

Finzi's Finale: Exploring the Posthumous Tenor Song Set,  
*Till Earth Outwears*, with Texts by Thomas Hardy

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## Chapter 1

## Finzi and Hardy: Resonant Minds

In choosing Thomas Hardy's poetry for most of his songs, Gerald Finzi forged a partnership with a man he never met. From his youth, Finzi had found his greatest literary inspiration in Hardy's lyrics. Although Finzi never met his muse, his dedication to the poet was not confined to the reading of his verses. Finzi also visited Hardy's home, Max Gate, almost yearly to pay his respects. When Hardy's library was sold in 1938, Finzi attended the auction; being unable to afford any books, he purchased Hardy's walking stick to have a small token from his favorite author's life.<sup>1</sup> His actions seem more like those of a family member than academic disciple.

Why would the younger man feel so personally connected to a man more than sixty years his elder? In a letter to his wife Joy, Gerald Finzi wrote, "I have always loved him so much and from earliest days responded, not so much to an influence as to a kinship with him (I don't mean kinship with his genius, alas, but with his mental make-up)."<sup>2</sup> In Hardy, Gerald Finzi found a resonant mind, a published author of great

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1. Diana McVeah, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2005), 92.

2. Curtis Alan Scheib, "Gerald Finzi's Songs for Baritone on Texts by Thomas Hardy: An Historical and Literary Analysis and its Effect on their Interpretation" (D.M.A. Research Document, West Virginia University, 1999), 26, accessed January 10, 2019, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

celebrity to whom he could relate. Hardy's often pessimistic outlook reveals optimism in the earth's most natural occurrences; he praises natural beauty, even when it comes from the decay of past life, which he describes with macabre detail in many of the poems. Finzi's love of nature and dedication nourishing the land in his orchards find inspiration in Hardy's poems along with empathy for life's great questions of love, loss, and human purpose.

The teenage Finzi had already experienced significant loss. First, his father battled aggressive cancer in various parts of his face, for which he had operations removing his right eye and part of his jaw before succumbing to the disease. While his father was an agnostic, Gerald's mother made slight attempts to insert religion into the home as a comfort through his bout with the illness. According to Gerald, his father's response to her mention of a divine presence was, "He must be a very cruel God to make me suffer so."<sup>3</sup> The young Finzi would have overheard this at the age of seven or eight, and it stuck in his memory throughout his life. Subsequently, he lost all three of his elder brothers to various illnesses. Although not an immediate family member, the

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3. McVeah, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music*, 6.

hardest hit for Gerald was the death of his mentor and composition teacher Ernest Farrar, who died in 1918, a casualty of the First World War.<sup>4</sup>

Hardy's poems number more than a thousand, and Gerald Finzi treasured his copy of the *Collected Poems*. Recurring themes are evident in the fifty or so poems he chose to set to music (including unfinished songs), although even this small selection shows Hardy's brilliant inventiveness and variation. It is clear from Finzi's documented adoration of Hardy throughout his life that he built something like a personal religion from the poet's words and views. In a letter from 1940, Finzi wrote, "Hardy! His outlook, from my point of view, seems all that an artist needs. He had ideas & feelings, but no beliefs."<sup>5</sup> Finzi used songs as a way to pay homage to the poet. He viewed his art as a manner of presenting text in oration rather than a new creation inspired by the poem.

While Hardy did not manage to publish his first poems until he was 58 years old, it is evident that he always believed in the value of poetry as an expressive medium; nonetheless, he was embittered by the lack of a market for his most passionately held ideas during the prime years of his writing career. Finzi was a more modest creator,

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4. Christopher Stunt, "An improbably partnership," in *The Clock of the Years: A Gerald and Joy Finzi Anthology*, edited by Rolf Jordan (Lichfield, UK: Chosen Press, 2007), 161.

5. McVeah, 116.

tackling projects that promoted the works of composers and poets he thought to be greater than himself. For example, he expended much energy in the preservation and publication of Ivor Gurney's songs and presented many lesser-known composers' works with his community orchestra, the Newbury String Players. Perhaps this is why he shows such reverence for the poet in his Hardy songs, transcribing some poetic rhythms that seem musically implausible, if not impossible to most composers. These often led to through-composed songs with changing musical meters and use of free recitative. Some of Finzi's most dramatic achievements in song come from these unlikely poems, including "In years defaced" and "I said to love," with their irregular verse lengths and use of ellipses. Joy Finzi was once asked why Gerald set such difficult words, and she replied with surprise: "But they never seemed difficult to Gerald!"<sup>6</sup> Finzi certainly found ways to support these texts by way of inventive morphing musical meters and intricate rhythms, almost exclusively giving each syllable a single note.<sup>7</sup>

Gerald's early interest in Hardy's poetry explains his reluctance to set more popular (and arguably more musical) verses, such as A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*.

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6. McVeah, 80.

7. In all Finzi's songs, he wrote only a single true melisma in the Shakespeare song 'Come away, death,' on the word "weep." This singular occurrence is likely an homage to weeping motives common in Baroque music to which he dedicated much study. There are also a few rare examples of syllables set to two notes in "It was a lover and his lass" and "For life I had never cared greatly."

Indeed, like so many of his fellow British composers, Finzi grappled with Housman's poetry during the 1920s, but failed to complete even a single song.<sup>8</sup> *A Shropshire Lad* contains lyrics similar to folk poetry that have an inherent musicality, metrically even phrases and simple poetic forms built almost exclusively of quatrains. Hardy's poems, even the shortest ones being so much more complicated in form and meter, sparked music from Gerald that he could not muster for Housman's verses.

Hardy lived a conflicted life in Victorian society, growing up in a working class, religious home. By his twenties, he had rejected Christianity, developing strong agnostic views that speak through his writing. He has even been described as a strong voice for the "first-generation atheists," although this was never how he described his own views.<sup>9</sup> He preferred the term agnostic and even claimed a sense of "churchiness" as a cultural aspect throughout his life; it was certainly difficult to remove oneself completely from the Church and maintain a social life in Victorian England. Hardy's early support of Charles Darwin's work and loathing of religious dogma were views shared by Gerald Finzi's father, and it seems likely that the young Finzi projected some love for his dead father into his love for Hardy's poems.

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8. Banfield, Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20th Century*. Vol 1. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 237.

9. *Ibid.*, 275.

Hardy made his living and became quite famous for his serial novels, the subject material of which often approached the periphery of cultural acceptability, with sexual and violent episodes that received particular disapproval. In fact, he became steadily more frustrated with the censorship his publisher imposed on him, forcing him to whitewash or cut the grittier passages. While the novels gave him years of stylistic practice, during which time he became the master of cliffhangers, he always considered himself to be a poet first and foremost. Poetry allowed him an escape; he thought it a purer art form to express his most personal views. For Hardy, there was special power in poetry, which functions as a less scandalous vehicle for conveying controversial views than “argumentative prose.” Hardy discusses his thoughts on poetry’s capacity for free expression in his personal notebook, dated 17 October, 1896:

Poetry. Perhaps I can express more fully in verse ideas and emotions which run counter to the inert crystallized opinion—hard as a rock—which the vast body of men have vested interests in supporting...If Galileo had said in verse that the world moved, the Inquisition might have let him alone.<sup>10</sup>

In this entry, Hardy manages to criticize censorship in his own time and far into the past. Although he did manage to publish his deepest and most controversial views through poetry later in life, like Petrarch, his poems were much more of a personal journal throughout his life. In the poems, he could be truly honest.

