

SYMBOL AND SONG:
INTERPRETING THE A.E. HOUSMAN SETTINGS OF JOHN IRELAND

BY

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Preface

John Ireland's settings of A.E. Housman evocatively capture both the poet's lyricism and tone, as has been examined in critical surveys of British song. The aim of the present project is to collect musicological perspectives, and importantly, to explore the poems themselves, fashioning an interpretive guide for those interested in performing (or teaching) the works.

Two factors crucial to the effective preparation & interpretation of art song are often unexplored in the voice studio due to constraints of time:

1. An understanding of a work's historical context
2. An understanding of poetic content

The technical execution of phrase and note should be viewed not as an end in and of itself; vocal technique is an art in the service of text. Word motivates a song composer's choice of note – and both are informed by cultural and personal contexts. Thus, the present study is concerned primarily with context (chapters on the “English Musical Renaissance,” A.E. Housman, and John Ireland) and poetic-musical analysis (with emphasis on the poetic).

This guide will be presented in conjunction with a performance of its surveyed works by Daniel Shirley, tenor. By increasing awareness and understanding of this important literature, the author hopes ultimately to encourage future performances by others.

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Abbreviations

ASL	<i>A Shropshire Lad</i>
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
EMR	English Musical Renaissance
RCM	Royal College of Music

Chapter 1: THE “ENGLISH MUSICAL RENAISSANCE”:

QUEST FOR A NATIONAL MUSIC

An examination of the history of English music – in particular the events of the late nineteenth-century which are associated with the so-called “English Musical Renaissance” – provides crucial context for A.E. Housman’s and John Ireland’s work.

Scanning the history of English music, one observes a startling gap in notable achievements by native-born composers for two whole centuries following the death of Henry Purcell, in 1695. The eighteenth century in London’s musical life was dominated by a German transplant, the court composer Georg Friedrich Händel – of course far better known as George Frederick Handel due to the enduring popularity of his London works, e.g. *Messiah* (HWV 56), *Zadok the Priest* (HWV 258; the “Coronation Anthem” dutifully performed since 1727), and *Music for the Royal Fireworks* (HWV 351). These and others have become so ingrained in the British musical consciousness that they have elicited patriotic feelings.¹ A later German visitor, Felix Mendelssohn, introduced the Victorian musical public to a palatable, inoffensive brand of nineteenth-century Romanticism during multiple tours over the course of nearly twenty years;² he premiered his English oratorio *Elijah* during one of his final visits in 1846.

“Royalty ballad” concerts were also immensely popular with the Victorian-era (nineteenth-century) musical public. Publishers such as John Boosey organized such

¹ Robert Stradling and Meirion Hughes, *The English Musical Renaissance 1860-1940: Construction and Deconstruction* (London: Routledge, 1993), 13.

² *Ibid.*

performances, and paid royalties to the popular singers of the day to promote and sing from their catalogs. Those families who could afford the luxury of a “piano in the parlour” might then be persuaded to purchase scores of songs “made famous by” a favorite ballad singer; thus, the tunes were churned out for commercial, not artistic, reasons.³ The musicologist Stephen Banfield minces no words in his utter distaste for songs of this sort:

It was the attitude of Victorian England to music as an exportable or importable – and on occasions expendable – commodity based largely on proven international standards of design and dimension which led to the ballad style, immediately recognizable by its very lack of distinction, in which personality was submerged, the influence of the text upon the music was at best pedestrian and at worst non-existent, the texture of the flowing accompaniment was uniformly ‘pianistic’, and the general idiom was such that procedures of Schubert, harmonies of Schumann, histrionics of Liszt, echoes of Grieg and foretastes of Fauré were alike reduced to a level of mediocre unmemorability.⁴

To him, royalty ballads represent the depths of exaggerated *sentimentality*, as opposed to literary and rhetorical *sensibility*. They cannot be deemed serious, enduring contributions to English song.

The bleak, mid-Victorian musical landscape thus consisted of triviality (royalty ballads) and the German influence (Mendelssohn and Handel). Britain offered neither a serious brand of “national” music, nor any serious musical response at all to Romanticism.⁵

The tides began turning in 1851, when London hosted the Great Exhibition, a world’s fair of industry and manufacturing. Intended to assert Britain’s dominance in commerce to the many international attendees, it evoked a spirit of national fervor which

³ Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 4-5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ Robert Hansen, "The Legacy of the Twentieth Century English Art Song," *The NATS Journal* 45, no.4 (March/April 1989): 4.

spread to the arts.⁶ Land in close proximity to the Great Exhibition area was designated the future home of the National Training School for Music; Albert (husband of Queen Victoria), presumably recognizing the vast political and cultural influence of music, became one of the school's indispensable lobbyists.⁷ Britain's "national music" was a political and patriotic venture from the beginning. The National Training School for Music was ultimately enveloped into the Royal College of Music, which was chartered in 1883, is still thriving, and is inextricably linked in history to the movement that would be known as the "English Musical Renaissance." (Morton Latham, in an 1888 lecture delivered at Stanford's College, Trinity, first used the word "Renaissance" to characterize this quest for national music; in doing so, he "spiritually" linked the artists of the sixteenth-century English Renaissance to his Victorian musical contemporaries.⁸)

George Grove (1820-1900), famous in music libraries the world over for the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, was appointed first Director of the RCM. He had been aligned with the "national music" cause for some years. The 1874 prospectus for his *Dictionary* can be thought of as a "manifesto" of the English Musical Renaissance; in it, he recognized great German composers as philosophical leaders who paved the way for the German unification of 1871.⁹ An English preoccupation with Germany – with equaling and even *bettering* the musical tradition passed from J.S. Bach to Beethoven and Brahms – surfaced during this time,¹⁰ and in part, motivated the founding of the RCM. The preoccupation was voiced by the Duke of Albany at a fundraising event in 1881:

⁶ Stradling and Hughes, *English Musical Renaissance*, 15-16.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 34-35.

⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

[English music] only wants the same use of the same means and the patient expenditure of the same time that have been so successful in Germany, to enable us to rival the Germans.¹¹

Grove recruited for two of his first professorships Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) and Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848-1918), two names indelibly tied to the EMR. Stanford, as Professor of Composition and Orchestra, was pedagogue to many of the most well-known figures of twentieth-century British music: Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Herbert Howells, George Butterworth, and John Ireland, to name several. In the studio, Stanford seems to have advocated simplicity, tautness of form, and directness of technique.¹² The qualities which he congratulated in his students' compositions, however, ultimately hindered his own success as a composer, and rendered his music an air of restricted creativity.¹³ The noted composer of the early English Musical Renaissance was, rather, Hubert Parry. The premiere of his *Scenes from Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound'* (1880) can be thought of as an official "start" to the English Musical Renaissance.¹⁴ He (along with Stanford) led composers to a new literary sensibility – away from the frivolous texts of royalty ballads – by championing texts of Shakespeare and (albeit to a lesser degree) other historical poets such as Blake and Donne.¹⁵ Though some of his early efforts actually reveal the influence of Wagner, a maligned figure of the English Musical Renaissance,¹⁶ Parry rose to greater prominence within the establishment, and ultimately succeeded George Grove as Director of the Royal College of Music in 1895. Referring to the network of RCM-trained musicians

¹¹ Ibid., 23.

¹² Banfield, *Sensibility*, 39.

¹³ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴ Stradling and Hughes, *English Musical Renaissance*, 26.

¹⁵ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Style and Literature* (Redmond, WA: Pst...Inc., 2000), 302.

¹⁶ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 22.

and the far-reaching cultural influence of Parry and Stanford, the composer John Stainer wrote (though not without a touch of hyperbole):

Parry and Stanford are rapidly getting absolute control of all the music, sacred or secular, in England; and also over our provincial Festivals and Concert societies, and other performing bodies!!!¹⁷

Stephen Banfield recounts several events which happened in the years surrounding the turn of the century, the aggregate of which constituted a watershed moment in the history of British music; the most pertinent of these to the current study are the first publication of A.E. Housman's collection of poems *A Shropshire Lad* in 1896, the first performance of Elgar's *Sea Pictures* in 1899, and the first publication of *The Vocalist* magazine in 1902.¹⁸ The Housman would be an indispensable source of song texts – a “magnet”¹⁹ – for generations of English composers; among them, notably, was one trained within the contexts of the English Musical Renaissance who went on to develop an individual style of expression manifested in his Housman settings: John Ireland. The Elgar cycle – consisting of five songs for contralto and orchestra – heralded art song as the “avenue” by which the British would become important musical and cultural contributors.²⁰ *The Vocalist*, a periodical devoted to the promotion of British song, ushered in the Edwardian era (which began in 1901) with, among others, the publication of Ralph Vaughan Williams' “Linden Lea” and “Whither must I wander.”²¹

¹⁷ British Library Manuscripts Collection, Egerton Manuscripts 3092/92: 211099, quoted in Stradling and Hughes, *English Musical Renaissance*, 41.

