatement of the opening idea (‘So with closed eyes I lay’) and the wistful final gesture (‘Only the day was there’) are handled in masterly fashion.

I had a dream last night
Dream of a friend that is dead
He came with dawn’s first light
And stood beside my bed:
And as he there did stand,
With gesture fine and fair,
He passed a wan white hand
Over my tumbled hair,
Saying: ‘No friendship dieth
With death of any day,
No true friendship lieth
Cold with lifeless clay.

Though our boyhood’s playtime,
Be gone with summer’s breath,
No friendship fades with Maytime
No friendship dies with death.’
Then answer had I made
But that the rapture deep
Did hold me, half afraid
To mar that rose of sleep
So with closed eyes I lay,
Lord of the vision fair;
And when ’twas perfect day
Only the day was there.

JULIAN STURGIS

**Thine eyes still shined for me**

A year after the appearance of Set III, Novello, who were evidently pleased with its reception, brought out Set IV. A version of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Thine eyes still shined for me* from *Poems* (1847) was originally written for the October edition of the *Atalanta* magazine in 1893
before being extensively rewritten. It is a particularly rich example of through-composition, where one idea (heard at the very opening) is continually developed and reshaped throughout the song. This process accordingly provides an apt musical metaphor for the ripening of love that lies at the heart of Emerson’s lyric. The song is dedicated ‘To Dolly’, the affectionate nickname of Parry’s beloved elder daughter, Dorothea.

Thine eyes still shined for me, Though far I lonely roved the land or sea: As I behold yon evening star, Which yet beholds not me. This morn I climbed the misty hill, And roamed the pastures through; How danced thy form before my path Amidst the deep-eyed dew!

When the redbird spread his sable wing, And showed his side of flame; When the rosebud ripened to the rose, In both I read thy name.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803-1882)

[12] **Weep you no more, sad fountains**

The anonymous text *Weep you no more, sad fountains* in John Dowland’s *Third Book of Ayres* of 1603, was one favoured by many English song composers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries (namely van Dieren, Gurney, Holst, Moeran, Quilter and Somervell). Dedicated to Mrs Robert Benson, Parry’s setting is one of deft simplicity. A vocal line largely independent of its Brahmsian accompaniment is lent added subtlety by the contrast of minor (verse 1) and major (verse 2) modes which mirrors the change of mood in the text. This modal shift also imparts meaning to the harmonic context: the closing progressions at the end of verse two may be common enough devices in the major, but they acquire a special point following their minor origins.

Weep you no more, sad fountains; What need you flow so fast? Sleep is a reconciling, A rest that peace begets; Look how the snowy mountains Doth not the sun rise smiling Heaven’s sun doth gently waste! When fair at even he sets? But my sun’s heavenly eyes Rest you, then, rest, sad eyes! View not your weeping, Melt not in weeping, That now lies sleeping, While she lies sleeping, Softly now softly lies sleeping.

ANONYMOUS
Proud Maisie

Set V of the *English Lyrics*, published in 1902 and dedicated to Parry’s youngest half-sister Hilda, contained several songs of a much earlier date, one of which was *Proud Maisie* written most probably during the 1880s. Scott’s poem (taken from chapter 40 of *The Heart of Midlothian*) is based on a well-defined dialogue between Maisie and the Robin which is underpinned by a tonal fluctuation of F major (symbolizing ‘proud’) and D minor (‘mortal’). This element is already anticipated in microcosm in the piano’s introductory bars which encapsulate both the sprightly and ironic sentiments of the text.

Proud Maisie is in the wood,
   Walking so early,
Sweet Robin sits on the bush,
   Singing so rarely.

“Tell me, thou bonny bird,
   When shall I marry me?”
“When six braw gentlemen
   Kirkward shall carry ye.”

“Who makes the bridal bed,
   Birdie, say truly?”
“The grey-headed sexton
   That delves the grave duly.

“The glow-worm o’er grave and stone
   Shall light thee steady;
The owl from the steeple sing,
   ‘Welcome, proud lady’.”

