

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS AND THE PASTORAL MODE

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Musicology  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012

Urbana, Illinois

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## **ABSTRACT**

The music of Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) has often been associated with a pastoral mode of expression. While scholars have begun exploring this relationship in projects of limited focus, an extended study has not yet been undertaken. This dissertation is the first such study. It examines ways in which Vaughan Williams and his music have demonstrable points of contact with the pastoral mode, emphasizing the role that literature and personal experience played in influencing this part of his imagination. The first chapter explores the term “pastoral” itself, its use in Western literature and music, and how all of these factors relate to Vaughan Williams and English culture. Subsequent chapters consider a selection of the composer’s activities, convictions, and compositions, and discuss them in light of significant pastoral influences. Through such case studies, this dissertation demonstrates that Vaughan Williams’s use of the pastoral mode was not only more complex and multi-layered than has previously been understood, but it was also a major attribute of his originality and a key ingredient in his artistic engagement with the contemporary world.

*For Kimberly, My Loving and Steadfast Wife*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Multiple people deserve recognition for helping me while I worked on this thesis. I first recognize my wonderful parents, all four of them: Lynn & Barbara Kopitzke, and Steve & Terry Ross. Their constant generosity, support, and encouragement have been truly overwhelming. I also specifically thank my father, Steve Ross, for finally convincing me to stay the course during my most challenging days as a doctoral student. My wife's parents, Donald & Nancy Estep, also offered their encouragement and hospitality unstintingly. Their selflessness manifested itself in many ways during the time of my research and writing. In addition to these individuals, I here collectively recognize the support of a multitude of other family members and friends, the complete list of whom I cannot possibly include in these acknowledgments. You are not forgotten.

Next, I thank my doctoral advisor, Gayle Sherwood Magee. Her advice and patience have surpassed anything I could have expected. I am extremely honored and grateful to have worked with her. I likewise thank my other dissertation committee members: Christina Bashford, William Kinderman, and Nicholas Temperley. While it would be impossible to recount everything I have learned from them, I can easily recall instances in which each went out of their way to aid me in my career and development.

Multiple people in the wider scholarly community also offered valuable advice and answers to questions. I single out Byron Adams for special thanks. His role in my selection for the 2006 Ralph Vaughan Williams Fellowship and his deep insights into English music acted as determining factors in my decision to study this topic. An incomplete list of other scholars (both of English music and of other areas) who assisted me in this project at various points includes Renee Cherie Clark, Alain Frogley, Daniel Grimley, Nathaniel Lew, Jeffrey Magee, Rebecca Mitchell, Julian Onderdonk, Eric Saylor, Christopher Scheer, Travis Stimeling, Aidan Thomson, Justin Vickers, John Wagstaff, and Aaron Ziegel.

Finally, I thank my wife Kimberly. Her unending patience, love, support, and encouragement throughout this project empowered me to overcome its formidable frustrations and obstacles. Of all the people who helped me, I owe her the most.

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## Introduction

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) was the first and most influential of twentieth-century English composers associated with a pastoral orientation. His avid collecting of folksong and interest in forging a distinctly national music have largely shaped his reputation. As Alain Frogley states, “Mention the name of Ralph Vaughan Williams and into most people’s minds come immediately three words: English, pastoral, and folksong.”<sup>1</sup> Titles of his major works, *In the Fen Country* (1904), *The Lark Ascending* (1914), and *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (1921), confirm this preoccupation with rural themes.

During the rising tide of the modernist aesthetic of the mid-twentieth century, Vaughan Williams became a target for charges of backward provincialism. Already in 1931, Aaron Copland likened Vaughan Williams to a “gentleman farmer” whose works had small claim on the international stage.<sup>2</sup> Even in his own country, Vaughan Williams drew criticism for works that were perceived to be pastorally inspired and therefore considered by some outmoded, especially *A Pastoral Symphony* (1921). Hugh Allen remarked that the symphony suggested V.W. rolling over and over in a ploughed field on a wet day,” while Peter Warlock compared it to “a cow looking over a gate,” and Elizabeth Lutyens dismissed the work as “cowpat music.”<sup>3</sup> Even now, Vaughan Williams is sometimes regarded, to borrow Walter Aaron Clark’s words, as

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<sup>1</sup>Alain Frogley, “Constructing Englishness in music: national character and the reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams,” in *Vaughan Williams Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), edited by Frogley, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Aaron Copland, *Copland on Music* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1960), p. 197. This statement comes from a lengthier writing treating music in London in 1931. To be fair, Copland amended his view decades later when this and various other writings were collected into the book cited in this note. Copland modifies his earlier view in a footnote: “Subsequent works, especially the composer’s *Symphony No. 4*, give the lie to this statement.”

<sup>3</sup> With the exception of the Lutyens quote (discussed more fully in Chapter 4), these statements may be found in Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, 2nd Edition (Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 155-156. For more on this topic, see Steve Smith, “Beyond ‘cow pat’: Ralph Vaughan Williams’s complex legacy,” in *The International Herald Tribune* FINANCE section (July 16, 2008), p. 10.

“a sort of bucolic bard, stubbornly resisting the encroachment of modernism and the eclipse of Albion.”<sup>4</sup>

In this context, a reevaluation of Vaughan Williams’s embrace of the pastoral mode is overdue. As recently as 2008, in his documentary film – *O Thou Transcendent: The Life of Ralph Vaughan Williams* – Tony Palmer sought “to explode forever, I hope, the image of a cuddly old Uncle, endlessly recycling English folk songs, and to awaken the audience to a central figure in our musical heritage who did more for us than *Greensleeves* and *Lark Ascending*.”<sup>5</sup> Palmer’s statement seems to subscribe to the notion that Vaughan Williams’s “pastoral” side elicits too much association with the quaint, provincial, or diminutive aspects of the composer as dictated by those who would (and did) hastily pigeonhole him. Moreover, the Vaughan Williams Fiftieth Anniversary Editions of two prominent classical music magazines in the United Kingdom, *Gramophone* and *BBC Music Magazine*, devoted large articles to the composer that strove to reassess and resituate his country bumpkin image.<sup>6</sup> While all of these projects assume, at least in part, the laudable position that there is more to Vaughan Williams’s music than the “pastoral” label, they nonetheless do little to explore the concept of the pastoral mode itself as something more than a monolithic and ultimately unflattering association.

Critical examinations of the pastoral aspects of Vaughan Williams’s music are a relatively recent development in the secondary literature. They are few and without exception limited in scope. Many are situated within larger studies with broader aims. For example, in their book *The English Musical Renaissance 1860-1940: Construction and Deconstruction*, Robert

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Aaron Clark, “Vaughan Williams and the ‘night side of nature’: Octatonicism in *Riders to the Sea*,” in *Vaughan Williams Essays* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2003), edited by Byron Adams and Robin Wells, p. 55.

<sup>5</sup> Tony Palmer, “O Thou Transcendent...,” *Oxford University Press Magazine* (2007), reprinted with permission on the Ralph Vaughan Williams Society Website: <http://www.rvwsociety.com/i-frame/tonypalmer.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> See the July 2008 issues of both magazines.

Stradling and Meirion Hughes discuss Vaughan Williams's folksong activities in connection with pastoral music and as part of a national movement in the decades before and after the turn of the twentieth century. But they do little to unpack the term "pastoral" beyond a general association with the countryside and folksong.<sup>7</sup> Also, as one review demonstrates, their representation of Vaughan Williams is deeply flawed.<sup>8</sup> Wilfrid Mellers's 1989 book, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, contains many unique personal insights that touch upon pastoral themes. These, however, lack investigative rigor and often have a journalistic feel.<sup>9</sup> Alain Frogley's introductory chapter to his 1996 edited volume *Vaughan Williams Studies*, already cited, is much more circumspect and research-grounded, though it treats the subject of the pastoral mode mostly in terms of how it has shaped the composer's reputation and for the purpose of preparing the subsequent studies in his book. David Manning's 2003 dissertation posits a linkage between pastoral music and nationalism especially in its early pages, but once more in an oblique way and in service of preparing the analyses mentioned in his title and that form the bulk of the document.<sup>10</sup> One very recent article by Eric Saylor focuses upon Vaughan Williams's *A Pastoral Symphony*, as well as other works by Elgar and Arthur Bliss, in the effort to reevaluate the negative musical reception of the term "pastoral" by placing the music within the context of World War I. One of the article's primary aims is to examine the pastoral mode's "hard" or "Death in Arcadia" aspect as adopted by early 20<sup>th</sup> century English composers, since it has been largely ignored or unrecognized. Saylor's first sentence well sums up the overall lack of

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<sup>7</sup> See Stradling and Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance 1840-1940: Constructing a National Music* 2nd Edition (Manchester University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> See Alain Frogley, Review-Article – "Rewriting the Renaissance: History, Imperialism, and British Music Since 1840," in *Music & Letters* Vol. 84, No. 2 (May 2003), pp. 241-257. Frogley discusses at length the factual errors in this book and the misconstruing of Vaughan Williams's character and career aims.

<sup>9</sup> See Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989). My comments on and quotations from this book apply strictly to the 1989 edition. I have only recently learned that a new edition appeared in 2009, and I have yet to access it.

<sup>10</sup> See David J. Manning, "Harmony, Tonality and Structure in Vaughan Williams's Music," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cardiff University, 2003).

solid discourse on the subject: “There is a longstanding problem associated with English pastoral music of the twentieth century: no one really knows how to describe it.”<sup>11</sup>

Extending and expanding upon Saylor’s work, my main goal in this dissertation is to demonstrate that Vaughan Williams’s relationship with the pastoral mode is multifaceted and goes beyond the pejorative images described up to this point. I also aim to illustrate how, like writers and artists before him, Vaughan Williams connected with it in ways that not only reference the past, but also speak directly to the social and cultural concerns of his time. In contrast to the ultra-modernist attitude that took hold around him in his later years – that the past was something to be written against or eschewed (at least in favor of the “new”) – Vaughan Williams believed throughout his life that the paradigms and creations of the past are a valuable key to understanding and engaging with the present, as well as a vital means by which to create original art.<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that he was against modernism in *all* of its manifestations. Quite to the contrary, Vaughan Williams treasured the original and experimented in many ways, but always with respect toward tradition. It is this aspect of his art that I believe is particularly useful in evaluating his “pastoral” music. The pastoral mode has a profound relationship with past conventions. If we hold to the most rigid ideals of certain early to mid-twentieth-century modernists – those in which tradition is something to be downplayed or even mocked – we may inevitably see the pastoral mode as something absolutely and inherently obsolete. But if we view Vaughan Williams’s pastoral music in the wider context of his culture and in the light of his actual, rather than merely assumed, views concerning the past and present, we stand a better chance of learning more about how and why he relates to it.

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<sup>11</sup> Eric Saylor, “‘It’s Not Lambkins Frisking At All’: English Pastoral Music and the Great War,” in *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 91, Nos. 1-2 (2008), p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> Vaughan Williams summarized some of his views on this subject in his short essay “Tradition,” contained within the larger collection of essays based upon lectures entitled “National Music.” See Vaughan Williams, *National Music and Other Essays* 2nd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 59-61.

A systematic examination of Vaughan Williams and the pastoral mode does not exist, and this writing is not an attempt at one. Rather, I will offer in the following chapters a roughly chronological series of case studies that discuss particular periods, musical activities, and compositions. In Chapter 1, I establish a framework for discussing the term “pastoral,” its major conventions, and its relationship to the composer’s background and musical pursuits. I argue that his primary means of contact with the mode are experiential and literary in nature. I move on in Chapter 2 to Vaughan Williams’s relationship with English folk music and how it relates to the pastoral mode. Building upon the work of Julian Onderdonk, Roger Savage, and others, I further explore this relationship in light of Vaughan Williams’s cultural and literary interests, with a central focus upon his favorite novel, *Lavengro*, during the period in which he first discovered and collected folk songs.<sup>13</sup> In Chapter 3 I discuss pastoral art and literature within the context of late Victorian and Edwardian culture before relating such trends to the poetry Vaughan Williams set and the interests and socio-political views he espoused before World War I (henceforth referred to as “the Great War”). During this period, his use of pastoral texts and subjects reflects a predominantly positive outlook, celebrating the beauty of his natural surroundings and exuding optimism at what the future might hold. With Chapter 4 I enter darker terrain and discuss Vaughan Williams’s clearest engagement with the so-called “hard pastoral” in his music following the Great War. In many of these pastoral works, he uses rural texts and images as a backdrop to death, mourning, and related themes. In Chapter 5 I continue my examination of Vaughan Williams and the pastoral elegy by considering the late (post-World War II) compositions. Placing *An Oxford Elegy* (completed 1949) at the center of my discussion, I analyze this and other works in light of the pastoral elegy that mourns not, or not only, the death

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<sup>13</sup> Throughout this dissertation I will use the term “folksong” to refer to a genre, style, or manner. I will use the words “folk song” to refer to particular examples.

of loved ones, but also the passing of an age. In this period of Vaughan Williams's career, themes of youthful innocence both contrast and intermingle with adult realities and postwar pessimism. The final chapter considers a single work, the *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as Vaughan Williams's life and career distilled into a dramatic morality tale. Given the presence of both soft and hard pastoral themes in his adaptation of John Bunyan's work, I compare the opera to the pastoral subgenre of the moral allegory. I find further justification for seeing this composition in such a way by citing Vaughan Williams's references in his written essays to Bunyan's literary masterpiece. One will notice that the pastoral works I choose for my subjects and analyses hinge largely on Vaughan Williams's points of contact with literary genres. I will explain reasons for concentrating on these in Chapter 1.

As researchers continue to assess the place of Vaughan Williams in twentieth-century music, they will face the challenge of confronting his pastoral forays and what they mean in the wider context of his time and place. As we learn more about Vaughan Williams and his music, it becomes clearer that we can no longer afford to accept lazy or pejorative or assumptions about his relationship with the pastoral mode. It is in this spirit that I offer the present study.

## Chapter 1

### Situating Vaughan Williams and the Pastoral Mode

The primary difficulty in using the term “pastoral” is establishing satisfactory definitions for it. Western pastoral traditions alone span more than two millennia and numerous cultures. Further differences and layers of complexity result from diverse repositories of pastoralism, among which are literature, visual art, and music. Quite simply, the term “pastoral” has been understood differently according to different times, places, and contexts. It is thus unsurprising that published writings have for long reflected the diversity that has built up around it. To quote a well-known article by Paul Alpers, in addressing the term’s definitions, “we find nothing like a coherent account of either its nature or its history...It sometimes seems as if there are as many versions of pastoral as there are critics who write about it.”<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the most famous, and certainly one of the most quoted, attempts at a definition comes from William Empson in his seminal *Some Versions of the Pastoral*: – “putting the complex into the simple.”<sup>15</sup> While this definition is not especially useful as applied to particular cases, it is striking both how open it is and how it has elicited acknowledgment in nearly every significant text on the subject. Empson’s definition illustrates the broad language needed for sufficient coverage. For these reasons, “pastoral” is often referred to by Alpers (in the article already cited) and others as a mode of expression rather than a cohesive style or genre.

Inevitably, the present study follows others in seeking a useful definition of the term “pastoral.” The first step is to establish some common denominator of understanding concerning what the term means in the most general sense and what signifiers are most often responsible for communicating an understood “pastoral” character. According to most dictionaries, the word

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<sup>14</sup> Paul Alpers, “What is Pastoral?” in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 8, No. 3 (Spring, 1982), p. 437.

<sup>15</sup> William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1950, 1968), p. 22.

“pastoral” carries four primary meanings: – something relating to shepherds, an idyllic rural setting, a work of art or literature involving shepherds or rural scenery, or relating to the leadership of a Protestant church congregation. The pastoral mode’s relationship with shepherds and the shepherds’ life is salient. Indeed, the word itself derives from the Latin “pastoralis,” which means “relating to a shepherd.” Its sister term “bucolic” comes from the Greek word “boukolos,” meaning “herdsman.” Literary scholars often use the terms synonymously.<sup>16</sup> Western manifestations of the pastoral mode show that shepherds and the shepherds’ life lie at the heart of the term’s associations in art and literature, particularly in ancient Greek and Roman poetry.<sup>17</sup> Still, wider understanding of the pastoral mode is also bound up with the idealized aspects of country life which may or may not include the shepherd theme that is at the roots of the terms “pastoral” or “bucolic.” In this latter vein, writers and artists particularly of Greek and Roman antiquity use the countryside as a setting within which to muse on the pleasant aspects of rural life or enact narratives of merriment and leisure. These two broad areas of the pastoral mode – that concerning the life of shepherds and that concerned with an idealized countryside of various sorts – are by no means mutually exclusive.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> J.E. Congleton points out that, with some exceptions, in the English Renaissance the literary terms “idyll,” “Eclogue,” “bucolic,” and “pastoral” were often used synonymously. See Congleton, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England 1684-1798* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), pp. 6 ff. This interchangeability often persists in late twentieth-century scholarship on pastoral literature. In his edited volume, *The Pastoral Mode: A Casebook*, Bryan Loughrey defines the term “bucolic”: “Now almost a synonym for pastoral, but with a slightly humorous overtone.” (pg. 25). For an example of synonymous use of the terms in practice, see J.D. Reed, “*Idyll 6 and the Development of Bucolic after Theocritus*,” in James J. Clauss and Martine Cuypers, eds., *A Companion to Hellenistic Literature* (Chichester and Oxford: Wiley and Sons, 2010), pp. 238-241.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the pastoral mode’s close relationship with the shepherd theme, see Paul Alpers, *What Is Pastoral?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), chapter 4; Helen Cooper, *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* (Ipswich, UK: D.S. Brewer Ltd.; Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1977); and Renato Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), chapters 1 and 5.

<sup>18</sup> For more on this, see Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal* and Terry Gifford, *Pastoral The New Critical Idiom Series* (London: Routledge, 1999), edited by John Drukakis, chapter 3.

The basic pastoral patterns of shepherds' lives and an idealized rural world lead one to consider another duality present in ancient literature and particularly noticeable more recently – that of the so-called “soft” as opposed to the “hard” pastoral.<sup>19</sup> The “soft” pastoral denotes an ideal setting in which its inhabitants live seemingly untroubled lives surrounded by natural paradise. It is analogous to Arcadia. In the Greek classical tradition, Arcadia was an actual region in southwest Greece celebrated on account of its desolate natural beauty and seclusion. It became the imagined home of the shepherd god Pan. On the authority of Virgil's *Eclogues*, Arcadia came to stand for a past “Golden Age” paradise in the hands of Renaissance writers and painters who looked back to antiquity for Utopian models. In Arcadia, gods, shepherds, animals, and other beings lived in harmony with one another and with nature, leading pleasant lives largely free of human vices that were common elsewhere. In large part because of this and other enduring versions of soft pastoral, the mode as a whole is often associated with nostalgia and the past.

The “hard” pastoral, on the other hand, typically denotes one of two primary forms of strife occurring in a rural setting. It may feature the rural world as the setting of death and other tragedy, often at odds with the beauty of the natural surroundings. It may also center on the portrayal of the hardness of life for rural workers. In this scenario, shepherds and other rural workers are hardly the happy, carefree figures that soft pastorals portray. Instead, they lead difficult lives in servitude to rich masters who idealize their lot; they scrape by on meager wages

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<sup>19</sup> The terms “soft pastoral” and “hard pastoral” regularly appear in recent secondary literature on the topic. I can date their usage in the scholarly literature at least as early as a 1972 article by Paul Alpers – “The Eclogue Tradition and the Nature of Pastoral,” in *College English* Vol. 34, No. 3 (Dec, 1972), pp. 352-371. An important study on the pastoral from the next decade uses the terms synonymously in the course of discussing, among other subjects, the poetry of William Wordsworth. See Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), pp. 45, 278-281. A source even more closely related to the topic of Vaughan Williams – Eric Saylor's already-cited article on *A Pastoral Symphony* – upholds the terms and their meanings. (See Saylor, “It's Not Lambkins Frisking At All.”)

without much hope of anything but a burdensome existence. In some cases the natural environment, despite its beautiful appearance, may actually contribute to material hardships for its underclass. Such a version of “hard pastoral” tinges Virgil’s *Georgics*. This work chronicles, among other things, the arduous tasks of farmers. Although present in all periods of literature, the hard pastoral arguably gained more traction in the periods after antiquity, when writers and painters more often opted for what they considered to be edgier or more realistic themes. An example of hard pastoral would be Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891), which recounts how an innocent woman succumbs to terrible circumstances in the author’s fictional English county of Wessex.

Mention of the Georgic brings to the forefront another important relationship in pastoral art is that between urban and rural worlds and their inhabitants. Peter Marinelli writes: “The contrast between town and country is...essential to the rise of a distinctively pastoral art.”<sup>20</sup> Raymond Williams’s *The Country and the City*, an important twentieth-century study of pastoral literature, treats this theme. It views the oppressed lower class in the rural world versus the upper class that leisurely idealizes that world and its people as an underlying tension throughout the history of the pastoral mode. Williams argues that the city and country are actually related through the dynamic of class perspective.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, other writers together with him emphasize the point that pastoral art and literature was long produced for and by a wealthy urban audience. According to them, creations in the pastoral mode often reflect the preconceptions of those whose personal stake betrays privileged status, and whose priorities often involve decidedly urban perspectives. W.J. Keith, for example, differentiates between the words “rural” and “pastoral” in that the former term is a much more neutral adjective for things non-urban and that

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<sup>20</sup> Peter V. Marinelli, *Pastoral*, The Critical Idiom Series (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), edited by John D. Jump, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

the latter tradition came to signify a rural “retreat from care” only according to urban sensibilities.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to, or perhaps in spite of, these broader trends, the pastoral mode carries another common characteristic that brings us back to a pattern mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Its particular manifestations from one case to another rely to a great extent on the perspective of whoever happens to be creating the world or narrative. As Annabel Patterson has argued, arriving at a precise definition for “pastoral” is thus ultimately impossible and less important than the manners in which different people have used it to express their own ideas and intentions.<sup>23</sup> It is a peculiarly supple mode, requiring few elements to be recognizable as such and yet yielding widely varying results that frustrate the establishment of satisfactory boundaries for it.

The complexities increase when we consider music. Music deemed “pastoral” developed according to varied traditions throughout Western Europe up through the Baroque Period and after.<sup>24</sup> The gestures that became widely associated with the musical pastoral manner in Common Practice period compositions, and analyzed as such by Robert Hatten and others, gained reliable consistency only in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and were initially largely associated with Italian operas based upon stories from antiquity.<sup>25</sup> Though such gestures varied from one period to the next, and from one work to another, a representative vocabulary may be rehearsed here: triple or compound meters with lilting rhythms, static chords or pedal points in the bass that may

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<sup>22</sup> W. J. Keith, *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 4. Owen Schur likewise differentiates between mere nature poetry and “pastoral” poetry. In his view, “the artifice of situation and setting” serve to characterize pastoral poetry as opposed to ordinary experience of nature. See Owen Schur, *Victorian Pastoral* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology: Virgil to Valéry*, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> For a fuller explanation of several such trends, see Geoffrey Chew and Owen Jander, “Pastoral,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40091> (accessed March 23, 2011).

<sup>25</sup> See Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures, Topics, and Tropes: Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 53-67.

signal drone-like effects, simple harmonic progressions that often favor major keys and modulations to the subdominant, the use of reed instruments for melodic lines or the imitation of such instruments where none are actually present, etc. Such features became the accepted means of signifying pastoral topics up until roughly the twentieth century, when the pool widened and more composer-unique signifiers and styles took root (i.e. Debussy's versus Ravel's musical pastoral styles that incorporate various pentatonic or modal mixtures, which may be seen in such works as *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* and *Daphnis et Chloé*).<sup>26</sup>

We now move to the particular case of Ralph Vaughan Williams and his musical engagement with the pastoral mode. The dynamic here, as always, is between broader pastoral definitions and a person's particular background and interests. In considering Vaughan Williams's "pastoral" music, I will show that while he musically set texts and themes that reflect many of the mode's social patterns (discussed above) to varying degrees, he did so in a highly individual, and often ambivalent, manner. Before examining Vaughan Williams's pastoral music, it is useful to recount certain themes and circumstances in his life and career. Some of these are of a personal nature, while others speak to outside circumstances that inevitably affected his activities and outlook.

Vaughan Williams was born into a family of means. His father, an ordained member of the clergy, came from a background of lawyers. His mother was a member of the Wedgwood family of ceramics fame and a niece of Charles Darwin. Neither during his youth, nor indeed during much of his adult life did Ralph experience material want, with the possible and unique exception of his service in the Great War. His life was one that was largely secure in privilege, allowing him to pursue his interests without fear of destitution. He developed some primary

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<sup>26</sup> A useful source that outlines pastoral trends in music from the Baroque period up to the twentieth century is Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 207-271.

interests while still young that, together with this background of plenty, go a long way toward determining the nature of his engagement with the pastoral mode.

The first of these interests was landscape. Upon the death of his father in 1875, the young Ralph moved from Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, where he was born, to the Wedgwood country house in the North Downs of Surrey - Leith Hill Place. Here, with the exception of lengthy trips and vacations, he spent much of the remainder of his juvenile years. The grounds of the home itself had (and have) considerable natural beauty, with ample and well-tended gardens. Such surroundings quickly excited the imagination of a boy as impressionable as Ralph. Ursula Vaughan Williams's biography of her husband contains many second-hand accounts of these scenes and related events, as well as many others throughout the rest of Vaughan Williams's life. It contains many interesting points and insights but should be used with caution. She opens the book with several anecdotes that lend support to her future husband's early enthusiasm for natural scenery, even while he was still living in Down Ampney as a toddler.<sup>27</sup> "Take me there," said the young boy, when he saw a darkened lane in the gardens at his first home.<sup>28</sup> His first attempt at a musical composition, the four-measure "The Robin's Nest," suggests that as early as age six he was responding musically to pastoral-related stimuli. Nor, according to both himself and Ursula, did he cease immersing himself in nature. In early adolescence he established his lifelong habit of long walks and extended bicycle trips into the countryside. On at least one occasion, he took a greater pleasure in rural surroundings than did his peers. While attending school at Rottingdean, he wrote home from Brighton: "Most of the boys thought the country

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<sup>27</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.: A Biography of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 8-38. These anecdotes are often of unclear origin, presumably coming to us second-hand from Vaughan Williams himself.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

round was dull. I thought it lovely and enjoyed our walks.”<sup>29</sup> When in 1887 he entered Charterhouse School in Godalming, one of England’s oldest boarding schools and surrounded by lush rural scenery, he continued his walks and expeditions.<sup>30</sup> When he interrupted his study at the Royal College of Music in London and pursued a history degree at Cambridge University from 1892 to 1894, he explored the surrounding countryside on a bicycle.<sup>31</sup> Such trips inspired him musically for the rest of his life, but there is evidence that this was the case even during his Cambridge years. Although he wrote “Miserable failure, not to be taken seriously” on its manuscript, the *Reminiscences of a Walk at Frankham* for piano of 1894 (with separate titles indicating the various parts of the excursion) indicates that, quite early in his adult career, Vaughan Williams freely allowed his outdoor sojourns to influence his musical endeavors.<sup>32</sup>

In a letter to his cousin, Ralph Wedgwood, Vaughan Williams summarizes his love for, to use his chosen adjective, “soft” pastoral beauty.

Don’t think me degenerate in my likes but you know I have always preferred soft scenery to stern uncomfortable scenery...My heart goes through the same manoeuvres as Wordsworths [sic] when he saw a rainbow when I see a long low range of hills – I suppose this comes from being born in Surrey S.W.<sup>33</sup>

A key highlight here is the reference to Wordsworth. Quoting him in this context, Vaughan Williams signals a second crucial element in his own background that is indispensable to any

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 37-38.

<sup>32</sup> The titles of the pieces are: “A steamy afternoon (andantino languid),” “Little River Hall,” “Anxiety on the Way Home,” “Grinham’s cottage appears in sight,” and “Evening comes on.” See Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, letter to Ralph Wedgwood dated some time in 1898, quoted in *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958* (Oxford University Press, 2008), edited by Hugh Cobbe, p. 31. Both Cobbe and Michael Kennedy note the error in this letter concerning Vaughan Williams’s birthplace. On the following page Cobbe suggests that this was an intentional error given that Vaughan Williams knew he was born in Down Ampney, Gloucestershire, but he offers no explanation as to why the composer would have done this. See also Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 396. Another letter to Ralph Wedgwood dated 1902 affirms a similar love for pastoral landscape. See Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 41.

discussion of his pastoral leanings: the deep knowledge and love of literature he harbored throughout his life. In an article devoted entirely to Vaughan Williams's literary tastes and influences, Ursula Vaughan Williams claims that, from an early age, Ralph's literary habits were in keeping with the Victorian tradition of middle and upper class families reading voraciously for both educational and recreational purposes. She gives us second-hand testimony that Leith Hill Place "was a household where there was plenty of time for everything, and one where all of them were expected to take their pleasures seriously. Reading aloud was a normal part of these pleasures, and the grown-ups devoted hours to the children's education." Ursula continues, describing how for Vaughan Williams "poetry [was] as normal an experience as prose," remarking not long after that she is "sure that the actual sound of words was a foundation well and truly laid in the composer's earliest years."<sup>34</sup> While still young, Vaughan Williams gained an impressive fluency in English literature, having read among many other things large helpings of Shakespeare, Dickens, and the Romantic poets. From this latter group, and particularly Wordsworth, Vaughan Williams could find plenty to further stoke his enthusiasm for pastoral beauty. He was also familiar with a great deal of literature directly involving the pastoral mode. A short list includes Virgil, the King James Bible, Spenser, and Bunyan.

Vaughan Williams's involvement with literature transcended that of a mere connoisseur and formed a central concern in his musical art. A large portion of his compositional output – both texted and un-texted works – takes words from, or is programmatically inspired by, literary sources. Addressing the centrality of literature to the music of Vaughan Williams, Michael Kennedy writes: "literature was the spark which set his imagination alight so that he could

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<sup>34</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, "Ralph Vaughan Williams and His Choice of Words for Music," in *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association* Vol. 99 (1972-1973), p. 81.

transform literary inspiration into his own musical language.”<sup>35</sup> Kennedy proceeds to point out the caveat that although Vaughan Williams was inspired by literature, he often set texts in ways that do not always follow their sequential placement, or even meanings. In the chapters that follow I will frequently point out such instances. This practice has profound implications for his pastoral settings.<sup>36</sup>

With his background of privilege, Vaughan Williams seems at first sight to conform for the most part to the template of upper-class pastoralist, with the exception of owning or claiming some sort of urban perspective. A closer examination does much to modify this picture. Ursula Vaughan Williams, in a letter to Lionel Pike, provided a crucial piece of insight:

I do think that it is a mistake to think of Ralph as a countryman – he wasn’t. Certainly born in Gloucestershire – but who can choose where they’re born? Brought up in his grandparents’ house at Leith Hill – but he escaped to London as soon as he could, and lived there till [his first wife] Adeline’s ill health made their tall Cheyne Walk home impossible. He was enchanted to return to London in 1953. He said that his London Symphony should be called ‘Symphony by a Londoner’. He certainly loved some country places, and walking, but he had no other country pastimes. (War-time vegetable growing doesn’t really count, I think.) And, if you look at his hands you will see that they are not at all country hands – I think that this is very important to remember. Of course folk songs are (were?) much found in country places, but he collected them because they were about to be lost, with the literacy following the education act, *not because* they came from the country.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> Byron Adams has discussed this aspect of Vaughan Williams’s compositional process as it pertains to the latter’s setting of Biblical texts. See Adams, “Scripture, Church, and culture: biblical texts in the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams,” in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, pp. 99-117.

<sup>37</sup> Excerpt of a letter from Ursula Vaughan Williams to Lionel Pike, quoted in Pike, *Vaughan Williams and the Symphony*, Symphonic Studies No. 2 (London: Toccata Press, 2003), p. 7, n. 1. I should note here that I do not entirely agree with Ursula’s statement about Vaughan Williams collecting folk songs from the country only because that is where he found them. As I argue in the next chapter, I believe Vaughan Williams’s fascination with folksong as being part of the countryside ran deeper.

Such remarks offered by the one closest to Vaughan Williams (at least during the latter part of his life) suggest much about how the composer's background relates to pastoral conventions. If she can be believed, her testimony places him squarely in the role of a privileged artist who spends considerable time in rural regions but whose lifestyle is decidedly urban in outlook. As much as he enjoyed his forays into rural England, and as much as they together with folksong demonstrably influenced his music, Vaughan Williams was not a member of the rural working community. Neither did he depend financially upon the grueling tasks of farming or other country occupations. His time there was largely characterized by leisurely activity. With the exception of voluntary military service in France Vaughan Williams was never compelled to experience the countryside in physically strenuous ways.

Not only did Vaughan Williams lack a rural working class background, but in multiple aspects his conception of the countryside was decidedly idealized. First, much of the pastoral literature that he consumed was itself the product of a leisured class. As literature was a deciding factor influencing his pastoral music, it is significant that much of what he read, and chose to set, largely complemented this outlook. Second, he believed that English folksong was hidden knowledge to be discovered in the hands of unlettered rural people. For him, this knowledge and repertoire formed part of the mystique of the countryside. (I discuss this in Chapter 2.) And yet, if he idealized folksong and other things he associated with the countryside, all indications are that he did not *trivialize* the lot of real rural-dwelling people. He was under no illusions about the fact that they lived physically harder lives than he did, and he strove to respect their dignity when he journeyed out to collect folk songs.<sup>38</sup> Much of this may stem from his upbringing. According to J. Ellis Cook, the son of a workman at Leith Hill Place during Vaughan Williams's youth, the

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<sup>38</sup> For more information on Vaughan Williams and his attitudes toward folksingers, see Julian Onderdonk, "Ralph Vaughan Williams's Folksong Collecting: English Nationalism and the Rise of Professional Society," (Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, 1998), chapter 6 ff.

Vaughan Williams children (Ralph along with his older brother, Hervey, and his younger sister, Margaret) were from a young age taught by their mother to respect the servants and were punished for “telling tales.”<sup>39</sup>

Williams’s musical approach to the pastoral mode is characterized by ambivalence. Only seldom in his output does one find obvious or unmediated appropriation of musical pastoral topics as they were used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and afterward. The difficulty lies in discerning when he is referencing pastoral topics and when he is imitating or invoking English folksong. Often it is unclear when he is attempting either, or if and when the two are mutually exclusive. Perhaps sensing this very issue, Raymond Monelle recently suggested that it is difficult to discuss Vaughan Williams’s music in pastoral terms because they are so deeply intertwined.<sup>40</sup> Since Vaughan Williams hardly ever mentioned musical pastoral topics in his writings, it is also difficult to say to what extent he separated them from the particular folk songs he heard. The best way of approaching this question is by analyzing what he did as a composer rather than what he said (or did not say) as an essayist. Though relatively rare, his references to the word “pastoral” in the titles and tempo indications of his works provide some insights. As a first example, let us briefly consider *A Pastoral Symphony* (completed 1921). Though the work was named “pastoral” by the composer, it is challenging to find in it any sustained or forthright use of musical pastoral topics. Much of the symphony belies the kind of simplicity of melody, texture, and mood typically associated with them. Its harmony is sophisticated, its melodic framework highly dependent on overlapping themes and figures, and its rhythms structurally complex.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in *The R.C.M. Magazine*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Easter Term, 1959), pp. 24-25. Cook also relates that the child Vaughan Williams used to ask workers around Leith Hill Place, including Cook’s grandfather, for songs that he would then write down.

<sup>40</sup> Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, pp. 270-271.

<sup>41</sup> See Lionel Pike, “Rhythm in the Symphonies,” in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, p. 185. Pike’s essay on rhythm in Vaughan Williams’s symphonies demonstrates the composer’s unique approach to this musical element.

the most tenable target for such discussion is the third movement. Notwithstanding the fact that a scherzo movement is usually the most rhythmically consistent point in *any* symphony, let alone one called “pastoral,” one sees here a section that on the surface seems to come closest to musical pastoral topics but that on closer inspection complicates such comparisons. First, it is true that after awhile the listener encounters what sounds much like a rustic dance, homophonic and in triple time. The example below shows the second, more fully scored, statement of this theme.

Ex. 1.1: Vaughan Williams, *A Pastoral Symphony*, Mov. III (mm. 134-143)

The image shows a page of a musical score for Vaughan Williams' *A Pastoral Symphony*, Movement III, measures 134-143. The score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Horns (1. 2., 3. 4.), Trumpets in C (1. 2., 3.), Trombones (1. 2., 3., Tba.), Timpani (Timp.), Cymbals (Cymb.), Harp (Harp.), Violins (VI. 1<sup>a</sup>, VI. 2<sup>a</sup>), Viola (Vlo.), Violoncello (Vcl.), and Double Bass (C-B.). The tempo is marked "Più mosso." The score features a variety of dynamics including *f*, *ff*, *fff*, *mf*, and *p*, and includes performance instructions such as "brillante", "pizz.", and "arco". A large "P" is printed at the bottom of the score.

One statement is particularly noteworthy and may be usefully applied to the third movement of *A Pastoral Symphony*: “Furthermore, it is time to jettison the idea that triplets represent a facile kind of folksiness in Vaughan Williams: an appreciation of his use of conflict between rhythmic manifestations of the prime numbers two and three is a fact basic to understanding the Fifth and Sixth symphonies.”

But the listener arrives at this point only after first encountering subtle passages of hemiola and textural layering. There's also a feeling of heaviness, or "clod-hopping" as Lionel Pike terms it.<sup>42</sup> Hugh Ottaway discerns a "mock-serious" quality to the tune in Example 1.1.<sup>43</sup> The listener also comes upon a recurring figure in this movement featuring solo flute and oboe over a static accompaniment dominated by harp and strings first encountered in measures 26-40. Upon first impression, this seems to denote both an idyllic atmosphere and the musical pastoral topic of high woodwinds over a drone. Yet every time the material appears it proves to be fleeting, as more instrumental layers and contrapuntal lines soon intrude.<sup>44</sup> A similarly scored and textured passage occurs in the final movement (the fourth), where, after a the wordless vocal line introduced by the solo soprano, and the subsequent initial statement of the mournful main theme in the orchestra, the flute takes up a secondary theme just finished by the cello. Both renditions of the theme appear alongside the accompaniment of the harp. Example 1.2 shows the flute's statement just prior to Rehearsal J.

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<sup>42</sup> Pike, *Vaughan Williams and the Symphony*, p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> Hugh Ottaway, *Vaughan Williams Symphonies* BBC Music Guides (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> In his program note for this symphony, Vaughan Williams simply refers to the third movement as "a slow dance" and the middle section as a "trio." See *Vaughan Williams on Music* (Oxford University Press, 2008), edited by David Manning, pp. 343-344.

Ex. 1.2: Vaughan Williams, *A Pastoral Symphony*, Mov. IV (from two measures prior through four measures after Rehearsal J)

The image displays a page of a musical score for Vaughan Williams' *A Pastoral Symphony*, Movement IV. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. At the top, a large letter 'J' is placed above the first staff, indicating the start of Rehearsal J. The instruments listed on the left include: Flutes (1, 2 and 3), Oboes (1, 2), Cor Anglais, Clarinets (1, 2 in A and Bass Clarinet in Bb), Basses (1, 2), Horns (1, 2 and 3, 4 in F), Trumpets (1, 2 and 3 in C), Trombones (1, 2 and 3), Tuba, and Timpani. A Harp part is also shown at the bottom. The music is in a key with three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The first staff (Flute 1, 2) features a melodic line with a series of eighth-note patterns, while the other instruments are mostly silent or have simple accompaniment. The Harp part at the bottom has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Here again, however, this suggestively musical pastoral area is short-lived, as later on the entire orchestra resumes a many-layered texture culminating in a climactic statement of the main theme.

These examples are a testament to the entire symphony integrating different aesthetic strands to a degree that qualifies the strictly topical associations of its title. When one adds to these considerations the wartime implications that Vaughan Williams harbored for this work (discussed in Chapter 4), the distance between soft pastoral “lambkins frisking” (as he termed it)

and what actually inspired the music deepen the problematic relationship between traditional musical pastoral topics and Vaughan Williams's practice in relation to them. No less is it unusual that a work containing the title "pastoral" happens to be one of its composer's most original creations, particularly harmonically, rather than a mere exercise in musical scene painting or escapism. Finally, the work quotes no discernable folk song. Although Hugh Ottaway claims that the first movement's themes are related to folksong (without being specific), Kennedy argues against attaching any folksong idiom to the symphony.<sup>45</sup> Even if an actual folk song were to be found quoted in the music, this alone would not guarantee the work's "pastoral" credentials. I will return to this last matter shortly.

By comparison the *Concerto for Oboe and Strings in A Minor* (1944) may offer the clearest example of a composition by Vaughan Williams that recalls musical pastoral topics as something distinct, if not wholly separate, from English folksong. In this music Vaughan Williams seemingly acknowledges the association of the oboe with the shepherd's pipe or some accordingly rustic instrument. The first movement's heading makes the connection explicit – "Rondo Pastorale" (see Example 1.3). With the main theme in the first movement built around a Dorian pentachord and some simple repeating pitch patterns, not to mention a subdued accompaniment, Vaughan Williams appears to be purposefully referencing musical pastoral topics.

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<sup>45</sup> See Ottaway, *Vaughan Williams Symphonies*, p. 26; and Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 169.

Ex. 1.3: Vaughan Williams, *Concerto for Oboe and Strings*, Mov. I (mm. 1-4)

I RONDO PASTORALE

Allegro moderato (♩ = 88) R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

SOLO OBOE *cant.*  
*p*

TUTTI *p* *pp*  
3 Desks  
3 Desks  
2 Desks  
2 Desks  
1 Desk  
*pizz.*  
*pp*

I VIOLINS  
II VIOLA  
CELLO  
BASS

The heading of the short second movement reinforces the musical pastoral character – “Minuet and Musette.” The musette’s association with rustic scenes is well-established, as it is a dance featuring a melodic line containing stepwise motions (not infrequently played by a high reed or flute instrument) above a drone bass such as the bagpipe.<sup>46</sup> The minuet, on the other hand, has long held the distinction of being a refined dance associated with aristocratic courtly life. In the second movement of his Oboe Concerto, Vaughan Williams frames his two dances in a ternary structure, with the minuet stated first, followed by the musette, and concluding with a return to the minuet in which elements of the musette appear in the primed accompaniment. Shown below are beginnings of the minuet and musette.

<sup>46</sup> *Grove’s* article on “Musette” is a good starting place for more information on the dance form. See Robert A. Green, et al. “Musette,” in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19398> (accessed December 8, 2011).

Ex. 1.4: Vaughan Williams, *Concerto for Oboe and Strings*, Mov. II: Beginning of Minuet (mm. 1-7)

II MINUET & MUSETTE

Allegro moderato ( $\text{♩} = 64$ )

SOLO OBOE

I VIOLINS

II VIOLINS

VIOLA

CELLO

BASS

Ex. 1.5: Vaughan Williams, *Concerto for Oboe and Strings*, Mov. II: Beginning of Musette (Rehearsal E and following)

E

Ob.

I Vln.

II Vln.

Vla.

Vlc.

Cb.

This movement presents yet another scenario where pinpointing what is pastoral and what is not presents difficulties. In most estimates, a minuet does not bring to mind pastoral dance, but rather

urban or upper-class refinement. Yet here the minuet's instrumental and musical character seems at times inextricably close to that of the "pastoral" musette, as is further evidenced during the return of the minuet wherein some of the musette's gestures are also present. One is forced to draw the conclusion that Vaughan Williams adapted these dance forms in personal ways that do not always conform to long-standing conventions. Even if one claims that the second movement as a whole is of a generalized "pastoral mood" (above and beyond the question of how it relates to its dances' traditional connotations), the sudden contrasts and virtuosic writing contained in the final movement complicate considering the whole work as one-dimensionally imitating musical pastoral topics or imparting a uniformly pastoral character. There is simply too much variety and individuality here, even in this large scale composition that would seem to concede most to such models.

Another problem presents itself when one conflates a so-called "folksong" idiom with "pastoral" in works that have no corresponding programmatic titles, texts, or other associations. (One may think, perhaps, of the First String Quartet, completed in 1908.) Although Vaughan Williams to a large extent equated the countryside with where to find folk songs in the early twentieth century, he was inconsistent in his collecting methods and at times acknowledged that certain "country tunes" (a term he used to refer to "folk songs" in the first years of the twentieth century) had shown signs of urban-rural exchange.<sup>47</sup> Second, while it is true that the formation of Vaughan Williams's musical style was in some measure ultimately pastorally-inspired because of its link to folksong in his mind, we encounter difficulties if we go further and state that a given composition is "pastoral" simply because it may quote a particular folk song or appear to contain

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<sup>47</sup> Julian Onderdonk discusses this issue at length in "Ralph Vaughan Williams's Folksong Collecting: English Nationalism and the Rise of Professional Society," chapters 3-5.

mannerisms of folksong.<sup>48</sup> In some cases this may work – one thinks of the folk songs quoted in the obviously pastoral opera *Hugh the Drover* (composed 1910-1914, revised multiple times after). But in other situations the connection is murky or problematic. Take, for instance, *A London Symphony*, the composer's second essay in the genre (completed 1913, revised 1918 and 1933). In a work that programmatically references England's largest metropolis, the music, as Lionel Pike and Alain Frogley have in different fashions pointed out, incorporates the modal character and melodic fingerprints of folksong.<sup>49</sup> This is proof that, as Anthony Payne suggests, for Vaughan Williams folksong-derived modality went far beyond simply being synonymous with "pastoral."<sup>50</sup> Julian Onderdonk also cautions that Vaughan Williams's relationship with the modality of folksong (and folksong itself) was never monolithic or even consistent.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, pinpointing other musical elements in Vaughan Williams's idiom, tying them to folksong, and calling each "pastoral" regardless of context seems to be a hopelessly flawed enterprise.

These complex issues illustrate the dangers present when we extend assumptions about what is musically pastoral, and what Vaughan Williams considered to be musically pastoral, indefinitely. A far more reliable method of assessing Vaughan Williams's pastoral music is to begin by examining the many works that offer definite programmatic connections in set texts, epigraphs, and titles. By letting Vaughan Williams's signifiers guide our labeling of certain

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<sup>48</sup> For more on the assimilation of folksong into Vaughan Williams's musical style, see Anthony Payne, "Vaughan Williams and folk-song: The relation between folk-song and other elements in his comprehensive style," in *The Music Review* No. 15 (1954), pp. 103-126, and Payne, "Encompassing His Century's Dilemmas: The Modality of Vaughan Williams," in *Vaughan Williams in Perspective: Studies of an English Composer* (England: Albion Press, 1998), edited by Lewis Foreman, pp. 164-175. A recent dissertation by Ian Bates proposes a theory of modality for Vaughan Williams's music and discusses folksong in connection with it. See Bates, "Generalized Diatonic Modality and Ralph Vaughan Williams's Compositional Practice," (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> See Pike, *Vaughan Williams and the Symphony*, p. 48 ff. I also draw from a paper presented by Frogley at the American Musicological Society 2006 Meeting in Los Angeles and elsewhere, entitled "Dancing in the 'City of Dreadful Night': Paris, Vienna and St. Petersburg in the 1914 Scherzo-Nocturne of Vaughan Williams's *A London Symphony*." I thank him for sharing this scholarship with me. I discuss both *A London Symphony* and Frogley's work further in Chapters 3 and 5.

<sup>50</sup> Payne, "Encompassing His Century's Dilemmas," pg. 173.

<sup>51</sup> See Onderdonk, "Vaughan Williams and the Modes," in *Folk Music Journal* Vol. 7, No. 5 (1999), pp. 609-626.

musical characteristics as “pastoral,” rather than merely singling out what are often at best vague or isolated references to musical pastoral topics or “folksong idiom” where nothing else is present, one gains the advantage of contextualizing what one hears.

I allow that sublimated pastoral influences and gestures (whether Western musical topics or English folksong elements) exist in “non-signifier” works in Vaughan Williams’s output, but identifying them often requires a degree of arbitrariness too great for confident assertion.

However, there is a middle category that deserves mention: compositions that are related to the pastoral mode through some degree of separation and that depend upon inter-textual connections not readily apparent in any immediate programmatic sense. Scores such as the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* and the Fifth Symphony belong to this category. The *Fantasia*’s relationship with Elizabethan culture and Englishness link it in a roundabout way to pastoralism because of the latter’s strong association with the former. (I discuss this in Chapter 3.) Likewise, though the Fifth Symphony may not contain any forthright pastoral signifiers, its definite link to Vaughan Williams’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (much of which relates strongly to the pastoral mode by any recognized standard) makes it a more ready candidate for the label than a work with no signifiers, direct or indirect. Yet here again the boundaries between what is and is not pastoral are extremely fluid, and it is not always clear to what extent or through which degree of separation one may reasonably apply the “indirect pastoral” label in a given case.

There is a final issue requiring a certain kind of arbitration when considering even Vaughan Williams’s direct texts and signifiers—by what criteria are we to label them “pastoral”? The multiple works invoking shepherds and detailed rural scene descriptions present obvious correlations, but often the lines between “natural,” “rural,” and “pastoral” are amorphous. Is all natural scenery rural scenery? Are all natural signifiers strictly rural? Flowers, for example, have

been important pastoral signifiers in literature and painting. But flowers obviously also grow in the city. Without some pattern of other contributing elements, their relationship with associatively pastoral imagery may be doubtful. Once more, context is crucial in labeling texts and signifiers as “pastoral.” The simple truth is that often an observer is compelled to make subjective and personal judgments concerning when to apply the label. With these issues in mind, I have created a list of those Vaughan Williams compositions the texts and signifiers of which I deem to be directly pastoral (i.e. invoking shepherds or what I consider to be some obvious rural scenic element) and have placed it in Appendix A. I have excluded from this list the middle category mentioned earlier and will address several of those special works in other contexts. What one will notice even from my conservative estimate, however, is that a significant portion of Vaughan Williams’s unarranged, finished output (perhaps 15-25%, depending on one’s method of calculation) intersects in some forthright way with pastoral themes. There are thus many possible outlets for discussing his pastoral music from strong points of reference.

Going forward, it is useful to reiterate some primary points of this chapter. First, although pastoral art and literature have many recognizable patterns and conventions in a wider sense, much of the mode’s character in specific cases depends upon the particular applications of individual influences, taking into account personal background, experiences, and goals. Second, when one considers the music of Vaughan Williams that may be called “pastoral,” one finds that literary and programmatic inspirations are a far more reliable and consistent place to begin analysis than are the presences (real or alleged) of strictly musical pastoral topics or a “folksong idiom.” Finally, Vaughan Williams often exhibited a great deal of ambivalence in his attitudes and his music. Just as the term “pastoral” and its traditions are rife with complications and

nuances, one discovers that Vaughan Williams's music displays similar traits on many levels, forcing analysts to frequently avoid or qualify overarching judgments. Keeping these points in mind, I argue, will offer the best platform for beginning to understand Vaughan Williams's music and its relationship with the pastoral mode.

**Chapter 2**  
**Folksong, the Pastoral Mode, and Vaughan Williams as “Musical Philologist,” ca. 1895-1914**

“Thus by the shepherds secrets are reveal’d,  
Which from all other men are kept concealed:  
Come to the shepherds then, if you would see  
Things deep, things hid, and that mysterious be.”  
—John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, First Part<sup>52</sup>

If using the term “pastoral” to refer to Vaughan Williams’s use of folk songs in or alongside particular compositions is often problematic, it remains true that his formative conceptions of English folksong were bound up with certain ruralist attitudes around him. In this chapter I will explore his idealization of folksong and suggest specific ways in which his thinking was shaped both by late Victorian cultural influences and by a cherished work of literature with a peculiar take on the pastoral mode – George Borrow’s *Lavengro*. As it did for the protagonist of *Lavengro*, a special body of knowledge associated with rural regions and with a forgotten past excited Vaughan Williams’s imagination and helped to shape his artistic identity.

As others have recounted, Vaughan Williams began his folk song collecting in 1903 and continued to seek them until 1913, not long before his military enlistment the following year.<sup>53</sup> Also well known is the fact that Vaughan Williams’s interest in folksong predated his first trips into the field by at least several years. Ursula Vaughan Williams recounts that a lecture on

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<sup>52</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (London: Penguin Classics, 1987), edited by Roger Sharrock, p. 107.