¹⁸ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 2-3.

¹⁹ Kimball, *Song*, 302.

²⁰ Stephen Cary, "A.E. Housman and the Renaissance of English Song," *The NATS Journal* 49, no. 1 (September/October 1992): 17.

²¹ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 2-3.

The Edwardian era saw the beginning of Britain's true response to German Romanticism, from the generation of composers trained by Stanford and Parry (among them, Gustav Holst, Ivor Gurney, Herbert Howells, Arthur Somervell, George Butterworth, and the aforementioned Vaughan Williams and Ireland). Although Edward VII died in 1910, the spirit of the Edwardian era continued into the years of the Great War (1914-18), another turning point in British musical history (not to mention, of course, world history). Banfield notes that "the first world war...held the door open for [English] composers to step through to a final phase [of Romanticism]...achieved through the images of nature and identification with *national traditions* of folksong and poetry."²² (Emphasis added.) The immediate postwar years also resulted in a surge of A.E. Housman *A Shropshire Lad* settings.

Stradling and Hughes call the aesthetic of the English Musical Renaissance "historical-pastoral."²³ In the quest for their own, native-born art music, turn-of-the-century English composers sought inspiration from sixteenth-century models such as John Dowland and Thomas Tallis (the "historical"), and from the rich legacy of the folk music of the British Isles (the "pastoral"). The composer who most closely, and famously, realized the aesthetic was Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958).²⁴ The duality of "historical-pastoral" is epitomized by two of his most well-known orchestral works, *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910) and *The Lark Ascending* (1914).

The English Musical Renaissance has weathered significant criticism, both during its time and in recent years. The playwright and critic George Bernard Shaw was one of

²² Banfield, *Sensibility*, 160.

²³ *English Musical Renaissance*, 60.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

its earliest skeptics, casting doubts on the movement's integrity by likening it to a "mutual admiration society."²⁵ The scholarship of Stradling and Hughes furthers this notion that the movement did not reflect an organic evolution of English music, but was rather orchestrated by "a self-appointed and self-perpetuating oligarchy" at the RCM.²⁶ They frame the work of Grove, Stanford, and Parry as a calculated political effort, which at its inception strove to compete with the Germans, and which, during the Great War-era, took on a martial significance.²⁷ The fraternal insiders of the EMR had no choice but to suppress those who did not align with their mission (in the press and in concert programming), such as Edward Elgar and Arthur Sullivan, both of whom, of course, achieved great independent fame.

Musicologist Barbara Docherty casts a different light on the "conspiracy theory" findings of Stradling and Hughes. She remarks that the history of German Romantic song – from the strophic ballads of Zelter and Reichardt to the introspective, personal meditations of Mahler and Wolf – was "telescoped" into the development of English song between 1904 and 1934.²⁸ Thus, the progression from royalty ballad to John Ireland constituted a rational (albeit expedited) evolution just like that of German song, and Britain was no more a wasteland of music in 1900 than Germany in 1800. (This is echoed by Stephen Cary, who compares early Edwardian song cycles by Somervell and Vaughan Williams to, in an historical sense, the song compositions of Haydn and

²⁵ Colin Eatock, "The Crystal Palace Concerts: Canon Formation and the English Musical Renaissance," *19th-Century Music* 34, no. 1 (Summer 2010): 90.

²⁶ *English Musical Renaissance*, 3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²⁸ Barbara Docherty, "English Song and the German *Lied* 1904-34," *Tempo* New Series, no. 161/162 (June-September 1987): 75.

Mozart.²⁹) In truth, some combination of many factors prevailed, with the agenda of the English Musical Renaissance acting as catalyst for a creative surge that took on a life of its own.

A student of Stanford and Parry – and later Professor of Composition at the RCM himself – John Ireland was a product of the EMR and its central institution, but he considered himself somewhat of an outsider from the culture of the movement.³⁰ Though many of his pieces are named for specific places in the British countryside, he attempted not to evoke their folk idioms (like others of the generation), but instead found inspiration in the mythology of their primitive societies. The critical reaction to one of his major commissions, the 1937 choral-orchestral work *These Things Shall Be* (commissioned for the BBC Coronation Concert), reveals both disdain for and misunderstanding of his music. Denunciations of the piece as “hollow” and devoid of “fundamental sincerity”³¹ spurred Ireland to wryly comment that if “one wrote better than the Holy Ghost and the Blessed Virgin Mary combined they would still piss on one’s works as insignificant rubbish.”³² Furthermore, Ireland revealed his anti-establishment political leanings (which further distanced him from the EMR) by quoting a communist anthem in the piece; it went unnoticed (perhaps luckily, for him) by the press.³³

²⁹ "A.E. Housman and the Renaissance of English Song," 17.

³⁰ Ian Lace, “John Ireland by Ian Lace”; available from <http://www.johnirelandtrust.org/johnirelandbyianlace.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 July 2015.

³¹ Frank Howes, *The English Musical Renaissance* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1966), 224, quoted in Stradling and Hughes, *English Musical Renaissance*, 179.

³² British Library Manuscripts Collection, Additional Manuscripts 52256/189: 100837, quoted in Stradling and Hughes, *English Musical Renaissance*, 179.

³³ Stradling and Hughes, *English Musical Renaissance*, 179.

Chapter 2: AN INTRODUCTION TO A.E. HOUSMAN

XL

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

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

Anthony Lane of the *New Yorker* muses on the final line of the above poem, no.

40 of *A Shropshire Lad*:

That “come” rings strangely on the ear; we are expecting “go,” as the counterpart to “went,” and “come” is like a tragic slip of the tongue. It suggests that, even if only for the duration of the poem, he has rejoined the highways—or, at any rate, fallen under the illusion that they still exist to be trod.³⁴

The “land of lost content” is, to the speaker, a place both remembered and unknown, both distant and immediate.

Though born in Worcester County – Shropshire’s direct neighbor to the southeast – Alfred Edward Housman (1859-1936) was actually unfamiliar with the “blue remembered hills” where he set his most famous work, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896). Having only visited the Shropshire town of Bridgnorth “for several hours” to experience “local colour,”³⁵ the place existed more in his mind. Evoked over the course of sixty-three poems, it is less a place of geography than it is a place of myth and longing.

³⁴ Anthony Lane, "Lost Horizon: The Sad and Savage Wit of A.E. Housman," *The New Yorker*, February 19 & 26, 2001; available from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/02/19/lost-horizon>; Internet; accessed August 2, 2015.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

A.E. Housman was the eldest son of Edward and Sarah Jane Housman. Most biographers, in painting a picture of the devoutly Anglican household, default to an image of stern, strict Victorian parents, choosing to overlook the accounts of warmth and kindness attributed to Mr. and Mrs. Housman.³⁶ At the age of eleven, young Alfred was sent to live with family friends when his mother fell ill of cancer. The news of her passing was revealed to him in a letter from his father, opened on his twelfth birthday.³⁷ From that point forward, Edward increasingly confided in drink, relying on his eldest son, Alfred, for domestic upkeep and the overseeing of the younger children. His sister Kate wrote that the lonely teenage Alfred “confide[d] in no one.”³⁸

From his days at Bromsgrove School, there are accounts of his sojourning from the boarding school back to his family’s home – and instead of surprising the family with a visit, gazing at the home’s façade from the shadows of the cemetery across the street.³⁹ This was a young man familiar with loss and longing.

He met during early college days at Oxford the young man he called his “greatest friend,” Moses Jackson.⁴⁰ As the critic Carol Efrati explains, sometimes Housman writes “friend” when he really means “lover;”⁴¹ that, of course, is how he felt about Moses Jackson. Housman was homosexual, and Jackson, not so, never returned the feelings, though their correspondences suggest a friendship that was dear to both of them for most of their lives (see Ch. 6, “We’ll to the Woods No More”). Jackson’s romantic rejection

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Terence Allan Hoagwood, *A.E. Housman Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), 3.

³⁸ Grant Richards, *Housman 1897-1936* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), xii, quoted in Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 3.

³⁹ Lane, “Lost Horizon.”

