Vol. 20 No. 2 October 2012

D. H. Lawrence Studies

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words, even though many humans are certain that they are not animals, they are really not certain what an animal even is. The “therefore” in the title of Derrida’s book is part of its ultimate conclusion, the aha, that we, humans, are indeed animals (75).

Works Cited


D. H. Lawrence and the “insidious mastery of song”¹

Bethan Jones | University of Hull

Just knowing the dream, just knowing the song the tune will hold fast in your mem'ry...²

There are a number of possible approaches to the fruitful and fascinating topic of Lawrence's relationship with music. One such method is exemplified by Elgin W. Mellow in his article “Music and Dance in D. H. Lawrence,” which considers the references made by Lawrence to classical music and theatrical dance in his early novels and letters. The analysis serves to establish the social status of the fictional characters in relation to the music with which they are associated, while Mellow goes on to explore the way in which Lawrence's references to music in his correspondence reinforce "the social position which he wanted to claim for himself" (49). One of the most interesting and convincing parts of the article is the section in which Mellow explores the influence of E. M. Forster on Lawrence in terms of musical
allusion, with particular reference to Leonard Bast in *Howards End*. He suggests, for instance, that Lawrence's enthusiastic attitude towards Italian opera at that time may well have arisen from reading and assimilating Forster's views (51–52). Mellown also considers the way in which in 1922, with the composition of *Aaron's Rod*, Lawrence moved away from Western classical music in general and rarely referred to it in fiction again (49).

This is one highly revealing approach to the subject of Lawrence and music; another might entail an analysis of texts such as *The Trespasser* or indeed *Aaron's Rod*, focusing on the roles of their musician-protagonists. A further possibility would be the exploration of the "sound world" of Lawrence's poetry, in which both music and silence serve crucial purposes. The approach I will adopt here is somewhat different, and involves a more "practical" or analytical approach to the way in which Lawrence's work both assimilated and inspired song cycles: musical works in which the "verbal music" becomes (or is married to) the "music of music" (Tippett 32). I will begin by considering Lawrence's enthusiastic response to Edvard Grieg's work *Haugtussa* in 1910, moving on to discuss Lawrence's own (much later) attempt to set text to music in creating his play *David* (1926). Finally I will analyse a selection of recent works by prominent composers such as Nigel Osborne, William Neil and Phillip Rhodes, in which Lawrence's poems have been used as the basis for musical settings, with (in my view) highly successful results.

**Humming Grieg**

On 4 August 1910, Lawrence made the following observation in a letter to Grace Crawford: "You are jolly lucky to go to Norway. I spend my time humming Grieg and thinking of 'Arne'" (L 1174). The allusion here is to the song cycle *Haugtussa*, op. 67 (*The Mountain Maid*) by Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) for soprano and piano, which was a musical setting of poems by the major Norwegian poet Arne Garborg (1851–1924). In May 1895, Garborg had published his book *Haugtussa*—essentially a novel in verse consisting of seventy-one lyric poems. These poems were written in "landsmaal" (a language of town and country): the name given to an orthography developed during the nineteenth century which became an official Norwegian language alongside Danish in 1885. Garborg's verse-novel centres on the experiences of a visionary young herd-girl (Veslemøy) from a wilderness area in western Norway. She possesses a gift for seeing spirits like trolls, hill-folk and fairies: hence the nickname Haugtussa or "hill-sprite." The mystic poems explore the fundamental dichotomies of good and evil, light and dark, temptation and resistance to temptation; and Garborg varies his rhyme and metre according to the mood of each specific poem. Grieg himself referred to this collection as "a quite brilliant book, where the music is really already composed" (Foster 187). He argued that "One just needs to write it down," while also finding landsmaal "a world of unformed music" (187). There are accounts of him reading long passages aloud to family members, just as Lawrence would later hum the Grieg song cycle (presumably in the company of others) and "think...of Arne" (L 1 174).