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10. Christopher Stunt, “An improbable partnership,” in *The Clock of the Years: A Gerald and Joy Finzi Anthology*, edited by Rolf Jordan (Lichfield, UK: Chosen Press, 2007), 156.

It is evident that Hardy and Finzi came to share a similar worldview, but their journeys to these conclusions were vastly different. Hardy was the son of a working-class household and was necessarily compelled to work for a living, while Finzi was born into a family of middle-class stature with the resources to give him artistic freedom throughout his life. Although he rejected the religious aspects, Hardy had a rich and loving family life, while Finzi experienced traumatic personal losses of family members at an early age. Regardless of their differences, the two men's work combine in some of the most moving songs in the English language.

### **Shared Vision: Recurring Themes in Finzi's Chosen Hardy Poems**

A pattern is evident in the subject material of the poems Finzi chose for his songs. They nearly always include one of three "preoccupations," as Diana McVeah has called them: (1) the "futility of war" and impossibility of avoiding death, (2) an "obsession with time's passing," and (3) the "beauty of the natural world and its indifference to man."<sup>11</sup> While it is perhaps subtler in the texts, Finzi appreciated above all Hardy's "freedom from religious bigotry."<sup>12</sup> Finzi opposed any dogmatic teaching, a

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11. McVeah, 174.

12. Ibid., 173.

practice he always criticized in Christian churches and came to associate most strongly with Nazism during the Second World War.

His Jewish background and Italian name had prompted questions about his “Englishness” that frustrated him long before the Second World War. With the rise of the Nazi party, he joined much of Europe in obsessing over the future. His personal endeavor was to document and promote composers from obscurity, being a special champion of his fellow British composers. In the late 1930s, he began to collect cuttings of newspapers about Jewish topics as well, writing his own annotations.<sup>13</sup> He also made a list of Jewish composers, likely as an attempt to document those that others in Europe sought to erase. Being a staunch supporter of any persecuted minority, he was motivated to protect the musical legacy of these composers.

War scenes are rare in Finzi’s songs for tenor (in *Till Earth Outwears*, the focus of this study, there is only the mention of war in “At a lunar eclipse”), although Finzi scholars rightly note that some of his greatest triumphs in the baritone sets relate to war. “Channel Firing” is a long and intense song, almost a cantata, that describes the gunfire of a battle as experienced by those long dead and buried in a churchyard. The hellish sounds of the guns are powerful enough to fool them into thinking Judgment Day has arrived. While the tenor singing Finzi’s songs will not portray battle, he must find a connection with Hardy’s macabre obsession with impending death. Often the

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13. McVeah, 89.

death addressed in the tenor songs is that of the narrator's lover, sparking memories of happier times that are inevitably interrupted by his realization that those times are over. "In years defaced," "It never looks like summer," and "Life laughs onward" broach this topic; each reaching a different concluding emotion. The first insists that love has left an eternal mark, the second sees despair as the only course for dealing with loss, and the final song takes a more optimistic view, celebrating new life.

Time's passing and the beauty of the natural world turn out to be two aspects of a single idea for Hardy. Time is only one dimension of natural order. The songs "I look into my glass" and "Life laughs onward" address time's effects with drastically different attitudes toward the outcome. "At a lunar eclipse" revels for a moment in the beauty of "Heaven" but quickly turns to distaste at human "Mortality." Nature is tremendous but cares not for the fate of any individual human. All the songs addressed in this study concern time's effects on the narrator's life experiences.

### **Publication of Finzi's Posthumous Songs**

In 1941, Finzi wrote a catalogue of his works to date, which included the introduction "Absalom's Place." Ever a dedicated disciple, he begins with a quotation of Hardy, "Why do I go on doing these things?" He agrees with his philosophical mentor that the appreciation he receives in life is not enough to motivate him to complete his works. The desire that keeps him working is to leave a legacy with which

to communicate his ideas and values to a future generation. He answers Hardy's question, "Yet some curious force compels us to preserve and project into the future the essence of our individuality, and, in doing so, to project something of our age and civilization."<sup>14</sup> The short essay is a reflection on his own motives in composing and publishing his works. It also functions as a sort of will and testament, asking that his wife Joy and best friend Howard Ferguson make arrangements for the publication of any remaining works.

In 1956, Finzi lost his battle with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a form of leukemia. Upon his death, twenty-six songs were complete but unpublished; among these were fourteen on texts by Thomas Hardy. Following Gerald's wishes, his wife Joy, along with his friend Howard Ferguson compiled these into sets, one of which they titled *Till Earth Outwears*. These songs were composed across the duration of Finzi's life. "The Market-Girl" and "At a lunar eclipse" were early songs that the composer cut from his early cycle, *A Young Man's Exhortation*, while two others, "It never looks like summer" and "Life Laughs Onward," were composed in his final year. Like the earlier cycle, these songs contemplate various themes of memory, loss, experience, and most importantly, hope.

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14. Gerald Finzi, "Absalom's Place," in *The Clock of the Years: An Anthology of Writings on Gerald and Joy Finzi Marking Twenty-five Years of the Finzi Friends Newsletter*, edited by Rolf Jordan (Lichfield, UK: Chosen Press, 2007), 104.

## Chapter 2

## Characterizing Hardy's Poetic Voice

Hardy's poetic output is vast and innovative in form, yet it often employs archaic language and plays with preexisting poetic forms from hymn tunes and folk poetry. As a poet, Hardy could simultaneously celebrate history and dissent from the culture of his time. Scholars have commented on the futility of generalizing Hardy's style and even his expressed beliefs in the poems. A practiced master of the cliffhanger from years of authoring serial novels, he continues to surprise us with plot and mood twists in his poetry. Donald Davie observes, "Time and again he writes in ways that it seems his declared intentions and his professed ideology would have ruled out."<sup>15</sup> Treating religious and other topics that he claims to despise, he simply cannot escape his own cultural background. While much of Hardy's variety is evident in the poems Finzi chose to set to music, there are some characteristics that the singing interpreter of these songs can keep in mind when delving into the texts and presenting them. Recurring topics that form the personality of his narrator include time, women, cynicism, and Hardy's uncanny ability to write a literary twist, shifting opinion suddenly and unexpectedly from one verse to the next.

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15. Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 41.

The overriding theme of Finzi's selected poems is Time. I capitalize this as Hardy is often wont to do; this is his manner of making a single word encapsulate greater meaning, signifying an archetype or personification of a greater idea. He wants the reader to recognize the symbolic gravity of these words, including all connotations and differing understandings of the topics. This is an aspect of Hardy's poetry that can provoke long reflection in the reader. Examples abound in the poems, including 'Might,' 'Fair,' and 'Paradise' in the first poem of *Till Earth Outwears*, "Let me enjoy." For Hardy, Time's personality is like that of an ancient deity, sometimes a friend granting gifts, but more often a fickle trickster. There is no way to avoid its negative consequences.