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Carol Efrati, *The Road of Danger, Guilt, and Shame: The Lonely Way of A.E. Housman* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2002), 227.

has prompted biographers to attribute Housman's failing grades on his final exams, in Classics, to despair over unrequited love. His failure probably resulted from some combination of "turbulence" in his relationship with Jackson, and a matter-of-fact distaste for the subject matter covered in the Philosophy portion.⁴²

Though Oxford did give him a second chance at the exams (which he passed), a professorship was seemingly out of reach. Housman in 1882 took a job at the London Patent Office, where Moses Jackson worked, and spent his free time in the British Library studying and editing classical Greek and Latin texts. Classical scholarship, from the point of view of textual criticism, was his life's primary vocation (rather than his own poetry).⁴³ His totally self-directed scholarship during his ten years as a clerk at the Patent Office culminated in 25 published articles on the texts of Horace, Ovid, Propertius and others. "In 1892, having achieved an international reputation as an outstanding classical scholar,"⁴⁴ he applied for, and was granted, a Professorship in Latin at University College, London. University College would be his base for 19 years, during which time he bolstered his international reputation with a multi-volume edition of Manilius and 99 publications.⁴⁵ Alan Ker called him "the greatest Latin scholar of his generation," and A.S. Gow notes a confident technique which revealed "not only a mind of unusual penetration, but also so complete [a] mastery...that the work of other scholars tended, beside his, to look amateurish."⁴⁶ In 1911 he was appointed Kennedy Professor of Latin

⁴² Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 14.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁶ Katharine Symons, et al., *Alfred Edward Housman* (Bromsgrove: Bromsgrove School, 1936), 49, 55, quoted in Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 20.

at the University of Cambridge, where he would lecture until six days before his death, in 1936 at the age of 77.

After Housman's death, a former student wrote to the *London Times* to recount one of his lectures at Cambridge on the Horatian ode *Diffugere nives*:

He read the ode aloud with deep emotion, first in Latin and then in an English translation of his own. "That," he said hurriedly, almost like a man betraying a secret, "I regard as the most beautiful poem in ancient literature," and walked quickly out of the room.⁴⁷

Poetry, for Housman, was an expression of emotion rather than an exercise of pure intellect. His passionate defenses of meticulous Classical scholarship were, essentially, defenses of an art form that deeply and personally moved his emotions. In his writing of poetry, as he explained in his lecture *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, he strove to crystallize feeling as directly as possible.⁴⁸ A.E. Housman's greatest legacy is his own poetry: the work for which he is best known today. He collected it in three volumes; *A Shropshire Lad*, published in 1896, achieved immense popularity in Britain and the United States, followed by *Last Poems* of 1922 and finally *More Poems* of 1936, published after his death by his brother Laurence.

Themes running through his poetic work include an outlook that life is fragile and brief, and therefore ultimately meaningless; this inspires not self-loathing but necessitates an "urgency"⁴⁹ of human connection and friendship. He echoed this sentiment in his inaugural lecture at University College: "Our business here is not to live, but to live happily."⁵⁰ (After all, the phrase *Carpe Diem* is taken from the Odes of Horace, one of Housman's scholarly interests.) Coinciding with this outlook on life's

⁴⁷ "Mrs. Pym," quoted in Lane, "Lost Horizon."

⁴⁸ Lane, "Lost Horizon."

⁴⁹ Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 66.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Lane, "Lost Horizon."

fragility is a profound hatred of war. The First Boer War, just one of Queen Victoria's imperialist ventures in Africa, coincided with his college days; he would later lose a younger brother in the Second Boer War, shortly after the turn of the century. The antiwar sentiment so palpable in poems such as "1887" – a sarcastic rallying cry for Victoria – thus carried a personal dimension for him. (However, the sentiment was so effectively coded in rustic, rural imagery, that in 1915, some of his poems were actually printed in a collection distributed to British soldiers fighting on the continent.⁵¹) British patriotism was tied inextricably to the furtherance of the Christian church, another institution disdained by Housman. Having been born the same year as the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, he grew up in an era in which the traditionally trusted institutions began being treated with skepticism; codes in his poetry reflect his personal atheism,⁵² such as the "Lent Lily" that "dies on Easter day." Unrequited love is an ever-present theme in the poems. His homosexual feelings, which could never be made public, added a layer of guilt and repression. (Housman was in his mid-thirties during the 1895 trials of Oscar Wilde, shamed and jailed for the then-crime of homosexuality.) Efrati explains that Housman alludes to his homosexuality – most especially his unrequited romantic love of Moses Jackson – through sophisticated codes and metaphors.⁵³

A Shropshire Lad, especially, occupies a unique place in the history of English song. Its poems were set by over 100 composers, with a flourishing of abundance in the

⁵¹ Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, xvi.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵³ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 24.

1920's, the twilight of the Great War. Trevor Hold calls *ASL* "one of the finest musical librettos in the English language."⁵⁴ The composer C.W. Orr explains its attractiveness:

[Housman] wrote verse that was (a) beautiful, (b) scanned, (c) rhymed, and (d) made sense; qualities that so far as I can see are very much to seek in present day poets...He is, I think, to English songwriters very much what Heine was to German and Verlaine to French composers, without having met his English Schumann or Fauré...⁵⁵

Additional external qualities rendering the poems appropriate for musical setting included regular iambic schemes, and, interestingly, the prevalence of monosyllabic words. It must be stated, however, that this appealing directness of language was, for Housman, a pathway to emotion,⁵⁶ rather than a matter of convenience for song composers. Housman was reportedly not a music lover, despite his style of verse which was musically "aware" in the same vein of his influences, Shakespeare and Heine.⁵⁷

Because, in the poetry, a "musical" surface often masks deep irony and fatalistic sentiments, "it is unlikely that Housman can ever gain much by being set to music; sometimes he can lose much."⁵⁸ What Banfield refers to is the fact that the underlying sentiment has, in general, *already* been set to an attractive "music" by Housman. The song composer is thus faced with a predicament: does he turn his attention to the ironic sentiment itself, or to the attractive structure that conceals it?

⁵⁴ Trevor Hold, "Flowers to Fair": *A Shropshire Lad's* Legacy of Song" in *A.E. Housman: A Reassessment*, ed. Alan W. Holden and J. Roy Birch (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000), 113.

⁵⁵ Letter to Joseph T. Rawlins dated December 29, 1971, quoted in Joseph T. Rawlins, "Housman, The Musician's Poet," *The NATS Bulletin* 37, no. 1 (September/October 1980): 23.

⁵⁶ Hold, "Flowers to Fair," 110.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 244.

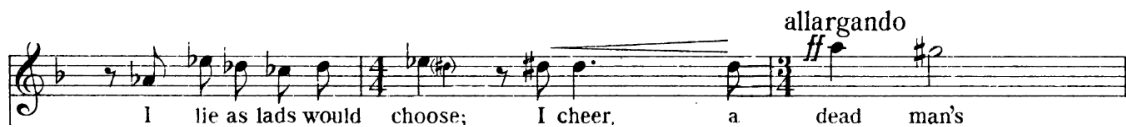
Two well-known settings of “Is my team ploughing?” display an instructive difference in tactic. George Butterworth preserves the meter and “poise of Housman’s verse:”⁵⁹

Example 2.1. Butterworth, "Is my team ploughing?," mm. 32-33. © 1911 Augener & Co.



Ralph Vaughan Williams’ setting, on the other hand, is more in the vein of a “highly theatrical” dramatic *scena* which seeks the expression of internal turbulence at the expense of poetic structure:⁶⁰

Example 2.2. Vaughan Williams, "Is my team ploughing?," mm. 48-50. © 1911 R. Vaughan Williams



His first hearing of the Vaughan Williams apparently sent Housman into a state of “torment,” according to his friend Percy Withers.⁶¹ Hearing that the composer had omitted stanzas 3 and 4 in his setting, the poet asked, “I wonder how he would like me to cut two bars out of his music?”⁶²

John Ireland, in his settings of Housman, captures nostalgia and bitterness of mood without sacrificing the poems’ greater structures or the intelligibility of individual phrases; he strikes a balanced (and successful) approach between form and content.

⁵⁹ Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 113.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 117.

⁶¹ *A Buried Life: Personal Recollections of A.E. Housman* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1940), 82-3, quoted in Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 109.

⁶² Grant Richards, *Housman 1897-1936* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 181, quoted in Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 118.