Grieg initially conceived about twenty songs based on a selection of Garborg's poems, with sketches indicating that he intended some of these for voice and orchestra (possibly suggesting the additional use of voices other than soprano). Eight appeared in the published version of 1898: 1. "Det syng" [The Enticement]; 2. "Veslemøy"; 3. "Blåbær-li" [Blueberry Slope]; 4. "Mote" [The Tryst]; 5. "Elsk" [Love]; 6. "Killingdans" [Kidlings' Dance]; 7. "Vond dag" [Hurtful Day]; 8. "Ved Giaetic-beckken" [At the Brook]. To a degree the song cycle reflects the trajectory of Garborg's entire *Haugtussa* story, and can be roughly considered in two halves. The first four songs reflect the daily life of Veslemøy, conveying the siren-like allure of nature (in the poems the hill spirits tempt Veslemøy to come and live with them), along with the initial meeting with the boy she falls in love with. The second half of
the cycle conveys the extreme, intense happiness the boy’s love affords her, followed by despair at his betrayal and a final attempt to find solace again in the natural world. Grieg aptly reflects the conflict inherent in the Garborg poems yet achieves a sense of unity and cohesion through musical structure and the use of key centres. Each of the songs is written in a simple strophic (verse and refrain) form, but the music possesses a tremendous range and variety, particularly in the folk-tinged harmonies that pervade the entire work. This piece is relatively little known among Grieg’s other compositions, yet the composer was aware of its immense power and felt it contained the best songs he had ever written (Foster 294).

The music is very striking in its drama, turbulence and sweetness: it is easy to understand on hearing this work why Lawrence was so impressed by it. The first song—“Det Syng” (“Enticement”)—exemplifies the scope and range of the music though employing a relatively simple three-part form. The first part concerns the seductive power of the Blue Hill as “enchantress,” linking dream with music that echoes and resonates in the memory. The second section celebrates the “gentle night” at which time “strife is suspended” and a sense of bliss ensues that is unattainable in the daylight. The third section opens with particularly dramatic music and lyrics:

You shall not be frightened of wild desire
which sins and cries and forgets;
it’s embrace is hot and its heart is gentle,
and it tames the angry bear.  

This apparent celebration of desire located in the amoral, mystical hills and the pantheistic natural world may well have appealed to Lawrence. Many of Garborg’s key dichotomies were also prominent in Lawrence’s early work, and continued to resonate later on. In destabilising the egos of his protagonists, Lawrence frequently creates turbulence, contradiction and confusion in which characters are drawn and driven by conflicting forces. Often in his works, the desire for humanity oscillates with an equally strong urge to retreat into nature—such as the episode in Women in Love where Birkin runs from Hermione and finds solace by moving naked through wet vegetation (WL 106–8). Garborg’s pantheistic vision might also be seen as a correlative to Lawrence’s preoccupation with primitive cultures through which he tries to identify the quality of spontaneous, intense living so often absent among the mechanized and urbanised masses. More explicitly relevant is the fact that Lawrence was composing “The Saga of Sigmund” (which became The Trespasser)—a novel steeped in music and myth, engaging explicitly with the legacy of Wagnerian opera—during the year he responded so enthusiastically to Haugtussa. 4 Garborg’s themes clearly interested Lawrence—but as the “music of music” replaces the “verbal poetry” when the two are combined in this way, it must have been the power of Grieg’s sound-world that enticed and captivated him, so that the composition sank into his memory. 5

Lawrence’s Music for David

Well over a decade after humming Haugtussa, Lawrence appears to have been singing the songs he wrote himself to accompany pivotal scenes in his play David. The first definite reference to David occurs in a letter to the American actress Ida Rauh on April 6, 1925 (L 5 233). Lawrence was working on ideas for three plays at this time: the others, entitled Altitude and Noah’s Flood, were abandoned, but he completed David and the play was published in 1926. The initial impetus seems to have come from Frieda, who suggested that Lawrence should write a play based on her reading of the Old Testament in German at this time, and her particular fascination with the figure of David (Plays lx–lxii). In the spring of 1924, however, Lawrence had met Ida Rauh for the first time in Taos. Lawrence subsequently engaged in games and charades with Ida and her family; he also decided that he would like to write a play for her (Plays lxii–lxiii; lxiii–lxiv). He finally turned to the
play after a period of illness, telling her that the play was “a real thing to me, in a world of unrealities” (L 5 233). In their “Introduction” to the Cambridge University Press edition of The Plays, Hans-Wilhelm Schwarze and John Worthen emphasise that David engages with an ancient cosmic, animist religion, pre-dating the Judeo-Christian tradition. The editors indicate that the play’s movement away from the older religious principle is reflected in the demise of Saul and the rise of David:

The play creates Saul as the last of the old civilisation, as one of the believers in the old relationship between man and the cosmos, whereas David is by comparison modern man, living through his wits and his intelligence, and believing in a personal relationship with a personal God, which is all that his intelligence permits him. (Plays 1xx)

The play was written decidedely as a performance piece rather than a work to be read on the page. Lawrence himself was the first performer, when Ida Rauh came to stay with Dorothy Brett in her cabin at the Del Monte Ranch in mid-May 1925. During the following two days after her arrival, Lawrence read the whole play aloud from the manuscript. Brett witnessed this rendition and described the way Lawrence read it

in the slightly shy, bashful way you have; and you sing in a soft voice the little songs you have invented for the play. You live every part. In some subtle way you change and change about, as the characters alter from men to women, from young to old. You read till evening, with pauses for tea... (Brett 219)

Lawrence initially wrote two songs into the manuscript and these were subsequently copied into the typescript. Martin Secker, who published the play in March 1926, did not include them, and they did not appear in print until the recent Cambridge University Press edition of The Plays in 1999.

Lawrence tried to arrange for David to be performed over the two years following its completion and this was finally achieved in May 1927, though the performance seems to have been deeply flawed (Hassall 547). Lawrence sent his own music to the director, Robert Atkins, yet it seems that the songs were not seriously considered, and music by Richard Austin was used instead (Plays 588). In fact, Lawrence’s music was not performed until 20 April 1996 at a D. H. Lawrence Centre conference, and subsequently at the Sixth International D. H. Lawrence Conference later in the same year.

Altogether Lawrence wrote ten songs, and he received some assistance from his neighbour Lily Gair Wilkinson, who recorded in her diary that he came over “to borrow the use of the piano and sat for more than an hour very happily composing a chant for his play of David.” The day after, “Lawrence came in with the manuscript score for the Psalm in his David, and we were able to find a good many mistakes... He went off very happy to have his M.S. ready for the post.”7 He composed only a vocal line with the text to be sung written beneath. He described the music to Atkins as “very simple, needs only a pipe, tambourines, and a tom-tom drum. I hope it will do” (L 5 557), and Lawrence clearly intended to leave the exact scoring to the performers, who would arrange it appropriately. In terms of musical influence, Lawrence told his friend S. S. Kotelsky that one song drew on the Hebrew musical version of Psalm xxxiii, which Kotelsky had taught him back in 1914: “Wonder if you’ll recognize the prophets singing Ranané Sadikim. But it won’t sound the same.” (L 2 252 n.3 and L 5 557) There is certainly no mention of Grieg, and no discernible evidence that Haugtussa informed any aspect of this series of compositions; nonetheless, it is interesting that the direct line of melodic derivation reached a long way back. The Psalm tune would, of course, have been highly appropriate, given the use of the Biblical story as the basis for the play. Interestingly, the pipe and drum point to a very different influence from the Hebrew Psalm tune and the Non-conformist hymns and Salvation Army tunes Lawrence heard in his youth (see “Hymns in a Man’s Life” in LE&A). In specifying the tom-tom drum, tambourines and pipe it is likely that Lawrence was pointing to the kind of rhythmic percussion playing encountered within Native American tribes in New
Mexico prior to writing the play. There are all kinds of performance possibilities here: the tom-tom would certainly give rhythmic impetus and could be played either with hands or sticks. The tambourines could accentuate the drum rhythms but equally could be shaken rather than tapped (at the ends of phrases, for instance). The pipe could double the vocal line, but also might weave about the melody, creating an expressive counterpoint with the tune. It could even be used to create specific effects, such as the cry of a wild bird.