<sup>53</sup> For two of the most comprehensive yet concise accounts of Vaughan Williams’s early folksong activities, see Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 23-40; and Tony Kendall, “Through Bushes and Through Briars...Vaughan Williams’s earliest folk-song collecting,” in Foreman, ed., *Vaughan Williams in Perspective*, pp. 48-68. A detailed account of the folk songs Vaughan Williams collected in various regions, as well as a good introduction to his collecting activities, may be found in *Folk Songs Collected By Ralph Vaughan Williams* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1983), edited by Roy Palmer. For broader treatments of English folksong collecting before the Great War, and the key individuals and issues involved, see Vic Gammon, “Folk Song Collecting in Sussex and Surrey, 1843-1914,” in *History Workshop Journal* Vol. 10 (1980), pp. 61-89; Richard Sykes, “The Evolution of Englishness in the English Folksong Revival, 1890-1914,” in *Folk Music Journal* Vol. 6, No. 4 (1993), pp. 446-490; and Dorothy De Val, “The Transformed Village: Lucy Broadwood and Folksong,” in *Music and British Culture, 1785-1914* (Oxford University Press, 2000), edited by Christina Bashford and Leanne Langley, pp. 341-366.

folksong brought him to the place where he would hear his first song “in the field,” and prior to this he was familiar with Lucy Broadwood’s and J.A. Fuller Maitland’s volume *English County Songs*.<sup>54</sup> This indicates that Vaughan Williams had formulated impressions of folksong before collecting examples of them. Among these early impressions we have the composer’s own recollections of key individuals who influenced him. In a later tribute to Cecil Sharp, Vaughan Williams muses on how both Sharp and his favorite Royal College of Music (RCM) teacher Hubert Parry influenced his youthful thinking concerning folksong:

But Sharp believed, and we believe, that there, in the fastness of rural England, was the well-spring of English music; tunes of classical beauty which vied with all the most beautiful melody in the world, and traceable to no source other than the minds of unlettered country men, who unknown to the squire and the parson were singing their own songs, and as Hubert Parry says, ‘liked what they made and made what they liked’ . . . . In the domain of theory, Parry applied the Darwinian theory of evolution to music, and had proved the necessity of folk song. It remained for the big man to come along and combine theory and practice in one . . . Parry had theoretically traced the evolution of music from the primitive to the elaborate symphony. It was left to Sharp to declare, in no half-hearted manner, that here was something of supreme beauty which had grown up, as part of our life, with our language and our customs.<sup>55</sup>

There is much to ponder in these sentiments, particularly concerning their place in Vaughan Williams’s formative experiences with folksong. The Parry quotation is noteworthy. It comes from the print version of his inaugural address to the Folk Song Society, which was

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<sup>54</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, pp. 62, 66. Broadwood’s and Maitland’s *English County Songs* was published by The Leadenhall Press in London in 1893.

<sup>55</sup> Vaughan Williams, “Cecil Sharp: An Appreciation,” taken from Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, rev. Maud Karpeles, 3rd edition (London: Methuen, 1954), pp. v-vi. Quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 269-270. In his book on English folk song, Sharp affirms Vaughan Williams’s statements. Sharp writes: “In bygone days, the ‘common people’ formed no inconsiderable part of the population, and were fairly evenly distributed between urban and country districts. Nowadays, however, they form an exceedingly small class – if, indeed they can be called a class at all – and are to be found only in those country districts, which, by reason of their remoteness, have escaped the infection of modern ideas.” See Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions* (London: Simpkin and Co., Novello and Co., 1907), p. 4.

printed in the March 1, 1899 issue of *The Musical Times*. Parry was one of the society's founding members when it was launched in 1898. This was a short time after Vaughan Williams graduated from the RCM. Elsewhere in the written version of the address, Parry makes several statements that conform directly to the rural idealization for which the English folksong movement has been known, fairly or not. Parry states outright that folksong is "characteristic of the race – of the quiet reticence of our country districts – of the contented and patient and courageous folk, always ready to meet what chance shall bring with a cheery heart." Parry sets this idyllic characterization against another group of people and another brand of music he saw as threatening folksong.

Moreover, there is an enemy at the door of folk-music which is driving it out – namely the popular songs of the day – and if we compare the genuine old folk-music with the songs that are driving it out, what an awful abyss appears! The modern popular song reminds me of the out circumference of our terribly overgrown towns, where the jerry-builder holds sway, and where one sees all around the tawdriness of sham jewellery and shoddy clothes, the dregs of stale fish, and pawn-shops, set off by the flaming gin-palaces at the corners of the streets. All these things suggest to one's mind the boundless regions of sham. It is for the people who live in these unhealthy regions, people who have the most false ideals, who are always scrambling for subsistence, who think that the commonest rowdyism is the highest expression of human emotion; for them popular music is made, and it is made, with a commercial object, of snippets of musical slang. This is what will drive out folk-music if we do not save it. The old folk-music is among the purest products of the human mind. It grew in the hearts of the people before they devoted themselves assiduously to the making of quick returns. In the old days they produced music because it pleased them to make it, and because what they made pleased them mightily, and that is the only way in which good music is ever made.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Taken from "A Folk-Song Function," in *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* Vol. 40, No. 673 (March 1, 1899), pp. 168-169.

Parry very clearly sets up the dichotomy of an idyllic rural society versus an urban society ruined by capitalist endeavor. From there he positions folksong as the music of the former and current popular music as belonging to the latter and threatening folksong's purity. Such sentiments adhere closely to values held by William Morris and others connected with the "Back-to-the-Land" movement, in which the "English countryside" formed the ideal center of a push to end what many saw as the evils of urban culture and land encroachment in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century England. (I will address this topic more directly in the next chapter.)

In his reflections on Parry and folksong, Vaughan Williams also alludes to Parry's conception of it as belonging to an earlier stage of human musical development.<sup>57</sup> Parry more fully sets forth his theory on the place of folksong within the evolutionary sequence of musical expression in a chapter of his book *The Evolution of the Art of Music*, first published in 1896 as a lengthened version of an earlier book, *The Art of Music* (1893), and issued in multiple subsequent printings.<sup>58</sup> Toward the end of the chapter, and alongside commentary on the emotional and aesthetic characters of different geographical areas' folk songs, Parry offers a convenient summary of his views on musical evolution:

So far the process of development is very easily followed. The savage stage indicates a taste for design, but an incapacity for making the designs consistent and logical; in the lowest intelligent stage the capacity for disposing short contrasting figures in an orderly and intelligent way is shown; in the highest phase of the pattern-type of folk-tune the instinct for knitting things closely together is shown to be very remarkable; and the organization of the tunes

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<sup>57</sup> Given the prominence of Parry's views in the English folksong movement, and their influence upon Vaughan Williams's early conception of English folksong, the reader may wonder what role Vaughan Williams's other famous teacher, Charles Villiers Stanford, had. According to Paul Rodmell, Stanford's approach to folksong was instinctive rather than research-driven. The latter's edition of the volume *The Petrie Collection of Irish Music* shows a lack of editorial rigor and instead groups tunes according to character. When it came to formulating ideas about folksong, Stanford largely relied upon the work of others. See Rodmell, *Charles Villiers Stanford* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 391-394.

<sup>58</sup> *The Art of Music* was first published in London in 1893 by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co. Limited.

becomes completely consistent from every point of view. A still higher phase is that which the skill in distributing the figures in symmetrical patterns is applied to the ends of emotional expression.<sup>59</sup>

It is an open question how far Vaughan Williams subscribed to this particular analysis. In a sense, at least, Vaughan Williams's idea of folksong displays kinship with Parry's. Beyond the notion of segregating popular urban music from country folksong (though, as discussed in Chapter 1, he had the ability to see past this division), Vaughan Williams shared with Parry the belief in an evolutionary model of folksong. In particular, before 1914 Vaughan Williams embraced the concept of a large repertory of folksongs existing autonomously and arising from individual people's idiosyncratic performances of them. He held the idea that they were timeless artifacts to be collected by the careful recorder, that transcended individual people, and that could link modern English musical culture with its national heritage. As late as the composer's lectures on music given in United States in the 1930s, and collected in print form in *National Music and Other Essays*, he was reiterating similar ideas.<sup>60</sup>

This then is the evolution of the folk-song. One man invents a tune. (I repeat that I grant this much only for the sake of argument.) He sings it to his neighbours and his children. After he is dead the next generation carry it on. Perhaps by this time a new set of words have appeared in a different metre for which no tune is available. What more natural than to adapt some already existing tune to the new words? Now where will that tune be after three or four generations? There will indeed by that time not be one tune but many quite distinct tunes, nevertheless, all traceable to the parent stem.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Hubert Parry, *The Evolution of the Art of Music* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Company, 1920), pp. 76-77. For more information concerning the influences upon Parry's views on culture and history, see Jeremy Dibble, "Parry as Historiographer," in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies* Vol. 1 (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999), edited by Bennett Zon, pp. 37-51.

<sup>60</sup> The fact that Vaughan Williams's 1912 remarks on folksong in *English Folk-Songs* were reprinted until 1953 with such little alteration also testifies to a remarkable consistency of these views as he held them over much of his life.

<sup>61</sup> Vaughan Williams, "The Evolution of Folk-Song," in *National Music and Other Essays*, p. 31. Vaughan Williams speaks further to the content of these remarks in an earlier chapter of the same collection, entitled "Some Tentative Ideas on the Origins of Music," and actually cites Parry's book multiple times. (See pp. 12-20.)

In an *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article published earlier, in 1929, Vaughan Williams makes similar comments, on this occasion invoking a key tenet of his great uncle Darwin's theory of evolution:

Thus a folk-song evolves gradually as it passes through the hands of different men and different generations. Nor will this gradual change ever be a process of deterioration, because those versions of the tune which are distasteful to others will die a natural death. Here then is a clear case of survival of the fittest. A tune which has been handed down from father to son through many generations will represent the united imaginations of thousands of men and women through hundreds of years of evolution.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, Vaughan Williams shared with Parry if not identical views, at least the conviction that folksong existed on an evolutionary continuum.<sup>63</sup> On account of Vaughan Williams's own statements, his reference to Parry's views in connection with his formative experiences, and his close relationship with Parry as his pupil, it is highly likely that the older man's models influenced Vaughan Williams's thinking.

Closely related to these ideas and impressions, there is the sense in some of Vaughan Williams's pre-war remarks on folksong that he subscribed to the notion that the countryside and those who inhabited it were the sources of special, even mysterious knowledge. He was hardly alone in this, as Cecil Sharp also articulated early on his belief in a rural population untouched by modern influences and still holding special knowledge with regard to folksong.<sup>64</sup> Vaughan Williams's earliest recollection of contact with folksong brims with such sentiments. A story

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<sup>62</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Folk-Song," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ix (14<sup>th</sup> edn, London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1929), pp. 447-448. Quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 229-230. Darwin died when the young Vaughan Williams had not yet reached ten years of age. There is a brief anecdote offered by Ursula Vaughan Williams recalling a time when the 6-7 year-old child was at one point alone in a room with his famous older relative. See Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, pp. 10-13.

<sup>63</sup> For more discussion on Vaughan Williams's conception of folksong along these lines, see Onderdonk, "Vaughan Williams's folksong transcriptions: a case of idealization?" in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, pp. 118-138.

<sup>64</sup> See Sharp, *English Folk Song: Some Conclusions*, p. 4.

related in multiple sources both by Vaughan Williams and others recounts how he heard his first musical specimen in the “field” when he was invited to a village tea party in Essex late in 1903, ironically to give a lecture on folksong, and a shepherd by the name of “Mr. Pottiphar” sang “Bushes and Briars”.<sup>65</sup> How fitting that this event occurred in a rural area, with a shepherd singer (that ever-iconic pastoral figure), featuring a folksong in triple meter and having thoroughly pastoral lyrics.

Ex. 2.1: “Bushes and Briars” (Showing the First Stanza of Lyrics)<sup>66</sup>

Through bu - shes and through bri - ars I late-ly took my way,  
 All for to hear the small birds  
 sing, And the lambs to skip and play.

Vaughan Williams himself likened this experience to having seen a ghost walk, citing it as the completion of his education on folksong.<sup>67</sup> In 1906, Vaughan Williams hinted at similar feelings in print:

I could imagine a much less profitable way of spending a long winter evening than in the parlour of a country inn taking one’s turn at the mug of ‘four-ale’ – (surely the most innocuous of all beverages), in the rare company of minds imbued with that fine sense which comes from advancing years and a life-long communion with nature – and with the

<sup>65</sup> For accounts of this story, see Vaughan Williams, Tony Kendall, “Through Bushes and Through Briars...Vaughan Williams’s earliest folk-song collecting,” in Foreman, ed., *Vaughan Williams in Perspective*, pp. 48-68.

<sup>66</sup> Source: Roy Palmer, ed., *Folk Songs Collected by Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 27.

<sup>67</sup> Vaughan Williams, “Let Us Remember...Early Days,” in *English Dance and Song* Vol. 6, No. 3 (1942), pp. 27-28. Quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 253. The account that Vaughan Williams gives of the event in *English Folk-Songs*, presumably dating from the 1912 writing, is remarkably consistent with how it is described in this excerpt. (See Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 185-188.)

ever-present chance of picking up some rare old ballad or an exquisitely beautiful melody, worthy, within its smaller compass, of a place beside the finest compositions of the greatest composers.<sup>68</sup>

Vaughan Williams shared similar thoughts some six years later in *English Folk-Songs*:

We can imagine the earnest student saying to himself... ‘I will try and find out the absolutely unsophisticated, though naturally musical, man – one who has no learning, and no contact with learning, one who cannot read or write, and thus repeat anything stereotyped by others, one whose utterance, therefore, is purely spontaneous and unself-conscious...’ To such an enquirer the answer is found in the folk-song. The imaginary man becomes an actuality. We do really find in every country among those people whose utterances must of necessity be spontaneous and unsophisticated – namely, the unlettered and untravelled portion of the community – a form of musical art unwritten, handed down by tradition, hardly self-conscious, which is their special property, and this music is not mere clownish nonsense, but has in it the germ of all those principles of beauty, of expression, of form, climax and proportion which we are accustomed to look for in the highly developed compositions of great masters. Face to face with this fact, we need no longer feel surprised that an unlettered countryman can inherit from his still more unlettered forefathers a melody like *Bushes and Briars* – adding, without doubt, to it something peculiarly his own.<sup>69</sup>

Here Vaughan Williams connects ownership of folksong with rural people he calls “unlettered” and “unsophisticated.” These people nonetheless have special lore of their own, bequeathed to them by older generations and developed further in individual usage.<sup>70</sup> Such sentiments would, of course, understandably follow from the ideas shared by Parry and Sharp that the realm of

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<sup>68</sup> Vaughan Williams, “Preface [to a Folk Song Collection],” in *Journal of the Folk Song Society* Vol. 2, No. 8 (1906), pp. 141-142. Quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>69</sup> Vaughan Williams, *English Folk-Songs*. Quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 191.

<sup>70</sup> Once more, Julian Onderdonk has explored this issue extensively, coming to the conclusion that Vaughan Williams did idealize folksong as belonging primarily to rural society, though he could see through this preconception at times. See Onderdonk: “Vaughan Williams’s folksong transcriptions: a case of idealization?,” in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, pp. 118-138; “Ralph Vaughan Williams’s Folksong Collecting: English Nationalism and the Rise of Professional Society,” chapters 4-8; and “Hymn Tunes from Folk-songs: Vaughan Williams and English Hymnody,” in Adams and Wells, eds., *Vaughan Williams Essays*, pp. 103-128.

authentic folk music encompassed the non-urban areas and that this music traversed an evolutionary trajectory. (However, here Vaughan Williams seems readier than Parry to grant folksong a measure of equality with what his teacher considered to be “more developed” music.)

Some patterns suggest that Vaughan Williams’s surroundings and personal interests helped to spur his imagination as well. His earliest juvenile recollections of folk songs, for example, outline significant points of contact. In a series of remarks that recall the early pastoral experiences covered in Chapter 1, Vaughan Williams offers this key remembrance:

But my real awakening to folk song did not come till 1898 when *English County Songs* came into my hands and I lighted on the ‘Lazarus’ tune as it is given there. When one comes across something great and new, if it is great enough, one’s attitude is not of surprise but of recognition, ‘but I have known this all my life’. I felt like this when I heard later Wagner, when I first saw Michael Angelo’s *Night and Day*, [and] when I first visited Stonehenge. I immediately recognized these things which had always been in my unconscious self.<sup>71</sup>

Multiple literary works that Vaughan Williams favored in his youth draw from the notion of the countryside being the realm of special knowledge and phenomena. There is Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, a book that Vaughan Williams especially cherished, and the narrative of which showcases the protagonist’s – Christian’s – encounters with a host of unique characters in often geographically remote, far-flung, and/or fantastic settings. But another book arguably makes this notion an even more central concern – George Borrow’s *Lavengro* (1851). In discussing this work and its relationship to Vaughan Williams in more detail, I hope that its themes’ similarities to the composer’s early experiences with folksong will become apparent.

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<sup>71</sup> Vaughan Williams, “Let Us Remember...Early Days,” quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 252. Manning mentions in an accompanying footnote the discrepancy between this story as Vaughan Williams relays it here and the same account as it appears in the composer’s “A Musical Autobiography,” which may be found in pages 177-194 of *National Music and Other Essays*. In the latter writing, Vaughan Williams states that he first came across *English County Songs* in the same year it was first published – 1893. (See *National Music and Other Essays*, p. 189, and Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 252, footnote “a.”)

George Henry Borrow (1803-1881) occupies a unique if somewhat obscure place in British literature. While never having the stature of Dickens, the Brontë sisters, or his other more famous contemporaries, Borrow was much more known to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century audiences (particularly in England) than at any time and place afterward. Perhaps his largest following consisted of young males around the turn of the century who were drawn to his idiosyncratic adventure writings. Vaughan Williams was a part of this demographic of admirers.<sup>72</sup>

With one notable exception, George Borrow and his works rarely receive discussion in the literature on Vaughan Williams.<sup>73</sup> Some mentions may be found in Ursula Vaughan Williams's biography of her husband, where she writes that he, in the last months of his life, re-read with her his favorite novel, *Lavengro*.<sup>74</sup> This is striking because in her book, in Michael Kennedy's life and works volume, and in other writings on Vaughan Williams, we find plenty of discussion of literature he did and did not set to music, with ample indication of how much particular authors' work meant to him. However, in the case of *Lavengro*, explicitly cited by the one closest to him as the composer's "favourite" novel, such discussion is scarce. Even in the composer's own writings one encounters almost no references to Borrow. Those found in his letters include the composer's suggestion to Harold Child (librettist for Vaughan Williams's opera *Hugh the Drover*) that one of the scenes should emulate portions from *The Zinca* (first published 1841), one of Borrow's earlier works. Another letter to Child reveals that his next

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<sup>72</sup> There is a lack of recent monograph literature on George Borrow. Two volumes from the early 1980s that address his character and writings are worth mentioning. See Michael Collie, *George Borrow: Eccentric* (Cambridge University Press, 1982); and David Williams, *A World of His Own: The Double Life of George Borrow* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

<sup>73</sup> The exception is Roger Savage's recent article "Vaughan Williams, The Romany Ryes, and the Cambridge Ritualists," in *Music & Letters* Vol. 83, No. 3 (August 2002), pp. 383-418.

<sup>74</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, pp. 311, 393. It is worth mentioning here that Ursula Vaughan Williams's volume, for all of its many merits, contains index flaws. For example, the index indicates that *Lavengro* is discussed on page 393, but neglects to mention that pages 311 and 405 also give mention of the book.

opera might be *Lavengro*, the composer having “always had this in [his] mind.”<sup>75</sup> Beyond this we have very little, and Vaughan Williams did not set any of Borrow’s works to music in a direct manner.<sup>76</sup>

In accounting for the gulf between Ursula Vaughan Williams’s attestation of *Lavengro* as being Vaughan Williams’s favorite novel, and the near-absence of any further direct information on this relationship in the principal texts on the composer, one begins to find answers in tracing the work’s character and reception history. First published in 1851, *Lavengro: The Scholar, The Gypsy, The Priest* (to give its full title) is a something of a hybrid, being part memoir, part philosophical testament, and part adventure novel. No one seems sure where and to what degree Borrow is describing actual people and events from his own past or merely spinning fictional material.<sup>77</sup> The story recounts in first person the significant stages and episodes of its protagonist’s youth. (Borrow declines to name himself throughout the book.) While still a child, he comes to know various regions and peoples of Britain as he follows his father through sequential military postings, often wandering off by himself in search of adventure. The author later recounts his disappointing first adult years in London, following the death of his father, as a translator/copier prior to setting out on the road once more as a self-taught tinker. Early in the narrative, the protagonist develops a keen interest in languages and cultural history. Many of the chapters in *Lavengro* concern his encounters in often desolate corners of Britain, where he demonstrates a knack for coming across fabulous ruins and natural scenes, and meeting eccentric

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<sup>75</sup> The letter is reprinted in Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 405.

<sup>76</sup> Roger Savage has pointed out that the short brass piece written by Vaughan Williams in honor of the conductor Sir John Barbirolli – *Flourish for Glorious John* – contains in its title a reference to Borrow’s publisher, John Murray II. Borrow places a reference to him in chapter 43 of *Lavengro*. See Savage, “Vaughan Williams, The Romany Ryes, and the Cambridge Ritualists,” p. 408. Savage also draws several parallels between themes in Vaughan Williams’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and other works, and themes prominent in *Lavengro*. (See pages 409-412.)

<sup>77</sup> One of Borrow’s early biographers, Herbert Jenkins, offered relevant remarks on this matter: “In the main *Lavengro* would appear to be autobiographical up to the period of Borrow’s coming to London. After this he begins to indulge somewhat in the dramatic.” See Jenkins, *The Life of George Borrow* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1912), p. 397.

characters.<sup>78</sup> Among the latter, the protagonist befriends the mysterious Romany people – the gypsies – who at the time the story is set in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and long after, wandered throughout Britain and practiced their traditional customs and language. It was these people, claims the author in chapter 17, who gave him the name “Lavengro,” meaning “word master” in the Romany tongue.

Two primary themes stand out in *Lavengro*. One is the glorification of the vagabond life, as Borrow’s early biographer Herbert Jenkins wrote.<sup>79</sup> The other is the pursuit of philology, the study of historical languages and cultural history. Taken together with a third theme, Borrow’s fervent patriotism, these strands support a larger angle that informs most of the events and encounters in the book: that Britain has been the scene of many exotic and fascinating peoples who have formed the identity of the region in ways hardly remembered or imagined by many. Indeed, one of the very first series of remarks in the author’s preface to the first edition of *Lavengro* reads thus:

The scenes of action lie in the British Islands. Pray be not displeased, gentle reader, if perchance thou hast imagined that I was about to conduct thee to distant lands, and didst promise thyself much instruction and entertainment from what I might tell thee of them. I do assure thee that thou hast no reason to be displeased, inasmuch as there are no countries in the world less known by the British than these selfsame British Islands, or where more strange things are every day occurring, whether in road, street, house or dingle.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Vaughan Williams’s friend and Cambridge classmate – the historian George Macaulay Trevelyan – mentions *Lavengro* in one of his monographs. He writes that it is “a book that breathes the spirit of that period of strong and eccentric characters.” See Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century (1782-1919)* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1922), p. 171.

<sup>79</sup> Jenkins, *The Life of George Borrow*, p. 398.

<sup>80</sup> George Borrow, Preface to First Edition of *Lavengro* (London: John Murray, 1851), p. vii.

Other opening statements by the author set the tone for the entire book. He claims that as a child, he was “a lover of nooks and retired corners” and “in the habit of fleeing from society.”<sup>81</sup> The very first sentence of the second chapter reads: “I have been a wanderer the greater part of my life.”<sup>82</sup> Although Borrow places part of his story in London, he makes it clear both in those and subsequent chapters that he considered his time there a failure and was glad to take to the road once more.<sup>83</sup> In any case, the bulk of the protagonist’s strange encounters and philological explorations occur in the non-urban regions he explored. These properly set up, in the words of Ian Duncan, “the revitalization of pastoral with the anthropological trope of nomadism.”<sup>84</sup>

The philological dimension of *Lavengro* holds some distinctive patterns that recall Vaughan Williams’s attitudes on folksong collecting. While still a juvenile, the protagonist becomes curious about the different people and cultures he meets on his travels. He commits himself to the study of philology, learning among other languages Irish and Welsh. This was a reflection of his exposure to both peoples and their cultures, partially through his father’s posting in Ireland. In one passage of chapter 13, the author states: “It has been said, I believe, that the more languages a man speaks, the more a man is he; which is very true, provided he acquires languages as a medium for becoming acquainted with the thoughts and feelings of the various sections into which the human race is divided.”<sup>85</sup> More than this, languages become for the protagonist in *Lavengro* a means of exploring the cultural histories of human races, particularly those connected with Britain. One passage directly describes this interest, concerning as it does

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, chapters 54 and 58.

<sup>84</sup> See Ian Duncan, “Wild England: George Borrow’s Nomadology,” in *Victorian Studies* Vol. 41, No. 3, Victorian Ethnographies (Spring, 1998), pp. 381-403 (quote on p. 382). Duncan’s article is an excellent study of how Borrow’s brands of nomadology and philology embody unique and significant forms of Englishness, which through their later popularity asserted themselves as cultural nostalgia during a time when industrialization and other modernizing efforts were underway in Britain.

<sup>85</sup> Borrow, *Lavengro*, p. 171.

his study of Welsh as a result of being introduced to the verses of the medieval Welsh bard Ab Gwilym.

If I remember right, I found the language a difficult one; in mastering it, however, I derived unexpected assistance from what of Irish remained in my head, and I soon found that they were cognate dialects, springing from some old tongue which itself, perhaps, had sprung from one much older. And here I cannot help observing cursorily that I every now and then, whilst studying this Welsh, generally supposed to be the original tongue of Britain, encountered words which, according to the lexicographers, were venerable words, highly expressive, showing the wonderful power and originality of the Welsh, in which, however, they were no longer used in common discourse, but were relics, precious relics, of the first speech of Britain, perhaps of the world...<sup>86</sup>

It is worth pausing here to notice the similarity of sentiments, if not exact content, between this passage and certain comments of Vaughan Williams concerning his folksong collecting. The similarities deepen when considering that *Lavengro*'s protagonist goes on to explain that mere books did not suffice to teach him about Welsh, but rather these did so in tandem with first-hand experience, in this case listening to the actual conversation of his gypsy friends.<sup>87</sup>

This last point forms the philological center of *Lavengro*. The protagonist's meeting, befriending, and unending fascination with the gypsies lent to his view of them as people whose mysterious language and knowledge went hand in hand with the marvel-filled countryside he loved to wander. He further believed that they were a people whose unique language, which he and others later in the book call "the language of the roads," might offer clues to a distant past.<sup>88</sup> As such, they were a driving cause behind his philological endeavors. Shortly after forming a

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<sup>86</sup> Borrow, *Lavengro*, p. 248.

<sup>87</sup> In the already cited *English Folk-Songs*, Vaughan Williams offers something very similar in the opening section: "What I am about to try to give you today is first-hand knowledge straight from the human subject, without any intervention of book knowledge at all," quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 185.

<sup>88</sup> Borrow, *Lavengro*, chapters 89-90.

fast friendship with a Romany man by the name of Jasper Petulengro, *Lavengro*'s protagonist offers these summary remarks on his relationship with this people henceforth. Once more, I quote at length to illustrate:

I soon found that I became acquainted with a most singular people, whose habits and pursuits awakened within me the highest interest. Of all connected with them, however, their language was doubtless that which exercised the greatest influence over my imagination. I had at first some suspicion that it would prove a mere made-up gibberish. But I was soon undeceived. Broken, corrupted, and half in ruins as it was, it was not long before I found that it was an original speech, far more so, indeed, than one or two others of high name and celebrity, which, up to that time, I had been in the habit of regarding with respect and veneration. Indeed, many obscure points connected with the vocabulary of these languages, and to which neither classic nor modern lore afforded any clue, I thought I could now clear up by means of this strange broken tongue, spoken by people who dwelt among thickets and furze bushes, in tents as tawny as their faces, and whom the generality of mankind designated, and with much semblance of justice, as thieves and vagabonds. But where did this speech come from, and who were they who spoke it? These were the questions which I could not solve...<sup>89</sup>

The protagonist's fascination with gypsies as a "singular" people possessing mysterious knowledge and roaming the countryside acts further as a means of self-discovery. In her book on gypsies and their influence on the British, Deborah Epstein Nord offers a keen discussion of this matter. She writes: "In two volumes of uncertain genre, *Lavengro* (1851) and *The Romany Rye* (1857), Borrow tells the tale of a man who finds his identity as a wanderer and discovers in the English Gypsies he encounters along the way a template for both vagabondage and authenticity of being," adding directly after that Borrow considered his gypsies the opposite of the genteel

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, pp. 226-227.

British classes.<sup>90</sup> Nord continues by describing how *Lavengro* mesmerized readers on the account of asking questions about “ultimate origins” and feeding the then-prevalent fascination with gypsies and exotic languages.<sup>91</sup> Borrow’s own interest in gypsies came at a time when historical linguists were discovering roots and characteristics of what we now call the Indo-European languages. The Romany language was first thought around this time to trace to India and share possible origins with English as a fellow Indo-European tongue.<sup>92</sup>

Before discussing the corollaries between *Lavengro*’s driving principles and Vaughan Williams’s early-formed attitudes concerning folksong, it is useful to consider the reception of the book up to and including the time when Vaughan Williams knew it. The response immediately following its release in 1851 was seen as largely negative by those who wrote about Borrow around the turn of the twentieth century. Borrow himself claims in appendices to subsequent printings of *Lavengro* that he was abused by critics. The author’s wife wrote a letter to his publisher, in which she exclaimed “if ever a book experienced infamous and undeserved treatment it was that book.”<sup>93</sup> This at one time appears to have been a matter of some debate, as is evidenced by a later article that re-examines the early reception of *Lavengro*. In this article the author, J.E. Tilford Jr., claimed that only six of eighteen reviews were outright negative ones, and that many were on the whole positive. He goes on to cite how much of the negativity was due to the uncertain genre of the book, and the question of whether it was fact or fiction, rather than to purely content-related concerns.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination, 1807-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 71.

<sup>91</sup> Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 72, 88.

<sup>92</sup> William Jones, who spent time in British-controlled India in the late eighteenth century, was one of the first to suggest similarities between Indian and English word patterns.

<sup>93</sup> Mary Borrow, letter to publisher John Murray dated 29 January 1855. Quoted in Jenkins, *The Life of George Borrow*, p. 430.

<sup>94</sup> See J. E. Tilford Jr., “Contemporary Criticism of ‘Lavengro’: A Re-Examination,” in *Studies in Philology* Vol. 41, No. 3 (July, 1944), pp. 442-456. Tilford cites and discusses many of the early reviews.

What is beyond doubt, however, is that *Lavengro* became quite popular among the literary class of English readers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In an essay on the English perception of gypsies in the nineteenth century, M.A. Crowther claims that *Lavengro* was “the book chiefly responsible for romanticizing the vagrant life.” He then summarizes its reception history:

Borrow’s reception by the reading public was curious: neither of his gypsy books [*Lavengro* and *Romany Rye*] sold well at the time of publication, but by the late nineteenth century they were esteemed by literary men, and were being produced in numerous cheap reprints, recommended especially to the adventurous young.<sup>95</sup>

In support of this, Crowther cites two contemporaneous remarks that are worth reproducing in the service of this chapter. First, consider this excerpt by Lionel Johnson from an 1899 piece in praise of Borrow. Notice the similarity between it and Parry’s description of urban versus non-urban culture:

Written by a man of intense personality, irresistible in his hold upon your attention, [Borrow’s books] take you far afield from weary cares and business into the enamouring airs of the open world, and into days when the countryside was uncontaminated by the vulgar conventions which form the worst side of ‘civilized’ life in the cities. They give you the sense of emancipation, of manumission, into the liberty of the winding road and fragrant forest, into the freshness of ancient country-life, into a *milieu* where men are not copies of each other.<sup>96</sup>

As Crowther writes, *Lavengro* had attained a celebrated status by the Edwardian period. He cites another of Borrow’s biographers, Clement King Shorter, who wrote this in 1913: “May we not say that an enthusiasm for Borrow’s *Lavengro* is now a touchstone of taste in English prose

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<sup>95</sup> M.A. Crowther, “The Tramp,” in *Myths of the English* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), edited by Roy Porter, p. 106.

<sup>96</sup> Lionel Pigot Johnson, “O Rare George Borrow!” in *The Outlook* 1 April, 1899. Quoted in *Post Liminium: Essays and Critical Papers* (London: E. Matthews, 1911), edited by Thomas Whittemore, p. 203. See also Crowther, “The Tramp,” p. 106.

literature?”<sup>97</sup> Crowther could also have quoted Shorter some pages later, where the latter compares *Lavengro*'s popularity at the time of initial publication to the status it had achieved in 1913: “It only remains here to state the melancholy fact once again that *Lavengro*, great work of literature as it is now universally acknowledged to be, was not ‘the book of the year’.”<sup>98</sup>

Although there seems to be no source that chronicles exactly when Vaughan Williams came to know and love *Lavengro*, we can safely deduce that this occurred while he was quite young. Wilfrid Mellers writes that the book was among Vaughan Williams's boyhood favorites, and while Mellers does not cite any source supporting his statement, his claim seems likely.<sup>99</sup> First it is worth bearing in mind that, as Crowther has stated, *Lavengro* was particularly marketed toward young readers during the era he describes. Second, Vaughan Williams's letter to Harold Child, in which he expresses his desire to compose an opera on *Lavengro*, bears the date “Summer 1910” in parentheses where it appears in Ursula's book. In this letter Vaughan Williams relays to Child that “I've always had this in mind” right after mentioning a possible *Lavengro* project. If we can trust the given date, and there is no reason why we should not, these words strongly indicate that the 37-year-old Vaughan Williams had come to know the book long since. Still other information supports this likelihood. We know, for example, that Vaughan Williams himself collected folk songs from gypsies.<sup>100</sup> Jan Marsh reminds us that a fascination with gypsies was an integral part of the late Victorian folk movement, citing Vaughan

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<sup>97</sup> Clement King Shorter, *George Borrow and His Circle* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1913), p. 278. Quoted in Crowther, “The Tramp,” p. 106.

<sup>98</sup> Shorter, *George Borrow and His Circle*, p. 287.

<sup>99</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, p. 27. I allow that Mellers and others may have had access to a source that would support this specific claim (perhaps Ursula Vaughan Williams's testimony), but I have neither had access to it myself nor seen it mentioned.

<sup>100</sup> See Savage, “Vaughan Williams, The Romany Ryes, and the Cambridge Ritualists,” p. 384; and Onderdonk, “Ralph Vaughan Williams's Folksong Collecting: English Nationalism and the Rise of Professional Society,” p. 243.

Williams's unrealized opera on *Lavengro* in the course of her discussion.<sup>101</sup> It is highly unlikely that, even if *Lavengro* was not the sole motivation for Vaughan Williams's early fascination with folksong, the book did not play some role in his consciousness and imagination during the course of his excursions. All available information thus collectively points to Vaughan Williams's introduction to *Lavengro* occurring in his formative years. And so we return to the era that saw the development of his interest in folksong.

The article by Roger Savage cited earlier thoroughly recounts both Vaughan Williams's relationship to Victorian and Edwardian gypsophilia (fascination with gypsies) and his accompanying musical interest in the idea of the rural wanderer. It also explores both existing and possible manifestations of *Lavengro* in certain operatic works by Vaughan Williams (in particular *Hugh the Drover*), as well as the novel's likenesses to other important themes and literary works in Vaughan Williams's life. The composer's fondness for Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in particular finds certain parallels in *Lavengro*. Both conform to parameters of the picaresque (an episodic narrative describing the exploits of an adventurous hero) and, perhaps more importantly, the *Bildungsroman* (a narrative tracing the personal development of a central character).<sup>102</sup> There is considerable evidence that Vaughan Williams viewed his own life as a man and as an artist in terms that recall the latter genre. (I will explore this matter more fully in Chapters 3 and 6.) However, in comparing Vaughan Williams's statements pertaining to his early idealization of folksong with *Lavengro*'s protagonist's philological aims and experiences, some other acute similarities present themselves. These strongly suggest that the strange book

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<sup>101</sup> Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land: The Pastoral Impulse in Victorian England, from 1880 to 1914* (London: Quartet Books, 1982), p. 88.

<sup>102</sup> I use the term "Bildungsroman" loosely in describing *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Although Bunyan's book bears certain similarities to a Bildungsroman, its publication predates the formation of the genre in Germany during the early Romantic literary period. For more information on the beginnings of the German Bildungsroman, see Todd Curtis Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman: History of a Genre* (Camden House, 1993); and Michael Minden, *The German Bildungsroman: Incest and Inheritance* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

that became the composer's favorite novel not only inspired various passages of his compositions and even prompted him to want to create an opera out of it, but it probably also acted as a significant stimulant upon his personal idealization of folksong.

Let us consider the evidence. Despite the fact that Borrow's protagonist worked with spoken language and Vaughan Williams worked with folksong, both clearly demonstrated the attitude that valuable knowledge was to be had from those who inhabited the rural regions of England. According to both, this special knowledge served as a testament to the rich traditions existing inside the borders of Britain that had been spurned or unnoticed by many of its inhabitants. This knowledge could form the basis both for cultural and national rediscovery, casting as it does non-urban England as the scene of ample "at-home exoticism," to use Nord's term.<sup>103</sup> Both also viewed their collected knowledge in essentially philological fashion, expressing their belief that these materials evolved or were handed down from earlier versions and thus contained vital links and clues to an irretrievable past. Finally, both *Lavengro's* protagonist and Vaughan Williams admit in their respective statements that the discovery of the gypsy language in the case of one, and folksong in the case of the other, were moments of self-discovery in their own lives and careers. Hence, in addition to finding reflections of Borrow's characters, scenes, and narratives in Vaughan Williams's operas and other works, as Savage has compellingly discussed, we find that the *Lavengro's* protagonist's attitudes concerning his philological pursuits almost startlingly parallel with those Vaughan Williams expressed from his earliest writings on folksong. Additionally, the only place where Vaughan Williams himself mentioned Borrow in any way other than expressing a desire to create an opera based upon *Lavengro* was when he wrote to Harold Child with the express wish that certain scenes in what became *Hugh the Drover*, his "folk song opera," be based on materials from *The Zincahi*. Early

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<sup>103</sup> Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination*, p. 3

in *The Zincoli*, Borrow recalls a prize fight at which he was present as a teenager. The prize fight scene occurs in Vaughan Williams's completed opera at the end of Act I. Something similar is present in *Lavengro* as well, with the protagonist making it a point at several junctures not to shy away from physical confrontation.

These parallels take on greater weight when considering the place of philology in Victorian and Edwardian historical studies, and the role that all of these played in the folksong revival in which Vaughan Williams participated. The urge to discover the past through special knowledge and materials of the present occurred across a wide spectrum. In the closing pages of his dissertation, Julian Onderdonk calls attention to this important overarching trend that formed the background of folksong collecting around the turn of the twentieth century. He writes: "It must be remembered that at the time Vaughan Williams was collecting there was a strong climate of scholarly opinion that sought an 'Ur-text' for cultural artifacts that had been transmitted over time."<sup>104</sup> At least some of this climate is traceable to scholastic developments in the nineteenth century. Dennis Taylor writes:

The Victorian period represents the climax of the once widely held commonplace that the function of history is to help us to understand the present...The 1860s in particular was [sic] intensely caught up in the quest for origins as a key to self-knowledge and general understanding...The successes of archaeology and anthropology in the 1860s encouraged a return to historical and, within limits, etymological understanding.<sup>105</sup>

In this climate the term "philology" came to accrue multiple layers of meaning beyond its mere association with the study of language. J.W. Burrow writes:

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<sup>104</sup> Onderdonk, "Ralph Vaughan Williams's Folksong Collecting: English Nationalism and the Rise of Professional Society," p. 325.

<sup>105</sup> Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 207-208.

In its primary sense, in the first half of the nineteenth century [philology] still tend to mean the general study of classical literature scholarship *tout court*...By the mid-century, however, the meaning of philology, and hence, in a sense, men's notions of the humanities in general, and of the place of them of [sic] the study of language, was changing rapidly...[referencing] ethnology, history, and geography.<sup>106</sup>

Even where the term “philology” was employed to refer to linguistic study, the pursuit shared goals with other endeavors in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. Scholars treating the subject tell us that the mid- nineteenth century saw philology shift to an approach that aimed for greater empiricism, whereas before, the intended emphasis was along more philosophical lines. In an important book on the study of language in late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century England, Hans Aarsleff writes:

It is universally agreed that the decisive turn in language study occurred when the philosophical, a priori method of the eighteenth century was abandoned in favor of the historical, a priori method of the nineteenth. The former began with the mental categories and sought their exemplification in language, as in universal grammar, and based etymology on conjectures about the origin of language. The latter sought only facts, evidence, and demonstration; it divorced the study of language from the study of mind.<sup>107</sup>

Still, whatever the empirical aims of new philologists, their research was not always backed by wholly scientific means. Dennis Taylor's study on Hardy and philology discusses how scientific and historical methods of investigating the past nonetheless led to intense speculation beyond what researchers' tools could reveal. Citing the example of the German-born Max Müller, one of the most publicly visible philologists living in Victorian England and who was interested in

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<sup>106</sup> J.W. Burrow, “The Uses of Philology in Victorian England,” in *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain: Essays in Honor of George Kitson Clark* (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1967), edited by Robert Robson, p. 181.

<sup>107</sup> Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England 1780-1860* (London: The Athlone Press, and Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 127.

language study as a window into religious history<sup>108</sup>, Taylor discusses this tension. He writes: “Thus, the new philologist, having set out on modest historicist and comparative grounds, sometimes ended in the sort of philosophical speculation which the new philology had reacted against.” Taylor describes how for Müller and others the mystery of ultimate origins, the original “Ur-language,” continued to tantalize even new philologists while remaining hopelessly out of reach from an empirical standpoint.<sup>109</sup>

According to this information, a picture emerges from mid-nineteenth-century England of certain historical and linguistic researchers caught between their desire for empirically based discovery on the one hand and their seemingly irresistible tendency to allow their imaginations a prominent place in their endeavors. This raises the question: What beyond a mere interest in roots could prompt such a dilemma? One, and possibly *the*, answer lies in the cultural and political preoccupations of the time and place in question. In many countries of nineteenth-century Western Europe, philology stood with other historical disciplines amidst widely felt urges to seek out and establish national roots and identities. In his essay already cited, Burrow describes how the comparative philological discipline that became increasingly prominent among enthusiasts and historians in latter nineteenth-century England had beginnings in Germany, where philology was linked with typical adjuncts of nationalism – folklore and the Romantic movement.<sup>110</sup> (Germany was also, as discussed earlier, the birthplace of the Bildungsroman genre.) According to Roy Harris (not the American symphonist), what really

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<sup>108</sup> For a primer on Max Müller’s aims presented within a summary view of Victorian philology, consult Richard Maxwell’s article “Philology,” in *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia* (New York & London: The Greenwood Press, 1998), edited by Sally Mitchell, pp. 598-599.

<sup>109</sup> Taylor, *Hardy’s Literary Language and Victorian Philology*, pp. 242-247. For more information on Max Müller’s religious philological endeavors consult Chapter 5 of Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), pp. 82-92.

<sup>110</sup> Burrow, “The Uses of Philology in Victorian Britain,” pp. 182 ff.

drove comparative philology at root was nationalist politics. This was especially so in Western European nations looking to justify their influence and expansion, and in some cases their attempts to establish racial credentials. The Victorians, for example, formed speculations about ancient roots and languages that fitted their political and imperial narratives.<sup>111</sup>

Not only were philology and other historical disciplines in nineteenth-century Britain often inextricably bound up with cultural politics, but all of these currents also formed the background to the English Folk Revival of which folk music became a major part. In her widely quoted book *The Imagined Village*, Georgina Boyes describes how these historical pursuits, as well as the new influence of Darwin's theory of evolution, helped to situate folk singers as precious sources of knowledge that not only provided a window to the past but also were fast disappearing in the first decade of the twentieth century. Boyes shows that these were constructions necessary for the Folk Revival's purpose of offering an alternative mode of living to the industrialization that many saw as nefarious.<sup>112</sup> Interspersed throughout the writings of major English folk song collectors is this very idea – that folksong was dying out and that quick work needed to be done to preserve it in its “authentic form.” The excerpt from Cecil Sharp's 1907 book quoted in an earlier footnote, as well as Parry's remarks at the inception of the Folk Song Society, offer the notion that modern urban society was at the point of corrupting the last vestiges of what they considered to be true folksong. That Vaughan Williams expressed similar views is well documented. Most notably, he came to believe this before he really began his

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<sup>111</sup> Roy Harris, “History and Comparative Philology,” in *Language and History: Integrationist Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2006), edited by Nigel Love, pp. 57-59. For further sources on the patterns and participants concerning nineteenth-century philology, its manifestations, and its cultural politics, see Hannah Franziska Augstein, *James Cowles Prichard's Anthropology: Remaking the Science of Man in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999); and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, “Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology,” in *Representations* No. 106 (Spring, 2009), pp. 34-62.

<sup>112</sup> Georgina Boyes, *The Imagined Village: Culture, Ideology and the English Folk Revival*, Music and Society Series (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1993), chapter 1, ff.

collecting, writing a letter to the *Morning Post* that urged the preservation of folksong.<sup>113</sup> Even decades later, Maud Karpeles, a close friend of Sharp and a participant in the English folk song scene, was reaffirming the notion of a disappearing “living tradition” by writing that virtually all authentic folksongs, which she distinguished along the familiar rural-urban lines discussed here, were either lost or had already been collected long before.<sup>114</sup>

Vaughan Williams hinted at an awareness of the scholarly and cultural climate in which he first collected folk songs when he claimed “no pretence to have any expert knowledge of archaeology or antiquarianism, or folk-lore, or any of those subjects which an expert should possess.” Rather, he writes, his authority on the topic stemmed from his experiencing folksong in its natural environment and working among the more “primitive” peoples of England.<sup>115</sup> Still, before he collected his first song, Vaughan Williams was showing himself in his writings on folksong to share the national and cultural concerns not only of his friends and mentors in the movement, but also larger currents that helped to shape all of their views. When Vaughan Williams did finally collect folk songs, he could not help but to interpret his findings in light of his cultural background even if, as Julian Onderdonk has shown, he was able to see past his preconceptions at times. I have further argued here that Vaughan Williams’s writings, interests, and other supporting facts suggest that the spirit and attitudes found in his favorite novel, *Lavengro*, likely formed a part of those preconceptions even while they colored his early operatic projects. The parallel is close if not exact. George Borrow’s protagonist discovers both himself and the hidden lore of his geographical home through wandering and taking up philology. Vaughan Williams also discovered part of himself through his seeking after folksong mostly in

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<sup>113</sup> The letter is quoted in its entirety in Kendall, “Through Bushes and Through Briars,” p. 62.

<sup>114</sup> Maud Karpeles, *An Introduction to English Folk Song* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 95-104.

<sup>115</sup> Vaughan Williams, “English Folk-Songs,” quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 185-186.

rural regions. He argued later that it was a primary means for England, through its past musical language, to find itself musically as well. It may be that Vaughan Williams did not go so far as to consider himself a man after the protagonist of *Lavengro*, journeying into remote corners of the English countryside, seeking after cultural treasures, substituting folk singers for gypsies (in a few cases both were one and the same), and in so doing enacting a kind of musical philology in the manner of Borrow. However, considering the similarities between Vaughan Williams's treatment of folksong as hidden knowledge brought to light, Borrow's exaltation of Romany and other languages as special lore, and the sharp resonance the latter had in a culture that prized the search for origins, one might be pardoned for making the connection. It would be much more difficult to claim that a passion on the part of Vaughan Williams for *Lavengro*, in many ways a culturally emblematic work of its time, had absolutely nothing to do with his rural idealization of folksong.

In conclusion, I reference the other remaining account provided by Ursula Vaughan Williams in which she invokes Borrow's name. She claims that in the years following the Great War, Vaughan Williams resumed a favorite pastime when he embarked upon one of his wayfaring trips in some of the counties of southern England, which as we shall see, had since Elizabeth times become iconic of English pastoral landscape as a whole. She writes that he stopped at a house for lodging and refreshment and found to his happy surprise that it was the home of a fellow soldier in the war. The friends stayed up through much of the night in each other's company. If Ursula's account of this meeting, with her sumptuous descriptions of the rural country forming the backdrop of this journey, were not enough to make readers recall these precise patterns in *Lavengro*'s adventures, she mentions at the end of the anecdote that "it was

still almost the world Borrow had known.”<sup>116</sup> One wonders whether Vaughan Williams saw these journeys in terms of his favorite novel, or described them as such to Ursula prior to the latter relaying them in her book. In any case, if the event occurred as she described, it does reinforce what his writings on folksong reveal – the fondness Vaughan Williams had for journeys into the field, and his Borrowian delight at who and what he might discover there.

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<sup>116</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 168.

### Chapter 3 Vaughan Williams, the Progressive Spirit, and the Pastoral Ode, ca. 1895-1914

The ways Vaughan Williams's pre-Great War compositions intersect with the pastoral mode are revealing. All too often the pastoral mode has been viewed as a merely backward-looking means of expression, denoting a deeply conservative outlook on life on account of its use of the myth of Arcadia and/or nostalgia for certain places and times. When one looks at the period in which Vaughan Williams began composing his first mature works, one finds a situation difficult to wholly reconcile with such an idea. At the very time when he was at his most progressive politically, and looking forward in terms of his career, he composed pastoral works most closely aligned with the idyllic, Arcadian aspects predominantly associated with the mode.

Several studies have addressed Vaughan Williams's political leanings and how these relate to his musical activities. Among the most successful are found in studies by Alain Frogley and Julian Onderdonk.<sup>117</sup> These are especially adept at resisting the urge to place upon Vaughan Williams an easy label without qualification or sensitivity to which of the composer's attitudes changed over time and which remained fairly consistent throughout his life. Onderdonk's study is particularly thorough in its explication of the composer's sensibilities, showing how the more leftist of Vaughan Williams's impulses were genuine but often checked by a number of moderating influences accrued since his youth in the Wedgwood estate.<sup>118</sup>

My task in this chapter will not be merely to revisit Vaughan Williams's politics. Rather, I am interested in how three currents both relate to and stand distinct from each other. First, I will recount how much the political and social climate in pre-war England provided a conducive

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<sup>117</sup> See Frogley, "Constructing Englishness in music: National Character and the Reception of Ralph Vaughan Williams," in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, pp. 1-22.

<sup>118</sup> See Onderdonk, "Ralph Vaughan Williams's Folksong Collecting: English Nationalism and the Rise of Professional Society," chapters 1-2.

backdrop for the flowering of the pastoral mode in new uses and contexts. Second, I will address the extent to which Vaughan Williams personally participated in and/or subscribed to the values and cultural activities of this atmosphere, focusing in part upon his reaction to the influential ideas of William Morris. Third, I will examine Vaughan Williams's pre-war pastoral compositions in light of the first two currents, determining where there are demonstrable points of contact and where Vaughan Williams took his musical art in more individual directions. At the end of these examinations, I will argue that Vaughan Williams's pastoral music largely takes on the dimensions of odes during the first part of his career. Here is Vaughan Williams's pastoralism at its most optimistic, supported by his own personal experiences and eager outlook at the time.

As outlined in several sources, the political climate of late nineteenth- and early twentieth- century England provided fertile soil for a cultural re-flourishing of pastoral sentiment. As more people resettled to towns, cities grew and new problems confronted society.<sup>119</sup> The pollution, squalor, and other ill effects that resulted from the unprecedented size and populations of cities such as London and Manchester alarmed many and produced some distinct reactions. There was an increasing sense that rural living was healthier and more natural than sacrificing one's health and dignity to enable others to pursue urban capitalist ventures. Industrialization fostered nostalgia for rural England that was not always reactionary in nature. An idealized rural England rooted in a mythic past was also something of a blueprint for a

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<sup>119</sup> Peter Mandler points out that, by 1851, the nation was predominantly urban in terms of population. See Mandler, *The Rise and Fall of the Stately Home* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 72. This being said, it is also true, as both Eric Hobsbawm and Dorothy De Val write, that England was still largely a rural nation in the nineteenth century and after in terms of land area. See Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: The Birth of the Industrial Revolution* (New York: The New Press, 1999), edited by Chris Wrigley, p. 173; and De Val, "The Imagined Village," pp. 342-343.

desired future return to balance. As such, the preservation of rural England and its embodiment of ideal living and national character began to take on progressive connotations in unique ways. A renewed love for things rural that at this time became fashionable, and which led to changes in legislation, might almost be considered a kind of proto-environmentalism, all the more as it was pitted against the ever-larger, dirtier mills and factories that the industrial revolution had brought about in metropolitan areas.<sup>120</sup>

In this climate a number of writers emerged who mixed various brands of socialist politics with literary expression. Many belonged to the middle or upper classes and viewed their subjects from a standpoint above material want. Perhaps the most visible of these was William Morris (1834-1896), whose paintings, crafts, and textiles spurred a cultural movement in the late nineteenth century.<sup>121</sup> All of these reflect in some measure Morris's belief in a natural and unfettered mode of living. His writings, which encompass a wide range of genres from poetry to fantasy novels, also reinforce this idea. One major work to this effect is *News from Nowhere* (1890), a treatise on Utopia in the form of a futuristic fantasy novel. It proceeds in the first person as the story of a middle-aged man, William Guest, who wakes one day to suddenly find himself in an England set many years in the future – 1952. Guest discovers a lushly pastoral

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<sup>120</sup> For a detailed treatment of all of these trends, see Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980* 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), especially chapters 4-5; Jan Marsh, *Back to the Land* (London: Quartet Books, 1982); and *The Victorian Countryside*, 2 Volumes (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), edited by G.E. Mingay. Wiener makes the important point that multiple sides of the political spectrum seized upon pastoral politics around the turn of the century, not progressives only. (See Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, chapter 4.) In light of this, the fact that Vaughan Williams's progressivism was moderated by a traditionalist streak is not surprising when viewing his life and work in the context of this culture. See also Mandler, *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home*, chapters 1 and 2, for a discussion of how the English country home as a cultural icon relates to these trends.