Chapter 3: AN INTRODUCTION TO JOHN IRELAND

*Look about you, Clarke. You see the mountain, and hill following after hill, as wave on wave, you see the woods and orchard, the fields of ripe corn, and the meadows reaching to the reed-beds by the river. You see me standing here beside you, and hear my voice; but I tell you that all these things—yes, from that star that has just shone out in the sky to the solid ground beneath our feet—I say that all these are but dreams and shadows; the shadows that hide the real world from our eyes.*⁶³

Dr. Raymond – the mysterious surgeon and “mad scientist” of Arthur Machen’s 1894 horror novella *The Great God Pan* – in his obsession to open the mind of humankind to the spirit world, believes that “there is a real world, but it is beyond this glamour and this vision...as beyond a veil,” though he does not “know whether any human being has ever lifted that veil...”⁶⁴

John Ireland (1879-1962) once asked, “How can people understand my music if they’ve never read Machen?”⁶⁵ The “real” world of spirits and visions described by Dr. Raymond – which was concealed by the pastoral English countryside, where ancient pagan societies once performed rites of celestial worship – captured the imagination of John Ireland. In his music we hear him attempting to “lift the veil” of pastoralism to express deeper, darker undercurrents.

Born in 1879 in Bowdon, Ireland’s parents (Alexander and Annie) were acquaintances of many important literary figures, and his biographer Muriel Searle

⁶³ Arthur Machen, “The Great God Pan,” in *Tales of Horror and the Supernatural* (London: The Richards Press, 1949), 62.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Julian Lloyd Webber, Foreword to *The John Ireland Companion*, ed. Lewis Foreman (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2011), xxi.

describes a young John Ireland placing a handful of wildflowers into the hat of visiting Ralph Waldo Emerson.⁶⁶ His love of literature, not only of Machen but of Hardy and Housman, ran deep. Like Housman, Ireland was forced to deal with death and loss early in life. Both his parents died in his early teens, after which young John immersed himself in his studies of the piano and of composition.

In 1893, at the age of 14, he enrolled in the Royal College of Music. Several years into his studies in piano and organ, he composed his *String Quartet no. 1 in D Minor* (1897), an attempt to impress the composer and pedagogue Charles Villiers Stanford, a central figure of the so-called English Musical Renaissance. Though Stanford was unimpressed by Ireland's early efforts,⁶⁷ he accepted Ireland into his studio for a four-year period of study: an experience which laid the groundwork for the development of a highly individual harmonic style rooted in "a sound technique" of melodic and formal directness.⁶⁸ Stanford's influence can certainly be heard in the strain of populist lyricism pervading songs like "Sea Fever" and "I have twelve oxen." However, one experiences Ireland's quintessential voice in the moments that he deviates from expectation, as in one of his most frequently-performed sacred works, "The Holy Boy." With touches of modality, he hearkens antiquity, enlivening its beautiful, graceful melodic structure. An E natural in the third measure evokes the Lydian mode:

⁶⁶ Muriel V. Searle, *John Ireland: The Man and His Music* (Tunbridge Wells: Midas Books, 1979), 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁸ Trevor Hold, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2002), 186.

Example 3.1. Ireland, "The Holy Boy," mm. 1-4. © 1917 Winthrop Rogers Ltd.



John Ireland was not a folk song enthusiast, a point which separated him from the nationalist agenda of the EMR. His music, which draws from the continental influences of Ravel and Debussy, can best be described as “English impressionism.”⁶⁹ Yet one comes across the word “personal” in descriptions of Ireland’s technique.⁷⁰ His musical personality was rooted in subjectivity. Uninterested in crafting surface-level musical representations of locales in the English countryside, he commanded a broad harmonic palate into the service of his wide imagination. Orchestral works such as the tone poems *Mai-Dun* (1921) and *The Forgotten Rite* (1913) dramatically evoke ancient battles and rituals. His fascination with historical sites in the Channel Islands did not go back merely centuries (which would result in evocations of rural folk music) but rather millennia, into prehistory.

This imaginative subjectivity is also quite relevant on a smaller scale, to the A.E. Housman settings. Where George Butterworth turned towards folk elements to express the rustic character of Shropshire, Ireland turned inwards, expressing not the atmosphere but rather his subjective perception of the Lad’s emotional states through a series of

⁶⁹ “Biography”; available from <http://www.johnirelandtrust.org/biography.htm>; Internet; accessed 8 July 2015.

⁷⁰ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 164-5.

subtle musical “symbols” described by Banfield. Akin to leitmotiv, Ireland utilizes specific textures and pianistic devices to symbolize ecstasy (“shimmering,” undulating piano figurations high in the treble range),⁷¹ passion (chromatic appoggiaturas reminiscent of R. Strauss),⁷² denial (aimless chromatics),⁷³ and submission (modality which evokes a liturgical atmosphere).⁷⁴

Ireland’s personal story is dominated by sad events, which in all likelihood contributed to his penchant for introspection. In addition to the aforementioned losses of his parents, his brief marriage of 1926-28 to his student Dorothy Phillips was “annulled on grounds of non-consummation.”⁷⁵ He became Professor of Composition at his alma mater, the RCM, where his students included E.J. Moeran and Benjamin Britten. He died in 1962 in Sussex, where, as in the Channel Islands, he sought and found inspiration in a countryside full of mystery.

⁷¹ Ibid., 165.

⁷² Ibid., 167-8.

⁷³ Ibid., 168.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 167.

Chapter 4: TWO WARTIME SETTINGS

The Heart's Desire (1917)

X

MARCH

The Sun at noon to higher air,
Unharnessing the silver Pair
That late before his chariot swam,
Rides on the gold wool of the Ram.

So braver notes the storm-cock sings
To start the rusted wheel of things,
And brutes in field and brutes in pen
Leap that the world goes round again.

The boys are up the woods with day
To fetch the daffodils away,
And home at noonday from the hills
They bring no dearth of daffodils.

Afield for palms the girls repair,
And sure enough the palms are there,
And each will find by hedge or pond
Her waving silver-tufted wand.

In farm and field through all the shire
The eye beholds the heart's desire;
Ah, let not only mine be vain,
For lovers should be loved again.

Ireland chose to set only stanzas three, four, and five of the above poem, Housman's "March," no. 10 of *A Shropshire Lad*. Ireland titled his setting "The Heart's Desire."

Taking all five stanzas into consideration, the reader observes a grand progression of all existence waking into spring, from the sun (riding the "gold wool" of Aries, the

symbol of March⁷⁶) to the animals, to the boys and girls of Shropshire, and finally to the lonely Lad himself. Referring to this change of season (typically depicted in poetry as the most joyous time of year) as “the rusted wheel of things,” the Lad hints at his resentment.⁷⁷ The daffodils culled by the boys and palms by the girls are images of springtime which also, ironically, symbolize death: the daffodil “dies on Easter day” (“The Lent Lily,” *ASL* no. 29) but not before the palms herald Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem to begin the Passion, a yearly ritual of death. The “silver-tufted wand” gathered by the girls is the willow-wand of ancient fertility celebrations.⁷⁸ The last stanza, an ironic surprise ending in the style of Heine, reveals a young man gazing – alone – at the new life and new love blossoming around him.

Ireland went straight for the human element of the poem, stanzas 3-5, bypassing the celestial and animal (stanzas 1 and 2, respectively). One wonders what Housman’s response to the piece would have been, having referred to Vaughan Williams’ omitting stanzas 3 and 4 of “Is my team ploughing?” as a “mutilation.”⁷⁹ Ireland succeeds in capturing a spirit of both anticipation and foreboding, elements present in Housman’s poem. A Mixolydian flat seventh darkens the color palate, and quickly hints at a modulation to IV in the third line of each stanza; this moment comprises the linear and expressive peak of the melodic period:

⁷⁶ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 141.

⁷⁷ Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 54.

⁷⁸ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 143.

⁷⁹ Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 118.

Example 4.1. Ireland, "The Heart's Desire," mm. 26-29. © 1917 Winthrop Rogers Ltd.

The musical score for "The Heart's Desire" (measures 26-29) is presented in a standard format. It includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked *tenuto* and contains the lyrics: "palms are there, And each will find by". The piano accompaniment features a right hand with arpeggiated chords and a left hand with a steady eighth-note bass line.

Formally, "The Heart's Desire" can be described as modified strophic, in which the piano accompaniment changes character from verse to verse to highlight certain images in the text. In the second verse, for example, one hears the fluttering palm branches and willows in the right hand figuration. For Banfield, who thought the setting "fresh" and effective, Ireland channels his "ecstasy" symbol into the undulating piano figuration.⁸⁰ Stately chords punctuate the text of the third verse, seeming more assuredly resigned than melancholy.