Hardy obsessed over Time because he experienced but was unable to truly enjoy his long life. Particularly in the later years of his unhappy marriage and the guilt following his wife Emma's death, he sought to escape the ravages of Time in his own memories. Joanna Cullen Brown astutely recognizes that, "Memory, for Hardy, is the one force strong enough to resist Time."<sup>16</sup> As a young man, his primary obsession had been women, and his memories of women are some of his most vivid descriptions in poetry.

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16. Joanna Cullen Brown, *A Journey into Thomas Hardy's Poetry* (London: Allison and Busby, 1989), 66.

Directly or as an allusion, each poem in *Till Earth Outwears* expresses a feeling for a woman or women more generally; however, these are no simple love poems. The most surprising mention of women is held to the very last line of "At a Lunar Eclipse." Here we see one of his signature plot twists. After praising the natural wonder of the eclipse, questioning the violent and miserable underbelly of humanity, and expressing outrage at warring nations, Hardy's final issue with the eclipse's limited image is that it completely obscures the presence of "women fairer than the skies." Even when all the major worldly problems concern his mind, his virile nature, his raw attraction to female beauty, eclipses all other thoughts.

In a subtler manner, "I look into my glass" is also concerned with women. While Time ravages his body but leaves his mind intact, the narrator feels the same carnal urges he has always felt. The "hearts grown cold" to him belong to the women who have rejected him, most importantly his wife Emma. The "throbbings of noontide" are the sexual desires he felt in the noon of his life, his physical prime. Time has made him helpless to act, but it refuses to dull his desire and pain.

Hardy's overarching attitude towards any topic is one of pessimism, albeit with a certain dark humor. Even in happier scenes, Hardy's voice contains incredible cynicism. While "Let me enjoy the earth" expresses a passion for life, it is a direct challenge to the dogmatic teachings of the Church. It is provocative as the narrator relishes his enjoyment of life according to his own principles. Even if 'Paradise' exists, like Virgil in

Dante's *Divine Comedy*, he will not be condemned to the Inferno but live happily in another land.

The most triumphant song in the set, "The Market-Girl," is colored with pessimism. It all leads to a happy ending, but Hardy discounts any value in his "prize." First, "Nobody took any notice of her." Then he paints his impression of her as so unappealing that even "if she had offered to give her wares and herself," no one would have taken her up on the offer. This air of dark humor within an otherwise happy scene reveals the subjectivity of Memory. It may be strong enough to resist Time, but it can never defeat it. Looking back from his old age, Hardy's memory is colored by his mature worldview. He cannot manage to escape into the memory.

Happy scenes can be tinged with bitter sadness, but the most striking turns of opinion are Hardy's shifts to nonchalance at Time as it spins in a circle. When Hardy looks forward to the beginning of the next cycle, one that will not include him, he accepts it as good. 'Life laughs onward' is a perfect example. The narrator goes seeking the physical place where his wife is buried, presumably desiring to accentuate his grief and wallow in it. He tries desperately to feel violated, even scandalized by the new developments with which Time has erased the site of his past. In the end, he recognizes that he is near the end of the natural cycle, and he can see the youthful beginnings of the next. He is only able to find release from his regret by recognizing this new life as good.

Finzi found inspiration in Hardy's ability to observe his surroundings with uncanny detail, to feel deeply, and his refusal to waste time attempting to explain away the bad through any system of beliefs. The interpreter of these songs must delve into this rather antagonistic mindset to present the artists' combined work with integrity.

## Chapter 3

## Interpreting the Texts of *Till Earth Outwears*

### 1. Let Me Enjoy

1

Let me enjoy the earth no less  
 Because the all-enacting Might  
 That fashioned forth its loveliness  
 Had other aims than my delight.

2

About my path there flits a Fair,  
 Who throws me not a word or sign;  
 I'll charm me with her ignoring air,  
 And laud the lips not meant for mine.

3

From manuscripts of moving song  
 Inspired by scenes and dreams unknown  
 I'll pour out raptures that belong  
 To others, as they were my own.

4

And some day hence, towards Paradise  
 And all its blest – if such should be –  
 I will lift glad, afar-off eyes,  
 Though it contain no place for me.

This is a meditation on a theme central to Hardy and Finzi's worldview: isolation and exclusion. Here, the poet accepts personal exclusion in four separate situations, yet he remains hopeful to the end. This poem is the first in *A Set of Country Songs*, published

in 1909.<sup>17</sup> The form is one of Hardy's most regular, four quatrains with verses alternating rhyme (ABAB, CDCD, etc.), almost entirely iambic. This regularity gives the poem a sense of lightness and youth, an imitation of folk poetry similar to A. E. Housman's poems that were such popular inspiration for English song at the turn of the twentieth century. To slow the poem's flow from one idea to the next, Hardy delineates four distinct parts by numbering the strophes, each of which addresses a separate part of the world that has shunned the narrator.

In the first part, the narrator laughs scornfully in the face of the Church, whose God "the all-enacting Might," supposedly created the world. Despite society's attempt to cage him within a Christian worldview, he is a free agent living in the world; he will be joyful as he lives according to his own principles, even if this has no place in the Church's plans. Hardy found an honest artistic outlet in his poetry, as his novels were rather strictly censored. His bitterness at this scrutiny is evident in this poem.

In the second strophe, a "Fair" woman scorns him, ignoring him completely. Hardy loved (obsessed over) women throughout his life, although he did not always find his affections reciprocated. Here, he decides to enjoy the view from afar, refusing to let rejection dampen the energy he experiences through his affection for her.

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17. Mark Robert Carlisle, "Gerald Finzi: A Performance Analysis of *A Young Man's Exhortation* and *Till Earth Outwears*, Two Works for High Voice and Piano to Poems by Thomas Hardy" (D.M.A. Treatise, The University of Texas at Austin, 1991), 30, accessed December 1, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

The third strophe is surely the voice of a performer who brings to life the work of past artists and scholars. Hardy toys with the reader's senses, using a visual manuscript to bring to life aural "raptures." When performed, a piece of music becomes the performer's own rendition, regardless of the poet/composer's intentions or beliefs. In this way we performers can enjoy works of art as if they were our own creations.

The final strophe paints a Dantesque vision of the afterlife, in which the narrator (presumably in some version of Purgatory) can lift his "afar-off eyes" and see Paradise above in the distance. There are two important expressions of doubt in this final verse, first the blatant aside statement, "if such [Paradise] should be." The second is much subtler. By using the subjunctive-mood "contain" in the final line, Hardy introduces a new idea of subjective uncertainty: if a true Paradise existed, he doubts that he would be excluded from it. He cannot comprehend a true system that could defy reason.