<sup>121</sup> One of the principal biographic volumes on Morris is still E.P. Thompson's *William Morris: From Romantic to Revolutionary*, first published in 1955 by Stanford University Press and reissued in subsequent printings, including one in 2011. Thompson's book is particularly insightful in how it traces Morris's development as a writer and socialist thinker. For further information, see Roderick Marshall, *William Morris and his Earthly Paradises* (Tisbury, UK: The Compton Press, 1979); and Florence S. Boos and Caroline G. Silver, *Socialism and the Literary Artistry of William Morris* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990).

Utopia in which the industrialized, unattractive portions of London have disappeared, where dwellings and clothing reflect the belief in beauty for its own sake, where people live in harmony with one another and work only for pleasure, and where money and personal ownership have been abolished in favor of a perfected communal society. Many chapters in the center of the novel take the form of Hammond, an old man, telling Guest how these changes came about from the late nineteenth century. They actually represent, under the guise of fiction, a kind of social and political manifesto of William Morris. Indeed, in the last words of the novel, Guest wakes and muses on this future vision, hinting at its suitability as a blueprint for actual social change.

There are some significant assumptions informing Morris's work that characterize certain progressive systems of thought in the era in which *News from Nowhere* appeared. First, Morris clearly favors elements of the distant past in terms of both the Arcadian world he paints and the regressive, indeed medieval, stage of technology he portrays as ideal in this novel. If Morris was not anti-technology through and through, he was surely against pervasive mechanical industry. Morris was, after all, also affiliated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement popular in nineteenth-century England. This movement favored among other things a return to principles of Renaissance painting that extolled the natural in manner and bearing. Yet as with the Pre-Raphaelites, Morris's vision extends past merely idealizing elements of a former age. He suggests in *News from Nowhere* that the social and natural harmony of a mythic past could become a reality if present society aspired to the proper socialist blueprint. Like many progressives of the time, Morris believed that Utopia could be achieved if mankind overcame present encumbering difficulties. This point is, I believe, important. In his study on pastoral, Terry Gifford, while at pains to demonstrate the centrality of the Arcadian myth to the pastoral ethos, downplays the fact that Morris's Arcadia is in the future while most Arcadias are set in a

past golden age. He writes that *News From Nowhere* “conforms to any definition of the pastoral” in terms of its “neo-medievalism” and its recognizable Arcadia regardless of the time in question.<sup>122</sup> While this is true enough, the distinction is significant. As a progressive humanist, Morris positions his Utopian pastoral paradise in the future out of a fundamental belief that human society could be perfected under the right conditions. This is very different from the role that Arcadia occupies in the Christian Scriptures, where, for example, the Eden of the remote past was the only earthly Arcadia that ever existed, and the only chance at an ideal future paradise lies in heaven. One of Jesus Christ’s chief tenets was, after all: “My Kingdom is not of this world.”<sup>123</sup>

Morris was not alone in aligning an idealized pastoral world with a future Utopia. Other writers such as John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) took up this theme in their own ways.<sup>124</sup> Nor was this notion entirely without precedent in older pastoral literature. Writing almost two millennia earlier, the Roman poet Virgil offered in his *Eclogues* ideas that, though different in setting and precise aim, anticipate some sentiments of the progressive pastoralists in late Victorian England. In two of these poems, Virgil aligns the pastoral mode with present political unrest and predicts a future era marked by balance in politics and nature. The very first Eclogue features shepherds who speak among other matters of the policy of enclosure threatening their way of life. The fourth Eclogue is the most unique and most discussed of the ten. It takes as its theme the anticipation of a new leader yet to be born who is

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<sup>122</sup> Gifford, *Pastoral*, pp. 36-39.

<sup>123</sup> King James Bible, John 18:36.

<sup>124</sup> Jan Marsh sees Carpenter, Morris, and Ruskin as the three whose writers proved to be the most influential in the Back-to-the-Land Movement. See Marsh, *Back to the Land*, pp. 8ff. Ruskin’s work remains much read and cited today. He outlined many of his own distinct ideas in *Unto This Last* (a series of four essays originally appearing in *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860 and published as a book in 1862), and *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968 [a reprint of the 1886 edition]). Vaughan Williams suggested that he was familiar with the works of Ruskin (whether with these particular titles or not is unclear) in his correspondence to Harold Child concerning what would become the opera *Hugh the Drover*. I will discuss this opera later in the chapter. See Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 406.

destined to usher in an era of harmony and prosperity. The copious pastoral metaphors of the poem help to position its new social age to coincide with an accompanying natural harmony also to be realized. The fourth Eclogue stands apart as the only one of the ten not obviously indebted to Theocritus's *Idylls*. It forms perhaps the principal precedent for the pastoral embodying a mythical future paradise.<sup>125</sup>

Vaughan Williams was well acquainted with the writings of both Morris and Virgil.<sup>126</sup> His few comments on Morris serve to illustrate something referenced in Chapter 1 – that he could acknowledge a liking for, and even an influence from, certain authors while remaining ambivalent toward their works. In the case of Morris, Vaughan Williams offers comments in multiple writings. In one cited in the last chapter, he recalls how during his youth his aunt was a fervent follower of the Morris movement. This formed some of the composer's earliest impressions.

That must have been in the early eighties when I was about 10. I used to go with my family every Christmas to stop with an Aunt. My Aunt had been much bitten by the William Morris movement. She frescoed sunflowers on her walls and put bottled glass in her windows. One of the by-products of this movement was the cult of the Christmas carol. My Aunt was a first-rate musician and her children were also musical and we used to gather round the pianoforte in the evening and sing 'Stainer and Bell'. I especially remember the 'Cherry Tree' carol tune which has remained a fragrant possession all my life and is, to my mind, much more beautiful than later discoveries to the same words.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> A good starting place for more information on Virgil's *Eclogues* is Wendell Clausen, *A Commentary on Virgil Eclogues* (Clarendon Press, 1995).

<sup>126</sup> Vaughan Williams indicated that he was familiar with Virgil's poetry in a letter to Ursula Wood postmarked 16 Oct 1941. In the course of praising some of Ursula's poetry, Vaughan Williams fondly references Virgil. See Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 325.

<sup>127</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Let Us Remember...Early Days," quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pg. 251.

Other allusions to Morris are even more instructive. In the course of offering tributes to his late friend and colleague, Gustav Holst, Vaughan Williams mentions how the deceased composer was an impassioned Socialist and follower of Morris's political philosophy, though his enthusiasm for certain points later waned. In making these remarks, Vaughan Williams shares his own value judgments about Morris. The first example is from an introductory talk given on the occasion of a Holst Memorial Concert that took place on June 22, 1934.

While [Holst] was still young, he was strongly attracted by the ideals of William Morris and, though in later years he discarded the medievalism of that teacher, the ideal of comradeship remained with him throughout his life.<sup>128</sup>

The second example comes from an essay on Holst, apparently penned earlier in the same year and while Holst was still alive. It is an obvious variation upon the sentiments presented in the first excerpt, though it provides some important complementary details.

It was Holst's strong sense of human sympathy which brought him when a young man into contact with William Morris and the Kelmscott Club. The tawdriness of London, its unfriendliness, the sordidness both of its riches and poverty were overwhelming to an enthusiastic and sensitive youth; and to him the ideals of Morris, the insistence on beauty in every detail of human life and work, were a revelation. No wonder then that the poetic socialism of the Kelmscott Club became the natural medium of his aspirations; to Morris and his followers 'comradeship' was no pose but an absolute necessity of life. And though as years go on Holst has grown out of the weak points in Morris's teaching, yet his ideal of thoroughness, of beauty and above all comradeship have remained and grow stronger. It is this almost mystical sense of unity which is the secret of Holst's power as a teacher.<sup>129</sup>

From these excerpts, which together represent Vaughan Williams's fullest discourse on Morris presently available, one learns several useful things about his approach to certain contemporary

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<sup>128</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Introductory Talk to Holst Memorial Concert," quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pg. 300.

<sup>129</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Gustav Holst: An Essay and a Note," in *National Music and Other Essays*, p. 135.

social ideas. First, he clearly relays that the exultation of brotherhood and beauty in life and art were the things that for him (and not for Holst only) held particular value in Morris's teachings. Second, the ambivalence that he showed toward several ideas and creeds in his life extended to Morris and his teachings as well. It is true that the remarks cited here all date from well after the first decade of the twentieth century and so could represent views that Vaughan Williams only later came to fully adopt. However, I have found no other information that proves beyond doubt that he emulated Morris as outwardly and enthusiastically as Holst once had.<sup>130</sup> It is known that the young Holst was more politically active.<sup>131</sup>

It is difficult to deny, however, that Vaughan Williams's writings and activities before the war he were very much in alignment with the celebration of beauty in life, art, and the natural world in a manner close to that espoused by Morris. In the first chapter I quoted a letter from him to his cousin Ralph Wedgwood that fervently professes a love for the natural scenery of southern England, where he spent much of his childhood. In the preceding excerpts, there is the enthusiasm with which he relays Holst's faith in the idea of communal brotherhood, further showing that he had shared this value with him. Finally, there is the fact that Vaughan Williams, like Morris, subscribed to Fabian Socialism, a political movement that valued gradual rather than revolutionary change and reforms through peaceful means.<sup>132</sup> However, it is also true that Vaughan Williams later, and in private communication, expressed a great deal of ambivalence toward his earlier political associations. He was, as Paul Harrington points out, likely never more

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<sup>130</sup> For example, the slow movement of Holst's *Cotswolds Symphony* (1899-1900) is an elegy subtitled "In Memoriam William Morris."

<sup>131</sup> Holst, for example, joined the Hammersmith Socialist Club in 1896 and became conductor of its choir. For more information on Holst's political and cultural activities and views, see Christopher M. Scheer, "Fin-de-siecle Britain: Imperialism and Wagner in the Music of Gustav Holst," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2007), chapters 1-2. While Vaughan Williams read Fabian tracts and discussed politics during gatherings with friends and fellow students, he never became an active member of a political organization.

<sup>132</sup> For more information on the movement, its formation, and its activities, see Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1916).

than a Fabian Socialist in the larger sense. The available information suggests that Vaughan Williams embraced the idea of comradeship but stopped short of wholeheartedly subscribing to elaborate social theories.<sup>133</sup>

Perhaps the clearest indicators of Vaughan Williams's affinity with the ideas of Morris and others in the progressive cultural climate of late Victorian and Edwardian England are his choices as a composer, both in terms of the themes and texts he handled. These may be classified according to two broad categories of compositions, both of which involve the pastoral mode. The first category comprises compositions that celebrate the evocative qualities of some natural landscape. The second group connects with the pastoral mode in the more vague, metaphysical sense of exploring beyond horizons or attaining a new state of being. This second category reflects Vaughan Williams's newfound discovery, at the hands of Bertrand Russell, of the poetry of Walt Whitman, though compositions with non-Whitman texts appear at this time and share these characteristics. Both categories unite under the more generalized rubric of the ode. While the ode may not have as sharply defined a tradition in pastoral art and literature as the elegy or the allegory (both discussed in later chapters), it runs through the literature that Vaughan Williams chose to set to music prior to the Great War. In this music he conformed more closely than at any other point in his career to the Arcadian ideal. Never again would he so consistently embrace an almost unmediated optimism. He did so through one group of compositions that predominantly celebrate the past and the present, and another group that looks with eager anticipation ahead and beyond.

For the first category, the obvious place to begin is with those orchestral compositions that bear scenic titles but present no set texts. Several of these take the form of tributes to various

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<sup>133</sup> Harrington, "Holst and Vaughan Williams: Radical Pastoral," in *Music and the Politics of Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), edited by Christopher Norris, pp. 124-125.

regions that Vaughan Williams knew or visited in his travels. These include *In the Fen Country* (1904), the *Norfolk Rhapsodies* (1906), and, for reasons that will shortly be made clear, the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910) (also commonly known as the *Tallis Fantasia*). Along with some “orchestral impressions” dating from between 1903 and 1907, the first two belong to a group of early orchestral works that represent Vaughan Williams’s first mature efforts as a composer.<sup>134</sup> Several coincide with his earliest experiences of collecting folk songs.<sup>135</sup> The titles of the compositions, some of which were never completed, allude to scenic locales mostly in the southern portions of England. Vaughan Williams either lived near to them at certain times or encountered them in his leisurely travels and folk song collecting expeditions (the Solent between the English mainland and the Isle of Wight, the “Fen Country” of East Anglia not far from Cambridge, etc.). Although poetry or inscriptions of a pastoral bent supplement the titles of more than one of these works, the selection of localities to use as inspiration must have also been guided by personal experience. The inclusion in this group of the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* merits some explanation. While it bears no explicit associations with pastoral themes, certain considerations may link it in a roundabout way with English landscape. Alun Howkins describes how the revival of Tudor music and culture in the late nineteenth century was closely related to the pastoralism of the era, and that the South embodied what many saw as the most ideal manifestation of rural England. Additionally, he points out how “Tudor England and the countryside were to be brought together as a new basis

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<sup>134</sup> Two of these orchestral impressions have formed the center of previous discussions due to their appearance in other compositions. See Andrew Herbert, “Unfinished Business: The Evolution of the “solent” theme,” in Foreman, ed., *Vaughan Williams in Perspective*, pp. 69-83. See also Savage, “Vaughan Williams, the Romany Ryes, and the Cambridge Ritualists,” p. 414. In the latter piece, Savage mentions the opening theme of the first impression – *Harnham Down* – in connection with the much later *An Oxford Elegy*. This composition forms the main discussion of Chapter 5.

<sup>135</sup> Michael Vaillancourt discusses this matter in a chapter on Vaughan Williams’s earliest orchestral music. See Vaillancourt, “Coming of Age: the Earliest Orchestral Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams,” in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, pp. 23-46, and especially 36-38.

for an English national music.”<sup>136</sup> Other commentators have linked some of the *Tallis Fantasia*’s gestures and themes with the folksong idiom.<sup>137</sup> Vaughan Williams himself explored the relationship between church tunes and folk songs in the last of the written-out lectures of *National Music*.<sup>138</sup> However, he did not leave behind any clear indication that he in any way connected with folksong Tallis’s modal psalm tune that forms the basis of his fantasia. Following from the discussion in Chapter 1, even if he had at all associated the *Tallis Fantasia* with folksong, that would not by itself establish for the work clear pastoral credentials. It is only a possibility that Vaughan Williams had pastoral imagery directly in mind concerning this music, but he certainly draws upon a past Tudor age widely associated with iconic English landscapes.

Another early orchestral work that merits special mention here is one that, given long unavailability of a recording or published score, has received very little attention in the secondary literature – the *Bucolic Suite* (1900).<sup>139</sup> This is one of Vaughan Williams’s earliest surviving, complete orchestral compositions. It is one of a few works in his whole oeuvre that makes use in its title of either the term “pastoral” or a close synonym. In the first chapter I discussed how Vaughan Williams only infrequently makes unmistakable reference to musical pastoral topics of the Western European tradition. The *Bucolic Suite* may be another exception to this pattern. Laid out in four movements, it contains gestures resembling widely recognizable

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<sup>136</sup> Alun Howkins, “The Discovery of Rural England,” in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920* (London: Croon Helm, 1987), edited by Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, pp. 62-68, 72.

<sup>137</sup> For example, see Pople, “Vaughan Williams, Tallis, and the Phantasy Principle,” in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Essays*, pp. 47-80; and Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, pp. 47-58. A recent article in the popular press also addresses the Tallis Fantasia as it may relate to folk and Tudor elements. See Rob Young, “Cloud of knowing,” in *The Guardian*, 11 June 2010.

<sup>138</sup> Vaughan Williams, “The Influence of Folk-Song on the Music of the Church,” in *National Music and Other Essays*, pp. 74-82.

<sup>139</sup> My conclusions on the *Bucolic Suite* are preliminary and based upon secondary sources, particularly Michael Kennedy’s *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, and Michael Vaillancourt’s essay “Coming of Age: The Earliest Orchestral Music,” found on pp. 23-46 of Frogley’s *Vaughan Williams Studies* and cited in multiple earlier instances. The manuscript for this score resides at the British Library under the shelfmark Add. MS 57275. A published edition is due out from Oxford University Press in the near future.

musical pastoral topics, including: dance-like meters in 6/8 or 3/4, lilting melodies above pedal points or similar bass patterns, and the use of high woodwinds such as flutes and oboes to play such melodies. Like the *Concerto for Oboe and Strings*, the *Bucolic Suite* may indeed concede something to conventional pastoral topics. As with case of the Oboe Concerto, however, certain circumstances complicate such a label. One early review written by Edwin Evans and quoted in Kennedy's life-and-works volume, presents an interesting take on the nature of its pastoralism: "the principal movements are rather more genuinely reminiscent of the countryside than pastoral music is apt to be. This is not the pastoral music of silk-clad shepherds and shepherdesses, but rather of brawny clodhoppers in corduroys...the key-note of the work is essentially the real country merry-making as opposed to that of ladies and gentlemen indulging in a passing fancy in the country."<sup>140</sup> If such remarks reflect Vaughan Williams's own conception of the work, then any nod to traditional pastoral art may be limited or non-existent. Written during a time when Vaughan Williams was first formulating his ideas on folksong (and before he collected any), he may have had in mind, as Evans suggests, the lives of folk singers rather than the lofty figures of Arcadian literature and opera. In this scenario, Vaughan Williams may have employed musical pastoral topics used since the early Baroque period as a stand-in due to an under-developed or idealized conception of actual folksong. In either case it is difficult, by reason of title and musical character, not to believe that the *Bucolic Suite* is some sort of rural idealization. There is little or no "hard pastoral" here.

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<sup>140</sup> Edwin Evans, from an article in the *Musical Standard* (July 25, 1903), quoted in Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 55-56. Evans (1874-1945) was an English music critic and promoter who wrote for several publications during his career. He is known for his advocacy of Debussy, his program notes for concerts of contemporary English composers, and his contributions to the *Grove Dictionary* among other things. Vaughan Williams corresponded with Evans as early as 1903. See Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, pp. 43-44, 183-184.

The other major subset of pastoral music in our first category includes the relatively large number of art songs Vaughan Williams produced around the earliest years of the twentieth century. Like much of the music composed before the Great War, and especially prior to his study with Ravel in 1908, these songs owe a great deal to Romantic Lied conventions of the nineteenth century. Many of them emphasize natural scenes or emotions connected with such scenes. Below is a table containing all of the explicitly pastoral-themed compositions that Vaughan Williams completed prior to 1914, excepting his many arrangements of folk songs. Notice the predominance of the song genre.

Table 3.1

<b>Pre-1914 Compositions by Vaughan Williams with Explicit Pastoral/Natural Themes (Excluding Arrangements)<sup>141</sup></b>	<b>Years Completed</b>
<i>Echo's Lament of Narcissus</i> (Madrigal for Choir, text by Jonson)	1895-1896
<i>The Splendour Falls</i> (Song, text by Tennyson)	Abt. 1896
<i>How Can the Tree but Whither?</i> (Song, text by Vaux)	1898
<i>Claribel</i> (Song, text by Tennyson)	1898
<i>The Garden of Prosperine</i> (Choir and Orchestra, text by Swinburne)	1899
<i>Bucolic Suite</i> (Orchestra)	1900
<i>Linden Lea</i> (Song, text by Barnes)	1901
<i>Blackmowre by the Stour</i> (Song, text by Barnes)	1902
<i>Tears, Idle Tears</i> (Song, text by Tennyson)	1902
<i>When I am Dead, My Dearest</i> (Song, text by C. Rossetti)	Abt. 1903
<i>The Winter's Willow</i> (Song, text by Barnes)	Abt. 1903
<i>Silent Noon</i> (Song, text by D.G. Rossetti)	1903
<i>Willow-Wood</i> (Song, later Cantata for baritone and orchestra; text by D.G. Rossetti)	1903, 1909
<i>Sound Sleep</i> (Song, text by C. Rossetti)	1903

<sup>141</sup> I am also excluding incidental music that Vaughan Williams composed for several plays before 1914. Although some plays he worked with contain clear pastoral references and settings (for example, Gilbert Murray's translation of Euripedes's *Iphigenia in Tauris*, for which Vaughan Williams provided music in 1911), I am uncertain in multiple cases as to which portions he set or how he set them.

Table 3.1 (cont.)

<i>Orpheus With His Lute</i> (Song, text by Shakespeare)	1903
<i>In the Fen Country</i> (Orchestra)	1904
<i>The House of Life</i> (Song Cycle inc. <i>Silent Noon</i> , texts by D.G. Rossetti)	1904
<i>Songs of Travel</i> (Song Cycle, texts by R.L. Stevenson)	1904
<i>Dreamland</i> (Song, text by C. Rossetti)	1904
Orchestral Impressions ( <i>Harnham Down</i> and <i>The Solent</i> completed)	1904-1907
<i>Pan's Anniversary</i> (Incidental Music for Jonson's Masque, produced in collaboration with Gustav Holst)	1905
<i>Norfolk Rhapsodies 1-3</i> (Only No. 1 survives)	1906
<i>Toward the Unknown Region</i> (Song for chorus and orchestra, text by Whitman)	1907
<i>The Sky Above the Roof</i> (Song, text by Verlaine)	1908
<i>On Wenlock Edge</i> (Song Cycle, texts by A.E. Housman)	1909
<i>A Sea Symphony</i> (Soloists, Chorus, Orchestra, texts by Whitman)	1909
<i>Romance and Pastoral</i> for Violin and Piano	Before 1914
<i>The Lark Ascending</i> (Romance for Violin and Orchestra or Violin and Piano, after a poem by George Meredith)	1914 (Revised 1920)
<i>Hugh the Drover</i> (Opera in Two Acts, libretto by Harold Child)	1914 (Revised afterward)

It is fitting in several respects to begin examining this largely pastoral song repertoire by first considering a single song – *Linden Lea*. This happens to have been Vaughan Williams's first published composition (appearing in 1902 in the magazine *The Vocalist*, where he also published multiple articles) and has received frequent performances. It was written when his interest in country music and local traditions were reaching a high intensity. The text is by William Barnes and showcases the poet's penchant for writing in the Dorset dialect, as well as his tendency to

glorify rural life.<sup>142</sup> Vaughan Williams retained enthusiasm for Barnes's poetry throughout his life, as is evidenced by his return to it for the 1952 song "In the Spring" (dedicated to Barnes) and by the fact that it was a highlight of his initial acquaintance with his future second wife Ursula Wood in 1938.<sup>143</sup> *Linden Lea* uses a simple strophic tune, matching well the text's gentle descriptions of its rural scene. Two factors are of particular interest. First, the published score offers texts that preserve Barnes's Dorset dialect poetry in addition to a standard English version of the words. (For convenience, I have placed both versions of the text in Appendix B.) Second, the poetry itself presents an interesting and perhaps revealing choice by the composer. The third verse begins: "Let other folk make money faster in the air of dark-roomed towns; I don't dread a peevish master, though no man may heed my frowns." In a poem otherwise glorifying nature, Barnes, a man whose life and poetry presents a very traditional and religious outlook, includes a dig at capitalist venture. Vaughan Williams in turn chose the poem as the subject of his first musical publication. In Chapter 2 I discussed how, in connection with folksong, Hubert Parry denigrated urban capitalism in favor of what he considered to be the rural folks' way of life. Vaughan Williams, though not as outspoken against urban financial venture, similarly idealized rural folk. In setting this Barnes text, how much did he personally subscribe to its most Morris-like sentiments? How much did the words mean to him and his fast-growing involvement with folksong?

Also prominent among Vaughan Williams's early songs are those set to texts by the Pre-Raphaelite painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882). There are two principal works using Rossetti's texts. The first is the song cycle *The House of Life* (1904), the second number of

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<sup>142</sup> More information on William Barnes and his place in Victorian literature may be found in R.A. Forsyth, "The Conserving Myth of William Barnes," in *Victorian Studies* Vol. 6, No. 4 (June, 1963), pp. 325-354. The article discusses among other things Barnes's philological activity, particularly his attempts to preserve the Dorset dialect.

<sup>143</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 219.

which – “Silent Noon” – was composed first, has achieved a separate popularity outside of the cycle, and virtually epitomizes Vaughan Williams’s nature settings from around this time.<sup>144</sup> The other work is the cantata *Willow Wood*, began in 1902 and finished in 1903 as a setting of some Rossetti sonnets, and scored for violin, piano, and voice. Vaughan Williams recast it, in the version most known today, for low voice, female chorus, and orchestra in 1908-1909. Kennedy writes that this cantata shares a musical theme (he does not specify which) with *The House of Life*, both having been written around the same time. Perhaps he is referring to a descending melodic idea in the initial song, “Love-Sight,” found beginning six measures in, which parallels with the harmonically elastic, recurring main theme in *Willow Wood*.

Ex. 3.1: Vaughan Williams, *The House of Life* – “Love-Sight,” mm. 1-13 (particularly 6-11)

Nº 1.  
**LOVE - SIGHT.**

Words by DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI.      Music by RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS.

Andante con moto ma non troppo.      ♩ = ♩

VOICE.      ♩ = ♩

PIANO.      *pp teneramente è molto sostenuto*      *p dolce*

♩ = ♩

*pp molto legato*

<sup>144</sup> Michael Kennedy’s *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* lists “Silent Noon” as composed in 1903 and the cycle *The House of Life* as completed in 1904. (See pp. 407-408.)

Ex. 3.2: Vaughan Williams, *Willow-Wood*, mm. 5-8 (particularly 7-8)

Ex. 3.3: Vaughan Williams, *Willow-Wood*, mm. 242-243

This theme, as one finds it in *Willow Wood*, is worth remark in that it demonstrates how already at an early stage Vaughan Williams was developing musical fingerprints that he would exploit to versatile effects. It finds a definite echo in another early, more overtly pastoral song. Compare the previous examples to the opening accompaniment theme of “The Sky Above the Roof” (1909), its lyrics adapted from Paul Verlaine’s French text by Mabel Dearmer.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>145</sup> Mabel Dearmer was a writer and wife of the Anglican clergyman Percy Dearmer, who Vaughan Williams worked with when he edited *The English Hymnal* between 1904 and 1906. Vaughan Williams recounts working with Percy

Ex. 3.4: Vaughan Williams, “The Sky Above the Roof”, mm. 1-4



The text of *Willow Wood* uses natural imagery in the course of recounting a meeting between the narrator and “Love” as a transcendent entity. Love then shows the narrator a vision of his deceased wife, reuniting the two in a brief, bittersweet quasi-dream. In his musical setting of the *Willow Wood* sonnets, Vaughan Williams sets melodies that seem to accentuate the atmospheric qualities of the verses at least as much as they do the narrative. Stephen Banfield writes that Vaughan Williams’s setting does not always capture these sadder aspects of the text, suggesting that his lack of occasion to personally identify with the death of a spouse (at least early in his career) limits his setting.<sup>146</sup> Vaughan Williams’s music in *Willow Wood*, in other words, seems to emphasize the beautiful and transcendent at the expense of the tragic. On the other hand, Banfield finds Vaughan Williams more successful in addressing the theme of death in the *House of Life* cycle.<sup>147</sup> But even here, one may argue that he brings out the sadder aspects primarily to paint a scene rather than share in any personal way with the poet’s angst. In setting this other Rossetti text, Vaughan Williams succeeds similarly on the level of accentuating the languorous and Edenesque atmospheres that they suggest. In the case of “Silent Noon,” for

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Dearmer in “Some Reminiscences of the English Hymnal,” part of a collection entitled *The First Fifty Years: A Brief Account of the English Hymnal from 1906 to 1956* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 2-5. Quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 115-118.

<sup>146</sup> Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century* Volume 2 (Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 78-79. Vaughan Williams’s first wife, Adeline Fisher, died in 1951 after years of physical illness.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

example, the breeze of the summer afternoon, together with fingers in the leaves of grass described by the text, receives treatment in the initial lilting theme in the piano. In the middle section, a series of treble chords above ascending arpeggios in the bass sets the scene for text's mention of the flowers that stretch out on the ground beyond where the lovers lie in the grass.

Ex. 3.5: Vaughan Williams, "Silent Noon" (beginning of middle section)

The image shows a musical score for Vaughan Williams' "Silent Noon". It consists of two systems of music. The first system is for the piano accompaniment, with a treble staff containing chords and a bass staff containing ascending arpeggios. The tempo is marked "Poco più mosso." and the dynamics are "pp" and "simile". The second system is for the vocal line, with lyrics: "All round our nest, far as the eye can".

The cycle *Songs of Travel* (1904), using texts by Robert Louis Stevenson, exemplifies many of the concepts that attach to Vaughan Williams's early pastoral music, including the wandering life, natural beauty, and romantic love. Although, as Trevor Hold points out, the *Songs of Travel* are less sensual and of a more "open air" quality than the Rossetti settings, they nonetheless share a few topical similarities.<sup>148</sup> The second number in particular, "Let beauty Awake," is another emblematic work that could accurately represent the tone of the early period pastoral music. The text in the excerpt below paints a decidedly pastoral scene, brought out by the undulating arpeggios in the piano accompaniment

<sup>148</sup> Hold, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song Composers* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2002), p. 109.

Ex. 3.6: Vaughan Williams, *Songs of Travel* – “Let Beauty Awake,” mm. 4-11

The image shows a musical score for the song "Let Beauty Awake" by Vaughan Williams, measures 4-11. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music is in a major mode. The lyrics are: "dreams, Beau - ty a - wake from rest! Let Beau-ty a - wake For Beau - ty's sake. In the hour when the birds a - wake in the brake And the stars are bright in the west!" The score includes a variety of musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *sp* and *p*. There are also some performance instructions like *sf* and *p* in the piano part.

This cycle is an early case in which Vaughan Williams chose and ordered individual poems from a much larger collection of texts, as he would do repeatedly with other works throughout his career. The songs in Vaughan Williams’s ordering begin by extolling the wandering life (as in “The Vagabond”) before exploring contrasting moods in the following songs. They conclude with the valedictory “I have trod the upward and downward slope.” Multiple commentators have

linked this cycle to German Romantic precedents by composers such as Franz Schubert. Michael Kennedy particularly mentions *Winterreise* in connection with *Songs of Travel* and wrote that the latter shares the quality of its wanderer-narrator being ready to face whatever may meet him.<sup>149</sup> Another biographer, James Day, remarks upon the difference between the Romantic angst of Schubert's protagonist versus the hardier, more upbeat wanderer of Vaughan Williams's group.<sup>150</sup> Rufus Hallmark discusses the wanderer-infused literature that Vaughan Williams loved, including Borrow's *Lavengro* and Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as well as the favored rural walks of the composer, in connection with *Songs of Travel*.<sup>151</sup> In all of these views the idea of optimistic steadfastness at what awaits emerges as a dominant theme. Kennedy even remarks: "In Stevenson's virile open-air verses Vaughan Williams found a half-way stage to Whitman."<sup>152</sup> It is tempting, as others have suggested, to view this cycle metaphorically in terms of Vaughan Williams's life and career. In a sense this would prove to be his "setting out" work, arguably his first truly successful and enduring composition of extended length.

Now I will turn to other, larger-scale, vocal works belonging to the first category of early pastoral music by Vaughan Williams. The first that deserves special consideration is another song cycle – *On Wenlock Edge* (1909), scored for tenor, string quartet, and piano. Here one immediately revisits a similar pattern to that discussed in connection with *Willow Wood* and the solo-piano songs. In what may at first glance seem to be an obvious exception to the rule of optimistic, often Arcadian works forming the bulk of Vaughan Williams pre-war pastoral music,

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<sup>149</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 8.

<sup>150</sup> James Day, *Vaughan Williams* (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 112.

<sup>151</sup> Rufus Hallmark, "Robert Louis Stevenson and *Songs of Travel*," in Adams and Wells, eds., *Vaughan Williams Essays*, pp. 133-135. Hallmark's essay also meticulously describes the inception of *Songs of Travel*, including the process wherein Vaughan Williams chose and reordered Stevenson's verse. (See pp. 129-132.)

<sup>152</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 80.

this well-loved song group for tenor, piano and string quartet (based upon poems by A.E. Housman) has been consistently held up by early commentators as failing to match the “Death in Arcadia” themes of its texts. Michael Kennedy’s discussion of the work cites an early pair of reviews by Ernest Newman that criticize it on multiple grounds, most notably on the account of its privileging pictorial qualities at the expense of the poetry’s drama.<sup>153</sup> Even positive assessments of *On Wenlock Edge* have spoken of its scene-setting qualities. Simona Pakenham writes that in the last song – “Clun” – “Vaughan Williams conjures up a picture of those sleepy West Country villages” and “quite overpowers the somber Housman,” though she admittedly does describe certain songs in the cycle as “dramatic.”<sup>154</sup> A.E.F. Dickinson considers the cycle to be one of “vignettes.”<sup>155</sup> Hubert Foss and Wilfrid Mellers, for two other examples, also write of the work largely in scenic terms.<sup>156</sup> It is also worth mentioning in light of this reception trend that *On Wenlock Edge* is one of the major examples where Vaughan Williams made clear choices concerning what to include and, perhaps more notably, what not to include in the way of texts. Over Housman’s express wish that none of *A Shropshire Lad* (the collection from which *On Wenlock Edge* draws its texts) be set to music, Vaughan Williams picked just six poems that were suitable for his purposes. In one case, true to lifelong habit, he omitted words he did not like. The third song, “Is my team ploughing?” is an abridgement of Housman’s poem.

Commenting upon the discarded lines, Vaughan Williams wrote to Hubert Foss: “I also feel that a poet should be grateful to anyone who fails to perpetuate such lines as: -

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<sup>153</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 116. Newman’s remarks are contained in a review from the *Sunday Times* dated 29 October, 1922, and in a longer, earlier review article entitled “Concerning ‘A Shropshire Lad’ and Other Matters,” in *The Musical Times* Vol. 59, No. 907 (Sep. 1, 1918), pp. 393-398. Newman’s *Musical Times* article criticizes *On Wenlock Edge* not only on the account of its pictorial emphasis but also because of a perceived lack of sensitivity toward the text’s rhythms.

<sup>154</sup> Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Discovery of His Music* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1957), pp. 36-37.

<sup>155</sup> A.E.F. Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p. 161.

<sup>156</sup> See Hubert Foss, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), pp. 100-105; and Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, pp. 32-42.

‘The goal stands up, the Keeper  
Stands up to keep the goal.’”<sup>157</sup>

In his short autobiographical sketch, Vaughan Williams mentions that *On Wenlock Edge* was one of the first works he composed upon returning to England from his study with Ravel in Paris in the early months of 1908. He describes himself as smitten with a case of “French fever,” citing the work as “a song cycle with several atmospheric effects.”<sup>158</sup> This seems to reinforce the consensus just described. Ursula Vaughan Williams adds in her volume, “Housman’s clear-cut poems with their nostalgic and vivid emotion were often set to music.”<sup>159</sup>

Such patterns are similarly discernable in Vaughan Williams’s first completed opera and the only one started before the Great War that would eventually be finished. *Hugh the Drover* grew largely out of Vaughan Williams’s involvement with folksong. The opera’s libretto follows the fortunes of a Cotswold woman (Mary) as she chooses a wandering stranger (Hugh) over an overbearing town butcher. Considered as a whole, the work revels in the kind of scene-setting and glorification of the wandering life encountered in the *Songs of Travel* and other compositions of the composer’s early period. Once more, German precedent comes to mind, this time in the form of the wandering Lohengrin, who mysteriously appears as rescuer of a local lady. Though often thought of as what Michael Kennedy called a “problem-opera,”<sup>160</sup> *Hugh* is in one sense a culmination of the soft pastoral manner that preoccupied Vaughan Williams throughout his pre-war output. Here, not only is the wandering life romanticized as it is in Borrow’s work, but the plot itself arguably assumes an overall secondary role to scene-painting qualities. As with *On Wenlock Edge*, the focus in *Hugh* is not entirely on the drama, but more on the evocative

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<sup>157</sup> Vaughan Williams, Letter to Hubert Foss dated 25 March [1938]. Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, pp. 256-257.

<sup>158</sup> Vaughan Williams, “A Musical Autobiography,” in *National Music and Other Essays*, p. 191.

<sup>159</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 82.

<sup>160</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 179.

qualities of the musically-set text. It is as much a series of scenes as it is a successive narrative. Indeed, Vaughan Williams uses the very word “tableaux” in his correspondence with Harold Child. Elsewhere in the correspondence he makes it clear that his early conception of the work proceeded along picturesque lines, and he expressed difficulty in thinking of the project in terms of the dramatic. He also intended the opera to portray country dwellers as sympathetic people and not the comic characters sometimes associated with rustic scenes.<sup>161</sup> It is likely enough that his folksong collecting work with real rural people in the countryside prompted such concerns.

The music at times contributes to the lack of drama in the opera. Eric Saylor’s recent article on the dramatic application of folksong in *Hugh* and the later *Sir John in Love* (completed 1928) discusses how the composer uses the ten folksongs he quotes in the former opera during static scenes such as the opening fair. Saylor finds that folk songs in this opera do not move the drama along but rather appear during the times when the viewer would not be distracted by detailed events and could focus more on the music.<sup>162</sup> The beginning can give one the impression of, to quote Kennedy once more, “an anthology of good tunes” rather than a homogenous, driven narrative.<sup>163</sup>

It is worth pausing here to consider the additional fact that Vaughan Williams was living in London and working on *A London Symphony* at about the time work on *Hugh the Drover* was underway. This circumstance alone illustrates that while he was happy to produce many works

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<sup>161</sup> The Vaughan Williams-Child correspondence is attached as an appendix to Ursula Vaughan Williams’s book. See Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, pp. 402-422.

<sup>162</sup> Eric Saylor, “Dramatic Applications of Folksong in Vaughan Williams’s Operas *Hugh the Drover* and *Sir John in Love*,” in *Journal of the Royal Music Association* Vol. 134 No. 1 (May 2009), pp. 37-83. Saylor places his discussion of *Hugh* and folksong as a non-dramatic element with respect to the broader problem of Vaughan Williams’s operas as a whole lacking dramatic compulsion. Another, separate observation that Saylor makes also bears quoting on account of its relationship to Vaughan Williams’s remarks concerning the special lore of people inhabiting the countryside discussed in the previous chapter. Saylor writes on page 50 of his article: “...the very presence of folksong among the people of rural England – a complex, long-standing oral tradition requiring musical and literary sensitivity from its practitioners – showed that they possessed spiritual and emotional depths that might not be perceived by outsiders.”

<sup>163</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 180.

celebrating the rural, he was equally capable of composing a large ode to one of Europe's busiest metropolises at the same time. In this he was decisively apart from many associated with the Back-to-the-Land movement, including Morris. Moreover, Vaughan Williams remarked in a program note to the symphony that the work might as well be called "Symphony by a Londoner" rather than "A London Symphony." At the same time he proposes that the sights and sounds heard by a Londoner can stand in as objects of the music's evocations. After this exposé, he characteristically suggests that instead the whole thing be allowed to "stand or fall" as absolute music.<sup>164</sup> What is significant here, however, is that Vaughan Williams refers to himself as "a Londoner" at all. Indeed, as Ottaway and Frogley point out in *Grove*, he considered himself a Londoner rather than belonging early in his life to the rural county of Gloucestershire, where he was born.<sup>165</sup> The relevant statement by Ursula Vaughan Williams quoted in Chapter 1 reinforces the association. This would seem to indicate that the division between country and city as part of an ideological framework did not exist for him. True to the ambivalence that characterized his personality, Vaughan Williams found much of interest in areas that were, according to certain cultural patterns around him, supposed to be opposed.<sup>166</sup>

And yet is *A London Symphony* a wholesale celebration of the city? Alain Frogley has addressed a curious circumstance involving the final movement, for which Vaughan Williams neglects to offer any statement in his program note. Frogley discusses how a different program note, written by Albert Coates for one of his performances of the work and abetted by Vaughan Williams himself, carries a tantalizing synopsis. It casts the movement as a depiction of

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<sup>164</sup> Vaughan Williams, Program Note for *A London Symphony*, quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 339.

<sup>165</sup> Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley, "Vaughan Williams, Ralph," in *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*.

<sup>166</sup> Nor is this tribute to the sounds and atmosphere of London an isolated example. Upon visiting the United States in 1922, Vaughan Williams wrote to Holst expressing admiration for the skyscrapers of New York. See Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, pp. 132-133. Vaughan Williams had developed an interest in architecture at an early age. See Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, pp. 21, 88.

London's hungry and unemployed abjectly marching in the city. Since this note was printed with Vaughan Williams's knowledge, and contains his own remarks elsewhere therein, it raises questions about the nature of his views on the city.<sup>167</sup> To what extent was Vaughan Williams like Bela Bartók - a many-time city-dweller who nonetheless idealized the rural even at the expense of the urban realm in which he chose to live?<sup>168</sup>

The second category of pre-Great War pastoral music by Vaughan Williams that I am identifying is related to the mode in less clear ways. I have referred to this vein as the "metaphysical pastoral," and it is associated largely with the poetry of Walt Whitman in Vaughan Williams's early period. Two works exemplify this vein – *Toward the Unknown Region* (1907), a song for chorus and orchestra, and *A Sea Symphony* (1903-1909) for soloists, chorus, and orchestra, the composer's first essay in the symphonic genre.<sup>169</sup> The texts of both, taken from *Leaves of Grass*, invoke natural scenery. While the *Sea Symphony* could be considered as a kind of "sea pastoral," the words of *Toward the Unknown Region* are not overtly pastoral by any generic standard. Both use natural or quasi-natural imagery as metaphors for exploring new horizons and attaining new states of being.

Although the texts of Vaughan Williams's major pre-war Whitman compositions are not in and of themselves conventionally pastoral, they are important in considering other pre-war works by Vaughan Williams that more obviously relate to the term. *A Sea Symphony* is the

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<sup>167</sup> See Frogley, "H.G. Wells and Vaughan Williams's *A London Symphony*: politics and culture in fin-de-siècle England," in *Sundry Sorts of Music Books: Essays on The British Library Collections* (London: The British Library, 1993), edited by Chris Banks, Arthur Searle, and Malcolm Turner, pp. 299-308.

<sup>168</sup> Like Vaughan Williams, Bartók idealized the folk music he collected as well as those who sang it for him. To a degree perhaps greater than Vaughan Williams, he distrusted urban culture and music despite living in New York City during his last years. A good starting point for more information on this is Leon Botstein's chapter "Out of Hungary: Bartók, Modernism, and the Cultural Politics of Twentieth-Century Music," in *Bartók and His World* (Princeton University Press, 1995), edited by Péter Laki, pp. 3-63. Vaughan Williams lived in London until 1930, when he and Adeline moved to the picturesque outskirts of Dorking in Surrey. After Adeline's death in 1951 and his marriage to Ursula Wood in 1953, Vaughan Williams moved back to London, where he held residence until his death. He thus lived at various stages in his life amidst both rural and urban surroundings.

<sup>169</sup> The work was at first referred to as "The Ocean" by Vaughan Williams.

largest project that occupied the composer before the war, both in terms of its size and the time taken to complete it (1903-1909). It spans a remarkable period in which he matured as a composer and finished his last formal lessons (with Ravel in 1908). Though a much smaller work, the cantata *Toward the Unknown Region* is nonetheless among the larger compositions of the pre-war period. Directly after its successful premiere in 1907, the composer made a revealing remark in a letter to Ralph Wedgwood: “But after all it is only a step and I’ve got to do something really big sometime. I think I am improving. It ‘comes off’ better than my earlier things used to...”<sup>170</sup> The “big thing,” as it turned out, was the *Sea Symphony*, finished some two years later and first performed in 1910. Ursula Vaughan Williams claims years after that her husband long worked assiduously in composing the symphony, the texts of which were “full of fresh thoughts.” He was conscious that it was to be the biggest thing he had yet attempted, and took great care in crafting it.<sup>171</sup> Stephen Town thoroughly recounts how Vaughan Williams left behind many revisions and stages of manuscripts for the work.<sup>172</sup> Both he and others connect the work with the optimistic first decade of the twentieth century. Once again, Michael Kennedy provides relevant remarks, this time in the context of Whitman and Vaughan Williams’s early nature music:

[Walt Whitman’s poetry] reflected the spirit of a new century, a bursting forth of new worlds of human and scientific endeavor...The reason for Whitman’s appeal to Vaughan Williams is fairly obvious...In Vaughan Williams’s nature there was a strong vein of mysticism veiled by a thoroughly down-to-earth commonsense approach to his art. He was a romantic; he was also an agnostic, a questioner; he believed in national roots and he looked to the past in order to venture into the

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<sup>170</sup> Quoted in Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 400.

<sup>171</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 65.

<sup>172</sup> See Stephen Town, “‘Full of fresh thoughts’: Vaughan Williams, Whitman and the Genesis of *A Sea Symphony*,” in Adams and Wells, eds., *Vaughan Williams Essays*, pp. 73-101.

future...Whitman presented a love of nature plus a combination of plain sentiment with mystical yearnings.”<sup>173</sup>

Byron Adams writes of Vaughan Williams’s fascination with Whitman as a “repudiation” of the Rossetti aesthetic that the composer had found attractive in the preceding years, further remarking that he was drawn to Whitman’s poetry on the account of its “out-of-doors” quality.<sup>174</sup> In this respect, at least, Vaughan Williams’s earlier liking for the poetry of Rossetti, which he not only set musically but also quoted in an article on Richard Strauss’s *Ein Heldenleben*, finds one corollary with his pre-war enthusiasm for Whitman.<sup>175</sup> In setting the poetry of the one, he musically drew out lush and evocative natural descriptions and rich atmospheres. In setting the poetry of the other, he musically evoked wide open spaces and the exploration of new horizons. Both fit comfortably under the wide umbrella of the pastoral mode.

Another pastoral-related work using non-Whitman texts but nonetheless connected with related themes was left incomplete during this period. It was to be a song for baritone, chorus and orchestra entitled *The Future* and based upon Matthew Arnold’s poem of the same name. The words recount the life journey of a man, positing him as a wanderer who rides a ship down the “stream of life” toward the ocean. A piano-vocal sketch of the opening measures survives and resides at the British Library. It suggests an opening not unlike that of *Toward the Unknown Region*.

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<sup>173</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 82.

<sup>174</sup> Adams, “‘No Armpits, Please, We’re British,’: Whitman and English Music, 1884-1936,” in *Walt Whitman and Modern Music: War, Desire, and the Trials of Nationhood* (New York & London: Garland, 200), edited by Lawrence Kramer, p. 30.

<sup>175</sup> The quotation in question appears in a 1903 article on Richard Strauss’s *Ein Heldenleben* that Vaughan Williams wrote for *The Vocalist*. He borrows lines 5-8 from Rossetti’s *The House of Life* in the course of describing the love song from this work. Quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 161. Vaughan Williams’s decision to cite Rossetti in the course of writing on one of Strauss’s better known compositions only reinforces the link between German Romanticism and Vaughan Williams’s early artistic consciousness.

Ex. 3.7: Vaughan Williams, *The Future* (Incomplete sketch, British Library Add. MS 57283, fol. 19, mm. 1-9)

'The Future' for Solo (Sop.:) chor: + orch

The first system of the musical score consists of four staves. The top two staves are labeled 'chor' and are in treble and bass clefs respectively, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 3/4. The bottom two staves are labeled 'orch' and are also in treble and bass clefs with the same key signature and time signature. The orchestration includes a 'Brass ff' marking. The music is in a sketchy, incomplete state, with some notes and rests visible in the vocal and orchestral parts.

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal line and includes lyrics. The vocal line is on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp and a time signature of 3/4. The lyrics are: "a wan - der - er is man from his". Below the vocal line are two empty staves, likely for piano accompaniment or other instruments. The music is in a sketchy, incomplete state.

The third system of the musical score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef, with a key signature of one sharp and a time signature of 3/4. The lyrics are: "birth". The music is in a sketchy, incomplete state.

Ex. 3.8: Vaughan Williams, *Toward the Unknown Region*, mm. 1-5 (reduction)



Thus the theme of the wanderer present in the songs, and connected with the search for knowledge of the past in the last chapter, finds another outlet in a group of works related in various degrees to life's future prospects.<sup>176</sup>

I have shown how much of what lies behind Vaughan Williams's broadly defined "pastoral" music dating from before the war is predominantly Arcadian and/or otherwise optimistic in nature. This is not surprising, for several interrelated reasons. First, this was the era when he both discovered and started collecting folksong. Once he had actually worked as a collector, Vaughan Williams formulated views that in some measure reinforced his previous idealizations about folk culture. If the rural was the realm of the folk, and pursuing folksong was a positive pursuit for British composers, then composing music that constructs a positive view of the countryside, and in many cases may even borrow from folk tunes and manners, is consistent with such an outlook. This recalls the Arcadian pastoral pattern from ancient times – the portrayal of the rural landscape from the point of view of the urban wealthy who go there for leisure. Second, although there is no evidence that Vaughan Williams composed anything

<sup>176</sup> In a 1963 letter to Michael Kennedy, Ursula Vaughan Williams mentions that she wished her late husband had completed *The Future*. (John Rylands Library, The Michael Kennedy Collection: KEN/3/1/7/96.)

directly inspired by the Back-to-the-Land movement, his focus upon scenic and “setting-out” themes in his early pastoral music is consistent both with his personal situation at the time and with a cultural mood that treasured rural England as a national heritage and as an ideal corrective to what were widely seen as the dangerous excesses of modern capitalism.

In light of such circumstances, much of Vaughan Williams’s pre-war music related to the pastoral mode takes on dimensions shared by the literary tradition of the ode. Broadly defined, an ode is simply a poem extolling a person, place, thing, or idea of some sort. As is true of the pastoral mode, the ode’s history is diverse and wide-ranging. The two traditions have intersected to form numerous cross-relationships. Several of the literary ode’s major practitioners – Wordsworth, Keats, and Coleridge – were writers Vaughan Williams knew well and even quoted or referenced occasionally in his own writings.<sup>177</sup> In the English ode tradition it was common for these and other poets to use pastoral imagery in the service of extolling not only the beauties of nature but much else by metaphorical extension.<sup>178</sup> In one of his most famous odic poems, *Intimations of Immortality* (set to music by Vaughan Williams’s younger friend and colleague Gerald Finzi), Wordsworth writes from the perspective of an older person looking back on his youth and celebrating his former ability to take great joy in the beauty of nature. Although Vaughan Williams never set a text by Wordsworth, we know that during his youth he was affected by the nature-praising qualities in early Romantic poet’s verse. Here it is helpful to

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<sup>177</sup> See Vaughan Williams: “Making Your Own Music,” in *National Music and Other Essays*, p. 238; “Local Musicians,” in *The Abinger Chronicle* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1939), pp. 1-3 (quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 79-81); “Hands off the Third,” in *Music and Musicians* Vol. 6, No. 2 (1957), p. 15 (quoted in *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 119-121); and “Sibelius at 90: Greatness and Popularity,” in *Daily Telegraph & Morning Post* No. 31, 308 (8 Dec. 1955), p. 6 (quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, pp. 175-178). Vaughan Williams quotes Coleridge in the form of the epigraph that heads the third movement (“Landscape”) of the *Sinfonia antartica*.

<sup>178</sup> A good starting place for more information on the English ode tradition is George Nauman Schuster’s *The English Ode from Milton to Keats* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1964). For a concise treatment of the Western musical ode traditions, see Michael Tilmouth, et al, “Ode (ii),” in *Grove Music Online* <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/50067> (accessed September 23, 2011).

briefly revisit the 1898 letter to Ralph Wedgwood: “My heart goes through the same manoeuvres as Wordsworths when he saw a rainbow when I see a long low range of hills...”<sup>179</sup>

Many of Vaughan Williams’s early compositions contain texts and music that predominantly celebrate nature and evocative atmospheres, using the pastoral mode as it relates to love and other emotions. Other compositions extol optimism by anticipating both personal and communal futures. The odic theme runs throughout, presenting across many works a tribute to the beautiful land of an idealized folk. Nature is largely positioned as a backdrop for Vaughan Williams’s own optimism on the threshold of what would prove to be a long and successful career.