However, a misplaced text underlay amounts to a missed opportunity for Ireland; in the third verse, he aligns the word "only" with the high note, when to reinforce the loneliness of the Lad, he could have made the word "mine" the phrase's focal point. Could the melodic contour not have been reimagined for this verse only?

⁸⁰ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 170.

Example 4.2. Ireland, "The Heart's Desire," mm. 52-55. © 1917 Winthrop Rogers Ltd.

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Heart's Desire" from Ireland. The top staff is the vocal line, with lyrics: "gain. Ah, let not on - ly mine be". The piano accompaniment is shown in two staves below the vocal line. The key signature is one flat (Bb major), and the time signature is 4/4. The piano part features a prominent bass line and a treble line with chords. A dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo) is present in the piano part. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and articulation marks.

The singer must understand that the grammatical phrase moves towards the word “mine” – “Ah, let not only *mine* be vain” – and must strive to propel the long phrase through the climactic note, directing it towards the word “mine” mentally, if not musically. This issue underscores the limitations of strophic settings.

In the third verse and the coda, the closed back vowel [o] above the male *secondo* *passaggio* presents some navigational difficulty, and should perhaps take on the dimensions of [ɑ]. It is actually helpful that the singer and pianist should (for the sake of the poem) move purposefully through the high note and avoid tenuto.

The poetic text in and of itself is not specifically gendered, so performances by female singers would be wonderfully appropriate. The key of Db major (published as the “high” key) is appropriate for undergraduate-level-and-above soprano and tenor. Some singers with still-developing high ranges, however, might find more manageable the “low” key of B major (which, in terms of tessitura, would be more accurately classified as “medium”).

Hawthorn Time (1919)

XXXIX

'TIS time, I think, by Wenlock town
The golden broom should blow;
The hawthorn sprinkled up and down
Should charge the land with snow.

Spring will not wait the loiterer's time
Who keeps so long away;
So others wear the broom and climb
The hedgerows heaped with may.

Oh tarnish late on Wenlock Edge,
Gold that I never see;
Lie long, high snowdrifts in the hedge
That will not shower on me.

Ireland named his setting of Housman's unnamed poem (no. 39 of *A Shropshire Lad*) "Hawthorn Time." The "time" of the hawthorn flower's blooming is late spring; its white flower is also referred to as the mayblossom, or – as it appears in the second stanza of this poem – simply "may."

In the popular "Loveliest of Trees" (no. 2 of *A Shropshire Lad*), the Lad sets off in the springtime to witness "the cherry hung with snow;" snow, here, does not mean precipitation, but rather clusters of white flowers. Housman has ironically fused the spring setting with an image of winter and seasonal death.⁸¹ He employs a similar metaphor in poem no. 39: the hawthorn (also a white blossom) "charge[s] the land" with "snowdrifts in the hedge." For the Lad, memories of beautiful springtime vistas are only reminders of the winter and his own mortality.

⁸¹ Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 31.

The Lad's isolation in this poem reaches a profound depth. After lamenting that he will (yet again) miss the yellow and white springtime blossoms in Shropshire, he expresses hope that they will last "long" and "late" for those who can witness them: a self-sacrificing gesture. This poem is from the point of view of the "exiled" Lad: older, reminiscent, and resigned to the fact that he will no longer see Shropshire.⁸²

Ireland's setting deviates between relative major and minor tonal centers, as if reflecting this juxtaposition between memory and reality. The opening measure quickly suggests a major mode orientation, but is pulled astray to minor mode with the second measure and the onset of the vocal melody. Organizationally, Ireland links the first and second stanzas of the poem, which dramatically isolates the pleas of the third stanza.

Ireland provides a meaningful harmonic commentary at the end of each stanza: all three end in the tonal area of V of the relative major. Each is essentially an antecedent phrase that yearns for fulfillment in major mode, the tonal landscape of the Lad's memories of Shropshire. The desire remains unfulfilled until the aforementioned repeat of the final line, when Ireland ultimately allows a cadence in the relative major.

The vocal setting is generally syllabic, with expressive moments occurring at wide intervallic leaps:

⁸² B.J. Leggett, *Housman's Land of Lost Content* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1970), 70-8, referenced in Kevin Whittingham, "The Centenary of *A Shropshire Lad* in British Music, the Great War, and the *Three Poems* of Willie B. Manson," *Journal of Singing* 62, no. 4 (March/April 2006): 377.

Example 4.3. Ireland, "Hawthorn Time," mm. 14-16. © 1919 Winthrop Rogers Ltd.

The musical score for Example 4.3 consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics: "- way; So o - thers wear the broom, and climb The". The middle and bottom staves are piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a more rhythmic, chordal line in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *poco cresc.* is placed above the piano part in the second measure.

However, the repeat of the final line contains the most vocally expressive moment of the piece, where a grand melodic contour frames sustained tones on “snowdrifts,” “show’r,” and “me.” It directs the piece to its final cadence in relative major:

Example 4.4. Ireland, "Hawthorn Time," mm. 30-33. © 1919 Winthrop Rogers Ltd.

The musical score for Example 4.4 consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics: "hedge That will not show'r _____ on me. _____". The middle and bottom staves are piano accompaniment in grand staff. The piano part features a melodic line in the right hand and a more rhythmic, chordal line in the left hand. A dynamic marking of *pp* is placed above the piano part in the third measure. The score ends with a double bar line and a fermata over the final note. The initials "J. I. 1919" are printed in the bottom right corner.

The pianist in the final two bars echoes the song’s opening measure, but with a new tonal center.

In Ireland’s interpretation, the Lad’s happy memories obviously win. Yet, their victory is not totally convincing to the listener. The conflict between major and minor

happens at too fast a pace to register dramatically, and despite the vocal expressiveness of the final line, the major-mode cadence leaves a slight impression of gimmickry; the device does not seem to align with the bitter tone of Housman's third stanza.

As with "The Heart's Desire," some high voices might have an easier time with the "low key" of G minor, rather than the "high key" of A minor. For instance, the prior example featuring the leap of a minor sixth – "So others wear the broom" – would be in the low key G3 leaping upwards to Eb4. Most tenors possess a greater degree of dynamic and expressive control over the inter-*passaggio* Eb4 than F4.

Ireland's interpretation of Housman would soon take a dark, introspective turn with the cycle *The Land of Lost Content*.

Chapter 5: *THE LAND OF LOST CONTENT* (1921)

The English tenor Peter Pears opined that Ireland's "edgy pessimistic nature matched [Housman's] perfectly."⁸³ Nowhere better among his Housman settings does Ireland communicate a sense of bitterness, fatalism, and pessimism than in the many dark moments of *The Land of Lost Content* (1921).

The "predominantly high tessitura" of this "true tenor cycle,"⁸⁴ in addition to calling for an experienced singer with facility above the *passaggio*, is the essential mode of vocal expression in the six songs. A longing is conveyed by the broad reaches of the tenor's melodic contours.

Shropshire is referred to as "the land of lost content" in a poem never actually set to music by Ireland: no. 40 of *ASL* (cited in Chapter 2). Housman's publisher Grant Richards recalled that Ireland had asked for permission to print poem no. 40 at the beginning of this cycle, but Housman would not grant it.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, a spirit of "lost content" is captured throughout the six songs.

The cycle is comprised of six settings from *ASL*, with 5 of 6 having been given original titles by Ireland (all excepting the first): "The Lent Lily," "Ladslove," "Goal and Wicket," "The Vain Desire," "The Encounter," and "Epilogue."

⁸³ Sleeve-note, "Twentieth Century English Songs," ZRG 5418, 1964, quoted in Hold, "Flowers to Fair," 129.

⁸⁴ Hold, "Flowers to Fair," 126.

⁸⁵ Grant Richards, *Housman 1897-1936* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), 185, referenced in Hold, "Flowers to Fair," 133.

The Lent Lily

XXIX

THE LENT LILY

'TIS spring; come out to ramble
The hilly brakes around,
For under thorn and bramble
About the hollow ground
The primroses are found.

And there's the windflower chilly
With all the winds at play,
And there's the Lenten lily
That has not long to stay
And dies on Easter day.

And since till girls go maying
You find the primrose still,
And find the windflower playing
With every wind at will,
But not the daffodil,

Bring baskets now, and sally
Upon the spring's array,
And bear from hill and valley
The daffodil away
That dies on Easter day.