SIR WALTER SCOTT (1771-1832) from *The Heart of Midlothian*

Lay a garland on my hearse

The miniature scale of *Lay a garland on my hearse* has Wolfian affinities, particularly the postlude in the tonic major. However, one wonders whether Parry is perhaps making reference to Purcell’s lament ‘When I am laid in earth’ (the sound of which is actually concealed in bars 2-4) where the fullest pathos is reserved for the postlude. It is a tempting parallel, not least because Parry had paid much attention to Purcell in 1895 during the composer’s tercentenary; but the use of the tonic major in this context is pure Romanticism, as is the prominent Brahmsian harmony (‘My love was false’) at the climax.
Lay a garland on my hearse,
Of the dismal yew,
Maidens, willow branches bear,
Say I died true.

My love was false, but I was firm
From my hour of birth;
Upon my buried body lie
Lightly, gentle earth.

FRANCIS BEAUMONT (1584-1616)
& JOHN FLETCHER (1579-1625)

When comes my Gwen
Close on the heels of Set V came Set VI, published in 1903. Taken from Edmund Jones’s translation of Mynydogg from Welsh Lyrics of the Nineteenth Century (1896), When comes my Gwen was completed on 24 December 1901 and dedicated appropriately to Gwendolen and Harry Plunket Greene as a ‘Christmas box’. At first the song would seem to belong to the drawing-room (albeit a highly sophisticated one), but in the final verse Parry lifts it onto a different, elevated plane, by shifting from E flat to the dominant of D. The recovery back to E flat, by way of a series of masterly progressions (‘Her loving eyes Reveal the skies’), also demonstrates Parry’s ability to handle chromaticism with ease.

When comes my Gwen,
More glorious then
The sun in heaven appeareth;
And summer’s self
To meet this elf
A smile more radiant weareth.

When comes my love,
The moon above
Shines bright and ever brighter;
And all the black
And sullen wrack
Grows in a moment lighter.

When comes my dear,
The darkness drear
’Twixt God and me is riven;
Her loving eyes
Reveal the skies
And point the way to heaven.

MYNYDDOOG, translated by E O JONES
**16 Love is a bable**

The sardonic *Love is a bable*, an anonymous lyric from Robert Jones’s *The Second Booke of Songs and Ayres* (1601) is a humorous scherzo-like ditty which makes amusing use of pauses and mock seriousness.

Love is a bable,  
No man is able  
To say ’tis this or ’tis that;  
So full of passions  
Of sundry fashions,  
’Tis like I cannot tell what.

Love is a fellow  
Clad oft in yellow,  
The canker-worm of the mind,  
A privy mischief,  
And such a sly thief  
No man knows which way to find.

Love’s fair in cradle,  
Foul in fable,  
’Tis either too cold or too hot;  
An arrant liar,  
Fed by desire,  
It is and yet it is not.

And yet I love her till I die

Parry’s setting of *And yet I love her till I die* (anonymous from Thomas Ford’s *Musicke of Sundrie Kindes* of 1607), a text highly popular with later English song composers, must be one of the first important interpretations of the poem. AAB in design, the simple diatonic progressions are most affecting, especially in the delicious closing words ‘till I die,’ a gesture that lingers in the memory.

There is a lady sweet and kind,  
Was never face so pleased my mind;  
I did but see her passing by,  
And yet I love her till I die.

Cupid is winged and doth range,  
Her gesture, motion and her smile,  
Was never face so pleased my mind;  
Beguile my heart, I know not why,  
And yet I love her till I die.

ANONYMOUS

*Found on back of leaf 53 of ‘Popish Kingdome or Reigne of Antichrist’*
Under the greenwood tree

Under the greenwood tree, sung by Amiens in Act II Scene 5 of Shakespeare’s As You Like It, was also an extremely popular text for many British composers; one thinks particularly of Gurney’s wonderful setting and others by Quilter, Coates, Howells and Walton. Parry’s interpretation is a skilful stylistic amalgam of archaisms, notably in the two-part canonic writing and a hint of pseudo-Tudor polyphony in the refrain (‘Here shall he see No enemy’). But once again it is the imperative of organicism and developing variation that drives the song. By way of illustration, Parry takes the feminine cadence at the end of the canon and uses it as the more dissonant basis of the second verse (‘Who doth ambition shun’). In addition, the first part of the refrain, which lays emphasis on winter as the enemy of life in the forest (‘but winter and rough weather’), is given keener accentuation in its repeat owing to Parry’s harmonic divergencies.