**2. In Years Defaced**  
**(Hardy's title: "A Spot")**

In years defaced and lost,  
 Two sat here, transport-tossed,  
 Lit by a living love  
 The wilted world knew nothing of:  
     Scared momentarily  
     By gaingivings,  
     Then hoping things  
     That could not be...  
 Of love and us no trace  
 Abides upon the place;  
 The sun and shadows wheel,  
 Season and season sereward steal;  
     Foul days and fair  
     Here, too, prevail,  
     And gust and gale  
     As everywhere.

But lonely shepherd souls  
 Who bask amid these knolls  
 May catch a faery sound  
 On sleepy noontides from the ground:  
     'O not again  
     Till Earth outwears  
     Shall love like theirs  
     Suffuse this glen!

Hardy sculpts a rich description of "A Spot" (his original title) in the countryside of his youth. This poem is included in the 1902 publication *Poems of the Past and Present*.

"A Spot" embodies the title of the collection and adds a future dimension of time; the long first stanza addresses the past and present, while the second looks to the future.

The unusual form of this poem is clear to see from its layout on the page. Its irregular line-lengths create the "knolls" of the hilly pasture where the lovers once met

in their own secluded spot, a sheep pasture called Coomb Eweleaze near Puddletown. Lois Deacon concludes that the lovers of the poem are Hardy himself and his cousin Tryphena Sparks, a close companion in childhood and young adulthood.<sup>18</sup> She was likely his first love.

The dramatic content of this poem is ideal for recitation. The first line makes it clear that the story that is about to unfold is one of a past life, something that has already been “defaced and lost” in time. The scene from Hardy’s personal past is a typical story of young love that has ended. Hardy brilliantly connects the past to his thoughts in the present with ellipses, excluding details of the painful ending of their star-crossed love. Instead, he exclaims his grief that in the present, “no trace remains” of their love story.<sup>19</sup> Through changing seasons and weather, he expresses the banality of life, alluding to nature’s neutralizing tendency, replacing each state of being with its opposite in a constantly changing cycle. He does not mention it by name, but Time has ravaged this place with its disinterested march forward. The final six verses of the first strophe are full of alliteration, one of Hardy’s favorite devices for making an obsessive point.

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18. J. O. Bailey, *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy: a Handbook and Commentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 158.

19. This is a sentiment shared in the final poem in *Till Earth Outwears*, “Life Laughs Onward.”

While no physical sign of their love remains, no initials carved in a tree as proof for the ages, Hardy insists that they have left a spiritual mark upon their “spot.” In the final stanza, looking to the future, he makes use of a folk belief that shepherds have power to sense the emotional past of a place, particularly where meaningful sentiments were shared.<sup>20</sup> For Hardy, the trauma of this period of his own life is also preserved in the physical place he shared with his lover. In *A Journey into Thomas Hardy’s Poetry*, Joanna Cullen Brown observes, “although in Hardy’s world places are vital and significant, they are almost invariably places marked by people, and people who are the dominant interest.”<sup>21</sup> Here, the mark of these people’s love will emanate from the ground, hailing its unique power until the end of time, “Till earth outwears.” As she had with past publications, Joy Finzi chose this powerful line of text as the title for the set of songs for the 1958 publication of Gerald Finzi’s posthumous songs.

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20. Bailey, *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy*, 158.

21. Joanna Cullen Brown, *A Journey into Thomas Hardy’s Poetry* (London: Allison and Busby, 1989), 26.

### 3. The Market-Girl

Nobody took any notice of her as she stood on the causey kerb,  
 All eager to sell her honey and apples and bunches of garden herb;  
 And if she had offered to give her wares and herself with them too that day,  
 I doubt if a soul would have cared to take a bargain so choice away.

But chancing to trace her sunburnt grace that morning as I passed nigh,  
 I went and I said 'Poor maidy dear! – and will none of the people buy?'  
 And so it began; and soon we knew what the end of it all must be,  
 And I found that though no others had bid, a prize had been won by me.

This charming scene is one of Hardy's most straightforward in content, relating a casual story of love's beginning. The poem tells of the narrator's chance encounter with a woman in an everyday situation, a topical trend that John Ward has identified throughout Hardy's output, "Many poems respond to women he saw by chance, probably once only, in the countryside or across a street."<sup>22</sup> What is unusual in this scene is that it marks the *beginning* of a relationship that presumably has grown into something greater. Looking back on the memory, the narrator lets some dark thoughts creep into the pleasant memory.

The two quatrains of this poem are built of unusually long lines with continuously changing meter. The strong dactylic rhythm of the opening reverses to anapests in the second half of the first line. The wordiness and wandering meter characterize Hardy's rather common awkwardness in many poems. Describing Hardy

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22. John Powell Ward, *Thomas Hardy's Poetry* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993), 6.

as a technician, Donald Davie remarks, "the occasional inexactitude is no less engineered."<sup>23</sup> While some critics have asked if Hardy was a bit careless in some of his inventive forms, these planned imperfections often bring the scene to life.

In this case, we feel the nervousness of a young man who wants to approach a love interest, told in the past tense by an older version of himself. He recounts arguments that he surely told his younger self as he worked up the courage to speak the first words to her. He noticed all the factors that contributed to her ordinariness: nobody noticed her, a sunburnt farmer girl selling her plain crops; even if given freely, most would pass on her offers. With her stature thus diminished in his mind, the shy youth could approach her and offer his suave line, "Poor maidy dear!" Thus began a relationship that one might assume bloomed into a long partnership.

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23. Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 23.

#### 4. I look into my glass

I look into my glass,  
 And view my wasting skin,  
 And say, 'Would God it came to pass  
 My heart had shrunk as thin!'

For then, I, undistrest  
 By hearts grown cold to me,  
 Could lonely wait my endless rest  
 With equanimity.

But Time, to make me grieve,  
 Part steals, lets part abide;  
 And shakes this fragile frame at eve  
 With throbbings of noontide.

This must stand among Hardy's greatest poems; it certainly finds a place in nearly every published study on Hardy's poetry. It is the final selection in *Wessex Poems*, published in 1898. Written in "short-metre," the second most common meter in Hardy's copy of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, this short poem flows smoothly through simple strophes.<sup>24</sup> The clarity of the form, three quatrains in a simple meter, easily communicates the frustration of an aging man who loses physical strength but retains his full mental capacities and physical urges. By employing a poetic form with no surprises, the reader is free to focus entirely on the content.

The power of this poem lies in Hardy's complex psychological manipulation of our senses. The rich visual description of the opening lines calls forth a disgusted reaction; however, Hardy is not upset by his own physical aging. Instead, he wishes his

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24. Bailey, *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy*, 112.

symbolic heart, his emotions and thoughts, would keep pace with the wasting away of his body. The grammatical mood changes with each stanza. The first offers a counterfactual condition: Hardy's mind has not deteriorated at the same rate as his body; therefore, the conditional statements of the second stanza cannot occur and cruel truth must be confronted in the final strophe of the poem.

The second stanza imagines, as so many thinkers have, the possibilities for peace if only one could shut off the brain. For Hardy, the difficulty in aging is the awareness of the changes as they occur. If his mental capacity would only diminish in time with the physical, then he could approach death "with equanimity," a calm and composed attitude. Trapped in a long, ever more distant marriage, it is probable that the "hearts grown cold" to Hardy include his wife, Emma.