The poem is rich with examples of Housman's perfectly crafted, multi-layered irony. A biting chill runs through this spring scene of blossoming flowers. The ground which produces the primrose and daffodil is "hollow" in anticipation of man's impending death. We are implored to gather up the daffodil "now," causing it a premature demise before the inevitable one *on Easter*, the Christian celebration of resurrection. Without hinting at "any implication of the renewal of life the following year," Housman

“detach[es] Easter from the concept of eternal life.”⁸⁶ Since we all face the same fate as the daffodil – which, for Housman, does not involve resurrection – the *carpe diem* plea of the final stanza takes on a morose significance.⁸⁷ He expresses the “transience of beauty” not only with symbolism but with the entire structure of the poem; it constitutes one long, flowing thought without grammatical cadence (the second and third stanzas, although preceded by periods, begin with “and”).⁸⁸

Thus, Ireland’s setting is devoid of substantial musical cadences. Ireland creates a feeling of suspension reminiscent of Schumann’s setting of “Im wunderschönen Monat Mai.” Parallel thirds wander through tonalities a minor third apart, E minor and G minor:

Example 5.1. Ireland, “The Lent Lily,” mm. 9-12. © 1921 Augener Ltd.

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Lent Lily" by Ireland, measures 9-12. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is one sharp (F#), indicating E minor. The time signature is 3/4. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The lyrics under the vocal line are: "un-der thorn and bram - ble A - bout the hol - low ground — The". The piano accompaniment features parallel thirds in the right hand and a more active bass line. There are dynamic markings: "p poco cresc." in the first measure and "dim." in the second measure.

The Dorian mode melody obscures the tonality of E minor, helping the piece evade tonal direction.⁸⁹ Ireland similarly avoids cadence in a temporal sense, alternating between measures of 3/4 and 2/4 to create a sense of unsteadiness.

⁸⁶ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 144.

⁸⁷ Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 64.

⁸⁸ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 243.

⁸⁹ Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 126.

Ireland sets the first three stanzas strophically, but propels the music through the enjambment separating stanzas three and four towards a sweeping climax, coinciding with Housman's *carpe diem* plea:

Example 5.2. Ireland, "The Lent Lily," mm. 44-47. © 1921 Augener Ltd.

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Lent Lily" by Ireland. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is the vocal line, written on a single treble clef staff. The lyrics are: "Bring baskets now, and sal - ly Up - on the spring's ar - ray, And |". The second system is the piano accompaniment, written on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part includes dynamic markings like 'f' and 'mf'. The score is in G major and 3/4 time.

From a vocal perspective, the tenor is responsible (along with the pianist) for the creation of an atmosphere. A *voix mixte* approach to the top of the staff is appropriate throughout. By setting one syllable to one note throughout, Ireland prioritizes the clear and unaffected enunciation of the text: a charge that must be taken seriously by the tenor.

Sydney Northcote declares this "one of [Ireland's] greatest songs,"⁹⁰ a perspective surely shared by many.⁹¹ It effectively internalizes Housman's lyric into an expression of mystery and beauty.

⁹⁰ Sydney Northcote, *Byrd to Britten: A Survey of English Song* (London: Baker, 1966), 108.

⁹¹ Hold, "Flowers to Fair," 126.

LOOK not in my eyes, for fear
They mirror true the sight I see,
And there you find your face too clear
And love it and be lost like me.
One the long nights through must lie
Spent in star-defeated sighs,
But why should you as well as I
Perish? gaze not in my eyes.

A Grecian lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain,
Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again.
There, when the turf in springtime flowers,
With downward eye and gazes sad,
Stands amid the glancing showers
A jonquil, not a Grecian lad.

One wonders whether it was purely coincidental that this poem falls in *ASL* at number 15, which was the age of Narcissus, the “Grecian lad” of the second stanza as portrayed in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Narcissus’ plight, Efrati explains, became a poetic metaphor for same-sex love. Seeing his own reflection in a pool, Narcissus could not turn away; he fell in love with himself, that is to say, the *same*. “Knowing himself” – and knowing his heart – led to intense sadness and, eventually, his demise.⁹² This speaks to the tremendous burden carried by a homosexual person in Victorian England. Some critics have actually written of Housman’s “girl” looking longingly into his eyes in the first stanza, which only underscores Housman’s skill at deception.⁹³

⁹² Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 301.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 299.

Ireland, no doubt in tune with the “homoerotic undertones” of the poem,⁹⁴ named his setting “Ladslove.” At certain cadential points, the melody “strain[s] upwards”⁹⁵ with “unappeasable yearning”⁹⁶ in an unexpected way:

Example 5.3. Ireland, "Ladslove," mm. 9-11. © 1921 Augener Ltd.



At others, Ireland employs a falling fifth – a “star-defeated sigh” – a melodic motive he explores throughout the whole cycle.⁹⁷

Example 5.4. Ireland, "Ladslove," mm. 17-18. © 1921 Augener Ltd.



The extremely high tessitura of this piece would present a difficulty to the young tenor figuring out the *passaggio*. The “strain” that Trevor Hold referenced is already written into the melodic contour, and does not need the singer to add to it. The text, set syllabically with a modified strophic approach, is a vehicle for extended *legato* lines, which Ireland crafts through off-beat entrances and tied values.

⁹⁴ Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 129.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁹⁶ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 173.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Goal and Wicket

XVII

TWICE a week the winter thorough
Here stood I to keep the goal:
Football then was fighting sorrow
For the young man's soul.

Now in Maytime to the wicket
Out I march with bat and pad:
See the son of grief at cricket
Trying to be glad.

Try I will; no harm in trying:
Wonder 'tis how little mirth
Keeps the bones of man from lying
On the bed of earth.

This poem is about diversions. Housman observes that the modern man occupies his days and nights with activities that are “ultimately meaningless,”⁹⁸ perhaps as an attempt to escape the realization of his own mortality. These diversions do not only include sports – games which, here, ironically take on a crucial existential meaning – but rather, all of “conventional life” is merely a futile “attempt to be happy.”⁹⁹

Housman is evasive as to the meaning of the final stanza. Is “wonder” a noun or a verb? For instance, could the reader precede it with “what a,” making the stanza a statement of jaded resignation? Or could it be “I wonder,” a question as to the ultimate meaning of life?

Ireland presents diversions and asks questions in his strophic setting, which he titled “Goal and Wicket.” Hold notes that it is “impossible to predict” the direction of the

⁹⁸ Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 58.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

dense chromatics, which spend the majority of the piece evading the tonic key of E minor.¹⁰⁰

Example 5.5. Ireland, "Goal and Wicket," mm. 1-3. © 1921 Augener Ltd.



The word “disturbing” appears in both his and Banfield’s impressions of Ireland’s interpretation. Its “dislocated” tonalities suggest nothing of an idyllic Shropshire cricket match, exemplifying musical irony.¹⁰¹

The melodic character of the piece starkly contrasts the previous two. Melisma appears for the first time in the cycle. These short outbursts of dotted rhythms and sixteenth-note passages are evocative of Baroque gestures. The tenor must not be tempted to approach them with subglottic force within the *passaggio*, but rather aim for calm clarity, as a “rhythmic energy”¹⁰² is already written into the phrases.

¹⁰⁰ Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 127.

¹⁰¹ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 173.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

The Vain Desire

XXXIII

IF truth in hearts that perish
Could move the powers on high,
I think the love I bear you
Should make you not to die.

Sure, sure, if stedfast meaning,
If single thought could save,
The world might end to-morrow,
You should not see the grave.

This long and sure-set liking,
This boundless will to please,
—Oh, you should live for ever
If there were help in these.

But now, since all is idle,
To this lost heart be kind,
Ere to a town you journey
Where friends are ill to find.

Events in Housman's life, and a critical study of his manuscripts, have led modern scholars to ascertain that this poem, *ASL* no. 33, is biographical; the likely recipient of these sentiments was Housman's "greatest friend," the object of his unrequited love, Moses Jackson.¹⁰³ Though some critics have conjectured that the "town" to which the intended might "journey" is death,¹⁰⁴ the less poetic yet more probable interpretation is that the poem was written in response to Jackson's departure to Karachi in 1887.¹⁰⁵ (Jackson would briefly return to London two years later for his wedding, to which Housman was not invited.) Housman's staggeringly lengthy sketches for the poem

¹⁰³ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 312-13.

¹⁰⁴ Hoagwood, *Housman Revisited*, 67.