What are we finally to make of the relationship between the pastoral trends of around the turn of the twentieth century, Vaughan Williams’s music, and Vaughan Williams the man? In sum, one must say that while he shared much with his political and literary surroundings, he assimilated and reflected them musically in ways that were very individual. Like many associated with the Back-to-the-Land movement, Vaughan Williams was an inheritor of privilege who was able to pursue his interests with a sense of leisurely detachment. In this he was like Morris, Arnold, and others who took up progressive cultural causes at this time. In this, too, Vaughan Williams adhered to one of the oldest profiles of the pastoral mode – he was a member of the upper classes whose optimistic and idealized treatments of his countryside-inspired subjects reflected the confidence of his secure socio-economic status. From a musical standpoint, the first period finds Vaughan Williams often drawing from likewise conventional sources – particularly German Romantic vocal music – to set texts that predominantly celebrate natural

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<sup>179</sup> Vaughan Williams, personal letter to Ralph Wedgwood dated “early June 1898.” Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 31.

beauty and communal brotherhood. Such a complex network of currents on one level cautions us against drawing fast and overly reductive conclusions about Vaughan Williams's music at this time. On another level it both allows us to see what patterns are there and how they relate both to the man and the world in which he lived. In his early pastoral music, he assumed multiple roles – the budding folklorist, the maturing composer, and the cultural optimist who, like the travelers about whom he was fond of reading, boldly set out to face the unknown. Little could he have imagined what lay in the period directly ahead. After the war, Vaughan Williams did not lose his appreciation for the beauty of the pastoral world, but seldom again would his art so closely conform to unmediated Arcadianism.

## Chapter 4 Vaughan Williams and the Pastoral Elegy, Part I: The Aftermath of the Great War

The pastoral compositions immediately following the Great War, with *A Pastoral Symphony* occupying the central place, are among the most recognizable works by Vaughan Williams. Ironically, this music has, at least initially, figured prominently in criticism of Vaughan Williams as provincial. It has also emerged as a principal source of confusion in considering the composer's relationship with the pastoral mode. Some early critics, hasty to typecast both the pastoral mode and Vaughan Williams himself, spoke with scorn of *A Pastoral Symphony* and what they saw as related music. Among the most famous invectives is ultra-modernist Elizabeth Lutyens's afore-mentioned derogatory term "cowpat music."<sup>180</sup> Even those who admired Vaughan Williams spoke of *A Pastoral Symphony* in terms of unflattering ruralisms, for example Hugh Allen's remark, also afore-mentioned, that the symphony reminded him of Vaughan Williams rolling over and over on a ploughed field on a wet day. Few may have expected that a subsequent statement made by Vaughan Williams in private correspondence would connect the work rather to the composer's wartime service in France.<sup>181</sup> In recent years, scholars have offered commentaries that further re-situate this composition in light of Vaughan Williams's experiences in the Great War. Michael Kennedy's summary statement that *A Pastoral Symphony* amounts to Vaughan Williams's "war requiem" has firmly replaced earlier

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<sup>180</sup> I should further add here that this statement appears in a variety of sources and contexts. Originally, Lutyens used it during a lecture she gave at Dartington Summer School of Music during the 1950s. (See "Cowpat Music," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e2526?q=cowpat&search=quick&pos=1&start=1#firsthit>, Accessed 5 May, 2010.)

<sup>181</sup> This and more information on the reception of Vaughan Williams's post-Great War pastoral music may be found within in a broader discussion of the composer's reception by Alain Frogley: "Constructing Englishness in music: national character and the reception of Vaughan Williams," in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, pp. 1-22. The quotes given and not otherwise cited may be found in Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 155-156.

responses as the conventional wisdom on this music.<sup>182</sup> Eric Saylor's recent study explains how we may see the *Pastoral Symphony* and other post-Great War compositions not as examples merely of "soft pastoral," or frivolous, Edenesque pursuits, but rather as being informed by the "hard pastoral" or a tragic, "Death in Arcadia" variety that hasty typesetters of Vaughan Williams and the pastoral have been slow to recognize.<sup>183</sup> However, if *A Pastoral Symphony* may be freshly understood in some way to act as a mournful or otherwise somber response to the war that directly preceded it, and if other works from the period immediately following it have been implicated in this aesthetic,<sup>184</sup> what remains largely unexplored is a closer examination of just how this music coincides with the long-standing convention of elegy. As one of the most prominent of the hard pastoral avenues, elegy deals in its most widely understood form with personal loss and mourning. This chapter will address this confluence first by examining some widely held traits of English elegy and how people have understood and employed it. It will then discuss Vaughan Williams's relationship with elegy, focusing first upon his immediate post-Great War pastoral music before considering his post-World War II music in the next chapter.

The concept of elegy (the term comes from the Greek word *elegos*, meaning "mournful song") has flourished in the past as a mode in its own right, giving way to a series of sub-categories to rival those of the pastoral mode itself. Despite having a long and varied tradition of its own, elegy has often figured prominently in close association with the pastoral mode,

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<sup>182</sup> See Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 155. Apart from the Frogley writing cited in the second footnote of this chapter, see also the following for discussions of *A Pastoral Symphony* as a war work: Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, pp. 86-93; and Pike, *Vaughan Williams and the Symphony*, pp. 76-106.

<sup>183</sup> Eric Saylor, "It's Not Lambkins Frisking At All," pp. 39-59.

<sup>184</sup> See, for example, Michael Steinberg, *Choral Masterworks: A Listener's Guide* (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 296-297; and Byron Adams, "Book Review: *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion* by Wilfrid Mellers (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1989)," in *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 74, No. 4 (1990), pp. 629-635.

beginning with the *Idylls* of Theocritus and continuing in art and literature ever since.<sup>185</sup> In the *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* article entitled “Elegy,” Melissa Zeiger names the pastoral mode as “one of elegy’s major conventions” and goes on to discuss how the two modes have been related.<sup>186</sup> The relationship achieves a distinct identity when one considers its importance in the cultural heritage of England. Zeigler identifies John Milton’s elegiac poem “Lycidas,” written in 1637 on the occasion of Milton’s university friend Edward King’s death at sea, as a significant point from which the English pastoral elegy flourished in its own right.<sup>187</sup>

In a seminal study on the English elegy, Peter Sacks discusses its primary bent: “the English versions of the defining form admitted a variety of subject matter to so-called elegies. But the definition that gradually gathered currency, particularly after the sixteenth century, was elegy as a poem of mortal loss and consolation.”<sup>188</sup> This is what commentators have referred to as the “funeral elegy.”<sup>189</sup> Reaching back to link Theocritus’s poetry (in this case the *First Idyll*, which I shall briefly discuss in the next chapter) with the English funeral elegy of later centuries, David Kennedy identifies several important pastoral corollaries at the beginning of a recent study:

Theocritus’ poem is notable because it establishes a number of conventions and figures that become characteristics of funeral elegy in English. These include: the invocation of a muse; the rebuking of nymphs for not being present to prevent death; a procession of mourners, in this case animals, shepherds and divine beings; the use of pathetic fallacy, that is the attribution of human emotions to the world of nature; a sense of the natural order being disrupted

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<sup>185</sup> For a large and encompassing treatment of some of the major treatments of elegy in ages past, see *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy* (Oxford University Press, 2010), edited by Karen Weisman.

<sup>186</sup> Melissa Zeiger, “Elegy,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*. Accessed online 7 May, 2010. <http://www.oxford-britishliterature.com/entry?entry=t198.e0153&srn=2&ssid=568568778#FIRSTHIT>

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* See especially the opening paragraphs.

<sup>188</sup> Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>189</sup> Zeiger, “Elegy.”

by death; catalogues of flowers and animals; and the apotheosis of the dead person.<sup>190</sup>

The long and identifiably English tradition of elegiac pastoral literature takes on an additional dimension when considered in conjunction with the milieu of the Great War. First, it is significant how English literature, especially poetry, played upon the psyches and sensibilities of British soldiers as they struggled in horrific circumstances to perform their duties and cope with the events that unfolded around them. In his landmark study *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell devotes an entire chapter to this subject alone. He mentions “the unparalleled literariness of all ranks who fought in the Great War” and goes on to write:

By 1914, it was possible for soldiers to be not merely literate but rigorously literary, for the Great War occurred at a special historical moment when two “liberal” forces were powerfully coinciding in England. On the one hand, the belief in the educative powers of classical and English literature was still extremely strong. On the other, the appeal of popular education and “self-improvement” was at its peak, and such education was still conceived largely in humanistic terms.<sup>191</sup>

Perhaps even more crucial is the influence that elegiac and pastoral subjects brought to bear upon the poetry read and produced during the Great War. According to Edna Longley, “Elegy is arguably both a genre and the over-arching genre of war poetry. Indeed, the Great War may have made all lyric poetry more consciously elegiac and self-elegiac.”<sup>192</sup> In discussing background in a chapter on postmodern elegy, Thomas Travisano remarks:

The pastoral elegy maintained so strong a hold on the Georgian poets who served as front line soldiers in World

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<sup>190</sup> David Kennedy, *Elegy* (New York: Routledge, The New Critical Idiom Series, 2007), pp. 12-13.

<sup>191</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 157. Alun Howkins confirms that Classical and English literature attained a prominent place in schools and universities in England during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, helped by political and nationalistic factors. See Howkins, “The Discovery of Rural England,” p. 65.

<sup>192</sup> Edna Longley, “The Great War, history, and the English lyric,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature of the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), edited by Vincent Sherry, pp. 72-73.

War I that one finds Wilfrid Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and others of that brilliant cadre consistently evoking pastoral motifs, if only for ironic contrast, in their threnodies from the trenches.<sup>193</sup>

The reference to irony is significant, as it assumes a central role in writings of the Great War. The juxtaposition of beautiful landscapes and the terrible carnage that took place in the French battlefield added a unique poignancy to elegiac and pastoral expression related to the conflict. Such approaches expanded the genre in ways hitherto unrealized. Mourning and remembrance came to occupy the same space, and the Arcadian ideal merged with the harsh realities of the war. Paul Fussell repeatedly illustrates the central role of irony in the circumstances of the Great War. For example, he discusses how the pastoral landscapes of northern and central France (the site of the major scenes of English bloodshed) at once prompted soldiers to recall the idyllic English summer of 1914 preceding the war and yet also served as the setting for horrors such as the notorious Battle of the Somme, in which thousands of British soldiers lost their lives in an astonishingly short period of time. In addition, Fussell describes how the sight of barbed wire and other markers added to the sick irony by means of, on the one hand, reminding soldiers of the fences and hedgerows of rural England while on the other reminding them of the harsh brutality of their current circumstances. He offers a summary statement in a chapter devoted to pastoral considerations:

Recourse to the pastoral is an English mode of both fully gauging the calamities of the Great War and imaginatively protecting oneself against them. Pastoral reference, whether to literature or to actual rural localities and objects, is a way of invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable; at the same time, it is a comfort in itself, like rum, a deep dugout or woolly vest.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Thomas J. Travisano, *Midcentury Quartet: Bishop, Lowell, Jarrell, Berryman and the Making of a Postmodern Aesthetic* (University of Virginia Press, 1999), p. 239.

<sup>194</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 231-254. See p. 235 for the summary quotation provided. Eric Saylor argues similarly in "It's Not Lambkins Frisking At All," p. 43.

Edna Longley's remarks on Great War literature similarly stress the importance of mutual antithesis, though they downplay the role of irony:

The issue of pastoral and war is not confined to whether invocations of rural landscape figure naively as nostalgia or knowingly as irony. What matters is the ability to hold pastoral (the sum of literary negotiations with Nature) and war in the same frame.<sup>195</sup>

Throughout all of these accounts the theme of soldiers' personal experience, and how they related it to what they both read and wrote, runs deeply. As discussed, part of this experience was the English tradition of literature as appropriated by especially literate British soldiers of all classes in the Great War.<sup>196</sup> In a way, this mirrors the trajectory of elegy itself, which, like pastoral mode, has a long tradition and yet is adaptable to the parameters and needs of new times and circumstances.<sup>197</sup> In the words of John D. Rosenberg, "The long history of English elegy is a fresh pouring of new tears into ancient vessels."<sup>198</sup> Understanding these points is essential in assessing the music related to the Great War. In an article already cited, Eric Saylor discusses ways in which Vaughan Williams, Edward Elgar, and Arthur Bliss access past traditions to inform their music directly inspired by the war. He writes, "the modernity of the pastoral comes from its power to modify its conventional signifiers in ways that were relevant to contemporary culture – and no event was more relevant to British culture in the early twentieth century than the First World War."<sup>199</sup> Having outlined the primary characteristics of pastoral, or

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<sup>195</sup> Longley, "The Great War, history, and the English lyric," p. 79.

<sup>196</sup> The additional point should be made here that the rate of literacy in England among the middle and lower classes during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was of an unprecedented level. For a full treatment and account of this trend, see Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, 2nd Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>197</sup> See Zeiger, "Elegy" (especially the section titled "Elegy and Inheritance").

<sup>198</sup> John D. Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age: The Presence of the Past in Victorian Literature* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), p. 5.

<sup>199</sup> Saylor, "English Pastoral Music and the Great War," p. 45.

“funeral,” elegy, and considered its place in Great War cultural history, let us examine related works by Vaughan Williams.

### *A Pastoral Symphony*

Excluding the romance for violin and orchestra more generally known by its picturesque title *The Lark Ascending*, which Vaughan Williams composed in 1914 and revised in 1920, *A Pastoral Symphony* is the first large-scale work that he completed after the Great War. It seems to have been the only major work he began composing, or at least otherwise actively planned, during the war itself. Michael Kennedy offers 1916-1921 as the time of composition.<sup>200</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams confirms this date, citing her husband’s remarks and the time he spent working in the battlefield ambulance corps at Ecoivres as the starting point for the symphony. She writes: “A bugler used to practice, and this sound became part of that evening landscape and is the genesis of the long trumpet cadenza in the second movement of the symphony: *les airs lointains d’un cor mélancholique et tendre.*”<sup>201</sup> This is the most indirect of the references made by the composer’s wife, and presumably originating with him, that addresses the aesthetic and programmatic origins of the symphony. Another statement comes directly from Vaughan Williams himself in a 1938 letter to Ursula, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

I’m glad that you liked the symph. I did rather myself after many years. It is really war time music – a great deal of it incubated when I used to go up night after night with the

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<sup>200</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Vaughan Williams*, p. 412.

<sup>201</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 121. A curious discrepancy exists on this point in the secondary literature. Referring to the bugler inspiring the music in the second movement of *A Pastoral Symphony*, Frank Howes writes: “...a recollection of camp life with the R.A.M.C. at Bordon in Hampshire where the bugler hit the seventh as a missed shot for the octave.” See Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 23. However, Ursula Vaughan Williams’s book, the Grove article on Vaughan Williams by Frogley and Ottaway, and other sources imply that the bugler was on the French battlefield itself. In any case, the experience of hearing the bugler was significant for the creation of *A Pastoral Symphony*, and the second movement in particular, no matter where Vaughan Williams heard it exactly. I here offer special thanks to Eric Saylor for sharing his insights with me on this matter.

ambulance wagon at Ecoiv[r]les & we went up a steep hill  
& there was a wonderful Corot-like landscape in the sunset  
– its [sic] not really Lambkins frisking at all as most people  
take for granted.<sup>202</sup>

The only other written information on the work offered by the composer comes at the beginning of the program note he provided for its first performance. The note begins: “The mood of this Symphony is, as its title suggests, almost entirely quiet and contemplative – there are few *fortissimos* and few *allegros*.”<sup>203</sup> The remainder contains purely technical descriptions of the symphony’s movements.

In these limited remarks, both direct and indirect, there is much to discuss in terms of the Great War. First, evening is the time of day mentioned in both statements. Past commentary has associated *A Pastoral Symphony* with a predominantly “grey” quality, and even Vaughan Williams himself acknowledged the work has a certain consistency of character in the last of his statements quoted above. However, this also formed part of the criticism of the work as a whole. Constant Lambert, for example, wrote in *Music Ho!*: “In a work like Vaughan Williams’s *Pastoral Symphony* it is no exaggeration to say that the creation of a particular type of grey, reflective, English-landscape mood has outweighed the exigencies of symphonic form.” He then claimed that the work’s “monotony of texture and lack of form” lent to the difficulty of such music being understood outside of England.<sup>204</sup> The fact that Lambert was almost certainly unaware of the origins at the time he wrote *Music Ho!* serves to lead him astray on multiple levels. Supposing that Vaughan Williams was completely preoccupied with English landscape

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<sup>202</sup> Ralph Vaughan Williams, personal letter to Ursula Wood, 4 October 1938. Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 265. Ursula quotes a nearly identical version of this statement (with negligible spelling differences and the first two sentences omitted) in her volume. See Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 121. The statement itself forms the middle part of a longer letter, the remainder of which is not directly related to *A Pastoral Symphony*.

<sup>203</sup> Vaughan Williams, program note to *A Pastoral Symphony*, quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 341.

<sup>204</sup> Constant Lambert, *Music Ho! A Study of Music in Decline*, 3rd Edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), p. 107.

and folksong in composing *A Pastoral Symphony*, Lambert not only failed to grasp the work's inspiration in a general sense, but he also missed out on the opportunity to ask pertinent questions. In any case, Lambert himself was too young to have participated firsthand in the war, and did not directly share in the experiences of soldiers such as Vaughan Williams.

A second look at the significance of twilight and what this meant in the Great War milieu, in conjunction with Vaughan Williams's and Ursula's statements, suggests that what Lambert and others pejoratively called "grey" was actually a key point. Far from making the music dull, it is what gives the work much of its unique character and effect. Returning to Paul Fussell's study of the Great War perhaps reveals extra significance in Vaughan Williams's written remarks. Fussell describes how times of sunrise and sunset, when the war landscape was illuminated by dimmed light and when stand-to's and other routine events took place, became associated with special meanings in the experience of participants. He states: "It was a cruel reversal that sunrise and sunset, established by over a century of Romantic poetry and painting as the tokens of hope and peace and rural charm, should now be exactly the moments of heightened ritual anxiety." Further on he writes: "This exploitation of waxing or waning half-light is one of the distinct hallmarks of Great War rhetoric. It signals a constant reaching out towards traditional significance...It reveals an attempt to make some sense of the war in relation to inherited tradition."<sup>205</sup> In light of this, Vaughan Williams's description of his dusk excursions into a "Corot-like" landscape takes on added significance, given Corot's well-known use of pastel and dimmed colors in his nature paintings.<sup>206</sup> To borrow a sentence from Eric Saylor, "Vaughan

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<sup>205</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 52, 55.

<sup>206</sup> For more general information on Corot's techniques and experimentation with light in his paintings, see Fronia E. Wissman, "Corot, Camille," in *Oxford Art Online*. Accessed 15 May 2010.  
[http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/art/T019570?q=corot&search=quick&pos=1&\\_start=1#T019572](http://www.oxfordartonline.com.proxy2.library.uiuc.edu/subscriber/article/grove/art/T019570?q=corot&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#T019572).

Williams was not viewing the postwar world through rose-colored glasses, but rather, in his evocation of Corot, peering through a glass, darkly.”<sup>207</sup>

The Great War literature and written recollections that Fussell cites in support of his statements sometimes bear distinct elegiac overtones. Perhaps the best example is a line from Laurence Binyon’s “For the Fallen” that reads: “At the going down of the sun and in the morning, We shall remember them.”<sup>208</sup> However, it happens that the relationship between sunset and elegy actually dates back at least to one of the most well-known pastoral elegies written in English – Thomas Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” first published in 1751. The very opening stanzas of the poem demonstrate a descriptive mixture of sunset and physical landscape:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
The lowing herd wind slowly o’er the lea,  
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,  
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower  
The moping owl does to the moon complain  
Of such, as wandering near her secret bower,  
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew tree’s shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,  
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

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<sup>207</sup> Saylor, “It’s Not Lambkins Frisking At All,” p. 49. One other recent study by Daniel Grimley offers fresh analysis of *A Pastoral Symphony* from the standpoint of its modernity, including related discussions of Fussell’s observations quoted here and the pastoral paintings of Paul Nash. See Grimley, “Landscape and Distance: Vaughan Williams, Modernism, and the Symphonic Pastoral,” in *British Music and Modernism 1895-1960* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2010), edited by Matthew Riley, pp. 147-174.

<sup>208</sup> See Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 56.

The extent to which *A Pastoral Symphony* relates to the ironies associated with the Great War is also worth further exploration in the context of elegy. In Vaughan Williams's remarks one may discern that in the midst of his service he was acutely aware of the strange beauty of the landscape before him and its influence upon his creative imagination. In this context it is worth reminding ourselves exactly what Vaughan Williams's duties were on his nightly excursions into the "Corot-like landscape" with the ambulance orderly. He carried back the wounded and dying with the knowledge that some of his friends were among those who were perishing in like circumstances.<sup>209</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams describes Vaughan Williams's experiences in 1916, after he had learned of the death (during the Battle of the Somme) of his close friend and promising young English composer George Butterworth:

For Ralph, the loss of Butterworth's friendship and the unfulfilled promise of his music were a profound sorrow. It was a time when casualty lists recorded almost every day the loss of some friend or acquaintance, and the wholesale slaughter of a generation of the youth of the nation left few homes untouched. Working in the ambulance gave Ralph vivid awareness of how men died.<sup>210</sup>

In the sentences following this excerpt, Ursula describes how Vaughan Williams and his unit "marched through the autumnal landscapes, which seemed uncannily quiet" en route to join the Battle of the Somme, the experience of which Vaughan Williams was ultimately spared.<sup>211</sup> Thus the link between his experiences with loss, death, and the aspects of landscape that Vaughan Williams cited with regard to *A Pastoral Symphony* can hardly seem separable in multiple

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<sup>209</sup> In a letter to Holst, Vaughan Williams explicitly laid out his duties with the ambulance: "I am 'Wagon orderly' and go up the line every night to bring back wounded & sick on a motor ambulance – this all takes place at night – except an occasional day journey for urgent cases." (Vaughan Williams, personal letter to Gustav Holst dated "late June 1916." Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 109.)

<sup>210</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 122. Vaughan Williams's letters to Butterworth's father during the time following George's death make for poignant reading. See Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, pp. 110-111, 116-117.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

instances – the excursions Vaughan Williams describes, and the march in anticipation of joining what would become probably the most infamous battle of the entire conflict.<sup>212</sup> Indeed, they fit in all too well with the ironic, or at least dichotomous, treatment of landscape and how this became a distinctly elegiac and pastoral theme in the course of the Great War. They also conform to how traditional understandings and perceptions of natural beauty took on connotations of brutality and suffering in an unprecedented way.

There are grounds for postulating an additional landscape-related inspiration behind *A Pastoral Symphony*. A corollary exists between this work and an earlier manuscript of a different work – the first of the unpublished Whitman nocturnes for baritone, semi-chorus, and orchestra – “Come, O voluptuous sweet-breathed earth.” The first and third nocturnes bear the dates August 18, 1908. All three, as Michael Kennedy explains, exist only in incomplete form. Nonetheless, he describes these works’ manuscripts as “the most important of all the unpublished MSS up to 1914” on account of what they reveal concerning the development of Vaughan Williams’s musical language up to that point. Interestingly, Kennedy singles out the third, “Out of the rolling ocean,” as containing ideas that appear in later works such as *Hugh the Drover*, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, and *A Pastoral Symphony*, among others.<sup>213</sup> The connection between the third nocturne and *A Pastoral Symphony* is a significant avenue of exploration in its own right, but the similarities between the opening melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic ideas of the symphony and the opening of the first nocturne in particular are also striking. Shown below in Example 4-A is the opening thematic sequence of *A Pastoral Symphony*, directly after the initial undulating triads played by the woodwinds. The thematic action at this point shifts to the strings, beginning with the D anacrusis in the solo violin line in measure 8, just before the double bar line. What

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<sup>212</sup> For some additional discussion on this point, see Byron Adams, “Scripture, Church, and culture: biblical texts in the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams,” pp. 112-113.

<sup>213</sup> See Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 41.

follows is a G Mixolydian-grounded melody placed above a series of second inversion triads in flat sonorities descending by half and quarter notes in whole and half steps, and later moving in a triplet rhythm.

Ex. 4.1: Vaughan Williams, *A Pastoral Symphony*: Mov. I, mm. 6-12 (particularly the strings and horn accompaniment at mm. 9-12)

These measures demonstrate straightaway Arnold Whittall’s description of the work as “a symphony about what happens to G as a tonic when a wide variety of pressures – diatonic,

chromatic, modal – are applied to it.”<sup>214</sup> These processes may also be seen in the opening of Vaughan Williams’s drafted first Whitman nocturne of 1908, shown below in Example 4.2. Here the G Mixolydian melody is nearly identical to that seen in *A Pastoral Symphony* and, apart from some minor rhythmic and other differences, the supporting harmonies behave as they do in the symphony.

Ex. 4.2: Vaughan Williams, *Three Whitman Nocturnes* – No. 1, “Come O Voluptuous [sic] sweet breathed Earth” (Sketch, British Library Add. MS 57283, fol. 1, mm. 1-4)

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of a piece. The tempo is marked 'Lento'. The title is 'Come O voluptuous sweet breathed Earth'. The score is written for piano, with a treble and bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The melody in the treble clef starts with a G4, followed by a chromatic descent: G4, F#4, F4, E4, D4, C4. The bass clef accompaniment features a triplet of chords: G2-B2-D3, F#2-A2-C3, and B2-D3-E3. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

If one accepts the kinship between these two openings, then the obvious question is whether the likeness speaks to anything beyond merely another example of Vaughan Williams borrowing from older, often discarded music in composing new works.<sup>215</sup> In exploring this possibility, it is helpful to look at further facts. First, the 1908 date places the first Whitman nocturne in a period during which Vaughan Williams was at the height of his musical

<sup>214</sup> Arnold Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 65.

<sup>215</sup> This is not the only work by Vaughan Williams dating from the first decade of the twentieth century that has been compared thematically to the opening of *A Pastoral Symphony*. In discussing *Harnham Down*, one of three “orchestral impressions” that Vaughan Williams composed between 1904 and 1907, Michael Vaillancourt draws attention to the similarities between their opening themes. (See Vaillancourt, “Coming of Age: The Earliest Orchestral Music,” p. 42.) In Chapter 5 I will examine *Harnham Down* more closely in a different context.

involvement with Whitman's poetry, as discussed in Chapter 3. But as Ursula reveals, he had with him a copy of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* during his latter stint (at least) of service in Great War France,<sup>216</sup> and at the end of his life confessed to Michael Kennedy to have had a lifelong and abiding interest in Whitman's poetry that extended past the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>217</sup> (This is further evidenced by his return to Whitman texts in *Dona Nobis Pacem*, completed in 1936.) The title of the first nocturne does not come from the *Drum Taps* section of *Leaves of Grass*, as Kennedy mistakenly suggests for all three nocturnes.<sup>218</sup> Rather, it originates within the twenty-first section of *Song of Myself*, perhaps Whitman's most well-known poetic achievement. In this lengthy poem of over 50 sections, Whitman explores a wide collection of topics and tropes, including much reference to both death and the pastoral mode. The twenty-first section in particular concerns itself with the narrator as poet and features some striking evening pastoral imagery toward the end.

Smile O voluptuous cool-breath'd earth!  
 Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!  
 Earth of the departed sunset – earth of the mountains misty-  
 topt!  
 Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with  
 blue!<sup>219</sup>

It is certainly not difficult to imagine that Vaughan Williams might have recalled these very lines, dealing as they do with sunset and earthly beauty, during his evening missions with the

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<sup>216</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 128-129. Ursula describes Vaughan Williams using a small copy of *Leaves of Grass* to record duty reminders when he worked in an artillery unit at the front.

<sup>217</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 100. The matter is also discussed by Byron Adams in multiple sources – “No Armpits, Please, We’re British,” p. 25; and “Scripture, Church, and culture: biblical texts in the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams,” p. 104.

<sup>218</sup> Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 41. Only the second nocturne, “By the Bivuoac’s Fitful Flame,” features text from *Drum Taps*, a section of *Leaves of Grass* that appeared with the 1867 edition and that presents poetry in response to the Civil War.

<sup>219</sup> One will notice straightaway the slight discrepancies between the first line cited in Whitman’s text versus the line as Vaughan Williams wrote it on the first nocturne’s manuscript. However, in the remainder of the manuscript, the music of which resembles *A Pastoral Symphony* in less explicit ways than the introduction just discussed, Vaughan Williams’s words in the vocal line leave little doubt about the fact that he was citing this particular poem.

ambulance orderly, especially if he carried Whitman's poetry with him during his service. Nor is it any great leap to question whether Vaughan Williams may have consciously recast in his mind this fragment of his unpublished Whitman nocturne when the first ideas for the symphony were germinating less than a decade later and under very special circumstances.

Taking this along with the other parts of my discussion of *A Pastoral Symphony*, I point to the common theme of landscape, either specifically that of Ecoivres and/or that otherwise experienced, as being central to any consideration of the music as an elegy. By now this point may seem obvious enough. However, the extent to which even champions of the work have emphasized the mood or some other aspect of the music, to the partial or whole omission of its intersection with landscape and other recognizably pastoral themes therein, justifies the reaffirmation. Herbert Howells, in a thoughtful article, wrote that the symphony is "a frame of mind" rather than a depiction of a scene.<sup>220</sup> He seemed to take his cue from the few words Vaughan Williams provided in the program note for the premiere.<sup>221</sup> Howells, of course, likely had no knowledge of what Vaughan Williams later privately revealed to Ursula about Ecoivres. Frank Howes wrote: "But it is not very pictorial; it is, as the composer in his own note on it suggested, contemplative, and the mood is singularly sustained." Howes goes on to acknowledge that the work was conceived in northern France, but then apparently downplays the notion, even seeming to contradict somewhat his earlier statement with the following: "The scenery in the Pastoral Symphony is not spectacular and northern France with its willows and streams is much

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<sup>220</sup> Howells's take on Vaughan Williams's *Pastoral Symphony* closely resembles Beethoven's attitude toward his own *Pastoral Symphony* (No. 6 in F Major), completed in 1808. Beethoven remarked that the symphony is "more an expression of feeling than tone painting." For more on this work, see William Kinderman, *Beethoven*, 2nd Edition (Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 127 ff.

<sup>221</sup> See Herbert Howells, "Vaughan Williams 'Pastoral' Symphony," in *Music & Letters* Vol. 3, No. 2 (April, 1922), pp. 122-132.

like southern England.”<sup>222</sup> Both Howes’s and Howells’s remarks, however perceptive, appear dated in light of later information. Yet even very recent commentaries on the symphony persist in separating its title from rural imagery. Raymond Monelle writes this about *A Pastoral Symphony*: “The chroniclers tell us that Vaughan Williams thought not of pastoralism or of strangeness, however, but of real experience during the First World War.”<sup>223</sup> He goes on to cite the bugle player as an example of that “real” experience.<sup>224</sup> Setting aside Monelle’s dubious account of what the chroniclers actually say, such a remark fails to acknowledge that pastoralism and strangeness quite often embodied real and intertwined psychological experiences for those participating in the Great War, as Paul Fussell and Vaughan Williams himself have demonstrated. But the statement also flies in the face of how the threads of psychology, mood and landscape are inseparable for the funeral elegy, and that the former do not exist at the expense of the latter, but in partnership with it. Here I return to one of David Kennedy’s criteria for the traditional pastoral elegy in English – the pathetic fallacy of conflating human moods and emotions with nature. All accounts indicate that this had a very real effect on Vaughan Williams’s *Pastoral Symphony* and its elegiac disposition. In that sense the music had a real landscape as its source of inspiration, which blended with actual experience. It seems appropriate to close discussion of this work with a last remark from Fussell in the opening sentences of his chapter on the Great War and the pastoral mode: “When H.M. Tomlinson asks, ‘What has the rathe primrose to do with old rags and bones on barbed wire?’ we must answer: ‘Everything’.”<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 22-23.

<sup>223</sup> Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, p. 104.

<sup>224</sup> Interestingly, Monelle chooses to cite the account of the bugle player in the camp given by Frank Howes, which I described in an earlier footnote of this chapter. See Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military, and Pastoral*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>225</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, p. 231. Fussell footnotes Tomlinson’s remark: “*Mars and His Idiot* (New York, 1935), p. 11.”

## Postwar Songs

The search for further postwar music by Vaughan Williams that is specifically elegiac, and that references pastoral themes, need go no further than the songs for voice and piano that were published in 1925 but composed in the years leading up to that date. Most appear within four major groups – *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove*, *Two Poems by Seumas O’Sullivan*, *Three Poems by Walt Whitman*, and *Three Songs from Shakespeare*.<sup>226</sup> According to Michael Kennedy, the growing career of Steuart Wilson, the English tenor who had performed in Vaughan Williams’s *On Wenlock Edge* before the war, prompted Vaughan Williams to compose these songs for male voice and piano in addition to other works between 1920 and 1925.<sup>227</sup> Kennedy also mentions that Vaughan Williams offered Wilson lodging upon his return from the war, during which he was injured to the point that his career was for a while in doubt. It is thus very possible that Wilson’s return to singing after suffering injury in combat had some bearing upon the aesthetic qualities of the songs.

Taken as a whole, this repertoire has received a relatively small amount of discussion in the secondary literature. Where discussion exists, complaints about either the poetry or the music have been common. This is particularly true concerning the Whitman collection (where the music has been faulted) and the Shove collection (where the poetry and in some instances also the music has been faulted). Still, by the measure of how several of these songs fit into the pastoral elegy vein to be found in Vaughan Williams’s post-Great War music, and how the settings bring out this quality in the poetry, they call for a central place in this chapter. I will focus primarily upon the Whitman and Shove groups.

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<sup>226</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams writes that these songs were shown to Ravel in the year previous to 1925 (*R.V.W.*, p. 158). It must here be added that a stand-alone song, Vaughan Williams’s voice and piano setting of Walt Whitman’s “Darest Thou Now O Soul” was also published in 1925.

<sup>227</sup> See Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 152.

Before beginning an examination of the Whitman songs, it will be helpful to pause and consider Whitman's poetry and its intersection with English elegy, English Great War life, and Vaughan Williams's own experiences and concerns. In a chapter on Whitman's post-Civil War poetry, M. Jimmie Killingsworth makes the connection between the American's elegiac poetry and traditional English elegiac conventions, explaining ways in which Whitman drew upon them in his own poems of loss.<sup>228</sup> In the same writing he also points out how Whitman, in his most famous elegy *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*, never makes the complete transition from grief to consolation, something that had been a hallmark of classic English elegy.

This pattern emerges in the works of other English and American poets around the turn of the century. R. Clifton Spargo, in a book entitled *The Ethics of Mourning*, writes: "After Wordsworth, elegists from Walt Whitman to Thomas Hardy to moderns such as William Butler Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens continue to evoke pastoral scenes, almost perhaps as a poetic reflex, but with perceptibly diminished expectations about the consolations they will offer."<sup>229</sup> On its face, this notion would seem to militate against Paul Fussell's point, quoted earlier, that pastoral signifiers acted as mental comforts to soldiers during the Great War. But Fussell also stressed the lingering presence of antithesis, allowing death and destruction a lasting place alongside attempts at reflection and consolation. That the pastoral mode could and did embody both in the context of the Great War was one of his primary arguments. It is also important to remember how personal experience may modify larger patterns.

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<sup>228</sup> See M. Jimmie Killingsworth, *Cambridge Introduction to Walt Whitman* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 57 ff. Plenty of other writers have discussed Whitman's relationship to elegiac and pastoral tradition. For only a couple of examples, see Daniel Mark Epstein, *Lincoln and Whitman: Parallel Lives in Civil War Washington* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2005), p 294; and Richard Adams, "Whitman's 'Lilacs' and the Tradition of Pastoral Elegy," in *PMLA*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (June, 1957), pp. 479-487.

<sup>229</sup> R. Clifton Spargo, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegiac Literature* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), p. 225.

One may begin to see the renewed appeal that Whitman's poetry continued to hold for Vaughan Williams after his earliest works. In his music immediately following the Great War there are signs of an intensified ambivalence that increasingly characterizes his postwar art, both in terms of the musical materials and in terms of the aesthetic and programmatic themes coloring them. This feature arguably reaches its peak with the music of his last period. In the Whitman songs published in 1925, Vaughan Williams exploits the dualistic qualities of Whitman's poetry in a unique manner. The texts originate from two sections in the latter half of *Leaves of Grass* – *Whispers of Heavenly Death* and *Songs of Parting*. This is among the poetry that demonstrates Whitman's deepening interest in elegiac themes during the years following the American Civil War. As James Day stated in a brief paragraph treating these songs, death is the overriding theme.<sup>230</sup>

Musically, the Whitman songs of 1925 are sparsely scored and unlyrical. In each there is a recurring rhythm or bass pattern, and piano accompaniments are chordal and repetitive. These ingredients are among the features that have led to criticism. Trevor Hold wrote that the Whitman songs “are recognizably the Vaughan Williams of the time” but “lack definition and clarity, and rely too much on the use of ostinato figures in the piano accompaniment.”<sup>231</sup> Stephen Banfield's criticism of the group is similar. He calls the Whitman songs “disappointingly opaque” and specifically faults the ostinato feature in the last song (though all adopt some form of bass pattern): “it is as though the composer were trying to avoid the idea of closure, placing a mystical emphasis on being rather than becoming.” He groups the concluding songs from the Shove cycle, the *Four Hymns*, and the *Five Mystical Songs* into this category.<sup>232</sup> Frank Howes writes merely that Vaughan Williams's “belated return to Whitman does not seem very

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<sup>230</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, p. 115.

<sup>231</sup> Trevor Hold, *Parry to Finzi*, p. 119.

<sup>232</sup> Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century* Volume 2, p. 329.

fruitful.”<sup>233</sup> James Day’s more neutral assessment provides an ideal point of departure for this discussion: “The three Whitman settings, also published in 1925, are simpler still, as if Vaughan Williams were seeking a kind of austere, self-imposed clarity of expression, underlining rather than actually setting the words.”<sup>234</sup> It is my contention that such traits as Day describes, and others criticized, stand in better relief when they are considered in terms of the particular elegiac poetry Vaughan Williams chose, the recent experiences of war that both he and Ursula described, and the significance of half light and twilight discussed earlier in connection with that Great War experience.

The first song involves many of the themes discussed. It is worth quoting the text here for easy reference.

Whispers of heavenly death murmur’d I hear,  
Labial gossip of night, sibilant chorals,  
Footsteps gently ascending, mystical breezes wafted soft  
and low,  
Ripples of unseen rivers, tides of current flowing, forever  
flowing,  
(Or is it the plashing of tears? the measureless waters of  
human tears?)  
I see, just see skyward, great cloud-masses,  
Mournfully slowly they roll, silently swelling and mixing,  
With at times a half-dimm’d sadden’d far-off star,  
Appearing and disappearing.

(Some parturition rather, some solemn immortal birth;  
On the frontiers to eyes impenetrable,  
Some soul is passing over.)

One may see how the dualities in this poem adhere to patterns of juxtaposition between natural imagery and human mourning discussed earlier in relation to the funeral elegy. In his musical setting, Vaughan Williams matches both strands on a couple of levels. First, common to the

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<sup>233</sup> Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 240.

<sup>234</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, p. 115.

whole text is a sense of motion – in the footsteps, the images of rivers, the passing clouds, and the migrant spirit. This, and the gloomily ponderous aspect of the text, may explain the use of a matching ostinato, marked “Andante con moto” and “molto legato” in the piano accompaniment by Vaughan Williams throughout the song. See the beginning measures below.

Ex. 4.3: Vaughan Williams, *Three Poems by Walt Whitman* – No. 1, “Whispers of Heavenly Death”, mm. 1-8

The image shows the beginning of the musical score for "Whispers of Heavenly Death" by Vaughan Williams. It features a voice line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Andante con moto" and the piano part is marked "ppp molto legato". The lyrics are: "Whispers of heaven - ly death - mur - mur'd I hear, Lab -". The score is in 4/4 time and the key signature has one sharp (F#).

The regular rhythm here may recall the very opening of *A Pastoral Symphony*, another work with introverted qualities. The sense of even motion also recurs throughout the movement.

Ex. 4.4: Vaughan Williams, *A Pastoral Symphony*: Mov. I, mm. 1-5 (woodwinds)

The image shows the woodwind parts for the first five measures of the first movement of "A Pastoral Symphony" by Vaughan Williams. The tempo is marked "Molto moderato. (♩=80)". The score includes parts for Flutes (1 and 2), Oboe 1 and 2, Cor anglais, Clarinets in A (1 and 2), and Bassoons 1 and 2. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The flute parts are marked "Solo" and "Flute 3rd".

Next in the song, Vaughan Williams captures the inward quality of the text – the feeling that the poet is really speaking more to himself than to anyone else in particular – in various ways. Most simply, the whole song is very quiet, never exceeding a *piano* dynamic marking. The

vocal line is to a large extent speech-like, rising and falling on language inflection and seemingly not as concerned with melodic imprint. To these things one must add the fact that Vaughan Williams shifts between directions for the singer from “parlante,” to “cantando” (staying here for much of the middle portion), to “parlando,” and finally to “cantando” once more. This reinforces both the impression of self-conversation and also that Vaughan Williams musically interprets the text as such.

Finally, the harmony of the first Whitman song merits some consideration. Concurrent with the quarter-note ostinato figure in the piano accompaniment are alternating chords and bare intervals in quarters or halves in the vocal part. Though the opening suggests a D Dorian tonal center, the harmonic course throughout the rest of the song meanders subtly, sometimes matching the vocal line and at other times merely supporting it. Perhaps most noteworthy is the final chord, created out of suspensions and intervals from the measures preceding, and made up of nine pitches that do very little to offer a restful closure. The tritone that forms the last part of this tied sonority is perhaps symbolically important.

Ex. 4.5: Vaughan Williams, *Three Poems by Walt Whitman* – No. 1, “Whispers of Heavenly Death”, mm. 67-71



Both the music and the text seem little concerned with resolution and instead drop off in the middle of the reciter’s sad thoughts. As far as this song is concerned, Banfield appears to be

correct in that the emphasis is very much on a “state of being” rather than on any convincing denouement. But denouement denotes resolution of some kind. And, in keeping with the pattern of Whitman’s downplaying of consolation, Vaughan Williams denies the listener a pure resolution. Instead, he extends the mournful contemplation to linger into a harmonically tenuous end. This implies continuance beyond the conclusion.

The second Whitman song is still shorter and more sparse. “Clear Midnight” is essentially another nocturne concerned with quiet rumination on death. Once more there is a repeating figure, this time in the form of a five-measure ground bass pattern, and once more the dynamic never exceeds *piano*. Vaughan Williams’s score indication under each of the Seumas O’Sullivan songs – that they may be sung with or without piano accompaniment seems like it may fruitfully apply here as well. Bare triadic pillars underlie the melody, mostly in half-note motion in the 3/2 time structure. The song winds down with the words “Night, sleep, death and the stars.” They immediately precede the *pianissimo* close, where again some harmonic tension emerges at the last sonority. This time, however, Vaughan Williams allows the listener the most fleeting of resolutions, which may hardly seem like one at all given its bare qualities.

Ex. 4.6: Vaughan Williams, *Three Poems by Walt Whitman* – No. 2, “Clear Midnight”, mm. 31-37



The image shows a musical score for the song "Clear Midnight" by Vaughan Williams. It features a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/2. The vocal line includes the lyrics "and the stars." The piano accompaniment consists of a steady, rhythmic pattern of chords in the bass register, with a *mp* dynamic marking. The instruction "sempre con gva" is written below the piano part.

The final song in the group, “Joy, Shipmate, Joy!” represents a contrast with the first two songs in nearly every respect. Though not strictly pastoral, the poem is relevant in Vaughan

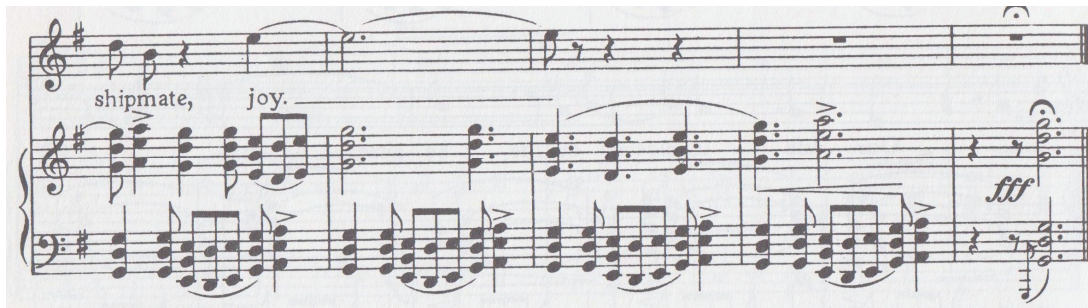
Williams's group both as a response to the earlier songs and as a continuation of their meditation on death. The text ostensibly presents a welcoming of death:

*Joy, shipmate, joy!  
(Pleas'd to my soul at death I cry,  
Our life is closed, our life begins,  
The long, long anchorage we leave,  
The ship is clear at last, she leaps!  
She swiftly courses from the shore,  
Joy, shipmate, joy.*

This poem appears as a small stand-alone offering in the middle of the *Songs of Parting* section of *Leaves of Grass*, where themes of death in war, mourning, and sunset figure prominently.

Whether or not Whitman intended this poem to be ironic, it is possible to discern some irony in Vaughan Williams's setting. The smoothly recurring ostinato patterns in the first two songs give way to an almost frantic reiteration of a one-measure pattern in the third song that never strays from its G-tonic position. Furthermore, the accent on the last quarter in the ostinato figure provides an extra jolt. The rapid tempo only increases the effect. While it is true that the dynamics sometimes fall to *piano*, most of the song stays at or above *forte*, with the final seven measures sustaining a *fortissimo* before finally even reaching *fff*. The last chord continues to deny the listener a pure major sonority, as is the case throughout the rest of the song despite the single sharp in the key signature.

Ex. 4.7: Vaughan Williams, *Three Poems by Walt Whitman* – No. 3, “Joy, Shipmate, Joy!” mm. 27-31



These musical traits in combination with each other can make the words of the text seem hollow, and the expression of joy forced or disingenuous. The singer might be trying to convince himself of what he is saying.

The dichotomy of life and death in the group’s final song operates on its own level poetically, but the effect in Vaughan Williams’s short cycle of “Joy, shipmate, joy!,” coming after the kind of songs that it does, provides another dichotomy. The outward expression of joy or false joy, however one chooses to see it, stands alongside quietly inward, and at times mournful, reflections on death in a natural or quasi-natural setting. To the extent that the cycle offers resolution in its final song, it is perfunctory and questionable as a source of consolation. In several instances throughout the three songs, the poetry offers visions of potential comfort – natural scenery and the prospect of an afterlife. But as the criticisms cited together hint at, the music does little to openly celebrate them in any resolute or genuine way. Even if one subscribes to the notion that Vaughan Williams was aesthetically earnest in his setting of “Joy, shipmate, joy!,” one may deny that it acts as a complete counterbalance to what came before it. At best, perhaps, rumination on death and brief outward anticipation of the afterlife merely coexist, just as the poet and nature, and life and death coexist in the texts for each of the poems. In this light, Vaughan Williams’s musical choices across the Whitman cycle accentuate well the subtle

elegiac themes of their texts, both in accordance with Whitman's elegiac practices and with respect to Great War modes of elegy.

Themes of life and death also coexist in the Shove poems that Vaughan Williams finished setting in 1922 and published three years later.<sup>235</sup> The aesthetic trajectory of the group somewhat compares with the Whitman songs, with the first three forming more of a homogenous character in comparison with a starkly contrasting final number.<sup>236</sup> Indeed, the first two songs of the Shove group carry on many of the poetic themes to be found in the first two Whitman songs, being concerned with the narrator's introspection and a decided emphasis on nature. There are musical similarities as well.

In "Motion and Stillness," one finds another tranquil meditation, this time on clear pastoral imagery and states of being. Mention of death occurs early in the poem.

The sea-shells lie as cold as death Under the sea,  
The clouds move in a wasted wreath Eternally;  
The cows sleep on the tranquil slopes Above the bay;  
The ships like evanescent hopes Vanish away.

The bleak underlying character of the poem readily recalls the first Whitman songs. The musical setting, though not as sparse, nevertheless similarly accommodates the text's gloomily introspective character. While nothing in the words explicitly suggests a nocturnal or dusk setting, the musical accompaniment, particularly initially, shares something with another song

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<sup>235</sup> The poet whose texts Vaughan Williams set in this cycle, Fredegond Shove, was actually a relative of his first wife's sister. Shove was the daughter of F.W. Maitland (a noted music scholar and admirer of Vaughan Williams) and Adeline Vaughan Williams's sister Florence. She married the Cambridge economist Gerald Shove. Trevor Hold questions whether Vaughan Williams's decision to set this poet's work (a poet he describes as having "modest but real skills") was motivated by family connections. See Hold, *From Parry to Finzi*, p. 118.

<sup>236</sup> Each of the songs in Vaughan Williams's Shove group come from the cycle of poems entitled *Dreams and Journeys*. The four poems that Vaughan Williams set are interspersed within a much larger number of poems in *Dreams and Journeys* and do not appear consecutively therein. Furthermore, the order Vaughan Williams selects for the four texts in his group of songs is different from that in *Dreams and Journeys*. See Shove, *Dreams and Journeys* (Oxford: B.H. Blackwell, Broad Street, 1918), pp. 5-6.

that is openly nocturnal – “The Twilight People,” one of the two Seumas O’Sullivan settings mentioned earlier.<sup>237</sup> With both, initial alternating harmonic intervals serve to set the mood for the text settings.

Ex. 4.8: Vaughan Williams, *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove* – No. 1, “Motion and Stillness,” mm. 1-3

The image shows the first three measures of the vocal and piano parts for Vaughan Williams' "Motion and Stillness". The tempo is marked "Lento" and the time signature is 4/4. The voice part begins with a rest in the first two measures, followed by the lyrics "The sea - shells" in the third measure. The piano accompaniment starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and features a steady, alternating harmonic pattern in the right hand, with the instruction "simile" at the end of the third measure.

Ex. 4.9: Vaughan Williams, “The Twilight People,” opening measures

The image shows the opening measures of the vocal and piano parts for Vaughan Williams' "The Twilight People". The tempo is marked "Andante con moto" and the key signature has three flats. The voice part begins with a rest in the first two measures, followed by the lyrics "It is a" in the third measure. The piano accompaniment starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and features a steady, alternating harmonic pattern in the right hand, with the instruction "sempre colla voce" at the end of the third measure. The lyrics "whis - per a - mong the ha - zel bush - es; It is a" are written below the voice line in the fourth measure.

<sup>237</sup> An interesting anecdote concerning Seumas O’Sullivan comes from Vaughan Williams’s friend, colleague, and dedicatee of his Fourth Symphony, Arnold Bax (1883-1953). Bax, who himself wrote poetry under the pen name ‘Dermot O’Byrne’, spent considerable time in the company of Irish writers. His description of O’Sullivan closely matches the title and character of the poem set by Vaughan Williams: “These were all regular weekly visitors to Rathgar Avenue, but there were many others who would drift in occasionally, amongst them, Seamus O’Sullivan, sombrely handsome and a subtle, crepuscular poet. His appearance brought to mind a comparison with a noble funeral horse.” Quoted in Bax, *Farewell My Youth* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 97.

In “Motion and Stillness” the trend of a predominantly quiet and spatial dynamic also continues, with the now-familiar pattern of an ending that very quietly fades and remains harmonically unsettled.

Ex. 4.10: Vaughan Williams, *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove* – No. 1, “Motion and Stillness,” mm. 19-21



The image shows a musical score for three staves in 4/4 time. The top staff is a vocal line with a triplet of eighth notes and a fermata over the final note. The lyrics are "Van - ish a - way." The middle staff is a piano accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes and a fermata over the final note. The lyrics are "niente". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment with a triplet of eighth notes and a fermata over the final note. The dynamic marking *ppp* is present in the middle staff.