Alas Hardy's favored theme, "Time," conspires against him, deteriorating the body at a quicker pace than the mind. The final stanza invokes Time in diverse forms: first as a personified force or deity, then as a man's life metaphorized to the span of a single day. The aging man reaches the "eve" of his life, but still feels the "throbbings of noontide," the vitality of his youth.

### 5. It never looks like summer

'It never looks like summer here  
 On Beeny by the sea.'  
 But though she saw its look as drear,  
 Summer it seemed to me.

It never looks like summer now,  
 Whatever weather's there;  
 But ah, it cannot anyhow,  
 On Beeny or elsewhere!

This briefest of poems manages to charm and move, flashing from young romance to a dim future of grief in two short quatrains. The opening quotation is that of Emma Gifford, who would become Hardy's wife. During their courtship, they visited Beeny Cliff in Cornwall on August 22, 1870; the young Hardy sketched Emma in pencil as it began to rain.<sup>25</sup>

Hardy wrote this text when he revisited the area in March of 1913 after Emma's death, a time of great poetic productivity as he dealt with his grief. The complexity of his own emotional state bleeds into the texts of this period. He and Emma had been estranged for years, but his memory of their early courtship prevailed. It is clear that the narrator experiences grief at the end of this poem. Knowing that Hardy's grief is compounded by guilt at the deterioration of their relationship in the years preceding her death lends extra strength to the utter grayness of life as he sees it in this moment.

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25. Bailey, *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy*, 379.

## 6. At a Lunar Eclipse

Thy shadow, Earth, from Pole to Central Sea,  
 Now steals along upon the Moon's meek shine  
 In even monochrome and curving line  
 Of imperturbable serenity.

How shall I link such sun-cast symmetry  
 With the torn troubled form I know as thine.  
 That profile, placid as a brow divine,  
 With continents of moil and misery?

And can immense Mortality but throw  
 So small a shade, and Heaven's high human scheme  
 Be hemmed within the coasts yon arc implies?

Is such the stellar gauge of earthly show,  
 Nation at war with nation, brains that teem,  
 Heroes, and women fairer than the skies?

On July 18, 1860, Hardy saw a lunar eclipse that prompted the brilliant scene he creates in this poem.<sup>26</sup> Fitting the "imperturbable serenity" of this sight into sonnet form, he begins with naked observation but quickly becomes lost in meditation of human existence in the universe. The poem was published in 1901 in *Poems of the Past and Present*.

The opening strophe describes the graceful beauty of Earth's shadow as it slowly "steals along" the moon's clear surface. This serene observation is suddenly interrupted by Hardy's characterization of the world's true nature as a "torn troubled" place, containing "moil and misery." What begins as praise of a natural wonder quickly

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26. Bailey, 142.

morphs into a critique of the entire human condition. Is it possible that the entirety of life, humans and Earth's other living creatures, can be contained on a planet that creates such a small visible mark on the greater universe?

Hardy employs some favorite devices to strengthen his judgmental meditation on the world's defining characteristics. Alliteration is ever present in the harshest of consonants in the "torn troubled form," "profile, placid," and "Heaven's high human scheme." The tone is mocking, but it is unclear if this mocking is Hardy's personal judgement or his imagination of the universe mocking humanity through this brief instant of visual proof of our insignificance.

While Hardy largely paints the world in a negative light, with "moil and misery" and "nation at war with nation," he uses one of his classic reversals in the final line. He is indignant that the lovely shadow of Earth hides its negative qualities, but his strongest complaint is that this image hides the "women fairer than the skies."

## 7. Life Laughs Onward

Rambling I looked for an old abode  
 Where, years back, one had lived I knew;  
 Its site a dwelling duly showed,  
     But it was new.

I went where, not so long ago,  
 The sod had riven two breasts asunder;  
 Daisies throve gaily there, as though  
     No grave were under.

I walked along a terrace where  
 Loud children gambolled in the sun:  
 The figure that had once sat there  
     Was missed by none.

Life laughed and moved on unsubdued,  
 I saw that Old succumbed to Young  
 'Twas well. My too regretful mood  
     Died on my tongue.

Another poem sparked by Hardy's nostalgia after the death of his wife, Emma, this one celebrates future life instead of dwelling on the past. It was published in *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses*. "Rambling," the narrator revisits sites from his youth, reminiscing and considering life's cycle.

In the first stanza, the aged narrator looks for the house where he once was happy in young love. Instead, he finds the house gone and a new one built in its place. The tone of this first stanza is matter-of-fact. Instead of delving deeper into his personal feelings at the sight of this new house, he wanders on to another place. It is as if to avoid his disappointment, he must distract himself elsewhere. He visits a gravesite, likely Emma's in the Stinsford Churchyard. Since daisies were favorites of Emma,

Hardy uses them to symbolize his late wife in this and several other poems.<sup>27</sup> These colorful symbols of life, diminish the sad impact of the grave, but Hardy does not express a clear resentment or relief that these flowers brighten the scene.

Once again, the brightness of youth overshadows nostalgia and grief for the past. These are not somber children, but “loud” and active in the sunlight. Without directly expressing it, Hardy invokes the color yellow in this scene, portraying a summer’s midday in full bloom. In such luminosity, the shadows of darker thoughts cannot survive.

Life’s cycle is immutable, moving ever forward with incessant energy. In the final stanza, the narrator is able to remove himself from the situation and view it as an outsider. With neutral vision, he is able to see that all is well in the cycle. “Old” must step aside to make way for “Young.” Recognizing this, his sadness disintegrates. Regardless, Hardy manages to insert the word “died” into the final line, a wordplay on the death he mourns, twisting the grim verb to support a positive thought.

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27. Bailey, 367.

## Chapter 4

# A Finzi Soundscape: Describing his Style

How does one define and describe Finzi's sound? Often the tunes and tonality are completely familiar, described by many critics as "conservative," yet unprepared and jarring dissonances arrive to (dis)color this placid soundscape. Folk-like melodies with simple accompaniment morph suddenly into densely contrapuntal passages. His piano parts reveal a quintessentially English choral texture. The pianist who performs this music, like a choral conductor, must ever be prepared to shift focus to the most musically interesting voice.

Scholars have difficulty in naming obvious influences on Finzi's musical style. He does not write with the same fluid love of folk songs that his mentor and friend Ralph Vaughan Williams championed, although aspects are present in Finzi's output. His own beloved Baroque composers, Bach in particular, can be heard in themes of several songs. The simple rondo of "For life I had never cared greatly" is an excellent example, with its recurring ornamental mordent and light style. Baroque-inspired ornaments brighten Finzi's lines, appearing unexpectedly to elevate melodies with surprising tenderness.

Finzi's music is often classified as belonging to an earlier generation, and his attitude toward his most famous contemporary, Benjamin Britten, shows harsh

judgment of the new vogue style of his day. Upon hearing a broadcast of *Billy Budd* on December 1, 1951, Finzi described the work as “fashionable hysteria...a piece of flimsy mysticism covering a homosexual story!”<sup>28</sup> Britten’s style of innovation held little interest for Finzi, who preferred a simpler style that supported recitation of the text over musical style for its own sake.