Under the greenwood tree,
Who doth ambition shun,
And loves to lie with me,
And tune his merry note
Unto the sweet bird’s throat,
Seeking the food he eats,
Come hither, come hither, come hither;
Come hither, come hither, come hither;
Here shall he see
Here shall he see
No enemy,
No enemy,
But winter and rough weather.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616) (As You Like It II:5)

On a time the amorous Silvy

The majority of songs in Set VII, published in 1907, are settings of Elizabethan and Jacobean poetry. On a time the amorous Silvy, an anonymous text in John Attey’s The First Book of Ayres (1622), is a delightful pastoral narrative, coloured by a series of deft tonal deviations, the most salient of which occurs at the end (‘Since I must go’) as the shepherd wistfully departs.

On a time the amorous Silvy
With that, her fairest bosom showing,
Said to her shepherd: Sweet how do ye?
Opening her lips, rich perfumes blowing,
Kiss me this once and then God be with ye,
She said: Now kiss me and be going,
My sweetest dear;
Kiss me this once and then God be with ye,
Kiss me this once and then be going,
For now the morning draweth near.
For now the morning draweth near.
With that the shepherd waked from sleeping,
And spying where the day was peeping,
He said: Now take my soul in keeping,
     My sweetest dear;
Kiss me and take my soul in keeping,
Since I must go, now day is near.

ANONYMOUS

20 O never say that I was false of heart

Shakespeare’s Sonnet CIX, *O never say that I was false of heart*, is an earnest declaration of love and unwavering constancy which, in view of its dedication to his wife, may well have been intended by Parry as a autobiographical statement. The emotional turbulence of the text is reflected in the marked tonal fluidity – the opening progressions in the piano and the oblique entry of the voice are but two examples. Indeed, the tonic, E flat, is only established in the closing bars, after an even more exceptional divergence to the flat submediant (C flat major), a move that underscores the most fervent statement of devotion (‘For nothing this wide universe I call’).

O never say that I was false of heart,
Though absence seem’d my flame to qualify!
As easy might I from myself depart.
As from my soul, which in thy breast doth lie:
That is my home of love: if I have rang’d,
Like him that travels, I return again;
Just to the time, not with the time exchang’d, –
So that myself bring water for my stain.
Never believe, though in my nature reign’d
All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,
That it could so preposterously be stain’d,
To leave for nothing all thy sum of good;
    For nothing this wide universe I call,
    Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my all.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616) Sonnet CIX
Ye little birds that sit and sing
Thomas Heywood’s *Ye little birds that sit and sing*, from *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (1607), and Herrick’s *Julia* (track 23), from *Hesperides* (1648) are rare examples of patter-songs. Both rely on the extensive repetition of material, yet, in both instances, Parry imaginatively varies the figuration of the piano accompaniments, subtly modifies the interludes and increasingly alters details of the vocal material. This is carried on to such an extent in *Ye little birds* that the elongation of the ‘warbling’ melisma in the last verse seems inevitable.

Ye little birds that sit and sing
Go tune your voices’ harmony,
Amidst the shady valleys,
And sing I am her lover;
And see how Phillis sweetly walks
Strain loud and sweet, that ev’ry note,
Within her garden alleys;
With sweet content may move her:
Go pretty birds about her bower,
And that she hath the sweetest voice,
Sing pretty birds she may not lower,
Tell her I will not change my choice,
Ah me, methinks I see her frown
Yet still methinks I see her frown,
Ye pretty wantons warble.
Ye pretty wantons warble.