Lawrence's intentions for the instruments will remain largely speculative, and it is perhaps more fruitful to investigate the strategies he employed in his specific writing for the voices. He produced a single line of music along with the words to be sung, making clear the number and gender of the singers required. (He also indicated precisely at what point in the play the music should appear.) It is specified in places that Saul's daughters Merab and Michal sing, and sometimes they are accompanied by a "chorus of maidens" ("Saul came home with the sword of the Amalakite. Hie! Amalakite...".). Later the music is scored for male voices. David sings a lyrical, sonorous and memorable psalm tune to the words "What is man that thou art mindful of him...." A herdsman sings a short, derisive snatch of music to the words "Yah! David missed her / Let him get her sister Oh": a mocking outburst which seems, in performance, to call for a "very nasal" (Plays 595), snarling or raucous tone. As the tension gathers in Scene 15, a chorus of prophets sing (and occasionally hum) a persistent tune—"Fire within fire is the presence of our God...."—over which Saul's invocation to God is heard: "Shall not the sun of suns rise among the hills of my heart, and make dawn in my body? What! Shall these prophets know the glory of the Lord, and shall the son of Kish stay under a cloud?" (Plays 518). Saul's appeal to God certainly expresses "wild desire" and a zeal that arises from his desperation to provoke a response. The combination here of monologue and underlying tune has extraordinary dramatic potential, and it is interesting that in this scene, over half of Lawrence's music for the play appears. Unlike the isolated instances of David's Psalm tune and the snatches of female melody alluded to above, the music of Scene 15 is fully integrated with the action and provides a continuous backdrop to the entire dramatic sequence.

Lawrence was not an accomplished musical composer and the scoring for the David music is in places problematic. He wrote most of the music for scene 15 in C minor, with the vocal line ranging over three octaves, which is unrealistic given the usual range of the human voice. It would be easy to attribute this flaw to inexperience on Lawrence's part, but it is important to note that he did sing himself and was familiar with notation written out in the Oxford song book and other places. The scoring suggests, in fact, that he was deliberately forcing the voice to extremes in places, with the intention of creating a sound that was strained and rough; ecstatic and rhapsodic. Lawrence may have over-stepped the mark, but his intentions seem quite clear. It is no accident that the highest-pitched vocal line occurs on the words "Lo in thy face strikes the lightning," while the lowest-pitched falls on "slowly he bleeds yet the red drops run away," enhancing the sinister impression conveyed by these words. He is purposely highlighting the contrast between different kinds of utterance—one declamatory and the other "inward."

In the Hægtusa poems, Veslemøy wrestles with a number of conflicting emotions, ranging from intense joy to utter despair within the primitive, mystical setting of the Blue Hill and its environs. In David, Saul (as tragic hero) and also David undergo equally turbulent emotions and experiences in their "too personal" relationship with God, within the primitive and often harsh Biblical setting. Saul in particular experiences an analogous attraction and craving followed by an analogous betrayal—and Lawrence's music, like Grieg's, has the potential to reflect and heighten the impact of the text.
Setting Lawrence

A number of recent composers have responded to Lawrence’s poetry in the way that Grieg responded to Anne Garborg, creating musical settings of his poetry. In considering the resulting song cycles it is necessary to take account of the way in which sequential composition impacts on the “meaning” or nature of individual poems. This is precisely the issue underlying Holly Laird’s Self and Sequence, in which she demonstrates the value of considering the way in which individual Lawrence poems were composed within sequences and (more broadly) within collections or “verse-books.” Lawrence did not write a novel in verse as Garborg did, yet it is indisputable that he did conceive some of his poetry books holistically (Birds, Beasts and Flowers arguably provides the best example) and it is certainly the case that the poems clearly belong together and link closely within clusters. In his critical work Poems in their Place, Neil Fraistat has gone so far as to argue that the consideration of a poem in isolation will “risk losing the meanings within the poem itself that are foregrounded or activated by the context” (Fraistat 8). A question that inevitably arises, then, is what happens when you break these sequences in order to find a group of poems (or even an isolated poem) suitable for musical interpretation. Inevitably, some kind of imposed or substituted musical coherence replaces the previous sequential order, creating a new context for the individual poem.