In *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers*, Trevor Hold comments on the lack of obvious influences from continental composers as well, suggesting that Hugo Wolf is the only non-British composer with whom Finzi shares his word-setting philosophy.<sup>29</sup> Although Hold doubts that Finzi was familiar with Wolf, Diana McVeah documents that he held Wolf’s songs in high regard after hearing some in a recital in 1948.<sup>30</sup> If this was indeed his first experience of Wolf’s songs, late in his life, then the relationship was not one of influence, but rather a recognized kinship, such as the one Finzi felt for Hardy. Finzi and Wolf certainly share an intense dedication to their respective native tongues and the portrayal of text above all. This often yields songs with similar spoken qualities that have more in common with recitative than most Romantic art song.

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28. Diana McVeah, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2005), 201.

29. Trevor Hold, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2002), 395.

30. McVeah, 166.

Finzi's compositional process could take years, with many songs begun and put away in his twenties to be revised and finished decades later. The pianist Howard Ferguson, Finzi's closest friend and an editor of his posthumous songs, has written that this "habit of spreading the composition of a work over years was only feasible because Gerald's style (like that of Elgar or Ravel) changes comparatively little during his lifetime."<sup>31</sup> One may be tempted to identify a late style in Finzi's surprising use of dissonance and a nearly religious adherence to Hardy's texts in the late songs, but when compared with earlier compositions, striking differences are absent. Such examples can be found throughout his entire output.

Spontaneity in his melodic writing is the most compelling aspect of Finzi's compositional process. In nearly every song he wrote, a single line of text, not necessarily the opening line, caught his initial attention. He would immediately set this portion of the text to music, and these passages often stand out as the most memorable portion of each song. The opening melody of "It never looks like summer" is an excellent example.

Although Finzi could write an excellent melody, he was unwilling to sacrifice the text in any way for the sake of musical flow. His melodies are completely married to the text, with memorable snippets appearing and disappearing in the inevitably spoken

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31. Howard Ferguson, "Biography" in *Gerald Finzi: A Bio-Bibliography*, ed. John C. Dressler (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 4.

rhythms. Stephen Banfield has warned that “Finzi’s integrity has its dangers. One is that the vocal line can become a mere functional code, an unemotional slow recitative.”<sup>32</sup> Finzi does manage to make his melodies meaningful by using them to support his chosen texts so perfectly. If one listens without paying attention to the text, the strictly organized formal plan may not be easily identified. Diana McVeah has discussed this character of his melodies: “If the tune were for an instrument, it would be fiendish to memorize; for the singer of words, it is impossible to forget.”<sup>33</sup> This has certainly been my experience in performing Finzi’s songs.

It is typical for Finzi to introduce the opening vocal melody within a piano prelude, although he employs various techniques for disguising the melody. For instance, in “Life Laughs Onward,” the prelude introduces the contour of the melody and strongly establishes the key of G major. In “I look into my glass,” the melody of the first vocal phrase is first introduced in the piano prelude; however, the dissonant chordal accompaniment and the placement of the melody in the middle of the texture makes it nearly unrecognizable.

The formal structures of Finzi’s songs are as diverse as the poems he sets.

Stephen Banfield has commented, “he [Finzi] does not hesitate to express the breadth of

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32. Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20th Century*, Vol 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 282.

33. McVeah, 40.

Hardy's fatalistic philosophy, often in unorthodox musical forms."<sup>34</sup> Finzi employs richly varied metrical schemes as the main mode of accommodating Hardy's poems. Time signatures may change from bar to bar with free recitative passages offering the performer flexibility. The most unusual in *Till Earth Outwears* is "At a Lunar Eclipse," which has no time signature at all, but an unstoppable forward-marching quarter note walking bass. While he does not spurn simpler song forms when they will support the text, Finzi is always open-minded in writing music that fits Hardy's poetic design.

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34. Stephen Banfield, *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain*, Vol 6, *The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 471.

## Chapter 5

## The Music of *Till Earth Outwears*, Op. 19 (published 1958)

### 1. Let me enjoy the earth (1936)

*Andante, ma con moto, quarter note = c. 69, 3/4, G-flat major*

The regularity of this poem's meter implies a strophic or varied strophic setting, but Finzi chose two distinct sets of melodic material, returning to the first for a ternary form. He reuses these loose melodic structures but varies them so much that they are not immediately recognizable when they reappear. Mark Robert Carlisle has rightly observed the form as ABB'A', largely determined by melodic return.<sup>35</sup> Finzi uses the opening melody of the A section in his transition to B in measures 9-10, making the new melodic material something of a surprise. He employs the same technique with melody B in the piano interlude in measures 24-25. Knowing Finzi's manner of setting an initial line of text with a memorable melody, it is probable that the catchy melody B was his initial compositional spark for this song.

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35. Mark Robert Carlisle, "Gerald Finzi: A Performance Analysis of *A Young Man's Exhortation* and *Till Earth Outwears*, Two Works for High Voice and Piano to Poems by Thomas Hardy" (D.M.A. Treatise, The University of Texas at Austin, 1991), 31, accessed December 1, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

There is a warm optimism throughout, remaining solidly in a diatonic *G-flat* major. The few color tones Finzi employs are passing and brief in the quick harmonic rhythm. The fast sixteenth-note texture of the B section “flits” through contrapuntal lines (Example 1), embodying the energy of the second stanza of text.

Example 1: *Let me enjoy the earth*, mm. 10-15.

10 *poco rit.* *a tempo* 87  
A - bout my path there flits a Fair, Who throws me not a word or  
*p dolce*  
13 sign; I'll charm me with her ig - nor - ing air, And laud  
*mf* 8va

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This motion creates contrast from the mostly chordal, quarter note accompaniment of the A material. The short postlude introduces a jarring dissonance in m. 34 (Example 2), a pang of doubt responding to the final line of text. While Hardy’s text is defiant, Finzi’s

setting introduces a tinge of uncertainty at potential exclusion from Paradise, even though he does not believe it exists.

Example 2: Let me enjoy the earth, mm. 32-36.

32 *rall. poco a poco*  
*p*  
 Though\_ it con-tain no place for me. \_\_\_\_\_  
*p*  
*pp*  
 [XIX no. 11]

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## 2. In years defaced (1936)

*Andante, quarter note = c. 66, 4/4, D minor*

The piano prelude is murky and dissonant from the start with a chromatic falling motive that jumps from voice to voice in the texture (Example 3). Only when the voice enters is this motive smoothed out into a larger melody, yet the dissonance in the piano part continues the mystery of the scene. With the piano part, Finzi reveals his subjective reading of Hardy's poem. The opening lines are narration, supported by a rather slow accompaniment. With the bright alliteration of "Lit by a living love," the piano part becomes livelier, with a rising scale in sixteenth notes.

Example 3: *In years defaced*, mm. 1-3.

The musical score shows three measures of music. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The piano part starts with a chromatic falling motive in the right hand and a similar motive in the left hand. The vocal line enters in measure 1 with the lyrics 'In years de-'. The piano part has dynamics markings of *mp* and *p*. A *poco accel* marking is visible in measure 6.