With “Four Nights” the nocturnal theme is once again obvious, as is the narrator’s musing upon nature and the cosmos. The narrator essentially relays the nature of his dreams in a given night from each of the four seasons. Some striking lines early in this poem that refer to spring speak to the impulse of finding peace beyond the waking world. At the end during the winter portion, the narrator claims to hear or see nothing while dreaming in winter, even going so far as to compare this state of sleep with death. In setting the poem, Vaughan Williams once again opts for a soft dynamic throughout and assigns each of the sections its own accompaniment figure. The opening may recall the use of consecutive major and minor triads in the very opening of *A Pastoral Symphony*. Interestingly, the opening figure reappears once the text about winter arrives. Given the pessimism of the texts at these points, the nocturnal setting, and the musical patterns therein (triads and combinations of triads), it is tempting to recall like points in *A Pastoral Symphony*.

Ex. 4.11: Vaughan Williams, *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove* – No. 2, “Four Nights,” mm. 1-4

The image shows a musical score for the song "Four Nights" by Vaughan Williams. The score is in 4/4 time and marked "Andante". It features a voice part and a piano accompaniment. The voice part begins with a circled question mark above the first measure. The lyrics are "O when I shut my eyes in spring A". The piano part is marked "pp" and consists of chords in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The composer's name "R. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS" is printed in the upper right corner of the score.

In remarking upon the first two Shove songs, Trevor Hold is less than charitable, dubbing “Motion and Stillness” “quite unsuitable for musical setting” and “glum and unmemorable.” He allows that “Four Nights” is an improvement but that it “still fails to elicit a strong musical response.”<sup>238</sup> Interestingly, Hold identifies the next song in the cycle, “The New Ghost,” with Vaughan Williams’s “preoccupations of his larger-scaled works of the period, particularly *A Pastoral Symphony* and *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*.”<sup>239</sup> Though this is undoubtedly true, the implied exclusion of the earlier songs is problematic. To marginalize or downplay the first two songs of the Shove cycle (and by possible extension the related Whitman songs) is, as I have attempted to show, to deny a unique and important vein in Vaughan Williams’s postwar elegiac music. Just as *A Pastoral Symphony* has been better understood within its Great War context, so too may the bleak and difficult songs of the Whitman and Shove groups be advantageously viewed in light of the conflict’s cultural vocabulary as well as Vaughan Williams’s own experiences.

The poetry of the “The New Ghost” concerns the death of a man whose soul afterward rises from the ground and follows the spirit of the Lord to heaven. (Because of the length of the

<sup>238</sup> Hold, *Parry to Finzi*, p. 118.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

poem, I have placed its text in Appendix C.) Some traditional tropes of pastoral elegy – death upon the green grass, the mention of flower names, the birds, and the spirit of the departed floating over the churchyard – are plain to see. As seen with *On Wenlock Edge* and other early vocal works, Vaughan Williams’s musical setting of “The New Ghost” may lie at some variance with the character of the text. Here we return to the matter of consolation in elegy. Reading the poem by itself, one is left with the impression that Shove is emphasizing the mercy and comfort of the Christian deity in light of a human being’s death. But Vaughan Williams, in keeping with what by this time may have been his own agnostic outlook, rather enlarges the mystic elements of the text in his musical setting, even if, as James Day writes, he avoids the obviously “grim and macabre.”<sup>240</sup> Day points to the poetry’s positive overtones in his remarks on the song. However, the musical dressing often seems more conducive to sorrowful contemplation than it does to any kind of joyful hope associated with Christ.

Much of the musical character in “New Ghost” may be traced to a small number of harmonic imprints. The first of these is the use of a recurring enriched minor chord (in this case, a clearly spelled minor triad with an added sixth tone). The listener encounters this straightaway after the quiet opening of the song. Then another important pattern appears – the use of consecutive minor triads.

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<sup>240</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, p. 115. Stephen Banfield views the aesthetic of the song as similarly mystic in character. See Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song* Volume 2, p. 329.

Ex. 4.12: Vaughan Williams, *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove* – No. 3, “The New Ghost,” mm.

4-9

The first system of the musical score for "The New Ghost" features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a 3/4 time signature and contains the lyrics: "full of death, And like a sword his spir-it showed out of the cold sheath." The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, with the right hand playing chords and the left hand playing a more active line. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor).

The second system of the musical score continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line contains the lyrics: "He went a pace or two, he went to meet his Lord,". The piano accompaniment continues with similar harmonic textures. The key signature remains one flat.

Though this is a pattern that Vaughan Williams uses throughout his output, in at least one other instance he employs it to color a text that describes a being in the spiritual realm. In his Christmas cantata, *Hodie* (completed in 1954), the use of consecutive minor triads accompanies the appearance of both the Holy Ghost and the Angel of the Lord, to Joseph in a dream. The pattern there creates a unique tension that matches well with the supernatural beings and events depicted. (I discuss *Hodie* further in Chapter 5.) In “The New Ghost” the effect is similar. The lack of a definite sense of arrival combines with the inherent qualities of minor harmonies to create a unique sense of unease in this song. This works more to highlight the eerie or deathly elements of the text than to emphasize the religious consolation and love that the spirit of the Lord clearly offers to the newly minted ghost.

A third pattern concerns rhythm. With the lines of the text that describe movement, the piano accompaniment assumes a flowing quality that juxtaposes eighth-note triplets with groupings of four sixteenth notes. The first instance of this occurs where the text paints an evocative atmosphere of the trees shivering and the birds crying out at the sight of the new ghost.

Ex. 4.13: Vaughan Williams, *Four Poems by Fredegond Shove* – No. 3, “The New Ghost,” mm. 13-15

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics: "And see-ing him the na-ked trees be-gan shiv-er-ing, And all the". The middle staff is the piano accompaniment, featuring a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 15. The bottom staff is the bass line, with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 between measures 13 and 14. A small asterisk is visible at the end of the bottom staff in measure 15.

More consecutive minor chords appear with the meeting of the Lord and the ghost not long after. When another area of rhythmic fluidity follows, the consecutive minor triads make another appearance under some continuing triplets. Similar music closes the song. There the minor harmony with an added sixth (mentioned earlier) ends above a high C and, in the words of James Day, “reaches out to remoteness.”<sup>241</sup>

The final number in the Shove group, “The Water Mill,” stands out among Vaughan Williams’s postwar songs in several respects. First, it is easily the most lyrical of any song in the Whitman, Shove, or O’Sullivan cycles, with its firm Mixolydian grounding and its tuneful melody that cycles throughout a modified strophic form. Second, the text is entirely of the idyllic pastoral character, with no “Death in Arcadia” undercurrents whatsoever. (See Appendix D for the complete text.) Both factors make “The Water Mill” noteworthy in Vaughan Williams’s postwar art. Stylistically, it could have been written before the war and among earlier vocal efforts such as the *Songs of Travel*. More than one commentator has called attention to its Schubertian qualities, seemingly both from the standpoints of lyricism and subject matter – the

<sup>241</sup> Day, *Vaughan Williams*, p. 115.

song readily recalls moments from *Die schöne Müllerin* though it lacks the final tragedy in that cycle.<sup>242</sup>

The placement of “The Water Mill” at the end of the Shove group forms an obvious parallel with the placement of “Joy, shipmate, joy!” in the Whitman songs. Both break with a more uniform character shared by the numbers preceding them and appear, at least on surface, to embrace a more upbeat aesthetic after much more somber and introverted music. It is more difficult, however, to make the case that “The Water Mill” acts in any way ironically. One strains, probably in vain, to see more than the charming idyll suggested by the text. There is no death, but only the portrayal of mill and a simple family life amidst natural beauty. In searching for consolatory imagery in Vaughan Williams’s postwar music, we possibly find it here, at least to the degree that escapism is consolatory. If irony is to be found, one is compelled to look at the place of “The Water Mill” in relation to its preceding songs rather than at the song itself (as may be the case with “Joy, shipmate, joy!”). In choosing and placing these particular Shove poems, and setting them musically in the manner that he did, Vaughan Williams obviously aimed on some level for the dichotomy of hard and soft versions of the pastoral. He pits visions of dimmed and/or death-tinged landscapes against a buoyant expression of an idealized rural scene. This mirrors a similar pattern found throughout the other poems of Shove’s *Dreams and Journeys*, which are predominantly concerned with death and pastoral life. In light of this, there is every reason to suppose that Vaughan Williams chose his poetry with more in mind than merely affection for, or obligation toward, a family relative.

One final group of post-war songs deserves mention, both in the context of pastoral elegy and also as a direct point of comparison with pre-war songs set to poetry from the same

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<sup>242</sup> For examples, see Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 190; and Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song* Volume 2, p. 329.

collection. The cycle *Along the Field* (1927) features poems from A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*, but the differences between it and the pre-war *On Wenlock Edge* are considerable. In keeping with the austerity in the collections just discussed, Vaughan Williams's scoring calls for soprano and violin only. The textures of this cycle are thus much more attenuated than those lush and richly atmospheric numbers from *On Wenlock Edge*. The musical moods, also, are more severe and befitting to Housman's subject in the chosen poems – the death of a young man and continued life of his former love amidst the beautiful countryside they once walked together. In his life and works volume, Michael Kennedy underscores the stylistic contrast between the cycles. He also cites a very telling review of the 1927 cycle in the *Musical Times*, in which the reviewer remarks on the “severeness of style” and explicitly states that, in contrast to *On Wenlock Edge*'s reception, “the composer has aimed at giving the poet the first place, obscuring the verbal effect as little as possible.”<sup>243</sup>

### ***The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains***

When one looks for other large-scale postwar works beyond *A Pastoral Symphony* that intersect with pastoral elegy, the most obvious choice for discussion is *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (henceforth referred to as *Shepherds* in this chapter). In contrast to those postwar works by Vaughan Williams in which the theme of consolation in elegy is absent, doubtful, or unclear, here is a composition where consolation in the face of death is central. Vaughan Williams dubbed *Shepherds* (completed in 1921) “a pastoral episode,” making another one of his sparing references to the term “pastoral” as it pertains to a specific work. Like *A Pastoral Symphony*, *Shepherds* is largely subdued and introspective music with brief surges of

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<sup>243</sup> See Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 116 n. 1, 196.

outward intensity. It is a stage work based upon relatively brief portions from John Bunyan's Christian allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a book that the composer cherished his whole life.<sup>244</sup> In Vaughan Williams's musical rendition, the wandering "Pilgrim" (renamed by Vaughan Williams from "Christian" in the interest of spiritual inclusiveness) finds rest in The Delectable Mountains, which one of the shepherds in his score dubs "Immanuel's Land." It lay within sight of the Pilgrim's final goal – the Celestial City – a representation of the afterlife and the final resting place for weary pilgrims.

The degree to which Vaughan Williams makes various departures from the material in the first part of Bunyan's allegory is significant. For instance, he omits the companion of the Pilgrim at this point (Hopeful), decreases the number of shepherds from five to three (and omits their names), and places the Delectable Mountains scene directly before the Pilgrim crosses the River of Death. In Part I of the book, the Pilgrim's arrival at the Delectable Mountains occurs a significant amount of time before the final crossing over, although still within long sight of the gates to the Celestial City.<sup>245</sup> At other points Vaughan Williams inserts Biblical verses and dialogue from different parts of *The Pilgrim's Progress* and modifies the text as he sees fit. This is in keeping with his lifelong practice of parsing and rearranging texts at will.

Two of the largest modifications made by Vaughan Williams to Bunyan's original sequence of events in *Shepherds* deserved some focused attention. They concern both the extent to which he enhances the pastoral ambience of the mountains, and also the Pilgrim's fitful preoccupation with death therein. Concerning the first, Bunyan makes it clear on multiple occasions in *The Pilgrim's Progress* that the Delectable Mountains are a place of comfort, both

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<sup>244</sup> Vaughan Williams's final opera, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, carries all but the last part of *Shepherds* in the latter scene of its fourth act. I will discuss *The Pilgrim's Progress* in fuller detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>245</sup> Part II of Bunyan's book also features the Delectable Mountains, but in the context of the Pilgrim's wife visiting them when she embarks upon her own journey of salvation after her husband had already reached the Celestial City.

when the Pilgrim spies them from afar earlier in his journey while staying at House Beautiful, and also when he arrives there some time later. Bunyan scholar Roger Sharrock points out, in his edition of the book, that the author drew upon “the fertile landscapes of the Old Testament, especially those in Psalms and the Song of Solomon.”<sup>246</sup> But Vaughan Williams makes significant additions, enhancing the setting as something of a God-protected, pastoral paradise. The very opening lines of the work, sung by the three shepherds, are additions to the Bunyan dialogue, being taken directly from verses of Psalm 91.

Whoso dwelleth under the defense of the Most High  
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty  
He shall defend thee under his wings  
And thou shalt be safe under his feathers  
For he shall give his angels charge over thee  
That thou hurt not thy foot against a stone

Briefly postponing a discussion of the following exchange between the Pilgrim and the shepherds, I now point to the primary modification by Vaughan Williams that heightens the Arcadian qualities of the Delectable Mountains. Here, after the Pilgrim falls into despondency in refusing to gaze upon the Celestial City, the first shepherd states words taken from the end of Part I of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, pertaining to a place called “Beulah.” In the book, Christian and his companion Hopeful reach Beulah directly before finally gaining entrance to the Celestial City at the conclusion of Part I. Bunyan's description of Beulah, as Brainerd Stranahan has pointed out, derives from Song of Solomon 2:12.<sup>247</sup> Vaughan Williams in *Shepherds* transplants this description as dialogue for one of the shepherds in the Delectable Mountains – “Here the air is very sweet and pleasant, here you shall hear continually the singing of birds and shall see

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<sup>246</sup> Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, edited by Sharrock, n. 48, p. 283.

<sup>247</sup> Brainerd T. Stranahan, “‘With Great Delight’: The Song of Solomon in *The Pilgrim's Progress*,” in *English Studies* Vol. 68, No. 3 (June, 1987), p. 224. Stranahan also explains how the name “Beulah” was itself taken by Bunyan from verses in Isaiah (Chapter 62: 4-5) that speak of the relationship between a bride and bridegroom.

every day flowers appear in the land.” Directly following this he inserts another Biblical addition that emphasizes the Edenesque scenery – an ensemble song with Psalm 23 as its lyrics.

Yet even in that most pastoral of psalms, the “shadow of death” rears its head.<sup>248</sup>

Elsewhere at this juncture, the theme of death exists both in Bunyan’s text and in Vaughan Williams’s *Shepherds* adaptation. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the shepherds of the mountain help Christian and his companion Hopeful, after they rest one night, by showing how former Pilgrims have come to ruin in dangerous spots beyond the mountains. In Vaughan Williams’s work the shepherds do no such thing beyond mentioning that “many will fall” along the path to salvation. Instead, in Vaughan Williams’s score they largely comfort the lone Pilgrim and help him prepare for his journey to the Celestial City. Most noteworthy, however, is how in *Shepherds* the Pilgrim, while at the Delectable Mountains, expresses a dismay and anxiety about death that Christian scarcely demonstrates at Bunyan’s corresponding juncture. In the latter, Christian merely asks (as does the Pilgrim in *Shepherds*): “is there any relief for Pilgrims who are weary and faint in the way?” For *Shepherds*, Vaughan Williams transplants dialogue that Christian had had with the characters Prudence, Piety and Charity in House Beautiful, which, as mentioned before, took place far prior to Christian reaching the mountains. The Pilgrim gives essentially the same answer, but now the shepherds are the ones who ask the question instead: “What makes you so desirous to get to Mt. Zion?” The Pilgrim’s response, “Fain would I be where I shall die no more, in the Paradise of God,” speaks to the heightened restlessness that the protagonist of Vaughan Williams’s work displays over and above that of Christian in Bunyan’s text at this point. The music follows accordingly. The Pilgrim’s response begins a brief period of dramatic intensity in *Shepherds*. This culminates in a moment of bitonal climax wherein the second

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<sup>248</sup> The “Valley of the Shadow of Death,” mentioned in Psalm 23, is actually a place that Bunyan creatively incorporates into the narrative of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. For a fuller discussion of this, see Chapter 6.

shepherd finishes describing the glories of the near-at-hand Celestial City just as the Pilgrim cries that he cannot look on account of falling “faint with desire.” The brief overlap presents the most outwardly robust point in the work. Note in Example 4.14 the descending harmonic motion in the bass portion of the orchestra when the Pilgrim interrupts the shepherd, and also its similarity to the excerpt shown for *A Pastoral Symphony* in Example 4.1.

Ex. 4.14: Vaughan Williams, *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (the six measures following from Rehearsal 9)

The image shows a page of a musical score for Vaughan Williams' *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains*. It features three staves: a vocal line for the Shepherd, a vocal line for the Pilgrim, and a piano accompaniment. The Shepherd's line includes the lyrics "wel - come the pil - grims. Eh - re - der Pil - ger." The Pilgrim's line begins with "I can-not look on that glo-ry, Oh" and "Ich kann die-sen Glanz nicht seh-en". The piano part is marked "ancora animato" and "ff" (fortissimo). The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The two largest factors that make *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* different from Bunyan’s portrayal of events in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* speak directly to themes of elegiac consolation and pastoral lushness that relate back to this chapter’s discussion. Here more than anywhere else lies an example of Vaughan Williams’s postwar artistic preoccupations with death in a pastoral setting – not merely in his choice of music, nor even in his choice of libretto, but in his very specific alterations of the libretto to suit his needs. This suggests as well that his very decision to return to work on a Bunyan project in the immediate aftermath of the war has larger significance. Fussell records how *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was a book that English men had been

brought up on as children, and how the allegorical events and places in it took on new meanings for them as participants in the war. In particular, Fussell describes how concepts and places in real life seemed to take on dimensions of Bunyan's settings. The "Slough of Despond" (the mire of the trenches), "The Celestial City" (demobilization) and, not least, "The Valley of the Shadow of Death" (self-explanatory) are three examples.<sup>249</sup> Indeed, there is ample evidence that Vaughan Williams himself thought of Bunyan's places and names in terms of his own life's experience in wider contexts than just the war. I will treat this matter more fully in the final chapter.

### **Flos Campi**

In considering *Flos Campi*, I move away from direct focus upon a strictly funereal type of elegy. Indeed, mention of this work in the context of Vaughan Williams's postwar elegiac music may elicit some surprise. My response to this possible reaction is twofold. First, there are enough themes in its textual epigraphs that speak to loss, despair, and a lush natural setting to suggest pastoral elegy. Second, while it may be difficult to tie *Flos Campi* to the Great War in any empirical way, it is reasonable to view its aesthetic as flowing directly from *A Pastoral Symphony* and related music, or, at least, as being made possible by works more obviously associated with the war. In any case, to pass over *Flos Campi* in a study of Vaughan Williams's pastoral music would be to shirk one of his most singular creations in the mode. Not merely a tone poem with programmatic inscriptions, *Flos Campi* is far removed from pastoral works such as *In the Fen Country* and the *Norfolk Rhapsodies*. It is renowned as one of Vaughan Williams's most beautiful and yet most enigmatic works, and it could only have been written following the Great War.

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<sup>249</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 137-144.

*Flos Campi*, completed in 1925 and first performed in October of that year, is a difficult work to categorize. Scored for solo viola, wordless chorus, and small orchestra, it is often grouped with compositions featuring a solo instrument. The music is divided into six short sections or movements, each of which bears at its head a verse quotation from the Biblical book *Song of Solomon* (also known as *Song of Songs*). The available manuscript sources occupy a central role in researching the origins of the work. Byron Adams was the first to discuss how annotations in Vaughan Williams's personal copy of the King James Bible (Add. MS 63859) suggest that the composer at some point planned a large-scale vocal work based upon the *Song of Solomon*.<sup>250</sup> When we consider Ursula Vaughan Williams's remarks on this composition and compare them to the annotations found in MS. 63859, a connection becomes highly likely. She writes:

So, in *Flos Campi*, words were the starting point, episodes from the *Song of Songs*. The viola with its capability of warmth and its glowing quality was the instrument he knew best, and he used it fully in the six sections that explore the sorrows, glories, splendours, and joys of the Shulamite, the king, and the shepherd lover. He added a wordless chorus to the strings that accompany the solo.<sup>251</sup>

These factors together suggest that work on what eventually became *Flos Campi* went through markedly different stages and began considerably earlier than the completion of the composition in 1925. This and its particular natural themes and overtones bear comparison with the pastoral music of the early to middle 1920s.

The title itself – translated as “Flower of the Field” – alone signifies the work's pastoral flavor and shares, at least nominally, common imagery with both the traditional elegiac and

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<sup>250</sup> Texts marked by Vaughan Williams in a literary source have gone on to appear in a composition in at least one other case – his marked texts in a personal copy of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, some of which appear in his full-length operatic allegory. (See British Library Add. MS 71123.)

<sup>251</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 156.

Great War tropes of flowers on a field.<sup>252</sup> The epigraphs that head each movement , in conjunction with their accompanying music, further establish the *Flos Campi*'s conformity with the hard pastoral pattern of lush scenery juxtaposed against angst. (See Appendix E for the series of epigraphs.) Such a focus is something of a departure from the norm for this particular text, however. Many commentaries on the Biblical book Song of Solomon stress, to varying degrees, its sensual themes, its idealized pastoral atmosphere, and its “secular” flavor (the book does not mention the name of God). In their own study and translation of the book, Ariel and Chana Bloch describe it thus:

The Song resembles Greek pastoral poetry in its central conceit – the lovers as shepherds in a setting of idyllic nature – and its celebration of innocent pleasures in highly sophisticated art. As in pastoral, the lovers exist in a world of leisure and delight, untroubled by the wind and the rain of a real shepherd's life, a world conjured up by the poet's idealizing imagination.<sup>253</sup>

Vaughan Williams, however, goes to special efforts to find those particular verses in Song of Solomon that illustrate or hint at unrest, places them at the heads of agitated musical movements, and juxtaposes them with verses that speak to pastoral or romantic harmony in other sections. The verse that heads the fourth movement makes an explicit reference to military force. There is also something like an elegiac flavor in the verses that involve the beloved's (The Shulamite) dismay at the absence of her lover (Solomon).

The opposing forces at work in *Flos Campi* have perhaps lent to its reputation of being difficult and/or mysterious. Even Vaughan Williams's close friend Gustav Holst remarked that

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<sup>252</sup> The most famous poem of the Great War, *In Flanders Fields* by the Canadian officer John McCrae, became emblematic of a whole genre of Great War poems that deal with flowers upon the battlefield and the tombs of the fallen. For a complete discussion of this, see Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, pp. 243-254.

<sup>253</sup> Ariel Bloch and Chana Bloch, *The Song of Songs: A New Translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Random House, 1995), pp. 25-26.

he “couldn’t get a hold of Flos a bit.”<sup>254</sup> Two years after the premiere the composer himself wrote a program note for *Flos Campi*, attempting to address some misunderstandings, but perhaps succeeding more in prompting further questions. The beginning of the note recalls how Vaughan Williams corrected in print prevailing false impressions about another elegiac and pastoral-themed work that was often misunderstood – *A Pastoral Symphony*.

When this work was first produced two years ago, the composer discovered that most people were not well enough acquainted with the Vulgate (or perhaps even its English equivalent) to enable them to complete for themselves the quotations from the ‘Canticum Canticorum’, indications of which are the mottoes at the head of each movement of the Suite. Even the title and the source of the quotations gave rise to misunderstanding. The title ‘Flos Campi’ was taken by some to connote an atmosphere of ‘buttercups and daisies’, whereas in reality ‘Flos Campi’ is the Vulgate equivalent of ‘Rose of Sharon’ (*ego Flos Campi, et Lilium Convallium*, ‘I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys’). The biblical source of the quotations also gave rise to the idea that the music had an ecclesiastical basis. This was not the intention of the composer.<sup>255</sup>

The indication here is similar to Vaughan Williams’s remarks in his letter to Ursula concerning *A Pastoral Symphony* in that he denies for *Flos Campi* the unalloyed Arcadianism suggested by the title. In this case, the emphasis is on the fortunes of the Shulamite and her lover Solomon. And while the sensuality is palpable, we sense that not all is “rosy.”

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<sup>254</sup> Gustav Holst, letter to Ralph Vaughan Williams dated November 11, 1925. Quoted in *Heirs and Rebels: Letters written to each other and occasional writings on music by Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), edited by Ursula Vaughan Williams and Imogen Holst, pp. 61-62.

<sup>255</sup> Program note for *Flos Campi*, written by the composer for a performance in 1927, quoted in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 347. Ursula Vaughan Williams seems to affirm the notion that *Flos Campi* had no “ecclesiastical basis” in a letter to Michael Kennedy. She writes: “I think Flos is not much mystical – but about R’s most sensual-sensuous work.” She proceeds to cite the story of Vaughan Williams visiting and flirting with a young woman at the time of the work’s composition. (KEN/3/1/7/29), The Michael Kennedy Collection, John Rylands Library, Manchester.) The story has been related from the letter by Byron Adams elsewhere. See Adams, “No Armpits Please, We’re British,” pp. 34, 41.

The case of the final movement is of singular interest for this discussion. Its music and epigraph, “Set me as a seal upon thy heart” (Song of Solomon 8:6a), in the published score seem to suggest a peaceful denouement alongside its predominantly diatonic musical language grounded in D Major. In previous portions of *Flos Campi*, and especially the much-referenced bitonal opening, Vaughan Williams uses rich harmonies and intense solo passages for the viola that match well the unrest suggested by its epigraphs. The final movement, however, stands apart from the rest of the work in terms of harmonic character and instrumentation, with the viola and wordless chorus providing consonant outlines of diatonic scales. Yet there is one apparent anomaly in the movement – the sudden return of the opening bitonal melody given by the instruments that played it in the beginning of the work.

Ex. 4.15: Vaughan Williams, *Flos Campi*: Mov. VI (reprise of the bitonal opening)

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Viola Solo and Oboe. The tempo is marked 'Lento (tempo del principio)'. The Viola part is marked '(senza misura)', 'pp', and 'lontano'. The Oboe part is marked 'pp' and 'lontano'. The score features a melodic line with triplets and slurs, characteristic of the bitonal opening mentioned in the text.

Reasons for this sudden interjection, recalling the unsettled opening theme, may have to do with a startling clue revealed by a late-stage manuscript of *Flos Campi*.<sup>256</sup> British Library Manuscript Ms.Mus.1584 (formerly Misc. Music Deposit 2003/22) presents essentially the same work as that found in the modern score of *Flos Campi*. According to an accompanying note,

<sup>256</sup> In 2006 I was awarded the Ralph Vaughan Williams Fellowship by the Carthusian Trust. According to the terms of the fellowship, I traveled to Charterhouse School in Godalming, UK where I stayed. From there I made several research trips to the British Library in London, where I studied the manuscripts discussed in this section. I recorded my observations in an essay that I turned in to the Carthusian Trust in agreement with the terms of the fellowship. I draw heavily upon the content of that essay here.

Vaughan Williams gave this manuscript to his student Elizabeth Maconchy during rehearsals for the premiere in 1925. She in turn gave it to her daughter Anna Dunlop, who then donated it to the British Library. It contains numerous small differences from the final version that do not alter the work beyond immediate recognition. By far the most significant difference between this manuscript and the published score is the indication of another epigraph that Vaughan Williams apparently once considered for the sixth movement. Written in red ink and crossed out on the page that begins the sixth movement in Ms.Mus.1584 are the Vulgate words corresponding to Song of Solomon 2:15: “Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.” Numerous interpretations have been posited in connection with this mysterious verse.<sup>257</sup> Most speak to troubling or anxious themes. That Vaughan Williams had apparently connected this quite different text with the final movement of *Flos Campi* before settling upon the much more consolatory selection in the final version, raises the question of how the composer actually conceived the music.

The obvious parallel to draw between the discarded epigraph and the sixth movement concerns the interjection of the opening material discussed above. One struggles to find anything else in the movement that could account for a dark verse such as Song of Solomon 2:15. Even without the knowledge that the verse played a role in Vaughan Williams’s creative process, the musical interpolation of the opening theme has a jarring quality and compromises our impression of the finale as an entirely benign scenario. The discarded epigraph, evidently abandoned or briefly entertained at a very late stage, further supports this notion. But when one considers the verse he finally chose, one sees that Vaughan Williams trimmed his selection. Immediately after

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<sup>257</sup> For example, Gregory of Narek equates the “vineyards” with the Judeo-Christian Church, and the “foxes” with Satan, who wants to destroy it. See Gregory of Narek, *The Blessing of Blessings: Gregory of Narek’s Commentary on the Song of Songs*, with translation, introduction, and notes by Roberta Ervine, *The Cistercian Study Series* No. 215 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2007).

“Set me as a seal upon thine heart” there are the words “for love is as strong as death” in Song of Solomon 8:6. Vaughan Williams did not include the second phrase in any extant manuscript.

In this light, *Flos Campi* is a work not far removed from the pastoral elegiac concerns so far discussed. The themes of absent love and intense longing, combined with lush pastoral scenery and even direct reference to armed men (fourth movement) create a world that fits with other postwar works by Vaughan Williams. Wilfred Mellers made this perceptive remark pertaining to the martial main theme in the fourth movement: “Although the theme is pentatonic, like so many non-Western melodies, it is also metrically rigid, marshalling spontaneity: so if it is erotic as well as exotic it points, in macho patriarchalism, to the link between sex and death, love and war.”<sup>258</sup> The new information concerning the sixth movement also prompts the view of *Flos Campi* as a work at a crossroads between postwar pastoralism and later developments. Its dualistic conclusion foreshadows an intensification of musical ambivalence in Vaughan Williams’s later music. This already becomes discernable in works such as the masque *Job* (1929-1930) and *Riders to the Sea*, where darker musical and narrative factors similarly make the appearance of peaceful denouements deceptive. Allison Sanders McFarland’s chapter-length study of *Job* includes these penetrating remarks concerning its conclusion:

The critical difference is that the epilogue moves quietly and unexpectedly to end on B flat, rather than the tonic G of the introduction. Indeed the entire masque up to this point generally revolves around G or, less frequently, the related centers of C and D. The only emphasis on a remote pitch occurs in the sections suggesting Satan’s victory, when the movement is to the tritone relationship of D flat. So the arrival at B flat at the end of the masque does not fulfill a purely musical purpose; rather it exists solely to delineate Satan’s interval of the minor third. **Vaughan**

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<sup>258</sup> Mellers, *Vaughan Williams and the Vision of Albion*, p. 109.

**Williams is clearly symbolizing the persistence of evil even when all is seemingly resolved.<sup>259</sup>**

Such a statement could also stand for much of the pastoral elegy that lies at the heart of Vaughan Williams's music from this time. In juxtaposing natural beauty with human death and suffering, he musically portrayed not only his own mindset but also the feelings of a generation of young men who had fought in the most terrible war the world had yet seen.

### **Conclusion**

Through all of the music I have discussed here, several qualities shared between traditional hallmarks of pastoral elegiac expression and Great War cultural patterns are discernable. What is also clear once more, however, is the personal element that Vaughan Williams brings to his postwar elegiac music. In his own engagement with the "Death in Arcadia" mode, he treats both consolation and unresolved mourning, holding not only death and pastoral landscape in the same frame, but also addressing both old and new elegiac responses to death in ways that recall his previous music and speak to his diverse literary interests. However, it is not merely a matter of studied assimilation. In the course of these reconciliations, Vaughan Williams created a fresh aesthetic that was further enriched by his own experience, just as folk song collecting and other formative activities enriched him in previous years. Prior to the war, the extent of his actual experiences in the rural world largely amounted to leisurely sojourns in England. In the course of his participation in the war, Vaughan Williams was compelled for the first time to live and work in a pastoral setting that was the opposite of any idealized Arcadia. He experienced firsthand death amidst natural beauty, and it is not surprising that like themes

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<sup>259</sup> Allison Sanders McFarland, "A Deconstruction of William Blake's Vision: Vaughan Williams and *Job*," in Adams and Wells, eds., *Vaughan Williams Essays*, p. 42. Emphasis mine.

saturate the postwar pastoral music from roughly the early to middle 1920s. Ursula Vaughan Williams wrote that Vaughan Williams after the war “was also going back to discover how his own invention had survived the years of suppression, wondering whether it could come to life again or whether it was lost for ever, and if so, what he could do with his life.”<sup>260</sup> This, however, was not the extent of Vaughan Williams’s engagement with pastoral elegy. In the next chapter I will examine how an aging composer once more took up the mode in a fresh manner, and in doing so embarked upon a fertile productivity similar to that in the immediate aftermath of the Great War.

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<sup>260</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 132.

**Chapter 5**  
**Vaughan Williams and the Pastoral Elegy, Part II: An Oxford Elegy and the Post-World War II Music**

In this chapter I shall examine Vaughan Williams's music through the lens of another kind of elegy that, though perhaps discernable in other works elsewhere in his output, exhibits a pronounced presence in the pastoral-related music dating from after the Second World War. As an expression of dismay over a current state of humanity, elegy conveys nostalgia for a lost era, often idealized, that is regarded as preferable to the present. In this discussion, I shall introduce the issues surrounding the composer's late music, move on to a discussion of how this second type of elegy has figured in English literature, and explore how Vaughan Williams engaged with it in one particular composition (*An Oxford Elegy*), while touching upon several others. Finally I will offer some conclusions on the place of these patterns in Vaughan Williams's output as a whole.

From a technical standpoint, commentators have pointed to the unique harmonic and timbral colors that Vaughan Williams's late music exhibits, along with certain retrospective qualities in style and manner.<sup>261</sup> Although there is some ambiguity concerning where a last period in Vaughan Williams's career actually begins, there is much agreement that a foundational inspiration for the new aesthetic proved to be the music for the film *Scott of the Antarctic* (1948).<sup>262</sup> Michael Kennedy stated that the *Scott* music "pervaded Vaughan Williams's

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<sup>261</sup> See, for instance, Hugh Ottaway, "Scott and after: The Final Phase," in *The Musical Times* Vol. 113, No. 1556 (Oct., 1972), p. 961; and Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 347.

<sup>262</sup> This ambiguity can perhaps best be illustrated through how Michael Kennedy handles the issue in his writings. In *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, Kennedy opens a section with the words "The last fifteen years of Vaughan Williams's life had an unexampled creative richness." (p. 347). He then cites the completion of the Fifth Symphony in 1943 as the point at which certain musical changes recognizable in the later works begin. In a later article entitled "The Unknown Vaughan Williams," in *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association* Vol. 99 (1972-1973), pp. 31-41, Kennedy explicitly identifies "the final period" in Vaughan Williams's career as being "from the Second World War to his death in 1958" (p. 31). However, later in the article Kennedy cites the *Scott* film music as that which "pervaded Vaughan Williams's final phase, his last fruitful ten years" (p. 40). Apparently Kennedy either

final phase, his last fruitful ten years.”<sup>263</sup> Hugh Ottaway and Alain Frogley, in some detailed comments, likewise cite Vaughan Williams’s *Scott* project as being the musical and extra-musical launching point for the last period of the composer’s career (approximately the years following World War II), though they refer back to the Sixth Symphony (1944-1947) and other earlier works in order to identify key precedents. Concerning the *Scott* music, they write:

It was a stroke of artistic good fortune that Vaughan Williams was asked for that particular score precisely at this juncture. The spiritual desolation of the Sixth found its physical counterpart in the polar wastes, and the sense of challenge and endurance was re-engaged by the story of Scott’s last expedition. Moreover, whatever Vaughan Williams’s reservations about the vainglorious aspects of Scott’s enterprise, the human values represented – heroic endeavour, loyalty, dedication, personal warmth – were a timely corrective to the ‘ultimate nihilism’ (Cooke, D(iii)1959) of the symphony. He soon knew that what he was writing was no ordinary film score and that an Antarctic symphony might well come of it. In fact, he was achieving a reconciliation that would open the way for not one but three more symphonies and would affect almost everything he wrote in the very active ten years remaining to him.<sup>264</sup>

Further on in this article they refer to a special progression from the Fifth Symphony, begun immediately before the war in 1938, to the Sixth, and then to the Seventh (1949-1952). This last work, entitled *Sinfonia antartica*, was based largely upon the film music for *Scott of the Antarctic*. The progression, in their analysis, forms the “reconciliation” they referred to in the last quote. They summarize:

...basically it concerns the fusion and transformation of hitherto opposed worlds of feeling: the ‘blessedness’ of the

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forgot that he had already delineated Vaughan Williams’s final period as occurring between the years 1945 and 1958 in his life and works volume (and even earlier in the same article as beginning with the Second World War), or he considered the “final phase” as being different from “the final period,” or he considered any differences here as negligible and allowed the ambiguities to go unaddressed.

<sup>263</sup> See the previous footnote.

<sup>264</sup> Ottaway and Frogley, “Vaughan Williams, Ralph,” in *Grove Music Online*.

Fifth and the nihilistic vision of the Sixth were resolved in a tragic but resilient humanism. Thus the last three symphonies share the same stylistic and philosophical orientation and have a wider range of imagery than any of the others since *A London Symphony*.<sup>265</sup>

The key descriptor is “a tragic but resilient humanism.” In a different article that focuses upon the music of Vaughan Williams’s “final phase,” Ottaway uses the same phrase to characterize the general aesthetic therein:

The prevailing tone of the final phase is that of a tragic but resilient humanism. There is much that is somber and grave, overshadowed, as it were, by the trauma of the Sixth. There is also a wonderful, warmth, humor, a lasting vitality, and a deep, inner composure which is really quite different from the ‘serenity’ of the Fifth and *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The crucial point, however, is that none of these qualities stands apart; the emphasis varies from work to work, but the vision is unified, the ethos unmistakable.<sup>266</sup>

In this excerpt Ottaway puts his finger on a hallmark of the final phase and issues a well-advised caution: while pointing out and recognizing even overarching patterns in Vaughan Williams’s music, one must be careful not to claim exclusivity for them, but to recognize that they nearly always operate alongside much else. Ottaway and Frogley affirm this in their Grove article, emphasizing that “parody and ambivalence predominate at almost every level” in the composer’s late period.<sup>267</sup>

The question of why the *Scott* story proved to be so compelling for Vaughan Williams during his last years is an important one, especially as it relates to his final pastoral works. Much hinges upon the aesthetic and philosophical themes that he associated with the story, and the subsequent changes that it prompted in the composer’s artistic and personal outlook. The story

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<sup>265</sup> Ottaway and Frogley, “Vaughan Williams, Ralph,” in *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>266</sup> Hugh Ottaway, “Scott and after: The Final Phase,” p. 961.

<sup>267</sup> Ottaway and Frogley, “Vaughan Williams, Ralph,” in *Grove Music Online*.

itself, which forms the basis for the film, concerns Captain Robert Falcon Scott, a Royal Navy officer who led an ill-fated expedition in 1911-1912, hoping to be the first to plant a nation's flag at the South Pole. Upon successfully reaching their destination, he and his men found that a Norwegian team led by Roald Amundsen had beaten them to the goal. Discouraged, Scott's small group headed back, only to die of hunger and cold on the Antarctic wilderness about halfway through the return journey. Vaughan Williams himself was at once inspired and angered by the story, while much moved overall. Ursula Vaughan Williams, speaking now from her firsthand recollections, describes his mood shortly after the time he was asked by Ernest Irving to provide music for the film:

Pictures of the Scott expedition lay about the house and the work was begun. Ralph became more and more upset as he read about the inefficiencies of the organization; he despised heroism that risked lives unnecessarily, and such things as allowing five to travel on rations for four filled him with fury. Apart from this he was excited by the demands which the setting of the film made on his invention, to find musical equivalents for the musical sensations of ice, of wind blowing over the great, uninhabited desolation, of stubborn and impassable ridges of black and ice-covered rock, and to suggest man's endeavor to overcome the rigours of this bleak land and to match mortal spirit against the elements.<sup>268</sup>

In a penetrating article on the *Sinfonia antartica*, Daniel Grimley places Vaughan Williams's ambivalent fascination with Scott's expedition in a convincing wider context. He draws attention to how the Scott story was seen by certain writers and audiences during the Second World War:

"The story of Scott's expedition...became both prospective (in its strong triumph-through-defeat-and-adversity trajectory) and powerfully retrospective, reminding contemporary audiences

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<sup>268</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 279. By this time Ursula had been Vaughan Williams's friend and lover for several years. She was a frequent houseguest at White Gates, Vaughan Williams's estate in Dorking during the war and at other times. They married in 1953.

of their capacity for endurance at a comparable time of national crisis.”<sup>269</sup> But for all its appeal to the “British spirit,” the Scott story also struck an opposite chord with some British audiences as it did with Vaughan Williams, creating an ambivalence which informs the latter’s music for both the film and the resulting symphony. Grimley cites remarks of the literary critic Cyril Connolly, pertaining to a spiritual crisis he perceived in the late 1940s and early 1950s in Britain, and ties them to the darker side of Vaughan Williams’s involvement with the Scott story:

For Connolly, contrary to any supposed spirit of optimism following the end of the Second World War, the prevailing mood of the times prompted an existentialist crisis of faith, which modern art, music, and literature could only begin to address. “This is the message of the Forties from which, alas, there seems to be no escape,” Connolly wrote, “for it is closing times in the gardens of the West and from now on an artist will only be judged by the resonance of his solitude or the quality of his despair.” Elements of Vaughan Williams’s response to the Scott myth in the *Sinfonia Antartica* suggest a similarly pessimistic outlook....this score exemplifies most powerfully the spirit of angst articulated by Connolly and others.<sup>270</sup>

In another article, Michael Beckerman offers a summary of the fascination with Scott as it appeared in the *Sinfonia antartica*:

In this case [referring to the ambivalence of Vaughan Williams toward the Scott story], the symphony is not simply to be heard as a paean to the heroism of man and the massive power of nature, but it is also meant to be associated with the bitterness of human failure, the pessimism of dreams dashed, and the futility of fools fighting the wind and ice.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Daniel Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the ‘Geometry of Fear’: The Landscapes of Vaughan Williams’s *Sinfonia Antartica*,” in *The Musical Quarterly* Vol. 91 (Spring-Summer, 2008), p. 120.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid*, p. 143.

<sup>271</sup> Michael Beckerman, “The Composer as Pole Seeker: Reading Vaughan Williams’s *Sinfonia antartica*,” in *Current Musicology* No. 69 (Spring, 2000), p. 59.

I shall further discuss the Scott phenomenon in Vaughan Williams's music later in the chapter as it relates to the afore-mentioned second type of elegy. But to better understand how this kind of elegy situates in representative music from Vaughan Williams's last period, one must also examine its literary background. The previous chapter explained how commentators have understood the literary concept of elegy to refer to mourning or reflection upon some sort of personal loss, and how that loss usually involves the death of a particular person or group of people. While this is perhaps the most common conception of elegy, it is not the only one. Some scholarship on the subject has examined ways in which the central theme of personal loss in elegy may find other outlets. John D. Rosenberg, for example, states in the introduction to his book on Victorian literature and the past: "[Elegy] must, I believe center on personal loss, although that loss may be of places or beliefs as well as persons, and the person may be imaginary."<sup>272</sup> In his study of the modern elegy, beginning with literature from the Victorian era, Jahan Ramazani immediately alerts us to its mutability: "Indeed, the poetry of mourning for the dead assumes in the modern period an extraordinary diversity and range, incorporating more anger and skepticism, more conflict and anxiety than ever before."<sup>273</sup>

That such observations come from studies treating literature from the Victorian era and after is significant. As I partially recounted earlier, many of those experiencing the drastic changes wrought by industrialization felt more keenly the passing of long-standing traditions, nostalgia for a rural life (either real or perceived) in apparent decline, and an unprecedented sense of foreboding at what might yet come to pass, even as others felt exhilarated by new opportunities due to urban and scientific progress. Certain writers from the Victorian period captured the anxiety in special ways. To quote from Rosenberg's volume once more: "The

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<sup>272</sup> Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*, p. 4.

<sup>273</sup> Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press), p. 1.

Victorians who speak to us most urgently today thought of themselves as living not in an age of peace or progress but, in John Stuart Mill's phrase 'an age of transition,' caught between a vanishing past and an uncertain future. Such an unsettled cultural climate provided rich soil for the flourishing of elegy."<sup>274</sup> Among the elegists of the nineteenth century, certain names stand out in this respect. In his study Rosenberg highlights the contributions of several and devotes sustained discussion to writers such as William Wordsworth, Alfred Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, and Thomas Hardy. These last two names in particular have prompted plenty of discussion in connection with poetic elegies as troubled reflections on past and present. I again quote Ramazani's volume with regard to Hardy (1840-1928):

In his elegies for the nineteenth century, for the queen who gave the century its name, for the unknown soldier of its imperial wars, and for God, who had been dying through much of the century, Hardy mourns the passing of one era and anxiously anticipates the arrival of another...Hardy elegizes the death of a Romantic and Victorian aesthetic and predicts the troubled emergence of its successor.<sup>275</sup>

Literary scholars have classified the elegiac works of Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) in very similar terms. Abbie Findlay Potts writes, "Arnold links the elegist with the problems of his time."<sup>276</sup> Hardly the first to make such connections, John D. Robinson mentions Arnold's well-known elegy "Dover Beach" and its themes of dismay over the "departure of God" and the loss of certitude.<sup>277</sup> In a classic monograph on Matthew Arnold, Lionel Trilling offers some summary remarks:

Like Wordsworth before him, like T.S. Eliot after, [Arnold] wrote primarily for a small group of saddened intellectuals for whom the dominant world was a wasteland, men who

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<sup>274</sup> Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*, p. 1.

<sup>275</sup> Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning*, pp. 36, 38.

<sup>276</sup> Abbie Findlay Potts, *The Elegiac Mode: Poetic Form in Wordsworth and Other Elegists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 263.

<sup>277</sup> Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*, pp. 9-10.

felt heartsick and deprived of some part of their energy by their civilization....His poetry, on the one hand, is a plangent threnody for a lost wholeness and peace; on the other hand, it is the exploration of two modern intellectual traditions which have failed him and his peers, the traditions of romanticism and rationalism, and, moving back and forth between the two strands, it is an attempt to weave them together into a synthesis.<sup>278</sup>

I single out Hardy and Arnold first because Vaughan Williams knew and had a special affinity for the works of both during his adult life, and second because their literature assumes prominent places in key pastoral works from the composer's last years. *An Oxford Elegy* is the only completed and non-withdrawn work by Vaughan Williams to a text by Arnold. However, the composer's fascination with his poetry dates back more than four decades. A letter written by Adeline Vaughan Williams (the composer's first wife) indicates that he had set *Dover Beach* to music in 1899.<sup>279</sup> However, this work was withdrawn and is presumed lost. Not long after, Vaughan Williams began and left unfinished a setting for soprano, chorus, and orchestra of a favorite Arnold poem, *The Future*, which I briefly discussed in Chapter 3 and for which Michael Kennedy has offered the approximate date of 1908.<sup>280</sup> The next known attempt at an Arnold work, *An Oxford Elegy*, had to wait decades to be realized, though ideas for an opera based upon its texts had long lingered in the composer's mind. Eventually, he decided to abandon this notion and craft a shorter composition through his by now familiar habit of parsing and cobbling different poems together. Ursula Vaughan Williams explains:

Many years ago he had planned an opera on Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar Gipsy*. He later realized that what he really wanted to do was to set some of both *The Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis* and he had started to sketch this two

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<sup>278</sup> Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (New York: Columbia University Press, London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1949), p. 79.

<sup>279</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 57.

<sup>280</sup> Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 42.

years earlier. There were a good many discussions about it during the summer; when he had read the poems aloud they made us both cry, for they are poems that are not easy to read later than midsummer, as an almost unbearable nostalgia for the spring burdens one's heart. After using a speaker for his *Thanksgiving for Victory* he thought it would be interesting to try this again, but in a much smaller, almost chamber, work. He cut and re-cut the poems, 'cheating' he said, so that all of his favourite lines should be in □ and I re-typed the script almost every week.<sup>281</sup>

An examination of the poems that Vaughan Williams chose for this work, *The Scholar-Gipsy* (1853) and *Thyrsis* (1866), quickly affirms the descriptions of Arnold's elegiac poetry quoted above.<sup>282</sup> In writing *The Scholar-Gipsy*, Arnold drew upon a story contained within Joseph Glanvill's *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), a philosophical and ecclesiastical commentary. Glanvill's account of the scholar gipsy depicts a student who out of poverty abandons university life to seek his fortune elsewhere. The student eventually takes up with a group of gypsies from whom he learns mysterious powers of mind and perception.<sup>283</sup> In his poem, Arnold adjusts the storyline. First, he emphasizes the lush rural surroundings of Oxford that he himself remembered as a student there in the 1840s – the Cumnor Hills, Hinksey, Fyfield, etc. Second, he adds to the scholar's poverty a brand of disillusionment from modern life, incorporating a decidedly nineteenth-century twist. Taking these two themes, Arnold then blurs the lines between them, so that the morose reflections of the narrator concerning the scholar seem inseparable with the landscape around him. In one way the scholar gipsy *is* the landscape. He represents a world all but vanquished by modernity, a relic from a more wholesome time. According to William Ulmer, *the Scholar-Gipsy* "establishes its protagonist as a celebrant of the

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<sup>281</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 292.

<sup>282</sup> For the purposes of easy reference and comparison, I have included the complete texts of both *The Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis*, as well as the adapted text that Vaughan Williams uses in *An Oxford Elegy*, in Appendix F.

<sup>283</sup> See: <http://www.kingmixers.com/Glanvill.html>.

Cumnor countryside, and then contrasts his fulfillment with the restlessness of modern society.”<sup>284</sup> For Lionel Trilling, *The Scholar-Gipsy* is “Arnold’s great lament for the present.”<sup>285</sup> According to John D Rosenberg, “the Scholar-Gipsy figures as the elusive personification of the landscape” and as a symbol for “[Arnold’s] culture’s lost wholeness.”<sup>286</sup>

*Thyrsis* intersects on at least one level with the kind of elegy treated in Chapter 4. Arnold wrote the poem in commemoration of Arthur Hugh Clough, a friend, fellow poet, and former classmate at Oxford who died after a period of sickness in 1861 at the age of 42. Clough was known at Oxford and after to harbor religious doubts and other feelings of disenfranchisement akin to those felt by Arnold. When reading some of the lines of *Thyrsis*, one sees Arnold not only mourning Clough, but sympathizing with his despair. In this way *Thyrsis* becomes something more than merely an elegy for a departed friend and takes on the dimensions of Arnold posthumously commiserating with him over the modern condition. In the words of Trilling: “Memorial of a vanished youth and of a nearly vanished mood no less than of a vanished friend, ‘Thyrsis’ is probably the last-composed of Arnold’s great poems.”<sup>287</sup> Trilling further describes parts of the poem: “in many turns of phrase we sense Arnold’s belief that his friend’s despair and death were acts of surrender.”<sup>288</sup> Finally, in choosing the name “Thyrsis” for the poem and to symbolize Clough, Arnold borrowed from the pastoral poetry of antiquity. The name itself appears in the first of Theocritus’s *Idylls*, which is one of the first recognized Classical poetic elegies, as the shepherd who sings a lament for Daphnis, another shepherd who died after refusing to succumb to Aphrodite. The name of Thyrsis turns up again in the seventh eclogue of

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<sup>284</sup> William Ulmer, “The Human Seasons: Arnold, Keats, and the Scholar-Gypsy,” in *Victorian Poetry* Vol. 22, No. 3 (Autumn, 1984), p. 247.

<sup>285</sup> Trilling, *Matthew Arnold*, p. 114.

<sup>286</sup> Rosenberg, *Elegy for an Age*, p. 149.

<sup>287</sup> Trilling, *Matthew Arnold*, p. 298.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid*, p. 299.

Virgil, this time as the name of a shepherd who loses a singing contest to his fellow herdsman Corydon. In *Thyrsis*, Arnold adapts Virgil's portrayal of the rivalry to suit his own purpose of connecting the death of his friend with the onset of modernity, stating that it was "Time" (and not Corydon) that got the better of Thyrsis, and that because of Thyrsis's passing Corydon is "without rival."

*The Scholar-Gipsy* and *Thyrsis* make an ideal pairing not only because both share related themes of a specific kind of loss, but because in *Thyrsis* Arnold makes explicit reference to "the scholar gipsy" on multiple occasions. In essence he equates the figure of Thyrsis with that of the scholar gipsy. As Alan Roper put it, both poems "are linked through their use of the same setting and through the later poem's explicit allusion to the earlier."<sup>289</sup> In one essay, Philip Drew thoroughly outlines the case for reading both poems as "separate parts of the same poem," stating that *Thyrsis* is a "sequel and counterpart" to *The Scholar-Gipsy*.<sup>290</sup> Thus the poems lent themselves naturally to Vaughan Williams's hybrid adaptation for *An Oxford Elegy*, making it easy for the composer to keep or discard lines as he saw fit while preserving the mutually-held themes of both writings.