A composer must decide whether to select poems by a single author or to combine poems by different ones. Schumann and Schubert (the two great lieder composers of the nineteenth century) most commonly used texts by a single author within a song-cycle, though they did at times adopt the other strategy. In the twentieth century, Benjamin Britten combined poems by a range of authors in his early Serenade for tenor, horn and strings (opus 31), in which he sets text by Tennyson, Cotton, Blake, Jonson, Keats and an anonymous poet. In his late Nocturne (opus 60) he adopted a similar approach, using poems by Shelley, Tennyson, Coleridge, Middleton, Wordsworth, Owen, Keats and Shakespeare, the only deviation in strategy being that the individual settings are woven together through a “sleep” motif on strings so there are no breaks between songs. Yet he also composed Winter Words (opus 52) using a series of poems only by Thomas Hardy, and the Michelangelo Sonnets (opus 22). Both compositional approaches have been adopted by prominent contemporary composers in setting Lawrence’s poetry.

I will focus in particular on works by Nigel Osborne (b. 1948) and William Neil (b. 1954) in order to consider some ways in which Lawrence’s poems have been successfully used as the basis for song cycles. I will then consider a work by Phillip Rhodes (b. 1940) in which a poem by Lawrence is used in conjunction with texts by other (established and unestablished) writers. The analytical approach adopted here will focus on the following elements:

- Musical form (is it free flowing or strict; is there a verse/chorus strategy?)
- Harmony (is it dissonant or is there a tonal centre?)
- Melody (how are high and low points used?)
- Rhythm (is it aggressive or gentle, using syncopation, clear patterns or irregularity?)
- Texture (instrumentation: how thick is the sound?)

I will limit the technical aspects of this analysis but aim to include enough to give an impression of the composer’s approach in responding to the nuances of the Lawrence poems.

In his vocal work For a Moment, the British composer Nigel Osborne creates settings of five Lawrence poems, in the following order: 1. The dawn verse; 2. For a moment; 3. Tarantella; 4. What is man without an income?; 5. The drained cup. This work (commissioned and performed by the Cantamus choir) was written for female choir, violoncello and Kandyan drum. “The Dawn Verse” is a short atmospheric poem of farewell and welcome, containing imagery of the dark dividing and the sun coming up. In his setting of this poem, Osborne interestingly merges Western and non-Western musical
traditions through combining primitive African drumming rhythms with simple plainchant.

The setting of the poem “For a Moment” (written in 1929) is much longer and highly evocative: consequently I will consider it in more depth and detail than the other songs of the cycle. Many of Lawrence’s late poems evoke “all sorts of gods” in fascinating and unorthodox combinations. Some poems, such as “God is born!,” are about manifestations of god or God in the natural world; others, like “Bavarian Gentians” evoke specific deities within a mythological setting. Gods from a number of cultural and religious contexts are frequently brought together even within a single poem. Some late poems are about the way in which divinity can be glimpsed within an individual, and “For a Moment” dramatizes instances in which people in their spontaneous, instinctive moments acquire attributes of multifarious gods:

For a moment, at evening, tired, as he stepped off the tram-car,
—the young tram-conductor in a blue uniform, to himself forgotten,—
And lifted his face up, with blue eyes looking at the electric rod which he was going to turn round,
For a moment, pure in the yellow evening light, he was Hyacinthus. (CP 672)

Osborne uses two female choruses for this setting: one chorus conveying the key textual material and the other shadowing. A three-part structure is created in the interests of musical symmetry, and one stanza of the poem is left out for this reason. The first and third sections begin with the words “For a moment” and the music of these two outer sections—haunting, lyrical and ethereal—is very similar. By contrast, the middle section speeds up and becomes more urgent, reflecting the running motion of Io fleeing from Zeus. The music, then, acquires its own coherence and form distinct from that of the poem.