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With outbursts of emotion, positive or negative, Finzi speeds up the accompaniment both in rhythm and with a *poco accel.* marking first in measure 6, then again in 8, and most strongly in measure 23. Within the pensive narrative voice of an older man looking back, these are the moments in which the telling becomes most

personal. Finzi sensitively supports these subtle changes in poetic voice, where the narrator loses control for an instant, then returns to the telling with a calmer demeanor.

While there is much to admire in this song, the musical climax is the final line (Example 4), which includes the phrase that Finzi's wife Joy chose as the title of this set, "*Till Earth outwears.*"<sup>36</sup> For this most profound statement, Finzi employs a reciting tone on *F*<sub>4</sub>, reminiscent of chant. Marked both *pp* and *poco meno mosso* to accentuate the secret told by a magical voice "from the ground," the fragility of this final statement is empowered by Finzi's music.

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36. McVeah, 253.

Example 4: *In years defaced*, mm. 32-38.

32 *Poco meno mosso*  
*pp*  
 "O not a - gain \_\_\_\_\_ Till Earth out-wears Shall love like theirs \_\_\_\_\_ Suf-

35  
 fuse this glen!" \_\_\_\_\_

*cantando* *mf* *dim.* *niente*

[XIX no. 2]  
 [2' 40]

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As in "Let me enjoy the earth," the postlude employs sharp dissonance, accentuating the seriousness of the final line of text. In mm. 36-7, he employs expressive appoggiaturas to great effect, delaying the final consonance of *D* minor.

### 3. The Market-Girl (1927/1942)

*Tempo commodo, quarter note = c. 72, 2/4, F major*

The piano introduction refuses to establish a key and alternates between harmonies of long duration and a short one-measure moving theme (Example 5).

Example 5: *The Market-Girl*, mm. 1-12.

The musical score for Example 5, measures 1-12, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-7) shows the piano introduction in 2/4 time, F major, with a tempo of *Tempo commodo* (quarter note = c. 72). The piano part consists of long-harmony chords in the left hand and a short one-measure moving theme in the right hand. The second system (measures 8-12) shows the vocal line beginning at measure 8 with the lyrics "No-bod-y took an-y no-tice of her as she". The vocal line is marked *Quasi recit.* and features alternating triplet and sixteenth note subdivisions. The piano accompaniment continues with long-harmony chords and a short one-measure moving theme, marked *pp*.

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It gives the impression of a person who doesn't quite know what to say or how to tell his story. When the singer enters, the rhythm is intricately laid out in alternating triplet and sixteenth note subdivisions of the beat, yet Finzi also indicates *Quasi recit.* Singers may be tempted to alter the rhythms for the sake of singing *recitative*, but the written

rhythms are an excellent fit for the spoken cadence of the poem. The accompaniment is that of a secco recitative, offering harmonic support but freedom in the vocal line.

Finzi first set this poem in 1927 but revised it in the 1940s. Diana McVeah classifies it as “Finzi’s parlando, conversational style at its best:”

the introduction so plaintive and bare; the piano bass octaves adding seriousness to ‘sell [give]...herself...too’; the ripple of movement at ‘as I passed nigh’; the confiding tone at ‘and so it began’: here are tenderness, a humorous chuckle, and—unusually for Hardy and Finzi—a triumphant ending.<sup>37</sup>

McVeah points out a surprisingly dark connotation of this poem, an allusion to prostitution that Finzi has both recognized and accentuated with heavier accompaniment for a mere three measures (mm. 19-21) before returning to the light and energetic opening motive. Both being sensitive to marginalized people, Hardy and Finzi humanize and celebrate women who would have been shunned as immoral by most people. A song from *A Young Man’s Exhortation*, “Budmouth Dears” opens a window into the temporary love-lives between visiting soldiers and similar women. Both songs celebrate the energy of young love, but this song implies that love saves the girl from a potentially difficult life.

While this song is brief and easily interpreted, it holds scholarly interest as a bridge into Finzi’s initial plans for his only true cycle, *A Young Man’s Exhortation*. The opening melodic and rhythmic motive forms the basis for the song “Two lips,” another

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37. McVeah, 113.

song from the 1920s and cut from *A Young Man's Exhortation*. "Two lips" was later published in the posthumous set, *I said to love*. Subject material of the poem has ties to "Budmouth Dears." The postlude shares harmonic and melodic structure with the postlude of "Former Beauties," a song that may initially have been meant to reflect back on the memory described in "The Market-Girl." While the final version of *A Young Man's Exhortation*, with its ten songs, has musical ties between songs that form a cohesive unit, the original set of fifteen songs may have been even more intertwined.

#### 4. I look into my glass (1937)

*Adagio, quarter note = c. 50, 4/4, no key signature [G minor]*

With one of Hardy's most striking poems, Finzi created a "masterpiece in miniature," as Leslie Denning has described it.<sup>38</sup> The chords of the two-measure piano prelude include the opening vocal melody (Example 6), nested in the lowest voice of the right hand. In performance this must be brought out if the listener is to hear the formal order hidden within the dissonance of these opening chords. Meanwhile, moving in contrary motion, the tenor voice mirrors the alto melody, perhaps an allusion to the looking glass of Hardy's poem.

Finzi treats every line of text equally, assigning each a single measure in 4/4 meter. Using varying subdivisions of the beat, he fits the varying line-lengths of the poem neatly into this pattern. By continuing immediately from the first stanza into the second, these first two stanzas of text become a single musical section in a short binary musical form.

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38. Leslie Alan Denning, "A Discussion and Analysis of Songs for the Tenor Voice Composed by Gerald Finzi with Texts by Thomas Hardy," A Doctoral Essay, University of Miami, 1995), 80, accessed March 12, 2017, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

Example 6: *I look into my glass*, mm. 1-4.

Adagio ♩ = c. 50

*poco ten.*

*pp*

*melody*

*a tempo*

*p*

3

look in - to my glass, And view my wast - ing skin, And

*cresc.*

3

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With no key signature and an avoidance of any clear cadences, the first section, (mm. 1-11) accentuates the dominant pitch *D*. Indeed, the song opens and closes with this pitch in the melody, beginning high and ending low. Each brief point of rest is harmonized with a major chord or open fifth until the story's turning point at the beginning of the third stanza of text. As an interlude, time tolls like a bell on the tone of *D* for the entirety of measure 11, anticipating the "throbbings" of the final line of the poem.<sup>39</sup> By avoiding harmonic stability, Finzi supports the unrest of the poet's voice,

39. Denning, 82.

using shocking dissonance at the phrase “shakes this fragile frame” to great effect. He does not offer the relief of the song’s ending tonality, G minor, until the moment the singer cuts off the final note (Example 7).

Example 7: *I look into my glass*, mm. 15-17.

15

throb-bings of noon - tide.