¹⁰⁵ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 314.

contain phrase after phrase of “hopelessness” and desperation, evincing an undeniable personal investment.¹⁰⁶

Ireland’s setting (titled “The Vain Desire”) reaches and stretches, melodically, in the same fashion as the earlier “Ladslove.” Full of “fruitless” chromatics and a sense of “dislocation,” it yearns for a destination that never was to be.¹⁰⁷ Ireland makes ample use of the falling fifth “sighing” motive (both in the vocal melody and accompaniment), also utilized in “Ladslove.” Yet there is an even deeper dimension to this piece; its unstable oscillations between Eb major and A minor seem to reveal Ireland’s deeply personal, and even troubled, connection with Housman’s words.¹⁰⁸ These two disparate tonalities, a tritone apart, express the rift between wish and reality – and the key of A minor ultimately wins.

At the dramatic climax of the first verse, Ireland asks the tenor to sing through the *secondo passaggio* on an [u] vowel:

Example 5.6. Ireland, "The Vain Desire," mm. 10-11. © 1921 Augener Ltd.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "The Vain Desire" by Ireland. It consists of two systems of music. The top system is the vocal line, written in a treble clef with a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "die. Sure. sure. if stead - fast". The notes are: a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note Bb4, a quarter note A4, and a quarter note G4. The bottom system is the piano accompaniment, written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a 3/4 time signature. It features a complex harmonic structure with chromaticism and a falling fifth motive. The piano part includes a bass line with a descending chromatic scale and a treble line with chords and moving lines. Dynamics markings like *f* and *mf* are present.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 313.

¹⁰⁷ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 174.

¹⁰⁸ Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 128.

While conventionally challenging, this instance could be considered a unique expressive opportunity. A *mf* stentorian approach would necessitate migrating the vowel towards [ɔ] – which might reduce to some degree the intelligibility of the word – but the tenor may choose an intimate dynamic with a *voix mixte* approach and fully retain the closed, rounded character of “sure.” At the corresponding moment in the second verse, Ireland writes a dramatic, rhapsodic ascent in the piano accompaniment, inviting a similar dramatic energy from the tenor, which seems to coincide well with the open vowels:

Example 5.7. Ireland, "The Vain Desire," mm. 28-29. © 1921 Augener Ltd.

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The top system is the vocal line, and the bottom system is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/D minor) and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo marking is *(Tempo I)*. The lyrics are: "these. But now, since all is—". The piano accompaniment features a dramatic, rhapsodic ascent in the right hand, starting with a half note chord and moving through a series of chords and melodic lines. The vocal line consists of a few notes with a long note on "is—" followed by a rest.

The Encounter

XXII

THE STREET sounds to the soldiers' tread,
And out we troop to see:
A single redcoat turns his head,
He turns and looks at me.

My man, from sky to sky's so far,
We never crossed before;
Such leagues apart the world's ends are,
We're like to meet no more;

What thoughts at heart have you and I
We cannot stop to tell;
But dead or living, drunk or dry,
Soldier, I wish you well.

On the surface, the poem seems to evoke standard *ASL* themes of isolation, forced militarism, and impending death. However there exists another layer explored by Efrati and others: a “buried erotic metaphor.” British soldiers in the Victorian era were commonly glorified as sex objects in erotic literature; the reason for this was because, to those “in the know,” many doubled as homosexual prostitutes.¹⁰⁹ This poem can be read as Housman’s coded expression of an anonymous encounter with one of them. One can imagine if the glance – the eye contact drawn out over two stanzas – were between a man and a woman (such as that evoked by Oscar Hammerstein in the lyric, “You may see a stranger...across a crowded room”), intimate connotations and “mutual attraction” would be obvious to the reader.¹¹⁰ Similarly, there is more here than friendship and a well-wish. Housman’s characterization of the young soldier begins anonymously: “a single redcoat.”

¹⁰⁹ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 259-60.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 261.

During their shared moment, he is *possessive* of him: “my man.” And soon thereafter, the simple and anonymous “soldier” is back on his way. Their shared glance acts as a stand-in for a sexual encounter.¹¹¹

Though it would be purely speculative to suggest that John Ireland knew of, and reacted to, the sexually-charged codes in Housman’s poem, his titling is again worthy of consideration. He could have easily named his setting, “The Soldier” or “The Passing Troops” or something of that nature, but he titled it “The *Encounter*”: a shared experience between two individuals.

A discordant musical texture imbues the scene with an unsettling irony.¹¹² A tritone ostinato in the piano left hand represents the march of the soldiers, while the obscure running figure in the right hand seems to evoke a fife & drum band. The vocal melody sometimes synchronizes with the piano right hand, and sometimes acts as a “descant.”¹¹³ The resultant soundscape is cacophonous, a representation of the noisy street scene.

The falling fifth, a “sighing” gesture used in previous songs, is reversed at the beginning of each stanza. Each opens with an ascending fifth:

¹¹¹ Ibid., 262.

¹¹² Banfield, *Sensibility*, 174.

¹¹³ Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 128.

Example 5.8. Ireland, "The Encounter," mm. 24-25. © 1921 Augener Ltd.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "What thoughts at heart have". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment. The piano part begins with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a crescendo hairpin, followed by the instruction *poco a poco cresc.* The piano accompaniment consists of a series of chords in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand.

The effect is that of the tenor striving to be heard – to be noticed – over the activity of the street. There is a sense of passion and urgency to his declamation. Ireland presents him not as a passive observer, but rather a motivator to the odd “encounter.”

Epilogue

LVII

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

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

In a manner reminiscent of Heine, this ballad poem strikes with fatalistic pessimism at its final line. It registers as a true surprise due to the pathetic sentiment set up by the line “better late than never;” Hoagwood notes that smiles and kind words are actually “*always* late” due to the sheer brevity of life.¹¹⁴ Thus, the poem can be read as an odd take on *carpe diem*. However, Efrati, in interpreting Housman's poetry through the lens of his own life, notes a “veil of ambiguity” as to the meanings of the words “friend” and “lover.”¹¹⁵ Housman referred to Moses Jackson as his “greatest friend,” yet it is well-documented that Jackson meant more than friendship to him. Could the first stanza's friend and lover be the same person, one his public and the other his private manifestation? “Better late than never,” could then be read as an invitation: a plea to the secret lover.

Ireland expresses ambiguity in the wandering tonalities of his setting of *ASL* no. 57, which he titled “Epilogue.” This “short, quiet coda”¹¹⁶ sums up and reflects Ireland's

¹¹⁴ *Housman Revisited*, 82-3.

¹¹⁵ *Road of Danger*, 303.

¹¹⁶ Hold, “Flowers to Fair,” 129.

thoughts on the collection of six poems. The most striking difference between this setting and nos. 1-5 is the fact that it is through-composed; as if “all passion [were] spent,” structural pillars are removed.¹¹⁷ Hold notes that Ireland cross-references musical ideas/symbols from earlier moments in *The Land of Lost Content*.¹¹⁸ He utilizes the falling fifth within a contour that is remarkably similar on the page to moments in “Ladslove” and “The Vain Desire:”

Example 5.9. Ireland, "Epilogue," mm. 10-11. © 1921 Augener Ltd.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line has the lyrics "hap - py is the lo - ver." The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as "mf", "cresc.", "f", and "dim." The score is for measures 10 and 11.

Running parallel thirds at the beginning and end of the piece echo the “English impressionism” of no. 1, “The Lent Lily.” These retrospective evocations imbue the setting with nostalgia and “passion that yet lives in memory.”¹¹⁹

The melodic material comprises a grand arc which builds through the first stanza, climaxes dramatically at “happy is the lover” (Ex. 5.9, above), and gradually reduces in intensity before a weak final cadence on the 6th scale degree (while musing on death). If cognizant of this overarching shape, the tenor can pace his performance so as to direct the audience’s focus to the pianistic devices, those symbols which exist “in memory” for the Lad. The song can then truly serve the function of an “Epilogue.”

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 174.

CHAPTER 6: *WE'LL TO THE WOODS NO MORE* (1928)

This three-song cycle of 1928, “an experimental, nonce form,”¹²⁰ is comprised of two settings for voice and piano followed by a solo piano piece. The two vocal settings are on verses from Housman’s *Last Poems* of 1922, and the piano solo is a meditation on two lines from *ASL* no. 39 (“Spring will not wait the loiterer’s time / Who keeps so long away”). Though only two of its three songs involve the actual declamation of text, Ireland showed deference to his poetic inspiration by titling it “a cycle for voice and piano by A.E. Housman and John Ireland.”¹²¹ Its dedication “to Arthur: in memory of the darkest days” was replaced by “for A.G.M.: February 22 1927”; Arthur Miller was a member of Ireland’s choir at St. Luke’s Chelsea and, in referencing Miller’s birthday of February 22 in numerous dedications, Ireland reveals that “their relationship was evidently of the deepest significance” to him.¹²²

The first two selections in the cycle are most appropriate for the light lyric baritone. They make few departures below the (sub-octave) treble clef, and each reaches its pinnacle at the F atop the staff. However, young tenors lacking adequate facility above the *passaggio*, or baritones making a gradual transition towards the tenor repertory, would benefit from studying these works. By setting the texts generally syllabically, Ireland places emphasis not on specifically vocal demands of agility and articulation, but rather on the recitation of Housman’s words.