As can be seen when comparing the poems to the adapted text in Appendix F, Vaughan Williams draws upon roughly the first two-thirds of *The Scholar-Gipsy* for the first part of his composition (with a brief interpolation from *Thyrsis*) and portions from *Thyrsis* for the second part. He omits many lines and even stanzas from both poems, excising all references to persons apart from Thyrsis and the scholar gipsy. (This includes Corydon.) He also passes over the more detailed descriptions of rural vegetation, evocations of places outside of Oxford country, and references to Classical pastoral characters and poetry. Most noticeable among the omissions,

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<sup>289</sup> Alan Roper, *Arnold's Poetic Landscapes* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p. 209.

<sup>290</sup> Philip Drew, "Matthew Arnold and the Passage of Time," in *The Major Victorian Poets: Reconsiderations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), edited by Isobel Armstrong, pp. 199-224, especially pp. 204-205.

however, are many of the lines that speak very sharply and specifically to Arnold's despair concerning his own perceived brand of modern decay.<sup>291</sup> At first glance this might seem to tell against the notion of Vaughan Williams writing a work in which the text emphasizes the kind of elegy under discussion. But upon closer inspection, one finds that he retains enough lines that establish the trope of mourning without overburdening his text with too many idiosyncratic expressions that are typical of Arnold's poetry but that do not lend themselves to the musical treatment envisioned by the composer. It may be true that Vaughan Williams's interest in or use for elegy here did not wholly conform to Arnold's and, as Oliver Neighbor has suggested, that he did not share all of the poet's particular concerns.<sup>292</sup> (I will return to this matter later in the chapter.) Let us now consider the composition as a whole more closely.

In discussing the second type of elegy, how it figures in Arnold's poetry, and the nostalgia that allegedly helped prompt Vaughan Williams's choice of lines for *An Oxford Elegy*, I return to the theme of time. The manifestations of this theme in text and music, in combination with the pastoral associations for both, likewise constitute important unifying threads throughout a work that joins seemingly disparate elements. Musically, *An Oxford Elegy* shares with other late works by Vaughan Williams the quality of harboring allusions to musical fingerprints that the composer had exhibited in earlier stages of his career, mirroring the subject matter of the poetry. Simona Pakenham writes, "it seems as if, almost deliberately, Vaughan Williams had chosen to compose a work that reaches back to the earliest of his moods and styles."<sup>293</sup> Michael Kennedy agrees, writing, "it recaptures evocatively the spirit of his early songs and rhapsodies,"

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<sup>291</sup> Roger Savage discusses this briefly in his article "Vaughan Williams, The Romany Ryes, and the Cambridge Ritualists," p. 416.

<sup>292</sup> Oliver Neighbor, "The Place of the Eighth Symphony," in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, pp. 216-217.

<sup>293</sup> Pakenham, *Ralph Vaughan Williams: A Discovery of his Music*, p. 155.

adding that though very little of Vaughan Williams's music is nostalgic, *An Oxford Elegy* fits this description.<sup>294</sup> From its first measures, *An Oxford Elegy* upholds these observations.

The initial measures present a strong dichotomy, hinting at the ambivalence that scholars have identified in Vaughan Williams's last period. The first musical idea occurs immediately in the shape of a short melodic fragment over a sequence of shifting intervals. This figure repeats, beginning within harmonic sonorities centered around an F Major scale with raised fourth and lowered seventh degrees, and gradually shifting briefly to an E-Flat centered area. A kind of tail motive is then introduced, which eventually leads to an ambiguous cadence (mm. 8-9).

Ex. 5.1: Vaughan Williams, *An Oxford Elegy*, (Piano-Vocal Reduction, mm. 1-10)

This is not the first work by Vaughan Williams in which this opening music appears. As we have seen how Roger Savage has noted, the material in the first ten measures presents a reworked version of a passage in a much earlier composition, the “Orchestral Impression” *Harnham Down*,

<sup>294</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 359.

which Vaughan Williams began in 1904 and eventually decided to withdraw.<sup>295</sup> The manuscript score of *An Oxford Elegy* bears an inscription from one of the more idyllic passages from *The Scholar-Gipsy* – “Here will I sit and wait, While to my ear from uplands far away The bleating of the folded flocks is borne, With distant cries of reapers in the corn – All the live murmur of a summer’s day.” The speaker enters with this text at three measures after Rehearsal D in the published score, with the orchestral accompaniment revisiting the opening *Harnham Down* material. The chorus repeats the text at Rehearsal E over a slightly altered restatement of the opening ten measures. For the purpose of comparison, I supply below the principal theme of *Harnham Down*.

Ex. 5.2: Vaughan Williams, *Harnham Down* Main Theme – first part (Sketch of an Orchestral Impression, British Library Add. MS 57228, fol. 42)



As Savage further notes, there is at least one other indication that this seeming reference to *Harnham Down* was very deliberate on the part of Vaughan Williams. It involves Vaughan Williams’s younger friend and colleague, Gerald Finzi, who keenly noticed the resemblance between the opening theme of *An Oxford Elegy* and that of the then long-withdrawn *Harnham*

<sup>295</sup> The single surviving manuscript of *Harnham Down* is contained within British Library Add. MS 57228 as the third of three “Orchestral Impressions.” On the title page, Vaughan Williams indicates that the work was begun in July of 1904 and completed in April of 1907. Of additional interest is that Vaughan Williams later quoted an earlier impression in the set, *The Solent*, in his First and Ninth Symphonies and in the film music for *The England of Elizabeth*. This is another example of early music reappearing in much later music (in the case of the Ninth and the film score).

*Down* at the former's premiere. Vaughan Williams apparently expressed surprise at being "found out" thus.<sup>296</sup>

What occurs immediately after the initial measures of *An Oxford Elegy* further suggests a deliberate intent to set the stage for the text's elegiac preoccupations with a lost time. Here is a reference to a pastoral work from his distant past pitted against some starker music more typical of recent times. At measure 11 the wordless choir enters in the alto voice with a melodic idea that resembles the opening gesture of the Sixth Symphony (1944 -1947).<sup>297</sup> The harmonic accompaniment assumes dimensions that very much heighten the resemblance. In the Sixth Symphony the clash of F minor and E minor at the very onset is well known. In this area of *An Oxford Elegy* there is a similar placement of minor triads a semitone apart, with the resulting emphasis on the tritone. For several measures after Rehearsal A, the listener hears a steady oscillation between A minor and A-Flat minor. Though admittedly the broken A minor broken chord is enriched with the presence of a D pitch, its effect against the enharmonically spelled A-Flat minor sonority that follows is palpable. Combined with similar motivic activity, this harmonic feature, while not exactly like the opening of the Sixth down to every pitch, nonetheless suggests a close kinship.

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<sup>296</sup> As Savage notes in his article, Stephen Banfield relates this incident in his volume, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), pp. 14-15. See also Savage, "Vaughan Williams, The Romany Ryes, and the Cambridge Ritualists," p. 414. I have discussed in past chapters how Vaughan Williams was known to have made reference to earlier works in later compositions. Another anecdote supports the notion that the composer sometimes enjoyed being surreptitious while referencing other music. In the midst of correspondence with Michael Kennedy, the organist William McKie relates a conversation he had with Vaughan Williams about his coronation *Te Deum* of 1937. He writes to Kennedy: "the high point of the afternoon [October 23, 1937] came when he looked at me with a mischievous gleam in his eye and said: 'One of the folk songs I used in it was —, and no one has ever noticed!' This story is spoilt because unfortunately I simply cannot remember the name of the folk song; it was something like Tarry Trousers, but far more frivolous." (John Rylands Library, The Michael Kennedy Collection: KEN/3/1/54, No. 2.)

<sup>297</sup> In the article by Roger Savage already cited, he mentions the Sixth Symphony by way of contrast with the retrospection in *An Oxford Elegy*, but he doesn't make any specific musical connections between the scores. (See p. 416).

Ex. 5.3: Vaughan Williams, *An Oxford Elogy*, mm. 11-15

The image shows a musical score for the Chorus-Alto part of Vaughan Williams' *An Oxford Elogy*, measures 11-15. The score is written for voice and piano. The voice part is marked *pp* and includes the instruction "(No words but covered head voice sounding 'er')". The piano accompaniment is marked *A*. The score is in 4/4 time and features a melodic line in the voice and a complex harmonic accompaniment in the piano.

Ex. 5.4: Vaughan Williams, *Symphony No. 6 in E Minor*, Opening of Mov. I (Melodic/Harmonic Outline, mm. 1-2)

The image shows the opening of the first movement of Vaughan Williams' *Symphony No. 6 in E Minor*, measures 1-2. The score is written for piano and is in 4/4 time. It features a melodic line in the right hand and a harmonic accompaniment in the left hand. The melodic line is marked *ff* and includes a triplet of eighth notes. The harmonic accompaniment is marked *pp* and features a series of chords and intervals.

The reception history of the Sixth Symphony constitutes one of the best-known speculations over the program of any work that Vaughan Williams composed. Many commentators continue to agree that the music exudes a decidedly bleak vision and is at some level a response to the Second World War, despite the composer's angry denial that the music "means war."<sup>298</sup> If one accepts the aesthetic resemblances between the music beginning at

<sup>298</sup> For accounts concerning the reception history of the Sixth Symphony, see Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 301-304; Roy Douglas, *Working With R.V.W.* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp.

measure 11 of *An Oxford Elegy* and the opening of the Sixth Symphony, one may appreciate on a whole new level its contrast with the very opening measures' resemblance to *Harnham Down's* main theme. One could regard the music as suggesting a nostalgic window to the past pitted against a more troubled present. At the very least, the juxtaposition at the outset of *An Oxford Elegy* exhibits a decided clash of harmonic fingerprints redolent of opposite ends of Vaughan Williams's career.<sup>299</sup> As such, the music demonstrably matches the relationship between past and present that is a dominant theme in the text.

This duality recurs until the last section of *An Oxford Elegy*. In particular, the persistent presence of the Sixth's melodic motive helps to maintain a sense of unease, even in some moments where the text seems to be preoccupied only with pastoral beauty. At Rehearsal G, for example, Vaughan Williams combines traits of the two opening harmonic areas of *An Oxford Elegy*, mixing the more consonant modal harmony with the semitone dissonance of this motive. The choral statement of the text at this point – “All the live murmur of a summer's day” – thus occurs over a considerable harmonic tension that seems disproportionate to its immediate poetic subject.

Vaughan Williams also manages to create like tension in other ways. For instance, when the speaker enters with the opening lines of the text, he does so immediately after a musical statement by the wordless choir, beginning after measure 11, concludes. The next musical idea,

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14-15; and Byron Adams, “The Stages of Revision of Vaughan Williams's Sixth Symphony,” in Adams and Wells, eds., *Vaughan Williams Essays*, p. 1.

<sup>299</sup> Hugh Ottaway remarks in his article on the late music that in Vaughan Williams's final phase “his feeling for tonal contradictions” was “at its keenest.” (See Ottaway, “Scott and after: The Final Phase,” p. 961.) In writing about the Ninth Symphony, just a little further on, he also makes the perceptive remark that Vaughan Williams “reached back through the Sixth to embrace (and modify) a familiar lyricism.” While the manner of the Sixth's opening clash of tonal centers a semitone apart was prefigured in the opening of the Fourth Symphony (1934), it is something atypical in Vaughan Williams's pre-Great War works (with the *London Symphony* being one possible exception), notwithstanding the fact that the earlier music features plenty of its own harmonic character and experimentation. Hence, the use of the term “fingerprints” to delineate patterns from across the composer's career.

which Example 5.5 shows, coincides with the second part of the text, where the narrator rouses its shepherd figure once more to take up his “quest.”

Ex. 5.5: Vaughan Williams, *An Oxford Elegy*, (from nine measures before Rehearsal D through five measures before Rehearsal D)

Allegretto (2 beats ♩ = 52)

*p*

Speaker: | 7 7 But when the fields are still,  
And the tired men and dogs all gone to rest,  
And only the white sheep are sometimes seen  
Cross and recross the strips of moon-blanch'd green;  
Come, Shepherd, and again begin the quest. - - - -

The new idea at this juncture bears some strong associations. The 6/8 time signature, the dance-like character of the rhythm, the drone-like quality of the ostinato (aided by the use of fifths), the choice of oboe to play the upper line supported by bassoon and other woodwinds (this is not discernable from this reduction score), and the flattened seventh toward the end all suggest both musical pastoral topics and folksong. But Vaughan Williams makes subtle realignments in the harmony along the lines of what we saw in the material following measure 11 (see Example 5.3). From its third measure, the musical idea in Example 5.5 begins to exhibit signs of the kind of dissonance in Vaughan Williams’s musical language that especially characterizes the years of and approaching his postwar years. The minor second clashes that result from the simultaneous G and A-Flat, and F-Sharp and G, pitches and the bare tritones that occur shortly before Rehearsal D are features quite unanticipated in the initial two measures, and quite at variance with the largely consonant repetitions of most folk songs or musical pastoral topics. If this is not a parodistic treatment of such manners, it is certainly a unique one.

The first part of *An Oxford Elegy* sets the scene around the city of Oxford, concentrating largely upon the surrounding landscape and the figure of the shepherd who inhabits it. It is left to the music to provide variety, which it does in the manners just discussed. The second part of the work explicitly introduces the scholar gypsy, beginning with a section where the narrator seems to blur the lines between his past and present. The speaker begins by discussing how “rumors hung about the country-side” where the scholar was spotted in various places. Perhaps the most striking portion here comes with the Lento at seven measures after Rehearsal P, where we enter into a decisively contrasting section. Here the cellos briefly introduce a quiet lead-in melody as the speaker shifts from rumors to his own eerie observations of the wandering scholar. The material in question begins with this text:

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill  
Where home through flooded fields foot-travelers go,  
Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge  
Wrapt in thy cloak and battling the snow,  
Thy face tow'rd Hinksey and its wintry ridge?  
And thou has climb'd the hill  
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumnor range;

As the speaker narrates these words, the listener hears the choir repeat a harmonic pattern wordlessly at short intervals, almost as a means of accompaniment. The gesture oscillates between minor chords a third apart (in every instance between B-Flat minor and G minor), sometimes ending on a final motion to the B-Flat minor triad (where every instance of it begins), and sometimes opening to a chromatic step higher on B minor. Under this alternating figure there is a monophonic line that matches the B-Flat minor chords with G-Flat and the G minor sonorities with a doubled G. In the cases where the wordless voices cadence to the enharmonically spelled B minor chord (C-Flat, D, G-flat) on its tied half notes, the orchestra responds in imitation, using this “B minor chord” itself as the launching point for an echoing

oscillation of its own – B minor to B-Flat minor and back again. In this short secondary rotating pattern the sixth falls out, but the clash between the minor chords a minor second apart provides a uniquely unsettling transition to the next B-Flat minor starting chord. A portion of this pattern may be seen in the example below.

Ex. 5.6: Vaughan Williams, *An Oxford Elegy*, (the four measures following from Rehearsal Q)

Speaker: | And once, in winter, on the causeway chill  
 Where home through flooded fields foot-travellers go,  
 Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge  
 Wrapt in thy cloak and battling with the snow,  
 Thy face tow'rd Hinksey and its wintry ridge?  
 And thou hast climb'd the hill  
 And gain'd the white brow of the Cumnor range; - - - - -

The musical score consists of three staves. The top two staves are for the voice, with the first staff marked 'pp' and '(HEAD VOICE)'. The bottom two staves are for the piano, with the right hand marked 'pp'. A rehearsal mark 'Q' is placed at the beginning of the first staff.

The brief entirety between Rehearsal R and Rehearsal S presents a simple but effective interruption to the oscillating pattern just discussed and avoids strict repetition. Here the choir drops out entirely and the speaker recites these lines:

Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snowflakes fall,  
 The lines of festal light in Christ Church hall  
 Then sought thy straw in some sequester'd grange.

For the duration of this text Vaughan Williams carries over in the upper strings the B-Flat octave, and at one-measure intervals twice punctuates this loudly with a D major chord sounded by a larger portion of the orchestra. Here the D major triad collides with the flattened sixth tone

of B-Flat, providing some continuity with the G Flat's role as a flattened sixth in previous measures. In his article on the *Sinfonia antartica*, Daniel Grimley describes precisely this sort of harmony and its role in the music of Vaughan Williams's last period. He calls the sonority of a triad with an added flat sixth degree an example of a "troubled diatonicism" and points out that this harmonic gesture "echoes throughout much of the music of his final decade and...becomes one of the most powerful musical symbols in the Seventh Symphony."<sup>300</sup>

The reader will recall their use of lean consecutive minor harmonies to color texts treating supernatural beings in a pastoral setting in the third of the Fredegond Shove songs discussed in the previous chapter, "The New Ghost" (1925). A similar use of successive minor chords occurs in a work contemporaneous to *An Oxford Elegy* – the Christmas Cantata *Hodie* (*This Day*), completed in 1954. In the second and sixth sections of this music the narrator describes the angel of the Lord appearing to Joseph and then to the shepherds in the field around Bethlehem, although in the latter instance the oscillation between E-Flat minor and C major, and other occasional major chords, factor in as well.

Returning to *An Oxford Elegy*, at Rehearsal S the listener encounters one last B-Flat minor/G minor rotation figure. This time, however, the very last B-Flat minor chord lingers in the treble voices of the choir, past all statements of the flattened sixth G Flat in the orchestra. A long silence ensues during which the speaker finally confirms what one has perhaps sensed in the text all along and what the music seemed to so chillingly hint at: the wandering gypsy is a phantom or figment of the imagination.

But what – I dream!  
Two hundred years are flown,  
And thou from the earth art gone.

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<sup>300</sup> Grimley, "Music, Ice, and the 'Geometry of Fear,'" pp. 129-130.

So concludes another part of *An Oxford Elegy* in which the trope of time and the pastoral mode dominate the discourse. Here the text blurs a former age with a present time by bringing the spectral figure of the scholar gypsy into the landscape of the living world. It is interesting to note that when the speaker recounts his own imagined (it turns out) encounter with the wanderer it is amidst a wintry, anti-pastoral landscape (which in some ways recalls the frozen scenery of the Scott music), where the scholar gypsy's ghostly qualities emerge in great relief.<sup>301</sup> Here the speaker first imagines that he has seen the scholar gypsy, but then confesses that he must be dreaming because he knows that the person has been dead for two hundred years. This is the first of multiple arguments that the speaker will have with himself over the presence of the scholar gypsy. By preserving this dynamic in the text, Vaughan Williams keeps intact a hallmark of elegy as discussed in Chapter 4 – that of the mournful living refusing, consciously or subconsciously, to give up their dead by somehow projecting them into the living world. But as the work's text unfolds, an additional dynamic presents itself. As mentioned earlier, Arnold's scholar gypsy stands for more than one man being mourned. He is also a symbol for something lost that transcends one person or one time. In the rest of *An Oxford Elegy*, Vaughan Williams not only merges not only the wandering scholar as a person (at once living and dead) with the text chosen, but he also preserves him as an idealized symbol comfortably fitted between idyllic past and troubled present.

I begin discussion of the final part of *An Oxford Elegy* with a return to material already encountered. The nine measures leading up to Rehearsal T reprise to the music shown in Example 5.5. This time Vaughan Williams employs the 6/8 music to serve a somber text as the speaker reflects upon the final resting place of the scholar gypsy. The words would appear to be

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<sup>301</sup> The sharp pastoral/anti-pastoral contrast in *An Oxford Elegy* recalls a similar Arcadian atmosphere that turns menacing in Beethoven's Sixth Symphony of 1808, subtitled "Pastoral." In that work, the penultimate, "Storm" movement acts as a counterbalance to the idyllic descriptions that Beethoven provided for the other movements.

a conscious reference on the part of Arnold to a recurring trope in English pastoral elegies – that of the rural church graveyard.<sup>302</sup>

Long since and in some quiet churchyard laid -  
Some country nook, where o'er thy unknown grave  
Tall grasses and white flowering nettles wave –  
Under a dark, red-fruited yew-tree's shade.

This continues the vein of the speaker attempting to convince himself that the scholar gypsy is dead. But then as he recites the next lines over a D-Flat minor chord he seems to change his mind again, and we as listeners begin to doubt whether or not the person discussed is a fixed being in the speaker's mind.

No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours,  
Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven! and we,  
Ah, do not we, Wanderer, await it too?

The phrase “spark from heaven” is a rare documented case where Vaughan Williams took some issue with Arnold's texts and where the composer's convictions thus seem to diverge somewhat from the poet's. In a tribute written in 1955 to Jean Sibelius, Vaughan Williams mentions it in connection with his own views concerning a composer's work habits and craft. He writes: “The Scholar Gypsy was always waiting for the spark from Heaven to fall, but it never fell: and why? Because he was waiting for it.”<sup>303</sup> Of further interest is the fact that Vaughan Williams took three non-consecutive lines from across four stanzas of *The Scholar-Gipsy*, none of which appear consecutively, and connected them to form the sequence seen above. The phrase “the spark from heaven” appears at the head of the eighteenth stanza, with the closing line “Ah, do not we, Wanderer, await it too?” In between there is much omitted text that speaks to strongly

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<sup>302</sup> In particular, the poem by Thomas Gray “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” gained considerable popularity when it was published in 1751, and it continued to exert influence on writers in years after. Both Arnold and Vaughan Williams would surely have been familiar with it.

<sup>303</sup> Vaughan Williams, “Sibelius (1865-1957) (A tribute written on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday),” in *National Music and Other Essays*, pp. 261-264. See p. 263.

despondent themes of alienation and the inability to move forward due to the malaise of the age. (See Appendix F.) Vaughan Williams's exclusion of these lines allows him to preserve balance by avoiding text that is too peculiar to its author. Why he decided to include the two mentions in *The Scholar Gypsy* of waiting for "the spark from heaven" when he expressed ambivalence toward the phrase is uncertain. This is another example of how difficult it can be to discern how or to what extent Vaughan Williams personally valued the texts he chose for his music.

What occurs next suggests a despair that Vaughan Williams connected with the hanging question just discussed, in contrast to the lack of personal sympathy he expressed for it in print. A new key signature of four sharps (centered loosely around C-Sharp minor) and a new tempo heading ("Largo sostenuto") usher in a short quasi-fugal section without text. Here the wordless voices, beginning in the bass, introduce a short melodic idea that is shuffled throughout the choir, with the orchestra gradually adding to the texture. The music eventually reaches a dynamic and textural peak with another repeated idea, once more making use of minor harmonies a third apart from each other. The build-up ends abruptly one measure prior to Rehearsal V, where the speaker reenters and the composition henceforth draws its spoken lines solely from *Thyrsis*. Some apparent textual discontinuity follows. The speaker recalls that he had visited the pastoral country around Oxford with Thyrsis in former days, apparently forgetting that Thyrsis has been dead for centuries. The fugal textures begin again at Rehearsal V, only to die away six measures later to the speaker's gloomy pronouncement: "We still had Thyrsis then."

Up to this point the role of the pastoral scenery in the text has functioned rather passively. This changes with the arrival of an important literary symbol in the next section – the elm tree on the hill. This presents an explicit link between the person of the scholar gypsy and the landscape,

deepening the mutual abstraction of a man melding with the countryside on one hand, and elements of the countryside assuming metaphysical properties on the other.

Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,  
Up past the wood, to where the elm-tree crowns  
The hill behind whose ridge the sunset flames?  
The signal-elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,  
The Vale, the three lone weirs, the youthful Thames? -  
That signal elm-tree bright  
Against the west, - I miss it! Is it gone?  
We prized it dearly while it stood, we said,  
Our friend the Scholar-Gipsy, was not dead;  
While the tree lived, he in these fields lived on

The most agitated section of the work follows beginning three measures before Rehearsal X. It corresponds with the text included by Vaughan Williams that most suggests Arnoldian angst over a modern world: “Needs must I, with heavy heart / Into the world and wave of men depart.” Here the wordless choir in four parts joins in a loud series of descending minor second motives, characterized by a “long-short” rhythmic pattern. Before the choir expounds upon this idea the music arrives at – once again – a cadence to an enriched minor triad.

Ex. 5.7: Vaughan Williams, *An Oxford Elegy* (from three measures before to two measures after Rehearsal X)

Agitato (♩ = 120)

*p* *cresc.* *ff* *pp* (Safely pause)

Speaker: | = } Needs must I, with heavy heart  
Into the world and wave of men depart;

After the conclusion of this line and the choral passage that follows, Rehearsal Y arrives with the text “The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I, go I!” Another abrupt change follows featuring a lengthy section of text that muses upon the pastoral world. The speaker recedes for a

while and the upper voices of the choir assume the text, describing a variety of floral life that will soon bloom, over a series of march-like quarter pulses. Here one may sharply recall Ursula Vaughan Williams's remarks concerning the nostalgia that comes with the passing of spring, and how she connected this with the genesis of *An Oxford Elegy*.

The next section presents the most elegiac text to be found in *An Oxford Elegy*, featuring among other lines: "But Thyrsis never more we swains shall see." At Rehearsal FF, the voices echo the words "Never more," the orchestra alights upon a quiet D pedal point, and the inner instrumental voices ebb and flow between F natural and F sharp, blurring the harmonic framework. The continued ambiguity between major and minor intervals occurring simultaneously with texts signifying despair or mourning is by now thoroughly established. While this is happening, the speaker concludes the text which he had begun as the choir's "never more" repetitions finish their course.

Thyrsis, let me give my grief its hour  
In the old haunt, and find our tree-topp'd hill.  
I know these slopes, who knows them if not I?-  
But many a dingle on the loved hill-side,  
With thorns once studded, old, white-blossom'd trees,  
Where thick cowslips grew, and far descried,  
High tower'd the spikes of purple orchises,  
Hath since our day put by  
The coronals of that forgotten time.  
They are gone, and thou art gone as well.

Once more the speaker's lines make the connection between the no-longer-present scholar gypsy and the former landscape that they both remembered, including another reference to the tree on the hill (which will later attain a special significance). With text such as "the coronals of that forgotten time," one notices that more is being mourned than the gypsy, whoever or whatever he may embody in disparate instances.

Another musical burst of grief follows with another new section, six measures after Rehearsal FF, and it presents another rare case of the choir singing text.

Yes, thou art gone! thou art gone!  
And round me too the night  
In ever nearing circle weaves her shade.  
I see her veil draw soft across the day.  
And long the way appears which seem'd so short

An airy section centered loosely around E Major, where the text (once again sung by the choir) makes a fleeting reference to a “throne of Truth” on the “mountain tops,” follows and the speaker is left yet again with grief over the departure of Thyrsis. Obviously the pessimistic Arnold considered the place to be a mythical destination where Thyrsis has gone, for the speaker once again enters with the text “There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here. Sole in these fields.” The soothing triplet harmonies to which the choir sang about the mountain tops and the throne of truth give way to a lone A-Flat minor triad on a dotted half note.

This A-Flat minor triad works as perhaps the most crucial pivot in the entire work. With few exceptions, the composition up to this point has been dominated by nostalgia and mourning. In the music immediately leading up to this juncture the grief and mourning in the adapted text reaches a high pitch, eventually coming to rest on this sullen A-Flat minor chord. However, a significant turning point arrives when the speaker utters the simple phrase “Yet I will not despair” as the sonority expires. The next measure introduces the largest and last homogenous section of the work. Another triad, this time a tied A minor chord in the orchestra, serves as a starting point for the next text given by the speaker and the music that follows.

Despair I will not, while I yet descry  
That lonely Tree against the western sky.  
Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the hay,  
Woods with anemones in flower till May,

Know him a wanderer still.

The tree on the hill returns as a hopeful symbol, and this time the music seems to support it as such more convincingly than before. The whole section, under the heading of “Largo” and the tonal center of F major, is of a hymn-like texture and character. This is a further case of Vaughan Williams adding yet another stylistic musical flavor of decades past to *An Oxford Elegy*. Almost as soon as the speaker begins reciting the lines above, the choir begins humming (directed to do so with the marking “closed lips”) a melody in near-unison over a chordal and largely diatonic accompaniment in the orchestra.

Ex. 5.8: Vaughan Williams, *An Oxford Elegy* (from seven measures before Rehearsal KK into three measures before Rehearsal KK)

The image displays a musical score for Vaughan Williams' *An Oxford Elegy*. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system features four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Largo" with a quarter note equal to 72 (♩ = 72). The dynamics are marked "pp" (pianissimo). The vocal parts are marked "(closed lips)". The piano accompaniment is marked "pp una corda". The second system continues the vocal and piano parts. The score is written in F major and 4/4 time.

The choir begins to chant the words “Roam on!” just after Rehearsal KK. The speaker seems to refer to them as the voice of wandering gypsy – “Then let in thy voice a whisper often come to

chase fatigue and fear.” At Rehearsal LL the choir drops out entirely and the speaker recites his last lines to the choral-like accompaniment of the orchestra.

Why faintest thou? I wander'd till I died.  
Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.  
Our tree yet crowns the hill,  
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hillside.

The choir then sings these lines to the same melody with which they began the section on closed lips. As they finish and *An Oxford Elegy* comes to an end we hear once more in the orchestra the very first theme, taken from *Harnham Down*.

I have discussed the major events in this last stage of *An Oxford Elegy* at length for the purpose of illustrating several important patterns. First, the outbursts of grief over the departure of the scholar gypsy, once the speaker finally determines that he has indeed passed on, provide fodder for some of the most dramatic moments of the work while showcasing the text's primary engagement with conventional elegiac mourning. Second, the emphasis on the cycle of seasons in the pastoral scenery facilitates the text's eventual equation of the scholar gypsy himself with the timelessness of the countryside, and in particular with the “signal elm.” This reinforces a primary trait of our second type of elegy – the mourning of time-related subjects adjoining and yet distinct from particular persons. That Vaughan Williams chose to include lines from the poems specifically mourning past settings and eras – “they are gone, and thou art gone as well,” etc. – reinforces these connections.

Finally, the theme of renewal and the refusal to succumb wholly to despair is the poetic subject matter that closes the work. As Oliver Neighbour has pointed out, Vaughan Williams places the words from *Thyrsis* “Yet I will not despair: Despair I will not” almost at the very end.<sup>304</sup> In Arnold's poem, the very last words (concerning the scholar still roaming the

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<sup>304</sup> Oliver Neighbour, “The Place of the Eighth Symphony,” in Frogley, ed., *Vaughan Williams Studies*, p. 227, n. 37.

countryside) occur some four stanzas after the text mentioning despair. Vaughan Williams thus made a conscious decision to finish his composition with lines that resist despair and immediately point toward the tree on the hill as a sign of hope and renewal. In Arnold's poem the lines do not appear together, and they also contain some text that Vaughan Williams omits. The effect is different in the original poetry than it is in the composer's adaptation. (Once more, see Appendix F.) One cannot help but notice the similarity between this situation and the Scott myth. In *An Oxford Elegy*, as in the music that resulted from Scott film project, one senses the ambivalence that Ottaway, Beckerman, and others have identified with the art of Vaughan Williams's final phase. In *An Oxford Elegy* dismay over loss exists directly alongside hope for restoration. In contrast to the tension of the music that comes before "despair I will not," the music ends with hymn-like, major mode materials, with the *Harnham Down* theme recurring at the very conclusion. The Scott compositions end with vindication after tragedy. *An Oxford Elegy* ends with hope after tragedy. The broader pattern is unmistakably similar.

What makes the pastoral aspects special in this work are the ways in which they conform to and enrich the different elegiac aspects of the text. Where the pastoral mode must evoke nostalgia, it does so by connecting the character and rural qualities of a place with that of remembrance of a person or idea lost. Where the need to provide imagery for loss and mourning arises, including personal loss, it does so in areas such as after Rehearsal Y with metaphors such as "The bloom is gone and with the bloom go I." Where Vaughan Williams calls upon it to signify renewal and the reaffirmation of an idea, it provides the symbol of the elm tree that stands as a beacon to those who would follow in the footsteps of the scholar gypsy. Where it suggests a sense of timelessness that encompasses the whole work – text and music – it fills the

need with references to the seemingly endless cycle of nature, such as the descriptions of the plant life in season around Rehearsal Z. It even makes an appearance in its “evil twin” guise, the anti-pastoral, in the Lento section shortly after Rehearsal P. Here, as discussed, the speaker spies the ghostly figure on the bridge, battling with the snow on the wintry ridge that is at odds with the lush descriptions of the rest of the text but that deftly matches the sense of fear and mystery connected with the supernatural. This “ghost” and the ghostlike effect of the wordless voices, brings strongly to mind the fragments of the past as they intrude upon the present.

The pastoral mode thus has a pan-chronic quality in *An Oxford Elegy* that distinguishes it from the elegiac works immediately following the Great War. This is matched by the retrospective quality of the work, wherein Vaughan Williams employs styles, allusions, and even direct references from various earlier compositions. This is something that, by comparison, is largely missing in the “visionary” style after the Great War, where the focus is on new horizons of expression and where the pastoral mode relates in large part to more immediate elegiac themes. In some cases, I have touched upon the musical kinship of portions of *An Oxford Elegy* with the Sixth Symphony and other later works by Vaughan Williams. This also sets it apart from earlier music. In the words of Hugh Ottaway, “Of all the works by Vaughan Williams that might properly be described as “pastoral,” surely [*An Oxford Elegy*], after the *Pastoral Symphony*, is the richest and most rewarding. And for all its ‘reminiscences’, it could only have been written in the last ten years.”<sup>305</sup>

Some further questions remain. What was Vaughan Williams “after” in composing *An Oxford Elegy* and using the texts he did? How does this relate to his continued and increasingly mutable use of the pastoral mode? One early reviewer, Ernest Newman, confessed himself to be

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<sup>305</sup> Ottaway, “Scott and after: The Final Phase,” p. 962.

perplexed in the course of asking similar questions. He finally decided that articulating an overriding “gist” for *An Oxford Elegy* constitutes an elusive venture.

I am left with the feeling that the scheme of this libretto, as we may call it, must have an inner unity that is valid for [Vaughan Williams] but not self-evident to the rest of us...Nor do I quite grasp the meaning of the “Elegy” of the title: an elegy for whom or what? I find myself asking. We must accept Vaughan Williams’s poetic structure, then, as it is and wait for further illumination of his general purpose, hoping also that the music will captivate the listener on its own account and that he will not ask too many questions as to the philosophical or personal purport of it all.<sup>306</sup>

It will perhaps not escape the reader that Newman allowed himself the liberty of questioning “the personal purport of it all” before discouraging others to do the same. However that may be, I will offer my own answer after considering the thoughts of some other commentators.

There has been ongoing discussion as to a possible impetus behind *An Oxford Elegy* apart from Newman’s musings. Roger Savage argues similarly to what I have offered here. He suggests the possibility that Vaughan Williams returned to the Arnold poems later in life because “the omnipresence of death in 1939-45 may have brought the earlier deaths of close artist friends into especial relief.” Further on, he makes connections to other artists after the war who shared with him a desire to reassert “remembered values and symbols.” Savage thus makes reference to both kinds of elegy that I have discussed and ties them into *An Oxford Elegy*. He further postulates that Vaughan Williams saw this work as artistically distinct from the Sixth Symphony because the composer omitted lines that describe a particular “modern malaise” that he (Savage) connects with the Sixth: “he could have felt he had already done justice to that malaise in the

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<sup>306</sup> Ernest Newman, “An Oxford Elegy,” in *The Sunday Times*, April 12, 1953. It is interesting to note that, in a letter to Michael Kennedy, Vaughan Williams regarded this article by Newman as being a case of “wanting to show how much he knows about the poetry.” See Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 523.

symphony, which he finished in the same year, 1947, that he started the *Elegy*.<sup>307</sup> However, if what I argued earlier is valid, the Sixth is perhaps not so far from *An Oxford Elegy* after all. Indeed the two works are aesthetically related. I will further address this matter nearer to the conclusion of the chapter.

Peter Pirie sees the work primarily in terms of a real mourned person, making the intriguing suggestion that the work is an elegy for Gustav Holst.<sup>308</sup> Certainly such a connection is possible, and at least partially probable. Vaughan Williams's and Holst's close friendship is well-known. It is also true that Holst shared with Vaughan Williams much of the same enthusiasm for England's folk music and countryside. Holst had a particular fondness for the countryside of the Cotswolds in western England, even composing a symphony bearing the name. As we saw in Chapter 3, Holst and Vaughan Williams also espoused some similar cultural and political ideals at various points throughout their lives. These facts seem to correlate with Vaughan Williams's use of lines in *An Oxford Elegy* that speak to the death of a wanderer who shared the rememberer's passions. However, the sense that the inspiration behind *An Oxford Elegy* runs broader than merely Holst, as close as the two men were, is difficult to put aside when one considers certain circumstances. First, for Vaughan Williams to begin composing an elegy for Holst beginning in 1947, when Holst died in 1934, may seem a chronological stretch. Still more, it would be unusual for Vaughan Williams to write a work that was supposedly to be in memory and honor of his old friend, while not divulging this in any way to anyone, even Holst's daughter Imogen Holst (who was close to Vaughan Williams), or his own wife Ursula, to whom he revealed much else. There appears to be no evidence that either of them ever made mention of such a connection. This is not to say that Vaughan Williams did not connect Holst with the work

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<sup>307</sup> Savage, "Vaughan Williams, the Romany Ryes, and the Cambridge Ritualists," pp. 414-416.

<sup>308</sup> Peter J. Pirie, "Choral," in *The Musical Times*, Vol. 124, No. 1685, Anglo-American Issue (July, 1983), p. 434.

at all. It is likely enough that Holst played some role in Vaughan Williams's creative conception of the music. But it seems doubtful that the connection was preeminent in the sense that Vaughan Williams was doing for Holst what Arnold openly did for Clough in writing *Thyrsis*.

Similarly, *An Oxford Elegy* does not well accommodate a specific linear narrative for multiple reasons. First, as we have seen, Arnold's original poems give little or no sense of a clear progression of events. Second, Vaughan Williams's text parsings present virtually insurmountable discontinuities. As I have shown, it is often all too clear that he was willing to sacrifice narrative clarity by lifting lines out of their original contexts or changing their emphases as he saw fit. These difficulties effectively confound attempts to 'read between the lines' or convincingly argue for any elaborate interpretation.

However, if one accepts that Vaughan Williams had no specific, blow-by-blow narrative in mind for *An Oxford Elegy*, one may still ask whether or not other inspirations beside Holst lie behind the work in a more general sense. I believe that the retrospective qualities of the text and the music, even in the midst of much that is new, can give us clues to this end. The number of retrospective works in the late period is conspicuously large, beginning with *An Oxford Elegy*, a work that Ursula Vaughan Williams explicitly referred to as nostalgic. In other late works, the loss of something precious in the present, and in some cases as pitted against a condition of the distant past that is preferable, has received attention. In discussing the Oboe Concerto (1944), Michael Kennedy wrote that "Very little of Vaughan Williams's music is nostalgic, but here [the central section of the finale] he seems to be yearning for some lost and precious thing."<sup>309</sup> In his essay on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, a work that more famously shares with *An Oxford Elegy* its diverse mixture of previous styles, Nathaniel Lew concludes that for Vaughan Williams, Bunyan's allegory "became a means of revisiting his own personal past in a way that

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<sup>309</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 347.

overwhelmed his more contemporary creative impulses.”<sup>310</sup> Finally, in his discussion of the Eighth Symphony (1955), Eric Saylor suggests that Vaughan Williams “may well have been in a valedictory frame of mind” while infusing the work with gestures and references from earlier points in his career.<sup>311</sup> It is not difficult to think in these terms when confronted in *An Oxford Elegy* by lines such as “The bloom is gone and with the bloom go I!” in addition to the purely musical retrospections in the work.

There are other late works that share with *An Oxford Elegy* a more explicit merging of nostalgia and present loss with pastoral surroundings or metaphors. At least three treat themes of juvenile innocence. Byron Adams writes briefly concerning the seventh movement of *Hodie*, which features a text by Thomas Hardy. He links the lines treating Christ in the rustic Bethlehem manger with a reflection of an adult beholder’s own loss of childlike faith:

Here, in the midst of the joyous celebration of Christmas, is a cry for the innocent faith of childhood from a speaker who has lost it, and experienced all the attendant pain and uncertainty that comes in the wake of that loss. By choosing this poem, Vaughan Williams clearly allies himself with Hardy, whose lost childhood faith was not replaced by adult belief.<sup>312</sup>

The *Ten Blake Songs* for tenor and oboe, originally written for the film *The Vision of William Blake* (1958) and using texts mostly from Blake’s *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, show a similar predilection toward yearning for the peace and contentment of infancy. This is evidenced by the very first number, “Infant Joy.” The third song, “The Piper,” is somewhat Arcadian in nature, speaking as it does of childhood happiness and piping in a rural setting. But interspersed are some songs of “experience,” where the harder and sadder matters of the adult

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<sup>310</sup> Nathaniel Lew, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the pitfalls of nostalgia,” in Adams and Wells, eds., *Vaughan Williams Essays*, p. 200.

<sup>311</sup> Eric Saylor, “The Significance of Nation in the Music of Vaughan Williams,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2003), p. 189.

<sup>312</sup> Adams, “Scripture, Church, and culture: biblical texts in the works of Ralph Vaughan Williams,” p. 116.

world are the focus of the music. Of these, “Poison Tree,” where the text describes a murdered adversary, is particularly grim. Lastly, one may consider the Ninth Symphony (1957). In his extensive work with the manuscripts of the symphony, Alain Frogley revealed much about their relationship to an unrealized dramatic work based on Thomas Hardy’s novel *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*. He explains how the manuscript sources for the second movement make multiple references to “Tess” and even mention “Stonehenge,” seemingly connecting musical ideas there with the tragic concluding scene in Hardy’s novel in which Tess is finally arrested after seeking refuge with her returned love interest, Angel Clare, for the night. She is then sentenced to hang for the murder of the man who had earlier taken her youthful wholeness through sexual assault. Vaughan Williams’s descriptors in the pages of this movement thus tempt us to connect the menacing and tragic qualities we may hear in the music with the setting of rural Stonehenge, and what transpires there.<sup>313</sup> In these works, as in *An Oxford Elegy*, the pastoral mode acts as a unifying bridge between a lost era of wholeness and a later time of crisis.<sup>314</sup>

Part of this trend may relate to the real-life situations of Vaughan Williams after the Second World War. There are some strong indications in both the primary and secondary literature that the onset of the new world war affected Vaughan Williams as deeply as the first had, albeit in different ways. When Germany invaded Poland in September of 1939, Vaughan Williams was approaching his sixty-seventh birthday and in a much different place in life than the idealistic young man that he was around the turn of the century, or the combat-scarred composer just reaching middle age in 1918, who, as it later transpired, had yet to write most of

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<sup>313</sup> For the full discussion, see Alain Frogley, *Vaughan Williams’s Ninth Symphony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 261-294.

<sup>314</sup> There is a significant broader pattern of twentieth-century composers who in later stages of their careers deliberately set out to depict innocent idyllism, often juxtaposed with menacing overtones. A short list includes Gustav Mahler (several of the large scale works), Leoš Janáček (*The Cunning Little Vixen*, 1924), Carl Nielsen (Symphony No. 6 – *Sinfonia Semplice*, 1925), and Dmitri Shostakovich (Symphony No. 15, 1971).

his best-known works. There is much written about how World War II may be heard in the Sixth Symphony and other works from the time. But when one examines Vaughan Williams's own thoughts in letters and essays, and the testimony of those closest to him, it is difficult to ignore the mournful and reflective attitude with regard to what was going on around him. One discerns the mourning of friends' deaths, but also notices a renewed focus upon the fortunes of mankind. The feeling of hope and excitement in human enterprise, and embraced by Vaughan Williams in his early music, gave way in the late phase to more sober thoughts. Shortly after hostilities broke out in September of 1939, Vaughan Williams involved himself in the war effort at home, growing vegetables for those in need and aiding the domestic effort as a conductor and lecturer. Michael Kennedy described him as being "in a strangely intense mood" at this time, and having "his mind numbed by the possibilities of world catastrophe."<sup>315</sup> In a letter to Ursula Wood (later Ursula Vaughan Williams), his resignation toward the war's beginning is plain to see: "Is it Herbert Fisher's *History of Europe* you are reading – magnificent but depressing – all good things men try to do perish...but nothing can destroy music – (platitude...)"<sup>316</sup> The Second World War would prove to be nearly as miserable for Vaughan Williams as was the First, if considered in terms of lost lives around him. Another account given by Ursula shows the recurring theme of loss during wartime as recalled from the Great War: "few weeks passed without news of someone [Vaughan Williams and his wife Adeline] knew being killed or wounded and they lamented again that other generation of musicians lost twenty-five years before in the other war."<sup>317</sup> His reaction to the First World War appears similar to his feelings upon the conclusion of the Second. Ursula relates this in her book. Note the natural references:

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<sup>315</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 258.

<sup>316</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 230.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid*, p. 237.

On Sunday morning Ralph's *Thanksgiving for Victory* was broadcast; sunlight filled the garden: lilac tulips, and young leaves were bright with dew. Adeline, Morris<sup>318</sup>, Ralph, and I heard the broadcast together and we were all aware that it was easier to mourn than to rejoice.<sup>319</sup>

In the years after the war, Vaughan Williams divulged in some of his letters certain feelings he harboured toward the world's political climate while reflecting upon the human history through which he lived. One notices a recurring theme of regret, sometimes bordering on a dystopian mindset, at what had come to pass since his youth. Some of his most revealing thoughts appear in the course of a substantial correspondence with fellow English composer Rutland Boughton. In these letters Vaughan Williams at times adopts the tone of an older man reconsidering his youthful radicalism with a sobriety borne of experience, and almost with regret that some of the promising ideas from around the turn of the century turned out to be untenable or poorly realized upon (mis)application. One excerpt in particular suggests his dismay and anger over failed social experiments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, recalling his feelings related to the inadequate planning of the Scott expedition. The context of the following statement involves his refusal to sign a 1949 petition for peace between Britain and Russia, a consequent written reproof on the part of Boughton, and a remark made by the latter that implicates Vaughan Williams in drawing too much on what he considered to be a dead theology in *The Pilgrim's Progress*:

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<sup>318</sup> This refers to R.O. Morris, who was a composer and teacher of composition and counterpoint at the Royal College of Music, and for a time at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. Morris was married to Vaughan Williams's first wife Adeline Fisher's sister Emmeline, and thus became Vaughan Williams's brother-in-law. He and Emmeline lived with Vaughan Williams and Adeline during most of the war at "The White Gates," the Vaughan Williams's home in Dorking. Morris had a great reputation as a teacher and taught many pupils who would go on to be eminent composers.

<sup>319</sup> Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 263. The *Thanksgiving for Victory*, renamed *A Song of Thanksgiving* in 1952, is a modest work for soprano, speaker, chorus and orchestra lasting about 15 minutes in performance and using texts from the Bible, Shakespeare, and Rudyard Kipling. It was commissioned by the BBC in 1944 to be played upon an Allied Victory, which by that point was expected soon.

As regards my Opera, might I ask you, at all events to read the libretto before your criticise me for writing it, and as to what you accuse me of – i.e. ‘redressing an old theology’, it seems to me that some of your ideas are a good deal more moribund than Bunyan’s theology:- the old fashioned republicanism [sic] and Marxism which led direct to the appalling dictatorships of Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini, or your Rationalism, which dates from about 1880 and has entirely failed to solve any problems of the Universe.<sup>320</sup>

A later response to a letter containing Boughton’s disavowal of communism as an ideology sees Vaughan Williams making the distinction between the attractive idea of socialism and its abuse by certain practitioners:

All right-minded people are in theory communists insofar as they believe that everything ought to be done for the common good, but when Socialism in practice means the unholy mess which the late government made of things and when Communism in practice means tyranny, double dealing and insincerity by Russia, one cannot join with its present manifestation.<sup>321</sup>

Another letter in this correspondence finds Vaughan Williams painting a picture of himself as a political contrarian. But one also detects something of a contrast between his youthful embrace of the socialist ideal and his later distaste for its subsequent manifestations.

My fault is probably that I have been always too much in opposition. When I was a boy at school I and another boy stood out as Radicals (as we were called then) against all the other boys. When I got to Cambridge in ’93 I and a few friends read the Fabian tracts, and in opposition to the majority of undergraduates, became socialists...The truth is, I think, that when I am with the Conservatives I become socialistic and when I am with Socialists I become a true blue Tory. Now the pendulum has swung right around and it is fashionable to be a Socialist or ‘Kremlinist’ – (I will not defile what ought to be a fine name ‘Communist’ by

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<sup>320</sup> Vaughan Williams, personal letter to Rutland Boughton, 20 December 1950. Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 471. (The “sic” is Cobbe’s.)

<sup>321</sup> Vaughan Williams, personal letter to Rutland Boughton, 25 June 1952. Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 501.

calling the present creed by that name), I have the courage to criticise and dissociate myself with the present manifestations of what used to be a fine creed, and I am not afraid to have the finger of scorn pointed at me because I refuse to be taken in by all these bogus 'peace' moves, which I think have duped even you...I believe in freedom and that is why I will not be bullied by Nazis, Fascists, and Russians.<sup>322</sup>

In one final letter pertaining to this pattern, there surfaces more evidence of Vaughan Williams recalling youthful attitudes that are at some odds with subsequent experience. In this instance the statements appear in a letter to fellow English composer and conductor Fritz Hart.

I wonder if things are *mentally* so very different now to what they were when we were young. I believe the things we talked about at Wilkins were much the same as what our followers at the modern equivalent of Wilkins say now & that the clever young men who write in modern journals are saying exactly the same clever foolish things that young men said in 1896 and old B. Shaw says *exactly* what he said in the 'Saturday Review' in the 90's.<sup>323</sup>

At the same time, to paint a picture of a composer utterly consumed with bitterness resulting from the post-World War II world would not be accurate. One will be disappointed in seeking hard evidence that could cast Vaughan Williams as an equivalent of Beethoven, who furiously scratched out a dedication to Napoleon when he doubted that the French leader could usher in a new Enlightenment Utopia. It happens, rather, that the ambivalence in Vaughan Williams's late music finds something of a parallel in his political views. Despite the sadness and regret in these written accounts, Vaughan Williams, in ways that perhaps recall the speaker's final words in *An Oxford Elegy*, continued to hope that lasting peace and freedom could be

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<sup>322</sup> Vaughan Williams, personal letter to Rutland Boughton, 9 July 1952. Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, pp. 502-503.

<sup>323</sup> Vaughan Williams, personal letter to Fritz Hart, 24 August 1946. Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 403. The words *Italics* appear as such in Cobbe's volume and presumably represent Vaughan Williams's own emphases. As Cobbe explains in a footnote to this letter, "Wilkins" refers to a café in London where Vaughan Williams and other young students, including Holst and Ireland, would discuss a wide range of topics at length.

realized in post-war Europe. In particular, the composer openly espoused the idea of a European Federal Union in belief that a politically unified Europe could prevent another catastrophic war from occurring. He summarized this position in a letter to Iris Lemare during the early stages of the war:

I hope for a United States of Europe to which all nations (including Germans) who do not believe in force will belong. *Not a league* of sovereign nations – but a *Union* to which all nations will give up a part of their sovereignty – preserving their individuality and nationality for their own affairs.<sup>324</sup>

Here, after reading Vaughan Williams's attitudes toward the political and social past through which he lived, is perhaps the best place to return to the issue of the text and music in *An Oxford Elegy*. While merely reading these sentiments gives us no certain way to interpret the work, they demonstrate how Vaughan Williams's concerns and worldview stood distinct and in a different time from those of Matthew Arnold. It may be true that both shared a melancholic attitude toward their respective times, but their circumstances differed greatly. Arnold had a unique relationship with the encroaching modernism of the late nineteenth century. His anxiety stemmed from his belief that traditional religion and moral certainty were no longer possible in a modern world. He placed his faith in high art and culture, and resolved to hope that these could provide a suitable moral paradigm for the masses if properly controlled and administered by a group of elite intellectuals. Vaughan Williams, on the other hand, composed *An Oxford Elegy* on the other side of the cultural changes that were just beginning in Arnold's lifetime. His ambivalence toward a collective leadership intended to work in the best interest of the people is plain to see, as is his lack of trust in pure reason as any sort of guiding light. Roger Savage asks

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<sup>324</sup> Vaughan Williams, personal letter to Iris Lemare, 4 October 1940. Quoted in Cobbe, ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958*, p. 307.

whether Vaughan Williams omitted so many lines that deal specifically with “modern malaise” in his adaptation because he already felt that he had addressed these matters in the Sixth Symphony. But perhaps in relating to Arnold’s nostalgia in *A Scholar Gypsy* and *Thyrsis*, Vaughan Williams was mourning something apart, if he was really mourning something at all, from the loss of a religious faith he never had, or from a moral certitude that, as shown in his actions and writings on music, he retained, and which utterly contrasts with Arnold’s somber wavering. Vaughan Williams would likely have experienced a different modern malaise than the most topically-specific lines in Arnold’s poem could properly address, but experienced related feelings nonetheless.