*p* dim - - - al - - - - niente

[XIX no. 4]  
[1' 15]

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### 5. It never looks like summer (1956)

*[Andante, quarter note = c. 63], 4/4, F major*

In February of 1956, Finzi set this song instantly upon reading the poem. Later that evening, he found an old sketch of the first line. Joy observed in her journal, "The line written today had the same shape and fall as the previous germ and was obviously the completed idea after twenty-odd years."<sup>40</sup> The text of this short song is as easy to understand as it is to love. The piano prelude introduces the contour of the melody but refuses to establish a key. Acute dissonance in measure 2 foreshadows the sadness of the end, and Finzi reuses the same gesture, transposing it to finish on *F* major.

The melody is conversational, but memorably lyrical. This piece is a prime example of a favorite compositional device; Finzi interweaves the melody in the piano part with the vocal line. Sometimes the piano doubles the vocal line for a phrase only to disappear in a thicker texture and in the rich harmonies Finzi favors. At other times imitation in quick succession draws the listener back and forth between the piano and vocal lines. This song is largely tonal, with sudden dissonances that pierce the grayness of the scene on the cliff where the lovers once courted. With the excitement of the young man's words in the memory, the piano part becomes more active in measures 5-6 (Example 8). Finzi uses his favorite accompaniment in sixteenth notes to add energy and propel the story from a memory into the present time.

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40. McVeah, 244.

Example 8: *It never looks like summer*, mm. 5-6.

5

though she saw its look as drear, Sum-mer it seemed to me.

*crescendo*

*f*

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Returning to the opening melody, Finzi harmonizes the vocal line with falling parallel sixths in the piano part and employs a chromatic bass line to arrive at the tonic *F* major.

## 6. At a Lunar Eclipse (1929)

*Andante sostenuto, quarter note = c. 63, no time signature (unbarred), B minor/major*

“At a Lunar Eclipse” stands among Finzi’s most brilliant songs. Howard Ferguson has included it in a list of unlikely poems for musical setting: “Unsettling though these might appear at first sight, Finzi had a way of getting to the heart of them and translating them into music that seems not only appropriate but utterly inevitable.”<sup>41</sup> Inevitable is an ideal description of this song, an unmetered work with quarter note chords that flow almost constantly to the end. The octaves of the bass have been described as Holstian, an appropriate comparison for the extraterrestrial vision represented by the music.<sup>42</sup>

Composed in 1929 and cut from *A Young Man’s Exhortation*, “At a Lunar Eclipse” has musical similarities with two songs preserved in that cycle. It shares a sense of unearthly experience with “The Comet at Yell’ham” (another unmetered piece), particularly in the striking piano parts. The heaviness of the doubled bass-line is reminiscent of “Shortening Days,” whose cider-maker is himself an allegory for unstoppable Time. These songs stand out because they are such unusual specimens in

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41. Howard Ferguson, Liner notes for *Gerald Finzi: Before and After Summer, I Said to Love, Till Earth Outwears, Earth & Air & Rain, A Young Man’s Exhortation*, Lyrita, 2007, compact disc.

42. Stephen Banfield, *Gerald Finzi: An English Composer* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), 155.

Finzi's output. There is no catchy introduction, no play with melodic motives; rather, an undulating rise and fall of a perfectly legato line (Example 9).

Example 9: *At a Lunar Eclipse, opening.*

Andante sostenuto ♩ = c. 63

Thy shad - ow, Earth, from Pole - to

*pp* sostenuto sempre, senza accento

2  
Cen - tral Sea, Now steals a - long up - on the Moon's meek shine In e - ven

3

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## 7. Life Laughs Onward (1956)

*Andante commodo, quarter note = c. 60, 4/4, G major*

Composed during Finzi's final year, it is comforting to hear so much creativity in this song supporting acceptance of life's cycle as a good thing. Diana McVeah writes that Finzi uses "an anthology of his idioms" in this piece, and what a stellar description this is.<sup>43</sup> If any one song could sum up his compositional style, this one would be among the best examples.

The song opens with a simple repeated theme that outlines the opening vocal melody. The staccato moving bass line "rambles" along like the narrator of the text. As the mood of the poem becomes inflamed with grief, the subdivision doubles in speed with the introduction of aggressively accented sixteenth notes in measure 10. The quarter note remains steady throughout, but Finzi alters the meter regularly to accommodate the text and adhere to his own one syllable per note *modus operandi*.

The opening melodic material returns at m. 14, but the vocal line suddenly rises to the highest notes of the piece. This outburst of emotion subsides in a brief piano interlude that wanders through several keys, once again "rambling" through previous melodic motives from the song. As the poem shifts into a more positive light, the composer uses his favorite devices to greatest rhetorical effect. The lilting accompaniment at "life laughed," measure 21, embodies the unexpected laughter and

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43. McVeah, 257.

leads to an abrupt recitative. The harsh dissonance of *F-natural* against *F-sharp* in the piano at “Young,” resolves to the dominant *D* major (Example 10). The voice reaffirms this arrival with an unaccompanied moment of recitative. Through an octave leap on *D* with the words “’Twas well,” we arrive at the home key of *G* major and a reiteration of the opening melody for the final line. The harmonic and melodic return signifies the completion of one life cycle and the beginning of the next.

Example 10: *Life Laughs Onward*, mm. 23-29.

The image shows a musical score for Example 10, consisting of two systems of music. The first system (measures 23-25) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic, followed by a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic, and ends with a piano (*P*) dynamic. The piano accompaniment also follows these dynamics. The lyrics for this system are: "I saw that Old suc-cumbed to Young: 'Twas well. My". The second system (measures 26-29) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the instruction "ritard." and ends with a fermata. The piano accompaniment includes a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic. The lyrics for this system are: "too re-gret-ful mood Died on my tongue. \_".

Till Earth Outwears by Gerald Finzi

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## Summary and Conclusion

Gerald Finzi found his greatest inspiration in Thomas Hardy. Finzi's early and continued dedication to Hardy's philosophy on human existence was paramount to his own spiritual and artistic development. Reading the poems gave Finzi a window into the most personal emotions and views his hero had experienced during his long life, sparking the composer's creativity in setting his favorite verses in song. Finzi remained Hardy's willing disciple throughout his life, even composing six songs on Hardy poems in his final year of life. This study examines the life experiences that brought these men to hold similar values and ideals, describes the content and style of the poetry, and characterizes Finzi's process for composing his songs. Focusing on the posthumous tenor song set *Till Earth Outwears*, examples of Finzi's earliest songs as well as his latest are explored.

Updating his catalogue of works in 1951, knowing that he faced a terminal illness, Finzi added a note:

I like to think that in each generation may be found a few responsive minds, and for them I should still like the work to be available. To shake hands with a good friend over the centuries is a pleasant thing, and the affection which an individual retains after his departure is perhaps the only thing which guarantees an ultimate life to his works.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gerald Finzi, "Absalom's Place," in *The Clock of the Years: An Anthology of Writings on Gerald and Joy Finzi Marking Twenty-five Years of the Finzi Friends Newsletter*, edited by Rolf Jordan (Lichfield, UK: Chosen Press, 2007), 106-7.

I hope that listeners and interpreters of this music will respond to Finzi's art with the same devotion he mustered in promoting his fellow artists, continuing to support his musical legacy for future generations to enjoy.

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