¹²⁰ Hold, *Parry to Finzi*, 203.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹²² Banfield, *Sensibility*, 175.

We'll to the Woods No More

*We'll to the woods no more,
The laurels all are cut,
The bowers are bare of bay
That once the Muses wore;
The year draws in the day
And soon will evening shut:
The laurels all are cut,
We'll to the woods no more.
Oh we'll no more, no more
To the leafy woods away,
To the high wild woods of laurel
And the bowers of bay no more.*

This poem serves as the unnumbered preface to the collection *Last Poems*.

Housman took inspiration from a lyric by Theodore de Banville (“*Nous n'irons plus au bois, les lauriers sont coupés*”), which he translated and arranged, as above.¹²³

Many critics have wrestled with the “private grief”¹²⁴ expressed in this poem, a deeply personal lament over the passing of time and the nearness of death. Perhaps its origin is in Housman’s dwelling upon the words “no more,” which he noted in his lecture *The Name and Nature of Poetry* “have the physical effect of pathos.”¹²⁵ Perhaps, as well, events in Housman’s life can shed light on the personal directness of the words. It is instructive to note that he sent a copy of *Last Poems*, bearing this lyric as its preface, to Moses Jackson’s hospital room as Jackson lay on his deathbed. The poem can be read as a farewell to his “greatest friend”: their countryside walks were distant memories, and

¹²³ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 125.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 126.

upon his approaching death, Jackson would cease to be Housman's "Muse," the inspiration of his poetry on the theme of unrequited love.¹²⁶

Parallel thirds meandering through distant tonal areas imbue the setting with an aura of impressionism. Hold calls the running thirds "ambiguous" and "unrelated,"¹²⁷ which in conjunction with the 5/4 time signature, further dissolve structural parameters:

Example 6.1. Ireland, "We'll to the Woods No More," mm. 1-3. © 1928 Oxford University Press

The image shows a musical score for three measures of the song "We'll to the Woods No More" by Ireland. The score is written for voice and piano. The tempo is marked "Rather slowly". The time signature is 5/4. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The voice part begins with a rest in the first measure, followed by the lyrics "We'll to the woods no" in the second and third measures. A triplet of eighth notes is indicated above the first three notes of the second measure. The piano accompaniment consists of parallel thirds in both the right and left hands, with a *p legato* marking. The piano part features a prominent falling fifth in the bass register in the third measure.

The haunting effect is that of stream-of-consciousness.

Moments of this through-composed song refer back to both the parallel thirds of "The Lent Lily" and to the oft-used falling fifths prevalent in *The Land of Lost Content*. Interestingly, the most noticeable appearance of the falling fifth is in the bass register near the end of the piece, where it anchors the final tonality in D minor.

¹²⁶ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 125.

¹²⁷ Hold, *Parry to Finzi*, 202.

In Boyhood

XXXII

When I would muse in boyhood
The wild green woods among
And nurse resolves and fancies
Because the world was young,
It was not foes to conquer,
Nor sweethearts to be kind,
But it was friends to die for
That I would seek and find.

I sought them and I found them,
The sure, the straight, the brave,
The hearts I lost my own to,
The souls I could not save.
They braced their belts around them,
They crossed in ships the sea,
They sought and found six feet of ground,
And there they died for me.

Efrati explains that the soldier held a double symbolic meaning for Housman: one “carnal,” as referenced in “The street sounds to the soldier’s tread” (set in *The Land of Lost Content*), and the other of “loyalty, courage, and commitment.”¹²⁸ This latter image more closely applies to this poem, no. 32 of *Last Poems*. Housman’s brother Herbert, who was killed in South Africa in the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), “haunts” many of the poems with militaristic themes; Herbert is the personal dimension to the poet’s hatred for Britain’s imperialist ventures, one of the “souls [he] could not save.”¹²⁹

Similarly, “friend” carries a double meaning for Housman. Forced to mask his homosexuality behind a series of codes and poetic symbols, he sometimes writes “friend”

¹²⁸ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 227.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 228.

when he means “lover.”¹³⁰ The symbol is complicated in Moses Jackson, his “greatest friend.” However, in this particular verse, he does not seem to charge the metaphors with sexual meaning, but rather muses on the notions of sacrifice and (non-erotic) friendship. Though Jackson refused Housman’s affections, Housman continued to feel deep affection and care for him throughout his life. In accepting that his relationship with Jackson would never be of a romantic nature – but that he would always be a friend – he “figuratively sacrifice[d] himself”: “He received what he most desired, but not as he had envisioned it.”¹³¹ The poem evokes both the sacrifice of his young brother and the sacrifice of himself, that is to say, the sacrifice of his truest and deepest feelings.

With a “conversational” and “syllabic” approach to the text setting¹³² (spelled plainly by the composer’s directive at the beginning of the piece: “At speaking pace”), Ireland’s modified strophic setting in D minor is relatively conventional; it seems more reminiscent of the wartime settings of Chapter 4 than the dark postwar meditations of *The Land of Lost Content*. Again, the melodic falling fifth appears, a motive so uniquely suited to express the nostalgia in Housman’s verses. In his setting of the final line, Ireland extends the value of the word “died” in a most unexpected way, thus giving the singer an opportunity to let the tone fade (“die”) in reflection.

¹³⁰ Efrati, *Road of Danger*, 227.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹³² Hold, *Parry to Finzi*, 202.

Spring Will Not Wait

XXXIX

'TIS time, I think, by Wenlock town
The golden broom should blow;
The hawthorn sprinkled up and down
Should charge the land with snow.

**Spring will not wait the loiterer's time
Who keeps so long away;**
So others wear the broom and climb
The hedgerows heaped with may.

Oh tarnish late on Wenlock Edge,
Gold that I never see;
Lie long, high snowdrifts in the hedge
That will not shower on me.

The two bolded lines above, from no. 39 of *ASL*, preface Ireland's "Spring Will Not Wait," a meditative work for solo piano which serves as the coda of the cycle *We'll to the Woods No More*. As if "emotions were by now 'past words,'" the singer is mysteriously silent.¹³³ However, a discernable "vocal melody" runs through the piece, and echoes of past-set texts can be heard in its short motivic fragments: the phrases "Spring will not wait," "Who keeps so long away," and "The laurels all are cut," for instance, can be easily applied syllabically to the piano melody in multiple instances. One wonders if Ireland had in mind phrases and fragments of other Housman poems which found expression in this wordless way.

Ireland cross-references and establishes connections to the previous two songs via multiple techniques. There is a tonal connection, as the piece begins in D major utilizing

¹³³ Hold, *Parry to Finzi*, 202.

“sprightly French rhythms”¹³⁴ and ends in D minor; this mode mixture seems to express a rift between hope and reality. In the final measures, one hears the wandering parallel thirds which gave “We’ll to the Woods No More” its impressionistic quality, falling fifths of unfulfilled sexual longing (having appeared in both prior settings), and, as in “We’ll to the Woods...,” an eerie Bb hanging over the D minor ending like unfinished business:¹³⁵

Example 6.2. Ireland, "Spring Will Not Wait," mm. 56-60. © 1928 Oxford University Press



The work’s D major beginning seems “a statement of affirmation and acceptance” by a reflective Ireland looking back over his life and work; yet, through cross-referencing and tonal ambiguities, he introduces to the music an inexplicable and “ever present pain” over his life’s passing springtime.¹³⁶ Difficult to pin down yet palpably present, this lingering pain is characteristically Housman and characteristically Ireland. It lurks beneath the surface of every work surveyed throughout this study. It rarely breaks through it, but instead is enveloped into the surface-music through *symbol*. This is the reason that John Ireland’s mysterious music accommodates the verse of A.E. Housman so ideally: they seem to share an understanding that in symbols – such as Shropshire’s fleeting spring, or unsettling, primal clashes of modality – are expressed hidden realities.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Banfield, *Sensibility*, 177.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

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