Ultimately, however, this is all peripheral to the larger issue. Whether or to what degree Vaughan Williams’s specific political preoccupations in old age inform *An Oxford Elegy* or any other composition from his last years, there are discernable patterns that distinguish the elegiac pastoral music in the 1920s from that of the last phase, in spite of much that they may share. The kind of elegiac texts and music presented in *An Oxford Elegy* and other late pastoral works I have discussed exude an autumnal retrospection and nostalgia for the earlier times in a person’s life. They mourn not only the loss of one’s youth, but also loss in the form of hopes and ideas ultimately unfulfilled. The pastoral music dating from the years immediately following the Great War, rather than being particularly retrospective, emphasizes a fresh aesthetic in the wake of a military conflict in which Vaughan Williams directly participated. Very little of it can be called nostalgic in the sense that music of the composer’s much earlier periods and styles works in the same retrospective vein that they do during the final phase. In his later years, Vaughan Williams often employs the pastoral mode in ways that align with the “tragic but resilient humanism,” that informs the Scott music. In *An Oxford Elegy* this manifests itself in a musical setting of a text

where a concluding refusal to despair in the face of present anxiety operates alongside hope that the wholeness of former times might once again be realized. In other works I examined, one may discern the theme of youthful innocence in rural settings juxtaposed with the tragic realities of adult experience, also in rural settings. Part of the Scott aesthetic is a refusal to yield to despair, even when present negative or catastrophic outcomes seem certain and an ideal past unrecoverable. This implies something to live for or, put another way, something with which to confront death. Vaughan Williams may have personally admired the courage and resolution of Scott and his men when they faced certain death, but his anger at the underlying needlessness of it all prevented any sense of final satisfaction, despite occasional references to optimism in his late works. What were lacking, despite a clear admiration for Scott's bravery, were any positive values beyond admiring a hero's demeanor during his demise. It turns out that one need not look far to find a major composition completed in the last years that offers such further affirmation. In the next chapter I will examine this work – the morality *The Pilgrim's Progress* – where the pastoral mode once more plays a pivotal and unique role.

**Chapter 6**  
**Vaughan Williams and the Pastoral Allegory: *The Pilgrim's Progress***

*Epigraph: "We all miss him sadly – above all, his wonderful, uncompromising courage in fighting for all those things he believed in – things which I personally believe to be some of the most important things in life." – Benjamin Britten, letter to the newly widowed Ursula Vaughan Williams, dated 28 August 1958*

The final phase in Vaughan Williams's career saw not only the fulfillment of his long interest in the poetry of Matthew Arnold and his desire to create a substantial composition based upon it, but also the fruition of a longer and more pervasive preoccupation: John Bunyan's 17<sup>th</sup> century allegory *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The final product, a four-act operatic composition of the same name, was completed in 1949 and revised in the following years. The music went through various stages of conception and composition dating back over four decades. A good portion originated or appeared in other compositions along the way.<sup>325</sup> Several statements in the secondary literature affirm the deep-seated presence that Bunyan's allegory had throughout the composer's works and artistic consciousness. For example, Nathaniel Lew writes: "Vaughan Williams's periodic returns to this subject demonstrate both its importance to him and its congruity with certain of his musical aims: he retained certain elements from work to work despite changing times and performance opportunities and even as his own musical and aesthetic ideals varied."<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>325</sup> A short list includes: the original incidental music for the Reigate production of a play based upon Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1906 (a first published edition of this music is now being prepared by Nathaniel Lew), *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* (completed 1922, and of which all but the final section was transplanted to the opera under discussion), the Fifth Symphony (completed 1943), and the incidental music for the BBC Radio version of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1943.

<sup>326</sup> Lew, "The Pilgrim's Progress and the pitfalls of nostalgia," p. 176. For a sampling of other statements, see also Day, *Vaughan Williams*, pp. 169-173; Frank Howes, *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 360-361; and Roy Douglas, *Working with R.V.W.*, p. 20.

When *The Pilgrim's Progress* premiered in April of 1951, it suffered from a faulty production and puzzled many in its first audience.<sup>327</sup> Perhaps sensing that the work did not (and would not in the future) make a wholly satisfying impression, Vaughan Williams made a defiant remark immediately after the premiere. The statement speaks to his special, personal fondness for both the libretto and the music he spent so long creating: "They won't like it, they don't want an opera with no heroine and no love duets – and I don't care, it's what I meant, and there it is."<sup>328</sup> His premonition proved somewhat well-founded. Critical reaction during the early life of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was decidedly cool, with some feeling that the work was unfit for the stage and better suited to a venue befitting an oratorio or a comparable genre.<sup>329</sup> Performances of the work ever since have been relatively rare despite its having retained devoted admirers in recent times.

Nathaniel Lew's already-cited recent chapter, "*The Pilgrim's Progress* and the pitfalls of nostalgia," addresses Vaughan Williams's seemingly inexplicable urge to invest so much energy and to risk his reputation upon this particular work and libretto. He describes how the "nationalist and pastoralist" elements of *The Pilgrim's Progress* form part of a cultural heritage belonging to a former age. Lew suggests that Vaughan Williams was too close to Bunyan's work and allowed it to overwhelm "his more contemporary creative impulses" later on.<sup>330</sup> I have already shown how in the composer's correspondence with Rutland Boughton, the latter accused Vaughan Williams of "redressing an old theology" in the libretto of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The response Boughton received resounds with trenchant loyalty to Bunyan's allegory and an

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<sup>327</sup> For an account of the first production's flaws and reception, see Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 309-315. *The Pilgrim's Progress* was premiered at London's Covent Garden, with Leonard Hancock leading the Covent Garden Orchestra and Chorus. Arnold Matters sang the role of the Pilgrim.

<sup>328</sup> Quoted in Ursula Vaughan Williams, *R.V.W.*, p. 308.

<sup>329</sup> For more information on and samples of these reactions see Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 309-315.

<sup>330</sup> Lew, "*The Pilgrim's Progress* and the pitfalls of nostalgia," p. 200.

accompanying reproof of the more “modern ideology” of communism to which Boughton subscribed in all but his last years.

In gauging both Vaughan Williams’s resolute determination to find contemporary relevance in Bunyan’s work, and the reactions discussed elsewhere in recent print sources, the question of “why” merits discussion. Why did he risk so much and spend so many years on the allegory that became the basis for his final completed opera? The answers I will offer in this chapter closely concern his life experiences and accrued convictions about the musical world in which he lived. I will explore how the ethos of Bunyan’s allegory deeply informed Vaughan Williams’s musical attitudes and appeared on multiple occasions in his lectures and published writings. In light of both these and his repeated returns to Bunyan-related musical projects, Vaughan Williams’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was more than a valedictory statement. The final opera became, in a very real sense, *his* allegory. Given the great extent to which *The Pilgrim’s Progress* as a whole draws on pastoral imagery and symbolism, I point to close similarities between the medieval and Renaissance traditions of pastoral allegories as social and political commentaries, and the unique place that Vaughan Williams gave Bunyan’s allegory in his writings and music.

In order to best discern the parallels between Vaughan Williams’s relationship to Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the literary tradition of allegory, it is first necessary to examine this tradition and how it relates to Bunyan’s work. As with “elegy” and “pastoral,” delineating precise parameters for “allegory” poses a formidable task. Allegory as a literary phenomenon has persisted in widely contrasting works from ancient times through the twenty-first century. In his classic commentary on allegorical love in medieval and Renaissance

literature, C.S. Lewis (whose own fictional series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, heavily borrows from Christian allegory) writes: “Allegory, in some sense, belongs not to medieval man, but to man, or even mind, in general. It is of the very nature of thought and language to represent what is immaterial in picturable terms.”<sup>331</sup> In narrowing focus upon a specifically English body of allegorical literature that coincides with pastoral tradition, some important works from the late medieval and Renaissance periods loom large – William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* (late 14<sup>th</sup> century), Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), and John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678). In each of these writings the theme of the epic quest features centrally, with the protagonists encountering fantastical beings, settings, and scenarios along the way. These characteristics stretch across differing traditions between medieval and Renaissance allegorical literature, and across poetic and prose formats. They function as critical commentary on real-life ecclesiastical, political, or cultural happenings.<sup>332</sup> As one article in an encyclopedia devoted to allegory puts it: “To the extent that epics are quest narratives they are allegorical...The hero’s journey is an extended metaphor for life’s journey. In another sense, too, epics are allegorical. Epics reflect the values and aspirations of particular cultures.”<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 1936), p. 44.

<sup>332</sup> It is these aspects of allegorical pastoral literature that form the basis for Renato Poggioli’s critique of the tradition. He provides a summary statement of his criticism in his landmark book on pastoral literature. Here are some representative lines: “The allegorical pastoral is a serious travesty, rather than a burlesque. Its inspiration is at best that of a satire; at worst that of an invective...For this special and minor genre the pastoral is but machinery or at its simplest, a device, based on no other motivation than the verbal identity, or metaphorical parallelism, between shepherds of sheep and shepherds of souls...In brief, the allegorical pastoral turns the praise of pastoral life into an indictment of the bad shepherds of the Church; and if it evokes an ideal of bucolic purity and idyllic innocence, it is only to make more severe its condemnation of the pastors who betray it.” See Poggioli, *The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal*, p. 94. Whatever the merits of Poggioli’s views on pastoral allegory, his dubbing of the genre as “minor” seems to be inconsistent with the amount of pastoral allegorical literature, both within and outside the Christian tradition, as well as the amount of secondary literature addressing the subject and quoted throughout this chapter.

<sup>333</sup> David Adams Leeming and Kathleen Morgan Drowne, *The Encyclopedia of Allegorical Literature* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1996), pp. 87-88.

The moral dimension of allegory is unique as it pertains to Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Although most allegories contain a vital moral element by definition, Bunyan's work diverges from the sixteenth-century political allegories by Spenser and others in its focus upon the common man. It is primarily concerned not with extolling monarch-backed institutions and ideas at the expense of opposing ones, but with an average person's quest for salvation using the Bible as his sole final authority. In this respect Bunyan seems to rely less on humanistic principles and more on spiritual truths as taught by Scripture. In the words of Maureen Quilligan:

The privileged authority of the pretext within the text makes Bunyan's allegory essentially different from Spenser's or (Langland's); both the earlier allegorists posit a trust in man's language which Bunyan seems to lack. For Spenser and Langland, man's language exists in continuum with the truthful language of Scripture; for Bunyan, man's language is less potent as well as able to cause much harm, and the only truly trustworthy words are between the covers of Christian's book.<sup>334</sup>

In *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the emphasis is squarely upon the individual protagonist "Christian," his journey to "The Celestial City" (that is, the life of faith culminating in the promise of salvation as taught by Scripture), and his personal struggles with hardship and temptation along the way. As Richard Greaves puts it, "*The Pilgrim's Progress* is Bunyan's resounding testament that through faith he would triumph over persecution, doubt, and despair, progressing from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City."<sup>335</sup>

What remains is to identify the particularly pastoral elements within *The Pilgrim's Progress* as a moral allegory, both those long associated with the literary tradition and those more particular to Bunyan's writing. Allegory's partnership with the pastoral mode in a broader

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<sup>334</sup> Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), p. 123.

<sup>335</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 265.

sense has been widely acknowledged. Somewhat simplistically, William Empson essentially defined pastoral in terms similar to those of allegory when he referred to it as “putting the complex into the simple.”<sup>336</sup> Yet even given much broader definitions, pastoral’s partnership with allegory by the time of Bunyan was widespread. David Daiches, in a written history of English literature, states: “Not only was the pastoral well established in Renaissance poetry by Spenser’s time; it had also been frequently used in an allegorical manner for moral and satirical purposes. Pastoral allegory was thus an established note.”<sup>337</sup> Likewise, there are several tropes and themes that figured in pastoral allegories throughout the medieval and the Renaissance periods. Most go beyond allegory and figure prominently in pastoral literature at large. Kenneth Borris provides a relevant summary statement:

In pastoral, for example, shepherds commonly had ecclesiastical, political, literary, or personal applications in figurative contexts, while tending or abusing sheep expressed a corresponding stance toward the relevant responsibilities. The topos of the golden age, the myth of Eden [sic], and the parable of the good shepherd were fundamental imagistic and conceptual resources for pastoral allegory, and this brief inventory could be much expanded.<sup>338</sup>

Anyone who has read *The Pilgrim’s Progress* will recognize in it some points of similarity with what Borris offers in his inventory. He invites us to expand upon these, and one of the first crucial elements to add is that of the role played by local landscape in shaping the backdrop, and lending to the ethos, of the allegorical quest. As early as Virgil’s writings, a reader can recognize the countryside around Rome as it shaped, for example, the setting of the

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<sup>336</sup> William Empson, *Some Versions of the Pastoral*, p. 23. (Cited at the beginning of chapter 1.) See also Gifford, *Pastoral*, pp. 9, 22-23; and Roni Natov, *The Poetics of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 92.

<sup>337</sup> David Daiches, *A Critical History of English Literature* Volume I, Revised Edition (Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1960, 1979, 2005), pp. 166-167.

<sup>338</sup> Kenneth Borris, *Allegory and Epic in English Renaissance Literature: Heroic Form in Sidney, Spenser, and Milton* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 66-67. Borris cites Helen Cooper’s *Pastoral: Mediaeval into Renaissance* as a good source for further information on the repertoire of pastoral allegory. I second his recommendation.

*Eclogues*. *Piers Plowman* opens within, and otherwise draws heavily from, the landscape of the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire. Spenser used the various settings of “faerie land” in *The Faerie Queene* as a euphemism for England and the topics with which he equates it. So too does Bunyan draw from a local landscape around Bedford and southeastern England to couch the pastoral scenery that laces his own allegory.<sup>339</sup>

One other aspect of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* deserves consideration in terms of its character – its heavy autobiographical focus. The emphasis of Bunyan’s allegory is very much upon the individual’s quest for personal salvation. This takes on deeper overtones when considering how many elements of the story parallel Bunyan’s own life circumstances. I will not dwell here upon an extensive list, but one well-known parallel in particular deserves special mention. This concerns the episode in Part I where Christian is imprisoned for his faith after a visit to the sinful town Vanity Fair, and after witnessing the martyrdom of his companion Faithful. Bunyan himself was imprisoned multiple times in his life, primarily for preaching in violation of the Anglican Church regulations of his time and place. Most scholars agree that it was during a 1675 stint in prison that he completed the first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.<sup>340</sup> This specific instance of allegory paralleling real life is significant as a fundamental theme

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<sup>339</sup> A qualification must be made here. In pointing out the prominent role that local landscape plays in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* we must not suppose that it plays the only or even the dominant role at all times. I already quoted Roger Sharrock in Chapter 4, where he points out that Bunyan’s scenery in The Delectable Mountains and other places was inspired by descriptions of pastoral landscapes found in the Biblical books of Psalms and Song of Solomon. For a discussion of Bunyan’s dream setting of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the various (and sometimes opposite) elements it employs, see Henri A. Talon, “Space and the Hero in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*: A Study of the Meaning of the Allegorical Universe,” in *Bunyan, The Pilgrim’s Progress: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1976), edited by Roger Sharrock, pp. 158-167. The first page of this article affirms the localized setting to be found in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* before discussing other elements. Perhaps the most comprehensive source laying out the various places in Bedfordshire that are identifiable with scenes from *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is Vera Brittain’s *In the Steps of John Bunyan: An Excursion Into Puritan England* 2nd Edition (London: Rich and Cowan, 1950).

<sup>340</sup> See David Hawkes, “Bunyan, John,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* (Oxford University Press, 2005), edited by David Scott Kastan. The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature: (e-reference edition). Oxford University Press. Access at the University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign. 28 August 2010 <http://www.oxford-britishliterature.com/entry?entry=t198.e0068>.

throughout Bunyan's story: the willingness of the protagonist not only to endure acute persecution, hardship, and loss in the interest of a strongly held set of principles and beliefs, but to be convinced that such faith will bring ultimate rewards at the end of all.

Both local setting and autobiography in *The Pilgrim's Progress* heighten the personal flavor of Bunyan's allegory. While it is abundantly true that he borrows from the Bible and other outside sources, he never relays any portion of the story but that with which he is somehow acquainted personally. Henri Talon summarizes:

The direct source of *The Pilgrim's Progress* is Bunyan's own experience. The spiritual development which is found in the autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, appears again in the allegory: but the growth of a conscience has become a Pilgrimage, the inward action has taken a concrete form, and the invisible ways of the understanding have built a road and paths like those of seventeenth century England. So the incidents in Christian's tale are symbols of his inward life.<sup>341</sup>

In spite of this basic characteristic, or perhaps in part because of it, Bunyan's allegory has achieved a kind of widespread attention that has eluded Langland's and arguably even Spenser's texts. David Hawkes's article on John Bunyan for the *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* begins by stating that, after the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress* was the most widely read book in the English-speaking world for two hundred years after it appeared.<sup>342</sup> As Paul Fussell has shown, its popularity persisted in England into the twentieth century, particularly with the generation who fought in the Great War. In Chapter 4 I cited Fussell's description of how soldiers saw their service in terms of the Pilgrim and the symbols in his story, making Bunyan's allegory coincide with their own experiences. Such appropriation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* has not been limited to this example. Given that the allegory is fundamentally Christian in outlook, it

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<sup>341</sup> Talon, "Space and the Hero in *The Pilgrim's Progress*," p. 158.

<sup>342</sup> David Hawkes, "Bunyan, John," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*.

is remarkable how people and groups of different times and ideological leanings have continued to relate to it. A major reason for this is that Bunyan's work transcends mere religious teaching and speaks to real life circumstances that human beings of all creeds and intellectual levels encounter. Roger Sharrock put it well in his introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Pilgrim's Progress*: "The strength of the work and the sense of reality it communicates to readers of widely differing varieties of belief depend on this combination of religious vision with loving, exact observation of human character."<sup>343</sup> Thus, many of the virtues Bunyan associates with the Christian journey are applicable in other contexts as well; the universality inherent within *The Pilgrim's Progress* is that of common human experience. To quote F.R. Leavis, *The Pilgrim's Progress* "has the vitality and significance of major art" and presents "a vitalizing reminder of human nature, human potentiality, and human need, and remaining that for us even though we may find wholly unprofitable the theology with which Bunyan accompanies it."<sup>344</sup>

One need look no further for a substantive example of Bunyan's allegory being taken in such a way than Vaughan Williams's own involvement with it. First, Vaughan Williams retained a lifelong love for this book despite holding first an atheistic and then an agnostic worldview during the course of his life. Second, there is direct evidence that he regarded *The Pilgrim's Progress* as being open to multiple interpretations. His explanation to Rutland Boughton as to why he changed the protagonist's name from "Christian" to "Pilgrim" in his completed opera is proof that he himself saw the allegory along the lines just discussed: "I on purpose did not call the Pilgrim 'Christian' because I want the idea to be universal and apply to anybody who aims at the spiritual life whether he is Xtian, Jew, Buddhist, Shintoist, or 5<sup>th</sup> Day Adventist."<sup>345</sup>

However, if Vaughan Williams believed that *The Pilgrim's Progress* could accommodate a wide

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<sup>343</sup> Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, edited by Sharrock, p. xiv.

<sup>344</sup> F.R. Lewis, "Bunyan's Resoluteness," in Sharrock, ed., *Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress: A Casebook*, pp. 204, 218.

<sup>345</sup> See Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 313.

range of perspectives, there is also evidence that it nonetheless held specific meanings for *him*. In deliberately dubbing the opera “a morality,” he raises what I see as two primary questions. First, what did he find particularly “moral” about Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*? Second, in what ways did his musical treatment of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* bring out the moral element of allegory? In addressing these questions, I will now turn to Vaughan Williams’s writings and then examine certain decisions he made as the composer of the “morality” *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

Throughout his large body of published articles and essays, Vaughan Williams makes frequent use of outside maxims and allusions to illustrate his points. Often one will find references to Bible verses, which demonstrate how profoundly this text influenced the composer culturally and intellectually.<sup>346</sup> There are also multiple instances in which he draws upon imagery and symbolism from Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, often in ways that reveal his specific views on topics of great importance to him. Below is a table listing occasions where Vaughan Williams refers to *Pilgrim’s Progress* tropes in the course of his writings.

Table 6.1

<b>Written Statements by Vaughan Williams pertaining to Bunyan and/or <i>The Pilgrim’s Progress</i></b>	<b>Sources in which the Statements Appear</b>
“Does anyone dare to sneer at our one hope in the slough of despond – the one fact to which we can point and say, ‘We are not an unmusical nation’?” (Referring to national tunes)	“A Sermon to Vocalists,” in <i>The Vocalist</i> Vol. 1, No. 2 (1902), p. 38. (Quoted in Manning, ed., <i>Vaughan Williams on Music</i> , p. 29.)

<sup>346</sup> Probably the best example of this may be found in the eighth section (“Some Conclusions”) of Vaughan Williams’s book *National Music*. Here Vaughan Williams uses several well known biblical verses to help him illustrate separate points he makes. He refers in print to each as a separate “sermon.” See *National Music and Other Essays*, pp. 62-73.

Table 6.1 (cont.)

<p>“It is as if a crowd of malignant, poisonous flies were upon us all of a sudden; the flutes, clarinets, and oboes spit and snarl, while two tubas reiterate their monotonous three notes like Pope in <i>Pilgrim’s Progress</i>...”</p>	<p>“Ein Heldenleben,” in <i>The Vocalist</i> Vol. 1, No. 10 (1903), pp. 295-296. (Quoted in Manning, ed., <i>Vaughan Williams on Music</i>, p. 160.)</p>
<p>“The art of the folk-singer, like all true art, is essentially un-selfconscious – the artistic result is not openly sought, but comes, as it were, by accident. Thus Bunyan, in trying to preach a sermon, produced a masterpiece of literature...”</p>	<p>“Sailor Shanties,” in <i>Musical News and Herald</i> Vol. 61, No. 1553 (1921): pp. 683-684. (Quoted in Manning, ed., <i>Vaughan Williams on Music</i>, p. 215.)</p>
<p>“As a composer his love and knowledge of the classics has led him along the great lines of musical thought by the narrow way right up the hill and not along the way of destruction, to stumble, fall and rise no more.”</p>	<p>“Sir Donald Tovey,” in William Rothenstein, <i>Contemporaries: Portrait Drawings by Sir William Rothenstein, with Appreciations by Various Hands</i> (London: Faber, 1937), pp. 102-104. (Quoted in Manning, <i>Vaughan Williams on Music</i>, p. 71.)</p>

Table 6.1 (cont.)

<p>“In the history of our art there has always been the good way, ‘the King’s highway, cast up by Patriarchs or prophets, as straight as a rule can make it, the way we must go’. Those who tread this way are not merely blind followers of the blind – not slaves but free; each one makes his own footsteps on that road and leaves his own impress. Here lies the true originality, the originality of inevitableness. There are others, it is true, who say ‘we will not walk therein’, but they seldom find that rest to their souls, that simplicity and serenity which is surely the final aim of all art. Too often they merely avoid Hill Difficulty and wander into a “wide field full of dark mountains where they stumble and fall to rise no more’. Ivor Gurney is a Pilgrim on the straight and narrow road...”</p>	<p>“Ivor Gurney (1890-1937),” in Vaughan Williams, <i>National Music and Other Essays</i>, pp. 256-257. (This tribute to Gurney bears the postdate 1938.)</p>
<p>“One more thing. This Musical Competition Festival is for members of HM Forces. I understand that some military authorities consider that music is ‘softening’ for the soldier. I would remind them that Socrates held that certain kinds of music put courage in the heart of the soldier, that David was an expert harpist but managed to slay Goliath, that Mr. Valiant-for-Truth carried his marks and scars with him across the river and that when he passed over all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side. Who shall dare say that music is not an essential part of the soldier’s equipment?”</p>	<p>Introduction to <i>News Chronicle Musical Competition Festival for HM Forces in Association with National Service Entertainments Board</i> (London: News Chronicle, 1942). (Quoted in Manning, ed., <i>Vaughan Williams on Music</i>, p. 88.)</p>

Table 6.1 (cont.)

<p>“So my choral friend who thought he was playing in a game was really practising a great art. This is how we do things in this country. Like Mr. By-Ends’ father, we look one way and row the other. Bunyan himself wrote his great epic under the impression that he was saving men’s souls. Reynolds practiced his wonderful art for material reward. Shelley thought his poems were important only insofar as they promoted social reform. So we choralists think we play a game and lo! We have achieved a great art.”</p>	<p>“Choral Singing,” in Concert programme for performance of Vaughan Williams’s <i>A Sea Symphony</i> and Walton’s <i>Belshazzar’s Feast</i>. Huddersfield Choral Society, Royal Choral Society and London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent. Royal Albert Hall, 9 June 1951. (Quoted in Manning, ed., <i>Vaughan Williams on Music</i>, p. 94.)</p>
<p>“Martin Shaw has devoted himself to the cause of church music from the time he met Percy Dearmer, and they worked together to rescue our church music from the slough of despond into which the Victorian fondness for saccharine [sic] insincerity had led it.”</p>	<p>“Martin Shaw,” in <i>The Diocesan Magazine</i> Vol. 42, No. 6 (1955), pp. 85-87. (Quoted in Manning, ed., <i>Vaughan Williams on Music</i>, p. 276.)</p>
<p>“Sibelius has gone straight up the Hill Difficulty and has left it to others to wander to destruction in Bypath Meadow; he will be the first to arrive at the Celestial City, even if the others arrive at all and are not refused admittance because they have no certificate. So up the hill the Pilgrim goes, along the well trodden path, and there he can still find priceless jewels which perhaps only he can see and know how to use.”</p>	<p>“Sibelius (1865-1957) (A tribute written on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday),” in Vaughan Williams, <i>National Music and Other Essays</i>, pp. 261-264.</p>

Much in these statements relates directly to the present discussion of Bunyan’s allegory, and they help illustrate some overriding principles that Vaughan Williams adopted as part of an artistic creed. In the cases of his tributes to Ivor Gurney and Jean Sibelius, for example, he extols

what he sees as the artistic virtues carried out by both composers in casting each as a Pilgrim walking a kind of ‘straight and narrow path.’ In the excerpt on Gurney one may see how he equates this path (“cast up by Patriarchs and Prophets” – exact wording from Bunyan) with what he calls “the originality of inevitableness,” or the only true originality. He expounds upon this by describing how Gurney worked within the traditions handed down to him by his teacher Stanford, and more indirectly by a group of nineteenth-century German masters. In the excerpt on Sibelius, Vaughan Williams lauds how the Finnish composer generally aligns himself with the harmonic tradition of Beethoven and Schubert and does not ask his performers to do unusual things with their instruments as would befit a more avant-garde approach. He then equates this manner of composing with the “well trodden path” that yields riches and eventually ends with the Celestial City. In so doing, he writes, Sibelius has avoided Bypass Meadow (“where others wander to destruction”) by going “straight up Hill Difficulty.” In both examples, Vaughan Williams clearly uses tropes from *The Pilgrim’s Progress* to express one of his own primary artistic positions: successful composers draw upon their own traditions and diligent training within these traditions as a means to develop an original voice, rather than forsaking their heritage entirely and seeking what are ultimately dead-end novelties.

As one can see in Table 6.1, another *Pilgrim’s Progress* trope that Vaughan Williams referred to more than once in his writings is that of the “Slough of Despond.” In Bunyan’s allegory, this takes the form of a deep bog that Christian encounters early in his journey to the Celestial City. Bunyan describes it as a place where Pilgrims may feel the weight of their guilt over sin, and anxiety over the prospects of embarking upon a long Christian journey. A glance at the instances where Vaughan Williams employs this reference shows that he positions it very similarly. As the above table indicates, his first use of the term occurs in a very early writing

entitled “A Sermon to Vocalists,” where toward the conclusion he briefly discusses English songs. He explicitly equates “the slough of despond” with feelings of inferiority resulting when British people think of their own folk songs as ‘old-fashioned’ and ‘countrified.’<sup>347</sup> Instead, he argues, the British may take heart even amidst these feelings and point to such songs as proof that England is not an “unmusical” land. The other context where he invokes “the slough of despond” occurs in a tribute to the composer Martin Shaw that was penned more than four decades later.<sup>348</sup> The term appears within a brief reference to church music, where he uses it to refer to the undesirable state of affairs wherein Victorian church music relied too much on “a fondness for sacharine [sic] insincerity.” His work on editing *The English Hymnal*, including his written introduction to the volume, involved making difficult decisions on which hymns to include as well as considerable effort on his part to exclude those selections he felt constituted a lesser quality. The use of the name “slough of despond” to refer to a specific kind of these “substandard” hymns reinforces our understanding of his convictions on the matter through the use of another Bunyan trope.<sup>349</sup>

I leave it to the reader to refer to Table 6.1 for the remaining instances of Vaughan Williams using Bunyan’s allegorical imagery to illustrate his convictions. In these examples, it cannot be clearer that he saw artistic choices as moral choices that could sometimes be illustrated using figures of speech from his favorite allegory. Indeed, in the course of an article praising Hubert Parry, he implied that his teacher’s attitude of equating artistic problems with moral

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<sup>347</sup> Vaughan Williams’s use of the term “countrified” only reinforces the notion, discussed in Chapter 2, that he associated such a concept with folksong generally.

<sup>348</sup> Martin Shaw (1875-1958) was an English composer and writer known for his sacred and stage works. He collaborated with Vaughan Williams on two collected volumes – *The Oxford Book of Carols* (1928) and *Songs of Praise* (Oxford, 1931).

<sup>349</sup> Vaughan Williams does not incorporate a Slough of Despond scene into his opera *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

problems was justified.<sup>350</sup> Perhaps nowhere is there clearer evidence that Vaughan Williams himself took this to heart than in his specially named “morality” *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. I will now turn to this work and more closely examine how Vaughan Williams’s choices present further support for the notion that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* can be seen as *his* adopted pastoral allegory.

The separate scenes in Vaughan Williams’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* have already received some discussion in the existing secondary literature, and there is no need to survey them here.<sup>351</sup> Herbert Murrill’s contemporaneous written comment that *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is “a work summarizing in three hours virtually the whole creative output of a great composer” is as concise a description as any.<sup>352</sup> But another comment made by Murrill in the same paragraph is of equal interest: “For the lessons he has to teach – of humility, of integrity, of directness, of devotion to our art – cannot be too often repeated.”<sup>353</sup> This is striking, particularly when viewed in light of later criticisms that Vaughan Williams’s morality fails to match the interest or worth of his other compositions from around the same time. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress* references to hymns and other simpler mediums serve, often in partnership with pastoral themes, to underline and in some ways even embody the moral messages presented in multiple scenes.

The opera opens with a “prologue” wherein the very first thing heard is a brass-led statement of the hymn tune *York* while the stage set shows the figure of Bunyan in prison writing his story. This sets up both the first act and the entire morality. Vaughan Williams included this tune when he edited *The English Hymnal*, where he indicates that the melody came from the

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<sup>350</sup> See Vaughan Williams, “Sir Hubert Parry,” in Manning, ed., *Vaughan Williams on Music*, p. 296.

<sup>351</sup> See Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 351-357. A.E.F. Dickinson has also provided a musical overview of *the Pilgrim’s Progress* in *Vaughan Williams*, pp. 358-369. It should be said, however, that this account is largely a negative one and that many elements of the work receive unsympathetic treatment.

<sup>352</sup> Herbert Murrill, “Vaughan Williams’s Pilgrim,” in *Music & Letters* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Oct., 1951), p. 327.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*

1615 Scottish Psalter.<sup>354</sup> *York* also appears at the head of the score for the Reigate stage music as well as in the BBC *Pilgrim's Progress* music, indicating that Vaughan Williams had long associated this tune with Bunyan's allegory.<sup>355</sup> Below is *York* as it may be seen in the *English Hymnal*.

Ex. 6.1: *York* as presented in *The English Hymnal*

YORK. (C.M.)  
Moderately slow  $\text{♩} = 66$ .

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Melody from Scottish Psalter, 1616.  
Harmony from J. MILTON, d. 1647.

618

Most mentions of this tune in connection with the opera *The Pilgrim's Progress* emphasize its appearance in the opening, and also the concluding scene, where the Pilgrim reaches his goal and crosses over the river of death into the Celestial City. In the latter, *York* features once more, triumphantly stated in the orchestral in between choral interjections of "Holy, Holy, Holy" and "Alleluia." This second word appears with a musical motive one finds throughout this opera and

<sup>354</sup> See *The English Hymnal with Tunes*, New Edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), edited by Percy Dearmer and Ralph Vaughan Williams, pp. 618-619. In the preface to the 1933 edition (the last edition that Vaughan Williams took part in editing), Vaughan Williams gives a complete list of new tunes added for the new edition. *York* is not on this list; it was one of the original tunes of the collection.

<sup>355</sup> See Lew, "The Pilgrim's Progress and the pitfalls of nostalgia," p. 180.

other Pilgrim-related music by Vaughan Williams, and that has been traced to another early work, the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*.<sup>356</sup>

Much less often discussed, if at all, is the brief reference to *York* that occurs almost at the very end of Act I, Scene I. While this may be a partial, fleeting appearance, it nonetheless comes at a crucial point in the action. Here it works to emphasize the first and deciding moral choice of the Pilgrim, who finally resolves to set out on the “King’s Highway” toward the Celestial City and thereby ceases his wavering. The scene takes place directly after the prologue and shows the Pilgrim in despair because the book in his hand tells him he will die. In this scene, as in the others, Vaughan Williams makes necessary cuts while condensing and otherwise altering the narrative as it is found in Bunyan’s book. Sometimes these changes drastically simplify the action in the opera. Certain components of the setting are thus left to the imagination in the score. One example concerns the paring-down in the first scene. The staging as indicated in the score can sometimes disguise the fact that the opening takes place in a decidedly pastoral setting. As Bunyan describes the surroundings, Christian (henceforth referred to as “Pilgrim” to avoid cumbersome oscillation between terms as used across the two works) is standing in a field near his home as the initial events unfold. When the Evangelist appears and directs the Pilgrim toward “The Wicket Gate,” as he does in both Bunyan and Vaughan Williams, the latter neglects to mention that the Evangelist points over “a very wide field” in the process of directing the Pilgrim toward the gate and the “Shining Light.” A couple of other pastoral signifiers survive the transition from Bunyan’s text to Vaughan Williams’s music in this scene. First, the four

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<sup>356</sup> For a thorough discussion on the relationship between the *Tallis Fantasia* and works related to *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, see Lew, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the pitfalls of nostalgia,” and Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 353. One special example of direct proof that Vaughan Williams associated the *Tallis Fantasia* with Bunyan’s allegory appears in the manuscript score of the BBC Pilgrim music. The ninth number in this piece, arriving with the words “That I may show thee the Words of God,” actually has a page of the published score of the *Tallis Fantasia* cut and pasted onto the BBC manuscript at this juncture. (See British Library Add. MS. 50419, Fol. 13A.)

neighbors of the Pilgrim (Pliable, Obstinate, Mistrust, and Timorous) take it in turns trying to stop the Pilgrim from going on his journey, warning him of the dangers ahead. Whereupon, the Evangelist reminds the Pilgrim in one of his interjections (which in this scene begin on an E-flat minor chord) that the Pilgrim has already “laid thy hand to the plough.”

Ex. 6.2: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Act I, Scene I (two measures after Rehearsal 16)

Second, upon failing to dissuade him from his journey, the four neighbors together sing “You may have the brave country alone for me.” Perhaps these are small details, but along with the Wicket Gate they hint at the pastoral setting and/or tone at this juncture of Bunyan’s text. Further indication that Vaughan Williams conceived the scene along pastoral lines as suggested by Bunyan may exist in the form of Dent’s letter to Vaughan Williams after the first performance, where he indicates that the landscape scenery for much of the production was very English.<sup>357</sup>

There is now a context for the reference to *York* at the end of the first scene. Musically, the section is dominated by the “What shall I do?” motive and its related materials.

<sup>357</sup> See Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 201.

Ex. 6.3: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act I, Scene I, mm. 1-5

The image shows a musical score for the Pilgrim's vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked "Più mosso" and the performance instruction is "whispering". The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are "What shall I do? —" and "Was soll ich tun?.. —". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. The score includes dynamic markings such as *sfpp* and *f*. A rehearsal mark "6" is visible in the top right corner.

Moments of “diatonic relief” occur in the instances when the Evangelist responds to the Pilgrim’s despair and/or tells him that his final salvation lies in the Celestial City. These accompany the Pilgrim’s initial turmoil and follow the times when he hesitates. The last and only unspoken hesitation (following the exit of the four neighbors) triggers the scene’s final response from the Evangelist and the arrival of the brief reference to *York* as he speaks the words “So shalt thou come at last to the Celestial City.” The measures shown below carry part of the tune in the orchestra, rendered in reduced form.

Ex. 6.4: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act I, Scene I (from three measures after Rehearsal 18 to six measures after Rehearsal 18)

The image shows a musical score for the Evangelist's vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a bass clef with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are "— to the ce-les - tial ci - ty. —" and "— in die himm — li - sche Stadt. —". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff with a key signature of two flats and a 3/4 time signature. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*.

At face value, *York*'s partial presence here seems to point forward to the Celestial City scene and to the Epilogue, where the Pilgrim attains his salvation. In the context of this early scene, however, the fleeting appearance of *York* serves a more immediate purpose: it signals the

end of the Pilgrim's wavering and simultaneously marks the point at which he accepts his quest with the full knowledge of the hardship that lies ahead. The grim determination of the Pilgrim may be felt in the tempestuous music immediately following, where he grasps his book and sets out, crying "Life eternal life!" The contrast here with the text and tenor of the "road" or "quest" works from earlier in Vaughan Williams's career could not be more apparent. Nowhere in the *Songs of Travel* is there such terror, and while the *Sea Symphony* is perhaps equally as exhilarating, its unbridled optimism is far removed from how Vaughan Williams shapes this scene musically and aesthetically.<sup>358</sup> The Pilgrim perhaps knows that salvation lies ahead at the very end, but he also knows that he will pay dearly before he attains it. A second look at the writings by Vaughan Williams that quote *The Pilgrim's Progress* reinforces the "way of truth" trope as presented musically in this scene, where he pointedly frames the path of salvation with "old fashioned" diatonicism and a well-worn hymn tune.

An additional, lengthier invocation of *York* occurs much later, but still before the end of the opera – at the conclusion of Act IV, Scene I. In this scene, the Pilgrim draws close to the end of his journey. The setting is decidedly rural, with the traveler coming upon a woodcutter boy at the edge of a forest and with the Delectable Mountains visible in the distance. The boy sings a short and simple tune, repeating it with different words. He is joined by the Pilgrim as the latter enters the scene and inquires as to the source of the music. The words sung match the simple beauty of the boy's melody, accompanied and interspersed by the clarinet. In the reduced score excerpt of Example 6.5, the treble line in the piano corresponds to that of the clarinet in the full score.

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<sup>358</sup> Michael Kennedy briefly calls attention to the similarity between *Toward the Unknown Region*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and other works that feature the common theme of braving unknown regions. See Kennedy, "The Unknown Vaughan Williams," p. 32.

Ex. 6.5: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act IV, Scene I (from eight measures after Rehearsal 1 through seventeen measures after Rehearsal 1)

This music carries certain similarities with, if not a direct resemblance to, an aria from Hubert Parry's oratorio *Job* (1892). In the first number of the second scene, a boy shepherd sings of the flocks of his "master." The accompanying clarinet, along with the affective and melodic similarities of the theme, suggest that Vaughan Williams perhaps treated Parry's music, either consciously or subconsciously, as a model for the corresponding tune in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Once more, much of the melodic material in Example 6.6 is marked by the clarinet, particularly when the boy is not singing.

Ex. 6.6: Parry, *Job*, Scene II, No. 1 – “The flocks of my master are blessed of God” (opening lines)

A SHEPHERD BOY (SOPRANO).  
The  
flocks of my mas-ter are bless-ed of God; No harm ev-er  
comes to the ten-der lambs or ewes; They

*cres.* *poco rit.* *p a tempo.* *dim.*

8170.

18

*mf*

Regardless of the creative origins of the woodcutter boy’s song, it could not be plainer that Vaughan Williams uses this character and his music to help set up the moral lesson of the scene. These characters contrast pointedly with the appearance of Mr. By-Ends and his wife, both of whom enter immediately after the scene’s opening musical materials have run their

course. The woodcutter boy himself is an addition to this series of events as set forth by Bunyan in his allegory. When the Pilgrim encounters Mr. By-Ends in the first part of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, he does so with his new companion Hopeful; Mr. By-Ends is accompanied by certain male companions and not the wife that Vaughan Williams includes. Both the woodcutter boy and his lyrics originally come from the second part of Bunyan's text, where the Pilgrim's wife Christiana happens upon the suddenly pleasant Valley of Humiliation, years after her husband had passed through the same place and had his encounter with Apollyon. Here the boy is not a woodcutter but a shepherd (like Parry's shepherd boy). Vaughan Williams transplants this boy and his lyrics to Act IV, Scene I of his opera, changes the boy's role from a shepherd to a woodcutter (probably in order to avoid redundancy with the shepherds in the following scene), and uses him as a kind of replacement for the Pilgrim's companion Hopeful, some of whose dialogue the boy also takes up.

By positioning the woodcutter boy in such a way, Vaughan Williams draws a stark contrast with the morally-compromised Mr. By-Ends and his wife, pitting the boy's humble attitude and theme against the jauntier music accompanying the dialogue of the couple. In the exchange between Mr. By-Ends and the Pilgrim that follows, the Pilgrim refuses the companionship of Mr. By-Ends on the road, citing the latter's refusal to adopt "the way of truth." As the Pilgrim prepares to continue on his journey, the boy points him in the direction of the Delectable Mountains, the last stage before the Celestial City (at least in Vaughan Williams's opera). When the boy mentions the Celestial City, and as the Pilgrim expresses his longing to be there, *York* once more makes an appearance. This time the signatory opening intervals of the hymn tune sound for a much longer duration than at the conclusion of Act I, Scene I. The reason

is perhaps because the Pilgrim is at this stage much closer to his goal and has overcome all but his last difficult obstacle.

Ex. 6.7: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act IV, Scene I (from nine measures before Rehearsal 12 up to Rehearsal 12)

PIL.  
PIL.

hav - en where I would be.  
im - mer und e - wig möcht' sein.

Exit Pilgrim slowly, looking straight in front of him. The boy watches him.

Repeat as often as required.

After this reference to *York*, Vaughan Williams leaves it to the woodcutter boy alone to conclude the scene much as he opened it. Upon wishing the Pilgrim a fair journey, the boy once more collects his bundles and takes up the simple tune he sang at the beginning of the scene. The lyrics comprise the last of the three stanzas found in Part II of Bunyan's text:

Fullness to such a burden is,  
that go on Pilgrimage,  
Here little, and hereafter bliss,  
Is best from age to age.

Following this there occurs a brief parting passage for solo clarinet that sounds somewhat reminiscent of the solo violin's music in *The Lark Ascending*. This reinforces the pastoral tone of the character and scene, recalling images of a boy shepherd and an unaccompanied instrument heard against a stage set of open rural space.



Murrill mentioned in connection with this opera as a whole – Vaughan Williams once more turns to a familiar hymn and a simple strophic melody.<sup>359</sup>

The manner in which Vaughan Williams allots moral significance to *York* in connection with the Pilgrim's path to salvation has not gone unnoticed. A.E.F. Dickinson, in his volume on the works of Vaughan Williams, finds the use of *York* in the opera to signal the Pilgrim's final victory "pompous" and "arbitrary," claiming that: "There is something so derivative about the whole conception of salvation through *York* as to weaken the finish."<sup>360</sup> Surely Dickinson could not be further from Vaughan Williams's own attitude and practices. The latter's mature compositional style owed much to hymn tunes. His advocacy for church music was scarcely surpassed in his long career leading up to the first performance of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Also, his use of a tune that had been with him from his early days must have seemed like a valedictory, even moral, gesture. In short, Dickinson's negative charge that Vaughan Williams was derivative in assigning such significance to *York* in *The Pilgrim's Progress* seems an unjustified indictment for anyone to make who claims to understand his music and views. How many of Vaughan Williams's other compositions feature a similarly "derivative" use of a hymn or folk tune in a prominent place?

Even where *York* is not heard, Vaughan Williams finds other means to emphasize the "way of salvation" through his use of the hymn idiom, even if not through the means a specific preexisting hymn. One part of the score characterized by such music is Act II, Scene I – The Arming of the Pilgrim. In Bunyan's text, this event takes place in the armory of a mansion called

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<sup>359</sup> It is noteworthy that in Vaughan Williams's correspondence with E. J. Dent following the first performance of *the Pilgrim's Progress* in 1951, where the two discuss needed edits and improvements to the production, Dent asks Vaughan Williams: "Could the Boy sing his hymns a little faster?" Vaughan Williams does not address this particular question in his response to Dent, but the question itself indicates that at least one careful listener connected the strophic tune of the Boy with the hymn idiom at the time of the premiere. Dent's remarks, as well as Vaughan Williams's response, may be found in Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 196-206.

<sup>360</sup> Dickinson, *Vaughan Williams*, pp. 366-367.

“House Beautiful,” which sits on top of the very Hill Difficulty mentioned by Vaughan Williams in his written remarks on Sibelius discussed earlier.<sup>361</sup> It is a place of respite and rejuvenation, and Vaughan Williams preserves Bunyan’s presentation of it as such over the course of Act I, Scene II and here at the beginning of Act II.<sup>362</sup> Once again, both Bunyan and Vaughan Williams invite comparisons with pastoral tropes in their use of House Beautiful. (Indeed, Vaughan Williams insisted to Dent in their correspondence that the background to this scene and others “represent[s] a road stretching straight out into the distance” and he also explicitly mentioned that he liked the landscape backdrops of the House in the preceding scene.<sup>363</sup>) The “country house” not only has a long presence in English poetry and literature (particularly visible in poetry from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century),<sup>364</sup> but it also has featured as a common landmark in England for centuries. It had established itself as a fixture in the cultural and regional consciousness of upper-class English people even by the time of Bunyan as an idealized place of hospitality and retreat from urban strains. Both are familiar ingredients in the traditional use of the pastoral mode as an escape. (In Bunyan’s allegory, of course, House Beautiful is not an escape from the urban so much as a temporary escape from the burdens of the Christian journey.) The country house was also connected with abundance.<sup>365</sup> This aligns with the background of Vaughan

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<sup>361</sup> As one early reviewer noticed, Vaughan Williams incorporates the Interpreter from “The House of the Interpreter” into the beginning of the House Beautiful scene, effectively combining the two houses into one. See Martin Cooper’s review in *The Spectator*, quoted in Lew, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the pitfalls of nostalgia,” pp. 191-192.

<sup>362</sup> One difference, however, is that Vaughan Williams, in the scene description of Act I, Scene II, positions the Wicket Gate to appear as the entry to the House Beautiful, while Bunyan’s text contains many more events and locations between the two landmarks.

<sup>363</sup> See Kennedy, *A Catalogue of the Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, pp. 204-205.

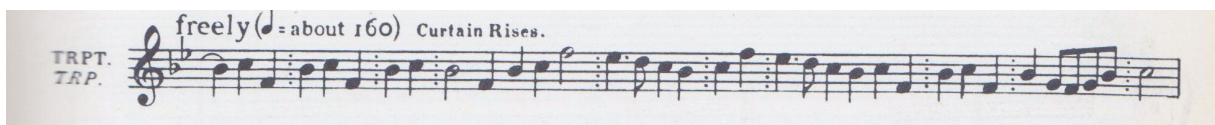
<sup>364</sup> Perhaps the most famous example is Ben Jonson’s *To Penshurst*, published in 1616. The exact nature of the class and other representations and sympathies in this and other country house poems have proved to be a matter of some debate. For a summary of this divergence of opinions, see Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England, 1500-1660* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 285ff.

<sup>365</sup> For further reading on the real-life evolution of the English country house from medieval times through the twentieth century, see Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

Williams who, as I discussed in Chapter 1, grew up in the estate house purchased by Josiah Wegdwood – Leith Hill Place in Surrey. It is difficult to imagine that his early familiarity with *The Pilgrim's Progress* did not at some point lead him to relate Leith Hill Place to House Beautiful somehow, seeing as each established themselves in his early consciousness.

Returning to the Arming of the Pilgrim and its relationship to the hymn idiom, one musical idea dominates this scene – the trumpet call by a herald signaling the “King’s Highway.” The motive sounds in its entirety after the opening five measures that carry the music over from the previous interlude.

Ex. 6.10: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act II, Scene I, measure 6



The words the herald uses to describe the King’s Highway come from Bunyan’s text and instantly recall the quote in Table 6.1 where Vaughan Williams uses part of the same excerpt to describe how Ivor Gurney followed the “good way” of a composer:

This is the King’s Highway cast up by Patriarchs and prophets  
It is straight as a rule can make it.  
Who will go on that way?  
Other ways are crooked and wide  
but the King’s Highway is straight and narrow.  
He that goes that way is like to meet with weariness, peril, and  
nakedness, and even death [sic].

The Pilgrim, upon hearing this invitation, volunteers to follow the path. The rest of the scene involves the herald and a chorus who essentially cheer the Pilgrim on as he arms himself for the road ahead. As the scene commences and the chorus establishes its increasing presence amidst repeated trumpet calls and monophonic proclamations of the herald, Vaughan Williams assigns it

parts of a fanfare-like melody that seem to be fashioned from the herald's trumpet call.

Eventually, the chorus states the full version of this hymn-like theme:

Ex. 6.11: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act II, Scene I (from three measures after Rehearsal 4 to fourteen measures after Rehearsal 4)

Animato maestoso

CHORUS

Who so be - set him round with dis - mal sto - ries, Do but them - selves con - found,  
Die ihn be - drän - gen all' Mit list - gen Lü - gen, Kom - men zu bö - sem Fall,

Animato maestoso

CHORUS

His strength the more is. No li - on can him fright, Hell with a gi - ant  
Doch er wird sie - gen. Ihn schrek - ken Lö - wen nicht, der Rie - sen Kraft er

The conclusion of the scene once again features the tune in full, accompanied by the herald's trumpet and full orchestra, effectively sending the armed Pilgrim off in a "blaze of glory."

The following measures take the form of a transition between the arming of the Pilgrim and the Pilgrim's subsequent confrontation with the monstrous Apollyon. Here the fanfare tune gradually gives way to more dissonant music. Act II, Scene II is a direct continuation of the

interlude and begins with a loud entry in the orchestra and chorus, who have now assumed the roles of the “doleful creatures” inhabiting the Valley of Humiliation in which the Pilgrim confronts the dreaded monster. Vaughan Williams describes this scene in the score: “The Valley of Humiliation, a narrow gorge shut in at the back by a bare grey hill.” The presence of the doleful creatures combine with Vaughan Williams’s scene description and the Pilgrim’s eventual encounter with Apollyon to paint the picture of a Scott-like Pilgrim traversing an anti-pastoral landscape under the threat of dire danger.<sup>366</sup> Much of the music in this scene only increases the effect. First, the music of the doleful creatures, who wordlessly sing wail-like, descending minor and major second motives that recall the Pilgrim’s “Save me, save me!” at the beginning of Act I, Scene II, is almost omnipresent until Apollyon’s defeat. There is also the stark contrast and interplay between music that colors the threat of Apollyon and references to the hymn idiom already heard, when the Pilgrim defies him. Consider one sequence not long after the beginning of the scene, when Apollyon first makes his presence felt, with his doleful creatures preceding his arrival. Imposing statements of a “polychord” built from the sonorities of A-Flat minor and G- minor signal the menacing shadow of Apollyon. Such a harmony, the reader may recall, famously opens both the Fourth and Sixth Symphonies and is present in *An Oxford Elegy*.<sup>367</sup> Also, the sudden crescendos and decrescendos of the wordless choral statements, accompanied by the gong in the orchestra, all bear some resemblance to Vaughan Williams’s use of the wind

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<sup>366</sup> I am not the first to make the Scott-*Pilgrim’s Progress* comparison. Daniel Grimley compares the Scott Expedition with the questions that the Pilgrim asks in the *Shepherds of the Delectable Mountain Scene*: “How far is it hither?” and “Is the way safe or dangerous?” See Grimley, “Music, Ice, and the ‘Geometry of Fear,’” pp. 148-149, n. 38. In the course of comparing Vaughan Williams’s film scoring project for *Scott of the Antarctic* to *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Jeffrey Richards refers to the film as “a secular analogue of *Pilgrim’s Progress*.” See Richards, *Imperialism and Music, Britain, 1876-1953* (Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 319.