Go tell her through your chirping bills,
Oh fly, make haste, see, see, she falls
As you by me are bidden,
Into a pretty slumber,
To her is only known my love,
Sing round about her rosy bed
Which from the world is hidden:
That waking she may wonder,
Go pretty birds and tell her so,
Say to her, ’tis her lover true,
See that your notes strain not too low,
That sendeth love to you, to you:
For still methinks I see her frown,
And when you hear her kind reply,
Ye pretty wantons warble.
Ye pretty wantons warble.

Sleep, from Sturgis’s *A Book of Song*, must rank as one of Parry’s finest songs. The gentle, Brahmsian figurations of the piano evoke a drowsiness that conceals an inner agitation. For a brief moment only, the song threatens to became more restless, but such emotions are restrained once more by the onset of a profound sense of tranquillity. Parry’s harmonic control in the last sixteen bars is both breathtaking and transfixing, surely constituting some of his most inspired writing for voice and piano.

Beautiful up from the deeps of the solemn sea
Cometh sweet Sleep to me,
From silent cool green deeps,
Where no one wakes and weeps,
Cometh, as one who dreameth,
With slowly waving hands,
And the sound of her garment seemeth
Like waves on the level sands;
So cometh Sleep.
There is rest for all mankind,
When her slow wings stir the wind;
With lullaby the drowsy waters creep
To kiss the feet of Sleep.
JULIAN STURGIS

**Julia**

Some ask’d me where the rubies grew,
And nothing did I say,
But with my finger pointed to
The lips of Julia.

Some ask’d how pearls did grow, and where?
Then spake I to my girl,
To part her lips, and show me there
The quarelets of pearl.

One ask’d me where the roses grew,
I bade him not go seek;
But forthwith made my Julia show
A bud on either cheek.

ROBERT HERRICK (1591-1674)

**Nightfall in winter**

The songs for Set VIII, published in the same year as Set VII, were composed between 1904 and 1906. *Nightfall in winter* and *Dirge in woods* are the two most expansive songs in the collection, suggesting perhaps a new atmospheric departure in Parry’s song-writing. *Nightfall*, taken from *Poems* (1894) by Langdon Elwyn Mitchell (a pseudonym for the American poet, John Philip Varley), is an evocation of a winter evening, still and frozen, vividly portrayed in the somewhat uncharacteristically austere textures of Parry’s accompaniment.

Cold is the air,
The woods are bare
And brown; the herd
Stand in the yard.
The frost doth fall;
And round the hill
The hares move slow;
The homeward crow,

Alone and high,
Crosses the sky
All silently.
The quick streams freeze;
The moving trees
Are still; for now
No breeze will blow:
The wind has gone
With the day, down,
And clouds are come
Bearing the gloom.
The yellow grass
In the clear glass
Of the bright pool
Grows soft and dull.
The water’s eye
That held the sky
Now glazes quite;
And now the light
On the cold hill
Fadeth, until
The giant mass
Doth seem to pass
From near to far;
The clouds obscure
The sky with gloom:
The night is come,
The night is come.
‘LANGDON ELWYN MITCHELL’

25 Dirge in woods

Meredith’s Dirge in woods, taken from A Reading of Earth (1888), paints an eternally active scene of nature (symbolized by the wind), but human life is transient, like the cones that drop from the pine to earth blown by the wind above. These two levels are in a sense captured by Parry in the tonal fluctuation from G major (which opens the song) to E minor which marks the end of the prelude. This certainly becomes significant in the later part of the song where E minor, as the symbol of man’s mortality, comes to the fore (‘And we go, And we drop like the fruits of the tree’) on a dominant pedal. No resolution occurs, however, and G major returns (‘Even we’) in the form of the preludial material. The conclusion of this passage once again is in E minor, which appears to be confirmed by the stoical vocal statement (‘Even so’); yet it is left to the piano, rather chillingly, to provide a final confirmation of G.
A wind sways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of wild air;
Still as the mosses that glow
On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there.
The pine-tree drops its dead;
They are quiet, as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race,
As the clouds the clouds chase;
    And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
    Even we,
    Even so.