<sup>367</sup> Alain Frogley also calls attention to this type of chord – one that results from the superimposition of minor triads separated by a half step – as it pertains to multiple themes in the Ninth Symphony. In the course of making these and other striking observations, Frogley also points out that the same type of chord is present in the first part of Act III, Scene II of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* – where the Pilgrim is in prison after his trial in Vanity Fair. See Frogley, *Vaughan Williams’s Ninth Symphony*, pp. 284-285ff.

machine in the *Sinfonia antartica*, as Michael Kennedy less specifically implies in his book on Vaughan Williams.<sup>368</sup>

Ex. 6.12: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act II, Scene II (from one measure before Rehearsal 16c through one measure after Rehearsal 18)

The huge shadow of Apollyon is now clearly seen. The Pilgrim starts back and stands facing him— no light on the Pilgrim so that his outline shows black against the light.\*

16c

17 Voice of Apollyon, off

AP.  
AP.

Whence come you?  
Wo-herkommst du?

*fp* *f* *ff* *p subito*

*gva bassa*.....

stage through megaphone.

18 The Pilgrim steps forward.

AP.  
AP.

And whither are you bound?  
Und wo-hin willst du geh'n?

DOLEFUL CREATURES  
ELENDE GESCHÖPFE

CHORUS

*p* *ff*

The A-flat minor/G minor poly-chord appears again in the moment when Apollyon thinks he has bested the Pilgrim in combat.

<sup>368</sup> Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 355.

Ex. 6.13: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act II, Scene II (from two measures after Rehearsal 21 through five measures after Rehearsal 21)

The image shows a musical score for a scene in Vaughan Williams' *The Pilgrim's Progress*. The score is divided into three parts: Apollyon, Chorus, and Piano. The Apollyon part is in bass clef and includes the lyrics: "Sure-ly I have thee now." and "End-lich, jetzt hab' ich dich." The Chorus part consists of two staves, one in treble clef and one in bass clef, with a dynamic marking of *f*. The Piano part is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and includes dynamic markings of *pp* and *sf*. The score is in 4/4 time and features complex harmonic textures, including a prominent tritone chord.

All instances of this chord, as well as the musical “wailings” of the doleful creatures, clash decidedly with the Pilgrim’s rebuffs of Apollyon leading up to the actual combat. The first of these presents a tune that the Pilgrim will sing in a later scene (where it takes on the dimensions of a hymn) when he finds the means to escape from prison after his episode in Vanity Fair.

Ex. 6.14 Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act II, Scene II (from eight measures prior to Rehearsal 19 up to Rehearsal 19, see especially the second line)

PIL.  
PIL.

Moderato ♩ = 120

is death. There-fore I bound my-self\_ to an - o - ther.  
ist Tod. Da - her ge - lobt' ich Treu' ei - nem an - dern,

e - ven the King - of prin - ces. -  
ihm, - dem Kö - nig der Für - sten. -

*f*

*p*

Upon the conclusion of the combat, the Pilgrim essentially declares victory and the music launches directly into a short statement of the “Who would true valor see” tune found in the “Arming of the Pilgrim” scene discussed earlier. Notice the interruption of this tune in the form of the doleful creatures hastily departing the scene, offering a last, perfunctory version of their musical gesture.

Ex. 6.15: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Act II, Scene II (Rehearsal 22 and following)

As in the cases of the other scenes examined, Vaughan Williams here associates the hymn idiom with the moral high ground and the Pilgrim's victory. He positions a small amount of the hymn-like music in such a manner that it nonetheless overshadows what many may consider his more contemporary music in the scene. In keeping with the pattern I have been discussing, he assigns yet another diatonic, stanzaic tune to close the act immediately after the Pilgrim's victory over Apollyon. The narrative picks up once more when the Pilgrim, in his own words, grows weak because of his wounds and collapses. Whereupon, a "Heavenly Being" appears and revives him with leaves from the "Tree of Life" and then the "Water of Life" so that he can continue his journey. Once more, much of this tune is squarely diatonic. The fact that the Heavenly Being sings it twice to different words serves to group it with the other simple, diatonic tunes considered, even if it is perhaps not strictly hymn-like on account of its flowing accompaniment. The words of the first stanza, at least, are quite pastorally suggestive.

Unto him that overcometh shall be given the Tree of Life,  
 Which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.  
 On either side of the river growth the Tree of Life,  
 the leaves of the tree are for thy healing.

Eventually the Evangelist appears again to guide the Pilgrim on his way. The scene closes in likewise modest musical proportions as both the Evangelist and the Heavenly Being promise the Pilgrim “The Crown of Life” if he is faithful to the end.

The music in Act II, Scene II that occurs leading up to Apollyon’s defeat illustrates another point about this opera that merits consideration. A significant portion of the music bears kinship with the more “dissonant” or harmonically complex, and hence more widely accepted notions of “modern,” music that the composer produced in the 1930s and 1940s. But not all of this music receives subordinate treatment to simpler mediums in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. An intriguing example comes from a strongly suggestive parallel with Vaughan Williams’s music for *Scott of the Antarctic* that appears between the Nocturne Intermezzo and the beginning of Act II, Scene I. Michael Kennedy was the first to point out that this brief section of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* dates from Vaughan Williams’s work on the Scott film music.<sup>369</sup> I would go further in suggesting that the music at this juncture is perhaps a recasting of moments from the scherzo second movement of the *Sinfonia antartica*, which is based substantially upon the *Scott* film music. Under a new stage direction – “The stage lights up gradually behind the curtain” – this “interlude at the end of an interlude” (my phrase) appears. The harmony suddenly changes from a predominantly consonant framework, comprised almost entirely of major and minor triads, to one where the tritone becomes more prominent and where rotating scales in the treble, conforming in large part to the Lydian mode, work against triads often separated by minor second intervals in the bass.

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<sup>369</sup> See Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, p. 353. In the Grove Opera article on *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Kennedy points out that Watchful’s Nocturne and the Enlargement of the Vanity Fair scene occurred in 1951-1952 before the premiere. See Kennedy, “Pilgrim’s Progress, The,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, edited by Stanley Sadie. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O009443> (accessed October 11, 2010).

Ex. 6.16: Vaughan Williams, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Conclusion of Nocturne-Intermezzo (the seven measures following from Rehearsal M)

The stage lights up gradually behind the curtain

(M) Allegro moderato

*fp*

*p*

*marcato ma legato*

The image shows a page of musical notation for a piano. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system has a treble clef staff with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The bass clef staff has a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The first system is marked 'Allegro moderato' and 'fp'. The second system is marked 'marcato ma legato'. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Consider the melodic, harmonic, and gestural similarities between this and a sample of what occurs at the outset of the second movement of the *Sinfonia antartica*.

Ex. 6.17: Vaughan Williams, *Sinfonia antartica*, Mov. II, mm. 10-13

The image displays a page of a musical score for Vaughan Williams' *Sinfonia antartica*, Movement II, measures 10-13. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves for each instrument family. The instruments listed on the left include Flutes (Fls.), Piccolo (Picc.), Oboes (Obs.), Clarinets (Clars.), Bass Clarinet (B. Cl.), Bassoons (Fags.), Cor Anglais (Cor. Ang.), Trumpets (Tpts.), Trombones (Tbns.), Tuba, Percussion (Perc.), Harp (Hp.), Piano (Pfte.), Violins I (Vl. I), Violins II (Vl. II), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Cello), and Bass (Bass). The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and various articulations such as slurs and accents. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The page number '40' is centered at the bottom.

This is likely a case of consciously recasting materials, supported by Vaughan Williams's habit of borrowing from his own music and even making something of a game in seeing if others

would notice. Hence, the question once more arises as to whether this recasting signifies something beyond itself. Very likely, Vaughan Williams thought that this bit of seemingly Scott-derived music would simply serve as good material to accompany the transition of scenes in which it appears. But given what the secondary literature offers in terms of a tangible Pilgrim-Scott connection, and given the observations that here support that notion, it is also possible that he made a conscious decision to include a modest Scott link in a work that would serve as a personal moral and stylistic compendium.

The presumably Scott-derived music's placement at this precise place in the operatic narrative is curious. It comes in perhaps the most unobtrusive, even "tucked away" location possible. Such a position indeed seems to downplay the notion that it points to anything beyond the practical need mentioned above. Even so, here is material that shares much with Vaughan Williams's Scott period but is not subject to any immediate upstaging by the hymn idiom as occurs elsewhere in this morality. Vaughan Williams allows the end of the interlude between Acts I and II to stand alone. It does not serve the function of coloring the doubt, conflict, or vices leading up to a deciding "moral victory" – outcomes typically reserved in this opera for hymns or other largely diatonic and stanzaic music. If the inclusion of this Scott-related music into an opera dubbed "a morality" is a conscious artistic choice, and therefore a moral one, it is fair to conclude that Vaughan Williams made purposeful, if fleeting, reference to the anti-pastoral world of Scott and the Antarctic. In doing so, he may have fashioned some sort of moral kinship, if not exactly moral equivalency, between Scott's quest and that of the Pilgrim.

There is another artistic choice worth considering when contemplating the most recognizably pastoral scene in Vaughan Williams's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. I have already

discussed Act IV, Scene II in Chapter 4, as being a nearly wholesale transplanted of *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* and differing almost solely in the “crossing over the river” portions.<sup>370</sup> The inclusion of the Delectable Mountains scene in this “morality” would alone establish pastoral credentials for the whole work. However, the scene emphasizes in a different way the moral choices Vaughan Williams made in this his final completed opera. Namely, the inclusion of virtually the whole of a much earlier composition into *The Pilgrim’s Progress* demonstrates his belief that music need not be “new” to be enjoyed or have relevance in a different setting. As with other portions of this opera, and as his writings show, he was more concerned with what he needed at a given time and place, regardless of how old or new the materials might be, than with their conformity to some arbitrary aesthetic or modernist standard. One passage from his brief musical autobiography (written in 1947 and 1948 when he was working on both the Scott and Pilgrim music) holds some relevance to this situation:

Why should music be ‘original’? The object of art is to stretch out to ultimate realities through the medium of beauty. The duty of the composer is to find the *mot juste*. It does not matter of this word has been said a thousand times before as long as it is the right thing to say at the moment. I never had any conscience about cribbing.<sup>371</sup>

Reading such statements and seeing *Shepherds’* place in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* may lead one to ask whether Vaughan Williams was making a moral statement simply by including the former into the latter in almost its complete original form. This is especially so since, as Nathaniel Lew points out, *Shepherds’* presence within the later opera creates some very noticeable stylistic inconsistencies. These in turn have led to criticisms then and now that the opera is in several

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<sup>370</sup> One other very small difference involves the names of the shepherds in *The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains* versus the simple numbering (First, Second, and Third) of the shepherds in Act IV, Scene II of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.

<sup>371</sup> Vaughan Williams, “A Musical Autobiography,” in *National Music and Other Essays*, p. 190.

ways uneven and heterogeneous. Given this, it is tempting to ask whether Vaughan Williams's decision to include *Shepherds* in such a manner stems from morally courageous impulses. Was he, in part, making a defiant statement when he incorporated an almost unaltered work decades old into it?

In conclusion I return to the notion that Vaughan Williams indulged in the "backward" by producing a work such as *The Pilgrim's Progress* at a time when his exploratory impulses seemed more pronounced than they had ever been. The charge has in at least one case been exaggerated, as when Hugh Ottaway suggested that the opera truly belongs to the period prior to the late phase, despite being completed in 1949.<sup>372</sup> The multiple examples of the Scott-period music and gestures in *The Pilgrim's Progress* discussed earlier, as well as their links to the Ninth Symphony and other late works cited by Frogley, compromise such a claim. However, it remains true, as I have shown and as Lew's remark quoted at the outset of this chapter partially suggests, that Vaughan Williams's use of the hymn idiom frequently overshadows the ample presence of a late-period manner, often in order to color the moral messages presented in several of the scenes.

While one may readily acknowledge that *The Pilgrim's Progress* does not display certain aspects of Vaughan Williams's late music in their most obvious light, a closer glance at this opera, in conjunction with his written statements that use Bunyan tropes as illustrative tools, prompts us to entertain another notion: for all of its apparently conservative elements, *The Pilgrim's Progress* could only have been completed at the end of Vaughan Williams's long

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<sup>372</sup> Ottaway, "Scott and After: The Final Phase," p. 961. Ottaway's date of completion is questionable for reasons mentioned earlier. Elsewhere, he makes clear what he considers to be *The Pilgrim's Progress's* dramatic and musical shortcomings. For example, see Ottaway, Recording Review: "Vaughan Williams: The Pilgrim's Progress. Noble, Herinx, Case, etc./LPO and Choir/Boult," in *The Musical Times* Vol. 113, No. 1551 (May, 1972), pp. 469-470.

career. I return to one particular statement in his tribute to the elderly Sibelius mentioned earlier, to further illustrate the point.

...his harmonic vocabulary is hardly different from that of Beethoven or Schubert. Yet (or is it therefore?) his music sounds absolutely new, and will remain new when the twelve tones have become intolerably old-fashioned...Sibelius has gone straight up Hill Difficulty and has left it to others to wander to destruction in Bypass Meadow; he will be the first to arrive at the Celestial City, even if the others arrive at all and are not refused admittance because they have no certificate. So up the hill the Pilgrim goes, along the well trodden path, and there he can find priceless jewels which perhaps only he can see and know how to use.<sup>373</sup>

Vaughan Williams's tribute to Sibelius – one venerable composer's tribute to another venerable composer – is essentially one musical pilgrim's tribute to another. It amounts to Vaughan Williams's recognition that Sibelius's path to success as a composer was similar to the one he trod – hard won and with original results made possible by, rather than in spite of, finding relevance in old musical traditions. Seen in this light, *The Pilgrim's Progress* assumes the character of Vaughan Williams's very own pastoral allegory not only in the sense that it reaffirms his lifelong value of finding continued relevance in traditional tunes, but also in its unmistakable reflection, almost at the end of his own long life, of himself as a truth-seeking artist. The struggles of Vaughan Williams's Pilgrim were his own; through hard work, persistence, diligent study, and adherence to the principles he taught and defended his whole life, he could in the end be vindicated.

Likewise, with the *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Vaughan Williams once more accesses a rich pastoral tradition to suit the artistic and personal concerns of a particular stage in his life. It is fitting that the pastoral as moral allegory is discernable at this point in his long career. Until then

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<sup>373</sup> Vaughan Williams, "Sibelius," p. 261.

he lacked the complete experience necessary to look back upon a full life in such a comprehensive and retrospective manner. In this light, the facts that the work draws upon music from throughout his life, and that it was finished only at the end of it, become significant. If there was a period in which it was appropriate for Vaughan Williams to produce an opera that intersects with the literary pastoral tradition of moral allegory, it was precisely when he did. In this respect, at least, *The Pilgrim's Progress* belongs entirely to the time in which all of its parts appeared presented as a whole.

## Epilogue

The preceding pages offer a broad survey of significant ways in which Vaughan Williams's musical endeavors intersect with the pastoral mode. Chapter 1 identified major pastoral themes in his career and music, compared them to broad cultural and historical conceptions of the pastoral mode, and outlined major obstacles that arise when negotiating the two. Chapter 2 argued that Vaughan Williams's favorite novel, George Borrow's *Lavengro*, influenced his early views on folksong and formed part of a larger cultural climate in which the countryside was sometimes seen as a source of clues to past origins. Chapter 3 discussed Vaughan Williams's early pastoral music in light of pre-Great War English optimism, and his own formative preoccupations. Chapters 4 and 5 explored the elegiac mode and the multiple ways in which it is present in the composer's pastoral music following the two wars. Finally, Chapter 6 showed how his treasured lifelong project, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, is in many ways not only the composer's very own personal and artistic testament, but also a rich musical morality tale in the tradition of the pastoral allegory.

With all of these discussions I have nonetheless only scratched the surface of my topic. In a recent book review, Byron Adams made the following perceptive comment: "One of the mysterious aspects of Vaughan Williams's achievement is that, as more and more information becomes available about his life and music, the ambiguity surrounding his beliefs, aesthetics, and character only deepens."<sup>374</sup> As I reflect upon the chapters offered here, I cannot help but contemplate these words as one may apply them to Vaughan Williams and the pastoral mode. After writing this dissertation, I am left with more questions than answers. For example, when were discernable "pastoral" patterns in his compositions the result of conscious decisions to

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<sup>374</sup> Adams, Book Review: "Hugh Cobbe, ed., *The Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) in *Twentieth-Century Music* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Sep, 2009): p. 264.

write such associated music? When were they the result of less premeditated and more sublimated responses to his own experiences and to the many layers of tradition that influenced him? To some extent these questions may be unanswerable. But it is clear that much more work remains to be done. One of the larger areas of further research that I have left largely unplumbed is the relationship of Vaughan Williams's pastoral music to that produced by his contemporaries and younger colleagues. How, for instance, does Vaughan Williams's encounters with the pastoral mode relate to Moeran's, Finzi's, and others'? How do their personal takes on the pastoral mode likewise relate to the past conventions discussed here in ways that may differ from or align with those of Vaughan Williams?

While many authors have lent to our understanding of Vaughan Williams and nationalism, and other points of focus, it will take more than the limited perspective of one or a few people before we begin to arrive at a broad understanding of Vaughan Williams and the pastoral mode. If the recent spate of Vaughan Williams scholarship is any indication, even then much new information and analysis may arrive that both provides new insights and yet leaves much more to be discovered. Adams's expressed pattern stands a good chance of being the norm for a long while to come.

## Appendix A: A List of Pastoral-Related Works by Vaughan Williams

Composition	Years Completed
<i>Echo's Lament of Narcissus</i> (Madrigal for Choir, text by Jonson)	1895-1896
<i>The Splendour Falls</i> (Song, text by Alfred Tennyson)	Abt. 1896
<i>How Can the Tree but Whither?</i> (Song, text by Vaux)	1898
<i>Claribel</i> (Song, text by Tennyson)	1898
<i>The Garden of Prosperine</i> (Choir and Orchestra, text by Swinburne)	1899
<i>Bucolic Suite</i> (Orchestra)	1900
<i>Linden Lea</i> (Song, text by Barnes)	1901
<i>Blackwore by the Stour</i> (Song, text by William Barnes)	1902
<i>Tears, Idle Tears</i> (Song, text by Tennyson)	1902
<i>When I am Dead, My Dearest</i> (Song, text by C. Rossetti)	Abt. 1903
<i>The Winter's Willow</i> (Song, text by Barnes)	Abt. 1903
<i>Silent Noon</i> (Song, text by D.G. Rossetti)	1903
<i>Willow-Wood</i> (Song, later Cantata for baritone and orchestra; text by D.G. Rossetti)	1903, 1909
<i>Sound Sleep</i> (Song, text by C. Rossetti)	1903
<i>Orpheus With His Lute</i> (Song, text by Shakespeare)	1903
<i>In the Fen Country</i> (Orchestra)	1904
<i>The House of Life</i> (Song Cycle inc. <i>Silent Noon</i> , texts by D.G. Rossetti)	1904
<i>Songs of Travel</i> (Song Cycle, texts by R.L. Stevenson)	1904
<i>Dreamland</i> (Song, text by C. Rossetti)	1904
Orchestral Impressions ( <i>Harnham Down</i> and <i>The Solent</i> completed)	1904-1907
<i>Pan's Anniversary</i> (Incidental Music for Jonson's Masque, produced in collaboration with Gustav Holst)	1905
<i>Norfolk Rhapsodies 1-3</i> (Only No. 1 survives)	1906
<i>Toward the Unknown Region</i> (Song for Chorus and Orchestra, text by Whitman)	1907
<i>The Sky Above the Roof</i> (Song, text by Paul Verlaine)	1908
<i>On Wenlock Edge</i> (Song Cycle, texts by A.E. Housman)	1909

<i>Romance and Pastoral</i> for Violin and Piano	Before 1914
<i>The Lark Ascending</i> (Romance for Violin and Orchestra or Violin and Piano, after a poem by George Meredith)	1914 (Revised 1920)
<i>Hugh the Drover</i> (Opera in Two Acts, libretto by Harold Child)	1914 (Revised afterward)
<i>A Pastoral Symphony</i> (No. 3) (Orchestra and Wordless Soloist)	1921
<i>Four Poems by Fredegond Shove</i> (Songs)	Abt. 1922
<i>The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains</i> (Pastoral Episode in 1 Act, after Bunyan)	1923
<i>Old King Cole</i> (Ballet)	1923
<i>Flos Campi</i> (Suite for Solo Viola, Mixed Wordless Chorus, and Small Orchestra; texts from the Old Testament Book <i>Song of Solomon</i> )	1925
“Orpheus With His Lute” (second setting) from <i>Three Songs from Shakespeare</i> (Song)	1925
<i>Two Poems by Seumas O’Sullivan</i> (Songs)	1925
<i>Three Poems by Walt Whitman</i> (Songs)	Abt. 1925
<i>Along the Field</i> (Song Cycle, texts by A.E. Housman)	1927
<i>Job</i> (Masque, story based on Old Testament Book of <i>Job</i> )	1930
Film Music for <i>The Loves of Joanna Godden</i>	1946
<i>An Oxford Elegy</i> (for Speaker, Mixed Chorus, and Small Orchestra; texts by Matthew Arnold)	1949
<i>The Pilgrim’s Progress</i> and related works (Morality in 4 Acts with Prologue and Epilogue, adapted from Bunyan)	1951
“Hill Over Dale” (From <i>Three Shakespeare Songs</i> )	1951
<i>In the Spring</i> (Song, text by William Barnes)	1952
<i>Hodie (This Day)</i> (Christmas Cantata, Various texts)	1954
<i>Symphony No. 9 in E Minor</i> (surviving manuscripts bear references to Hardy’s <i>Tess of the</i>	1956

<i>d'Urbervilles)</i>	
<i>Ten Blake Songs</i> (Songs for Oboe and Piano)	1957

## **Appendix B: *Linden Lea* Texts (Barnes)**

### Standard English Text Used by Vaughan Williams in his 1901 Song

Within the woodlands, flow'ry gladed,  
By the oak trees' mossy moot,  
The shining grass blades, timber-shaded,  
Now do quiver underfoot;  
And birds do whistle overhead,  
And water's bubbling in its bed;  
And there, for me, the apple tree  
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

When leaves, that lately were a-springing,  
Now do fade within the copse,  
And painted birds do hush their singing,  
Up upon the timber tops;  
And brown-leaved fruits a-turning red,  
In cloudless sunshine overhead,  
With fruit for me, the apple tree  
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

Let other folk make money faster  
In the air of dark-roomed towns;  
I don't dread a peevish master,  
Though no man may heed my frowns.  
I be free to go abroad,  
Or take again my homeward road  
To where, for me, the apple tree  
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

### Original Version of the Poem Using the Dorset Dialect

'Ithin the woodlands, flow'ry glëaded,  
By the woak trees' mossy moot,  
The sheened grass blëades, timber-shëaded,  
Now do quiver under voot;  
An' birds do whissle over head,  
An' water's bubblen in its bed,  
An' there vor me the apple tree  
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

When leaves that lëately were a-springen  
Now do fade 'ithin the copse,  
An' painted birds do hush their singen  
Up upon the timber tops;

An' brown leaved fruit's a-turnen red,  
In cloudless zunsheen, auverhead,  
Wi' fruit vor me, the apple tree  
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

Let other vo'k mëake money vaster  
In the air o' dark-room'd towns,  
I don't dread a peevish mëaster;  
Though noo man do heed my frowns.  
I be free to goo abrode,  
Or teake agëan my hwomeward road  
To where, vor me, the apple tree  
Do lean down low in Linden Lea.

(Source: Vaughan Williams, *Linden Lea*, Boosey & Co. Ltd., 1912)

**Appendix C: *The New Ghost* (Fredegond Shove, 1918)**

And he cast it down, down, on the green grass,  
Over the young crocuses, where the dew was.  
He cast the garment of his flesh that was full of death,  
And like a sword his spirit showed out of the cold sheath.

He went a pace or two, he went to meet his Lord  
And, as I said, his spirit looked like a clean sword,  
And seeing him the naked trees began shivering  
And all the birds cried out aloud as it were late spring.

And the Lord came on, He came down, and saw  
That a soul was waiting there for Him, one without flaw,  
And they embraced in the churchyard where the robins play,  
And the daffodils hang down their heads, as they burn away.

The Lord held his head fast, and you could see  
That He kissed the unsheathed ghost that was gone free  
As a hot sun, on a March day, kisses the cold ground;  
And the spirit answered, for he knew well that his peace was found.

The spirit trembled, and sprang up at the Lord's word,  
As on a wild April day, springs a small bird,  
So the ghost's feet lifting him up, he kissed the Lord's cheek,  
And for the greatness of their love neither of them could speak.

But the Lord went then, to show him the way,  
Over the young crocuses, under the green may  
That was not quite in flower yet, to a far distant land:  
And the ghost followed like a naked cloud holding the sun's hand.

**Appendix D: *The Water Mill* (Fredegond Shove, 1918)**

There is a mill, an ancient one,  
Brown with rain, and dry with sun,  
The miller's house is joined with it,  
And in July the swallows flit  
To and fro, in and out,  
Round the windows, all about;  
The mill wheel whirrs and the waters roar  
Out of the dark arch by the door,  
The willows toss their silver heads,  
And the phloxes in the garden beds  
Turn red, turn grey,  
With the time of day,  
And smell sweet in the rain, then die away.

The miller's cat is a tabby, she  
Is as lean as a healthy cat can be,  
She plays in the loft where the sunbeams stroke  
The sacks' fat backs, and beetles choke  
In the floury dust. The Wheel goes round  
And the miller's wife sleeps fast and sound.

There is a clock inside the house,  
Very tall and very bright,  
It strikes the hour when shadows drowse,  
Or showers make the windows white;  
Loud and sweet, in rain and sun,  
The clock strikes, and the work is done.  
The miller's wife and his eldest girl  
Clean and cook, while the mill wheels whirl.  
The children take their meat to school,  
And at dusk they play by the twilit pool;  
Bare-foot, bare-head,  
Till the day is dead,  
And their mother calls them in to bed.

The supper stands on the clean-scrubbed board,  
And the miller drinks like a thirsty lord;  
The young men come for their daughter's sake,  
But she never knows which one to take;  
She drives her needle, and pins her stuff,  
While the moon shines gold, and the lamp shines buff.

## Appendix E: *Flos Campi* Epigraphs (With King James Translations/Verse Numbers)

### Published Score

Movement 1: *Sicut Liliū inter spinas, sic amica mea inter filias...Fulcite me floribus, stipate me malis, quia amore langueo.* ("As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters... Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick with love."---Song of Solomon 2:2,5)

Movement 2: *Jam enim hiems transiit; imber abiit, et recessit; Flores apparuerunt in terra nostra, Tempus putationis advenit; Vox turturis audita est in terra nostra.* ("For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land."---Song of Solomon 2:11-12)

Movement 3: *Quaesivi quem diligit anima mea; quaesivi illum, et non inveni . . . 'Adjuro vos, filiae Jerusalem, si inveneritis dilectum meum, ut nuntietis et quia amore langueo' . . . Quo abiit dilectus tuus, O pulcherrima mulierum? Quo declinavit dilectus tuus? et quaeremus eum tecum.* ("I sought him whom my soul loveth, but I found him not... 'I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him I am sick with love'... Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women? Whither is thy beloved turned aside? that we may seek him with thee."---Song of Solomon 3:1, 5:8, 6:1)

Movement 4: *En lectulum Salomonis sexaginta fortes ambiunt...omnes tenentes gladios, et ad bella doctissimi.* ("Behold his bed [palanquin], which is Solomon's, three score valiant men are about it...They all hold swords, being expert in war."---Song of Solomon 3:7-8)

Movement 5: *Revertere, revertere Sulamitis! Revertere, revertere ut intueamur te...Quam pulchri sunt gressus tui in calceamentis, filia principis.* ("Return, return, O Shulamite! Return, return, that we may look upon thee...How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O Prince's daughter."---Song of Solomon 6:13, 7:1)

Movement 6: *Pone me ut signaculum super cor tuum.* ("Set me as a seal upon thine heart."---Song of Solomon 8:6a)

### Crossed-out Epigraph in Ms.Mus. 1584

Movement 6: *Capite nobis vulpes vulpes parvulas quae demoliuntur vineas nam vinea nostra floruit.* ("Take us the foxes, the little foxes, That spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes."---Song of Solomon 2:15)

## Appendix F: Vaughan Williams's Adapted Text for *An Oxford Elegy* and the Original Poems by Matthew Arnold

### Vaughan Williams's Adapted Text for *An Oxford Elegy* (Taken from Matthew Arnold's *The Scholar-Gipsy* and *Thyrsis*)

Go, for they call you, Shepherd, from the hill;  
Go, Shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes:  
No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed,  
Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats,  
Nor the cropp'd grasses shoot another head.  
But when the fields are still,  
And the tired men and dogs all gone to rest,  
And only the white sheep are sometimes seen  
Cross and recross the strips of moon-blanch'd green;  
Come Shepherd, and again begin the quest.

Here will I sit and wait,  
While to my ear from uplands far away  
The bleating of the folded flocks is borne,  
With distant cries of reapers in the corn-  
All the live murmur of a summer's day.  
*(Here will I sit and wait,  
While to my ear from uplands far away  
The bleating of the folded flocks is borne,  
With distant cries of reapers in the corn-  
All the live murmur of a summer's day.)*

Screen'd is this nook o'er the high, half-reap'd field,  
And here till sun-down, Shepherd, will I be.  
Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep,  
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see  
Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep;  
And air-swept lindens yield  
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed showers  
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,  
And bower me from the August sun with shade;  
And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers,  
*That sweet city with her dreaming spires;  
She needs not summer for beauty's heightening:  
Lovely all times she lies, lovely today.*

Come, let me read the oft-read tale again:  
The story of that Oxford scholar poor,  
Who, one summer morn forsook his friends,  
And came, as most men deem'd, to little good,  
But came to Oxford and his friends no more.

But rumours hung about the country-side,  
That the lost Scholar long was seen to stray,  
Seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied,  
And I myself seem half to know thy looks,  
And put the shepherds, Wanderer, on thy trace;

Or in my boat I lie  
Moor'd to the cool bank in the summer heats,  
'Mid wide grass meadows which the sunshine fills,  
And watch the warm green-muffled Cumnor hills,  
And wonder if thou haunt'st their shy retreats.  
Leaning backwards in a pensive dream,  
And fostering in thy lap a heap of flowers  
Pluck'd in shy fields and distant Wychwood bowers,  
And thine eyes resting on the moonlit stream.  
Still waiting for the spark from Heaven to fall.

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill  
Where home through flooded fields foot-travellers go,  
Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge  
Wrapt in thy cloak and battling with the snow,  
Thy face tow'rd Hinksey and its wintry ridge?  
And thou hast climb'd the hill  
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumnor range;  
Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snowflakes fall,  
The line of festal light in Christ Church hall—  
Then sought thy straw in some sequester'd grange.

But what— I dream! Two hundred years are flown;  
And thou from earth art gone  
Long since, and in some quiet churchyard laid—  
Some country-nook, where o'er thy unknown grave  
Tall grasses and white flowering nettles wave—  
Under a dark, red-fruited yew-tree's shade.

No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours.  
Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven! and we,  
Ah, do not we, Wanderer, await it too?  
See, 'tis no foot of unfamiliar men  
Today from Oxford, up your pathway strays!  
Here came I often, often, in old days;  
Thyrsis and I; we still had Thyrsis then.

Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,  
Up past the Wood, to where the elm-tree crowns  
The hill behind whose ridge the sunset flames?

The signal-elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,  
The Vale, the three lone weirs, the youthful Thames?—  
That single elm-tree bright  
Against the west—I miss it! is it gone?  
We prized it dearly; while it stood, we said,  
Our friend, the Scholar Gipsy, was not dead;  
While the tree lived, he in these fields lived on.  
Needs must I, with heavy heart  
Into the world and wave of men depart;  
But Thyrsis of his own will went away.

So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,  
From the wet field, through the vext garden-trees,  
Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze:  
*The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I!*  
*Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go?*

*Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,  
Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,  
Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,  
Sweet-William with his homely cottage smell,  
And stocks in fragrant blow;  
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,  
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,  
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,  
And the full moon, and the white evening-star.*

He hearkens not! light comer, he is flown!  
What matters it? next year he will return,  
And we shall have him in the sweet spring-days,  
With whitening hedges, and uncrumpling fern,  
And blue-bells trembling by the forest-ways,  
And scent of hay new-mown.  
*(He will return.)*  
But Thyrsis never more we swains shall see.  
*(Never more.)*

Yet, Thyrsis, let me give my grief its hour  
In the old haunt; and find our tree-topped hill.  
I know these slopes; who knows them if not I?—  
But many a dingle on the loved hill-side,  
With thorns once studded, old, white-blossom'd trees,  
Where thick the cowslips grew, and far descried,  
High tower'd the spikes of purple orchises,  
Hath since our day put by  
The coronals of that forgotten time.

They are all gone, and thou art gone as well.

*Yes, thou art gone! and round me too the night  
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.  
I see her veil draw soft across the day,  
And long the way appears which seem'd so short,  
And high the mountain tops, in cloudy air,  
The mountain tops where is the throne of Truth!*

There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here  
Sole in these fields; yet will I not despair;  
Despair I will not, while I yet descry  
That lonely Tree against the western sky.  
Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the hay,  
Woods with anemonies in flower till May,  
Know him a wanderer still.

*(Roam on!)*

Then let in thy voice a whisper often come  
To chase fatigue and fear.

Why faintest thou! I wander'd till I died.  
Roam on! the light we sought is shining still.  
Our tree yet crowns the hill,  
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hillside.  
*(Why faintest thou! I wander'd till I died.  
Roam on! the light we sought is shining still.  
Our tree yet crowns the hill,  
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hillside.)*

*The Scholar-Gipsy (Matthew Arnold, 1853)*

Go, for they call you, Shepherd, from the hill;  
Go, Shepherd, and untie the wattled cotes:  
No longer leave thy wistful flock unfed,  
Nor let thy bawling fellows rack their throats,  
Nor the cropp'd grasses shoot another head.  
But when the fields are still,  
And the tired men and dogs all gone to rest,  
And only the white sheep are sometimes seen  
Cross and recross the strips of moon-blanch'd green;  
Come Shepherd, and again begin the quest.

Here, where the reaper was at work of late,  
In this high field's dark corner, where he leaves

His coat, his basket, and his earthen cruise,  
And in the sun all morning binds the sheaves,  
Then here, at noon, comes back his stores to use;  
Here will I sit and wait,  
While to my ear from uplands far away  
The bleating of the folded flocks is borne,  
With distant cries of reapers in the corn—  
All the live murmur of a summer's day.

Screen'd is this nook o'er the high, half-reap'd field,  
And here till sundown, Shepherd, will I be.  
Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep,  
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see  
Pale blue convolvulus in tendrils creep:  
And air-swept lindens yield  
Their scent, and rustle down their perfumed showers  
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid,  
And bower me from the August sun with shade;  
And the eye travels down to Oxford's towers:

And near me on the grass lies Glanvil's book—  
Come, let me read the oft-read tale again:  
The story of that Oxford scholar poor,  
Of pregnant parts and quick inventive brain,  
Who, tired of knocking at Preferment's door,  
One summer morn forsook  
His friends, and went to learn the Gipsy lore,  
And roam'd the world with that wild brotherhood,  
And came, as most men deem'd, to little good,  
But came to Oxford and his friends no more.

But once, years after, in the country lanes,  
Two scholars, whom at college erst he knew,  
Met him, and of his way of life inquired.  
Whereat he answer'd that the Gipsy crew,  
His mates, had arts to rule as they desired  
The workings of men's brains;  
And they can bind them to what thoughts they will:  
'And I,' he said, 'the secret of their art,  
When fully learn'd, will to the world impart:  
But it needs Heaven-sent moments for this skill!'

This said, he left them, and return'd no more,  
But rumours hung about the country-side,  
That the lost Scholar long was seen to stray,  
Seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied,

In hat of antique shape, and cloak of grey,  
The same the Gipsies wore.  
Shepherds had met him on the Hurst in spring;  
At some lone alehouse in the Berkshire moors,  
On the warm ingle-bench, the smock-frock'd boors  
Had found him seated at their entering,

But 'mid their drink and clatter, he would fly:  
And I myself seem half to know thy looks,  
And put the shepherds, Wanderer, on thy trace;  
And boys who in lone wheatfields scare the rooks  
I ask if thou hast pass'd their quiet place;  
Or in my boat I lie  
Moor'd to the cool bank in the summer heats,  
'Mid wide grass meadows which the sunshine fills,  
And watch the warm green-muffled Cumnor hills,  
And wonder if thou haunt'st their shy retreats.

For most, I know, thou lov'st retirèd ground.  
Thee, at the ferry, Oxford riders blithe,  
Returning home on summer nights, have met  
Crossing the stripling Thames at Bablock-hithe,  
Trailing in the cool stream thy fingers wet,  
As the slow punt swings round:  
And leaning backwards in a pensive dream,  
And fostering in thy lap a heap of flowers  
Pluck'd in shy fields and distant Wychwood bowers,  
And thine eyes resting on the moonlit stream:

And then they land, and thou art seen no more.  
Maidens who from the distant hamlets come  
To dance around the Fyfield elm in May,  
Oft through the darkening fields have seen thee roam,  
Or cross a stile into the public way.  
Oft thou hast given them store  
Of flowers – the frail-leaf'd, white anemone—  
Dark bluebells drench'd with dews of summer eves,  
And purple orchises with spotted leaves—  
But none has words she can report of thee.

And, above Godstow Bridge, when hay-time's here  
In June, and many a scythe in sunshine flames,  
Men who through those wide fields of breezy grass  
Where black-wing'd swallows haunt the glittering Thames,  
To bathe in the abandon'd lasher pass,  
Have often pass'd thee near

Sitting upon the river bank o'ergrown:  
Mark'd thine outlandish garb, thy figure spare,  
Thy dark vague eyes, and soft abstracted air;  
But, when they came from bathing, thou wert gone.

At some lone homestead in the Cumnor hills,  
Where at her open door the housewife darns,  
Thou hast been seen, or hanging on a gate  
To watch the threshers in the mossy barns.  
Children, who early range these slopes and late  
For cresses from the rills,  
Have known thee watching, all an April day,  
The springing pastures and the feeding kine;  
And mark'd thee, when the stars come out and shine,  
Through the long dewy grass move slow away.

In autumn, on the skirts of Bagley Wood,  
Where most the Gipsies by the turf-edged way  
Pitch their smoked tents, and every bush you see  
With scarlet patches tagg'd and shreds of gray,  
Above the forest-ground call'd Thessaly—  
The blackbird picking food  
Sees thee, nor stops his meal, nor fears at all;  
So often has he known thee past him stray  
Rapt, twirling in thy hand a wither'd spray,  
And waiting for the spark from Heaven to fall.

And once, in winter, on the causeway chill  
Where home through flooded fields foot-travellers go,  
Have I not pass'd thee on the wooden bridge  
Wrapt in thy cloak and battling with the snow,  
Thy face towards Hinksey and its wintry ridge?  
And thou hast climb'd the hill  
And gain'd the white brow of the Cumnor range;  
Turn'd once to watch, while thick the snowflakes fall,  
The line of festal light in Christ Church hall—  
Then sought thy straw in some sequester'd grange.

But what—I dream! Two hundred years are flown  
Since first thy story ran through Oxford halls,  
And the grave Glanvil did the tale inscribe  
That thou wert wander'd from the studious walls  
To learn strange arts, and join a Gipsy tribe:  
And thou from earth art gone  
Long since and in some quiet churchyard laid;  
Some country nook, where o'er thy unknown grave

Tall grasses and white flowering nettles wave—  
Under a dark red-fruited yew-tree's shade.

—No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours.  
For what wears out the life of mortal men?  
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls:  
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,  
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls,  
And numb the elastic powers.  
Till having used our nerves with bliss and teen,  
And tired upon a thousand schemes our wit,  
To the just-pausing Genius we remit  
Our worn-out life, and are – what we have been.

Thou hast not lived, why shouldst thou perish, so?  
Thou hadst one aim, one business, one desire:  
Else wert thou long since number'd with the dead—  
Else hadst thou spent, like other men, thy fire.  
The generations of thy peers are fled,  
And we ourselves shall go;  
But thou possessest an immortal lot,  
And we imagine thee exempt from age  
And living as thou liv'st on Glanvil's page,  
Because thou hadst – what we, alas, have not!

For early didst thou leave the world, with powers  
Fresh, undiverted to the world without,  
Firm to their mark, not spent on other things;  
Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt,  
Which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings.  
O Life unlike to ours!  
Who fluctuate idly without term or scope,  
Of whom each strives, nor knows for what he strives,  
And each half lives a hundred different lives;  
Who wait like thee, but not, like thee, in hope.

Thou waitest for the spark from Heaven: and we,  
Vague half-believers of our casual creeds,  
Who never deeply felt, nor clearly will'd,  
Whose insight never has borne fruit in deeds,  
Whose weak resolves never have been fulfill'd;  
For whom each year we see  
Breeds new beginnings, disappointments new;  
Who hesitate and falter life away,  
And lose to-morrow the ground won to-day—  
Ah, do not we, Wanderer, await it too?

Yes, we await it, but it still delays,  
And then we suffer; and amongst us One,  
Who most has suffer'd, takes dejectedly  
His seat upon the intellectual throne;  
And all his store of sad experience he  
Lays bare of wretched days;  
Tells us his misery's birth and growth and signs,  
And how the dying spark of hope was fed,  
And how the breast was soothed, and how the head,  
And all his hourly varied anodynes.

This for our wisest: and we others pine,  
And wish the long unhappy dream would end,  
And waive all claim to bliss, and try to bear,  
With close-lipp'd Patience for our only friend,  
Sad Patience, too near neighbour to Despair:  
But none has hope like thine.  
Thou through the fields and through the woods dost stray,  
Roaming the country-side, a truant boy,  
Nursing thy project in unclouded joy,  
And every doubt long blown by time away.

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,  
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;  
Before this strange disease of modern life,  
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,  
Its heads o'ertax'd, its palsied hearts, was rife—  
Fly hence, our contact fear!  
Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood!  
Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern  
From her false friend's approach in Hades turn,  
Wave us away, and keep thy solitude.

Still nursing the unconquerable hope,  
Still clutching the inviolable shade,  
With a free onward impulse brushing through,  
By night, the silver'd branches of the glade—  
Far on the forest-skirts, where none pursue,  
On some mild pastoral slope  
Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales,  
Freshen they flowers, as in former years,  
With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,  
From the dark dingles, to the nightingales.

But fly our paths, our feverish contact fly!  
For strong the infection of our mental strife,

Which, though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest;  
And we should win thee from they own fair life,  
Like us distracted, and like us unblest.  
Soon, soon thy cheer would die,  
Thy hopes grow timorous, and unfix'd they powers,  
And they clear aims be cross and shifting made:  
And then thy glad perennial youth would fade,  
Fade, and grow old at last, and die like ours.

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!  
—As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,  
Descried at sunrise an emerging prow  
Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily,  
The fringes of a southward-facing brow  
Among the Aegean isles;  
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,  
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,  
Green bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in brine;  
And knew the intruders on his ancient home,

The young light-hearted Masters of the waves;  
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more sail,  
And day and night held on indignantly  
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,  
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,  
To where the Atlantic raves  
Outside the Western Straits, and unbent sails  
There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets of foam,  
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come;  
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

Thyrsis (Matthew Arnold, 1865)

How changed is here each spot man makes or fills!  
In the two Hinkseys nothing keeps the same;  
The village street its haunted mansion lacks,  
And from the sign is gone Sibylla's name,  
And from the roofs the twisted chimney-stacks--  
Are ye too changed, ye hills?  
See, 'tis no foot of unfamiliar men  
To-night from Oxford up your pathway strays!  
Here came I often, often, in old days--  
Thyrsis and I; we still had Thyrsis then.

Runs it not here, the track by Childsworth Farm,  
Past the high wood, to where the elm-tree crowns  
The hill behind whose ridge the sunset flames?  
The signal-elm, that looks on Ilsley Downs,  
The Vale, the three lone weirs, the youthful Thames?--  
This winter-eve is warm,  
Humid the air! leafless, yet soft as spring,  
The tender purple spray on copse and briers!  
And that sweet city with her dreaming spires,  
She needs not June for beauty's heightening,

Lovely all times she lies, lovely to-night!--  
Only, methinks, some loss of habit's power  
Befalls me wandering through this upland dim.  
Once passed I blindfold here, at any hour;  
Now seldom come I, since I came with him.  
That single elm-tree bright  
Against the west - I miss it! is it goner?  
We prized it dearly; while it stood, we said,  
Our friend, the Gipsy-Scholar, was not dead;  
While the tree lived, he in these fields lived on.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here,  
But once I knew each field, each flower, each stick;  
And with the country-folk acquaintance made  
By barn in threshing-time, by new-built rick.  
Here, too, our shepherd-pipes we first assayed.  
Ah me! this many a year  
My pipe is lost, my shepherd's holiday!  
Needs must I lose them, needs with heavy heart  
Into the world and wave of men depart;  
But Thyrsis of his own will went away.

It irked him to be here, he could not rest.  
He loved each simple joy the country yields,  
He loved his mates; but yet he could not keep,  
For that a shadow loured on the fields,  
Here with the shepherds and the silly sheep.  
Some life of men unblest  
He knew, which made him droop, and fill'd his head.  
He went; his piping took a troubled sound  
Of storms that rage outside our happy ground;  
He could not wait their passing, he is dead.

So, some tempestuous morn in early June,  
When the year's primal burst of bloom is o'er,

Before the roses and the longest day--  
When garden-walks and all the grassy floor  
With blossoms red and white of fallen May  
And chestnut-flowers are strewn--  
So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,  
From the wet field, through the vext garden-trees,  
Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze:  
The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I!

Too quick despairer, wherefore wilt thou go?  
Soon will the high Midsummer pomps come on,  
Soon will the musk carnations break and swell,  
Soon shall we have gold-dusted snapdragon,  
Sweet-William with his homely cottage-smell,  
And stocks in fragrant blow;  
Roses that down the alleys shine afar,  
And open, jasmine-muffled lattices,  
And groups under the dreaming garden-trees,  
And the full moon, and the white evening-star.

He hearkens not! light comer, he is flown!  
What matters it? next year he will return,  
And we shall have him in the sweet spring-days,  
With whitening hedges, and uncrumpling fern,  
And blue-bells trembling by the forest-ways,  
And scent of hay new-mown.  
But Thyrsis never more we swains shall see;  
See him come back, and cut a smoother reed,  
And blow a strain the world at last shall heed--  
For Time, not Corydon, hath conquered thee!

Alack, for Corydon no rival now!--  
But when Sicilian shepherds lost a mate,  
Some good survivor with his flute would go,  
Piping a ditty sad for Bion's fate;  
And cross the unpermitted ferry's flow,  
And relax Pluto's brow,  
And make leap up with joy the beauteous head  
Of Proserpine, among whose crowned hair  
Are flowers first opened on Sicilian air,  
And flute his friend, like Orpheus, from the dead.

O easy access to the hearer's grace  
When Dorian shepherds sang to Proserpine!  
For she herself had trod Sicilian fields,  
She knew the Dorian water's gush divine,

She knew each lily white which Enna yields  
Each rose with blushing face;  
She loved the Dorian pipe, the Dorian strain.  
But ah, of our poor Thames she never heard!  
Her foot the Cumner cowslips never stirr'd;  
And we should tease her with our plaint in vain!

Well! wind-dispersed and vain the words will be,  
Yet, Thyrsis, let me give my grief its hour  
In the old haunt, and find our tree-topp'd hill!  
Who, if not I, for questing here hath power?  
I know the wood which hides the daffodil,  
I know the Fyfield tree,  
I know what white, what purple fritillaries  
The grassy harvest of the river-fields,  
Above by Ensham, down by Sandford, yields,  
And what sedged brooks are Thames's tributaries;

I know these slopes; who knows them if not I?--  
But many a tingle on the loved hillside,  
With thorns once studded, old, white-blossom'd trees,  
Where thick the cowslips grew, and far descried  
High towered the spikes of purple orchises,  
Hath since our day put by  
The coronals of that forgotten time;  
Down each green bank hath gone the ploughboy's team,  
And only in the hidden brookside gleam  
Primroses, orphans of the flowery prime.

Where is the girl, who by the boatman's door,  
Above the locks, above the boating throng,  
Unmoored our skiff when through the Wytham flats,  
Red loosestrife and blond meadow-sweet among  
And darting swallows and light water-gnats,  
We tracked the shy Thames shore?  
Where are the mowers, who, as the tiny swell  
Of our boat passing heaved the river-grass,  
Stood with suspended scythe to see us pass?--  
They all are gone, and thou art gone as well!

Yes, thou art gone! and round me too the night  
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.  
I see her veil draw soft across the day,  
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade  
The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent with grey;  
I feel her finger light

Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train; --  
The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,  
The heart less bounding at emotion new,  
And hope, once crush'd, less quick to spring again.

And long the way appears, which seem'd so short  
To the less practised eye of sanguine youth;  
And high the mountain-tops, in cloudy air,  
The mountain-tops where is the throne of Truth,  
Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and bare!  
Unbreachable the fort  
Of the long-batter'd world uplifts its wall;  
And strange and vain the earthly turmoil grows,  
And near and real the charm of thy repose,  
And night as welcome as a friend would fall.

But hush! the upland hath a sudden loss  
Of quiet! - Look, adown the dusk hill-side,  
A troop of Oxford hunters going home,  
As in old days, jovial and talking, ride!  
From hunting with the Berkshire hounds they come.  
Quick! let me fly, and cross  
Into yon farther field! - 'Tis done; and see,  
Backed by the sunset, which doth glorify  
The orange and pale violet evening-sky,  
Bare on its lonely ridge, the Tree! the Tree!

I take the omen! Eve lets down her veil,  
The white fog creeps from bush to bush about,  
The west unflushes, the high stars grow bright,  
And in the scatter'd farms the lights come out.  
I cannot reach the signal-tree to-night,  
Yet, happy omen, hail!  
Hear it from thy broad lucent Arno-vale  
(For there thine earth forgetting eyelids keep  
The morningless and unawakening sleep  
Under the flowery oleanders pale),

Hear it, O Thyrsis, still our tree is there!--  
Ah, vain! These English fields, this upland dim,  
These brambles pale with mist engarlanded,  
That lone, sky-pointing tree, are not for him;  
To a boon southern country he is fled,  
And now in happier air,  
Wandering with the great Mother's train divine  
(And purer or more subtle soul than thee,

I trow, the mighty Mother doth not see)  
Within a folding of the Apennine,

Thou hearest the immortal chants of old!--  
Putting his sickle to the perilous grain  
In the hot cornfield of the Phrygian king,  
For thee the Lityerses-song again  
Young Daphnis with his silver voice doth sing;  
Sings his Sicilian fold,  
His sheep, his hapless love, his blinded eyes--  
And how a call celestial round him rang,  
And heavenward from the fountain-brink he sprang,  
And all the marvel of the golden skies.

There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here  
Sole in these fields! yet will I not despair.  
Despair I will not, while I yet descry  
'Neath the mild canopy of English air  
That lonely tree against the western sky.  
Still, still these slopes, 'tis clear,  
Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee!  
Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the hay,  
Woods with anemonies in flower till May,  
Know him a wanderer still; then why not me?

A fugitive and gracious light he seeks,  
Shy to illumine; and I seek it too.  
This does not come with houses or with gold,  
With place, with honour, and a flattering crew;  
'Tis not in the world's market bought and sold--  
But the smooth-slipping weeks  
Drop by, and leave its seeker still untired;  
Out of the heed of mortals he is gone,  
He wends unfollowed, he must house alone;  
Yet on he fares, by his own heart inspired.

Thou too, O Thyrsis, on like quest wast bound;  
Thou wanderest with me for a little hour!  
Men gave thee nothing; but this happy quest,  
If men esteem'd thee feeble, gave thee power,  
If men procured thee trouble, gave thee rest.  
And this rude Cumner ground,  
Its fir-topped Hurst, its farms, its quiet fields,  
Here came'st thou in thy jocund youthful time,  
Here was thine height of strength, thy golden prime!  
And still the haunt beloved a virtue yields.

What though the music of thy rustic flute  
Kept not for long its happy, country tone;  
Lost it too soon, and learnt a stormy note  
Of men contention-tost, of men who groan,  
Which tasked thy pipe too sore, and tired thy throat--  
It failed, and thou wage mute!  
Yet hadst thou always visions of our light,  
And long with men of care thou couldst not stay,  
And soon thy foot resumed its wandering way,  
Left human haunt, and on alone till night.

Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here!  
'Mid city-noise, not, as with thee of yore,  
Thyrsis! in reach of sheep-bells is my home.  
Then through the great town's harsh, heart-wearying roar,  
Let in thy voice a whisper often come,  
To chase fatigue and fear:  
*Why faintest thou! I wander'd till I died.*  
*Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.*  
*Dost thou ask proof? Our tree yet crowns the hill,*  
*Our Scholar travels yet the loved hill-side.*

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