GEORGE MEREDITH (1828-1909)

At the request of the executors of Parry’s estate, Sets XI and XII of the *English Lyrics* were edited for publication in 1920 by Emily Daymond (the composer’s amanuensis), Plunket Greene and Charles Wood, since, according to the editorial note, it seemed clear that the composer had intended to complete two further sets ‘from evidence among his papers’. Four of the songs included in Set XI were by Alfred Perceval Graves, close friend of both Parry and Stanford, prominent inspector of schools (1875-1910), member of the Irish Literary Society and publisher of many Irish songs and ballads. He is best known today as the author of the popular *Father O’Flynn*. He also published an autobiography *To return to all that* in response to his famous son’s (Robert Graves) autobiography *Goodbye to all that*. Graves’s verse evidently appealed to Parry, probably because much of it struck a chord with his own inner melancholia. In his later years Parry seems to have been haunted by a feeling of lost love which Graves may also have shared. It is certainly true that Maude became a more distant figure emotionally, and though Parry retained his love for her, she in turn did not return the same passion. Parry’s son-in-law, Arthur Ponsonby (husband of Dorothea), conjectured that Parry’s love for his wife in later life was based on the memory of his youthful ardour, an idea that seems highly plausible in the light of the song texts to which he was drawn. *The Spirit of the Spring* and *The Blackbird* are both about a sadness which, after beholding the beauty of nature, is driven out, while *The Faithful Lover*, with its rather contemporary harmonic ambience, and *She is my love beyond all thought* (prophetic of the Bach-Finzi fusion), are deeply personal disclosures of great
poignancy. Fear, pain and lost love similarly haunt *What part of dread eternity*, the text of which is probably by Parry himself. This is perhaps the most agonized of all Parry’s later songs and provides a most moving insight into a part of the composer’s life that has for so long remained hidden.

**26 The Spirit of the Spring**

As I went down to Taunton Town,
Pondering thoughts of pain,
The very spirit of the Spring
Came glancing up the lane.

Violet eyes soft and wise,
A mien of matchless grace,
Fluttering feet that skimmed the street
Like swallows in the chase.

Upon her arm of moulded charm
A maund of nodding flowers,
A radiant crew, all drenched with dew
From Quantock’s breezy bowers.

Primroses, violets,
Into my heart they shone;
Till in their gleam of golden joy
All my grief was gone.

ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES (1846-1931)

**27 What part of dread eternity**

What part of dread eternity
Are those strange minutes which I gain;
Mazed with the doubt of fear and pain;
Whenas thy delicate face I see,
A little while before farewell?

What share of the world’s yearning tide,
That flash, when new day bare and white
Blots out my half-dream’s faint delight,
And there is nothing by my side,
And well remembered is farewell?

What drop in the grey flood of tears,
That time when the long day toiled through
Shows nought for me to do;
And nothing worth my labour bears
The longing of the last farewell?

What pity from the heavens above,
What heed from out eternity,
What word from the swift world to me?
Speak, heed and pity, O tender love,
That knew’st the days before farewell.

ANONYMOUS

**28 The Blackbird**

As I went up a woodland walk
In Taunton Dene, when May was green,
I heard a bird so blithely talk,
The trembling sprays between,
That I stood still
With right good will
To know what he might mean.

No yellow horned honey-suckle
Hath e’er distilled the sweets he spilled
In one long dulcet dewy chuckle
That blackbird golden billed;
Ay piping plain,
“Hope, hope again!”
Till my heart’s grief was stilled.

ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES (1846-1931)
She is my love beyond all thought
She is my sun and moon and star,
Though she has wrought my deepest dole,
Who yet so far and cold doth keep,
Yet dearer for the cruel pain
She would not even o’er my bier
Than one who fain would make me whole.
One tender tear of pity weep.

She is my glittering gem of gems,
Into my heart unsought she came,
Who yet contemns my fortune bright;
A wasting flame, a haunting care;
Whose cheek but glows with redder scorn
Into my heart of hearts, ah! why?
Since mine has worn a stricken white.
And left a sigh for ever there.

ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES (1846-1931)

She hath grown cold, whose kindness won me to her,
Shall I complain? O, no! true love complains not,
Wherefore is this? Being denied.
Shall I disdain? O, no! true love disdains not,
Wishing them more, I find her favours fewer.
What is amiss?
Only false pride.
If, when she liked, to love my friendship flowered,
Shall I less love her for her heart’s denial?
With too fond haste,
Nay, year by year,
Say why should hers, to scorn injurious soured,
Since she is worthy, thou shalt find thy trial
As sudden waste?
Daily more dear;

Till, it may be, the faithful spirit in thee,
Fresh from love’s fast,
Out of her eyes his look of looks shall win thee,
Lover, at last.

ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES (1846-1931)

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Stephen Varcoe

Stephen Varcoe has established a reputation as one of Britain’s most versatile baritones, and has sung in opera, concerts and recitals covering a wide range of repertoire in Europe, America and the Far East.

His operatic appearances include Haydn’s *L’Infedelta delusa* in Antwerp, Debussy’s *La chute de la maison* in Lisbon and London, John Tavener’s new opera *Mary of Egypt* for the Aldeburgh Festival and Peri’s *Euridice* for the Drottningholm Festival, Sweden.

Stephen has appeared with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Ulster Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Northern Sinfonia, the St Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, New Zealand Chamber Orchestra, the Hanover Band, the Aarhus & Odense Symphony Orchestra, at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal, at the National Arts Centre Orchestra, Ottawa, with The Kings Consort, at the Festival Cervantino in Mexico, at the BBC Proms and with conductors Brüggen, Daniel, Gardiner, Hickox, Lindberg, Mackerras, Malgoire, Minkowski, Östman, Pinnock, Rifkin, Rozhdestvensky and Tortelier. He took part in Jonathan Miller’s dramatization of Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*.

Stephen appears regularly in recital here and abroad and is heard frequently in recital with The Songmakers’ Almanac and on BBC Radio 3. Recent recital work has included a programme of Finzi and Somervell with Iain Burnside, Schubert’s *Winterreise* with Eugene Asti, a Lieder tour with Peter Seymour, Brahms, Schumann and Wolf at Wigmore Hall with Graham Johnson, Grainger with Penelope Thwaites for BBC Radio 3, Schubert with Roger Vignoles in Belfast and with Graham Johnson at the Bury St Edmund’s Festival.

Stephen has made over 100 recordings including Purcell, Handel and Bach with Pinnock, Gardiner, Hickox and Kuijken, Mozart with Marriner, Fauré with Rutter, Holst with Hickox, Richard Strauss with Norrington, recitals of Finzi with Clifford Benson and French songs with Graham Johnson, with whom he recorded Volume 2 in the Hyperion Schubert Edition.
Clifford Benson

Clifford Benson is an artist highly acclaimed for his sensitivity, outstanding musicianship, and strong feeling for poetry and colour – an ideal pianist to partner singers, chamber groups and instrumental soloists.

His career, though, is not confined to accompanying. He also gives solo recitals, lectures and masterclasses, adjudicates at music festivals, and currently gives piano chamber music workshops at several London colleges including the Royal Academy of Music. He has also been involved with the BBC’s ‘Young Musician of the Year’ and the British Chamber Music for Schools Competition.
# Parry’s English Lyrics

**STEPHEN VARCOE baritone**  **CLIFFORD BENSON piano**

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<td>The Spirit of the Spring</td>
<td>A P Graves</td>
<td><em>English Lyrics</em> Set XI No 3</td>
<td>1'52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>What part of dread eternity</td>
<td>Parry?</td>
<td><em>English Lyrics</em> Set XI No 2</td>
<td>3'53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>The Blackbird</td>
<td>A P Graves</td>
<td><em>English Lyrics</em> Set XI No 4</td>
<td>1'07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>She is my love beyond all thought</td>
<td>A P Graves</td>
<td><em>English Lyrics</em> Set XI No 8</td>
<td>1'56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>The Faithful Lover</td>
<td>A P Graves</td>
<td><em>English Lyrics</em> Set XI No 5</td>
<td>3'39</td>
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