This setting harks back to very early constructions of harmony, and employs a twelfth century technique, Cantus firmus, which was common in

the polyphonic strategies of Church music from this period. This technique results in a ghosting effect: one chorus sings the words “for a moment” as part of the continuing melodic line and supplies any decoration, while the other echoes a few key phrases but in long sustained notes beneath. This twentieth century setting therefore functions as a modern version of what was done by monks in singing the early Mass, in which the text was chanted under a decorated vocal line. The slow, sustained rendition of the key titular phrase suggests that the moment is almost frozen, contrasting with the swift motion conveyed in the middle section. As well as the structural unity through the three-part frame, Osborne uses a tonal centre: the music constantly returns to a unison A, followed by a descending scalar figure moving away through dissonance. The combining of the old and the new in this song results in a sound-world of poignancy and great beauty.

The poem chosen to follow this is “Tarantella,” in which the narrator dances on some rocks in the company of the sea and the moon, mocking a troubled, isolated observer and wanting to be part of the “sea’s fiery coldness.” In accordance with tradition there are six quaver beats to the bar, and the movement conveys the vigour and speedy pace of the dance. Next comes “What is man without an income?”: an ironic, repetitive poem about joblessness and worthlessness in society’s terms. A comic effect is achieved through the repetitions in “dole dole dole,” “hole hole hole” and “soul soul soul,” but these rhymes also contribute to the overall impression of stagnation. There is a strong sense of inertia here—a lack of forward momentum—in stark contrast with the previous song. The cycle concludes with “The Drained Cup” which also employs repetition and is about stasis: this time within a relationship. The poem furnishes a new musical opportunity and challenge as it is written using the Nottinghamshire accent and dialect. The composer here employs the troubled-sounding “devil’s interval” (an augmented fourth leap), which is exposed as the song is sung in unison without instrumental accompaniment. The combination of uncomfortable interval and thinned-out
texture at the end of the sequence offers resistance to any sense of closure or climax.

The poems selected for this sequence derive from all periods of Lawrence's literary career and the composer makes no attempt to reflect the chronology of their composition. Instead, he juxtaposes contrasting poems that serve his compositional purposes, resulting in a convincing musical work. In a composition called "Phoenix" which I wrote in collaboration with Philip Weller in 1996, we adopted a different selection procedure, using poems only from the More Pansies and Last Poems notebooks. Instead of a melodic vocal line, this work uses Sprechgesang, with words spoken over the musical accompaniment provided by either clarinet or piano. The cycle begins with "Prayer" (the last poem in More Pansies) and ends with "Phoenix" (the poem that ends Last Poems). As in Osborne's work, however, the principle of juxtaposition was driven by the need for contrasting moods, creating an oscillation between serious, meditative poems and comic, satirical ones. The resulting order was: 1. Prayer, 2. Intimates, 3. Fatigue, 4. The Egoists, 5. The Heart of Man, 6. Sidestep, O sons of man, 7. Phoenix. The piano and clarinet accompany each movement in oscillation, achieving very different effects. The piano underscores the more "serious," mythopoeic or meditative poems, while the clarinet is generally used playfully for the humorous or satirical verse. The latter sometimes achieves comic effect through mimesis—echoing the term "squeak," for instance, in "The Egoists" and foreshadowing the desired cracking of the mirror in "Intimates." The instrumental versatility aims to reflect the astonishing range and diversity within Lawrence's two late poetry notebooks filled in 1929.


Young Lady. This work, scored for mezzo soprano and piano, was commissioned by the Katherine A. Abelson Fund of the Lester Abelson Foundation and premiered on American radio in 1996. The rationale for this setting is explained by the composer:

Lawrence...has written on the subject of love and relationships in much of his poetry and prose. I have been attracted to his ability to evoke the mysteries of love, unlocking some of the forbidden doors in the process. In The Waters are Shaking the Moon, I have selected poems that explore not only the relationship between lovers, but relationships that Lawrence visited many times in his work: mother and son, father and son, man and nature, adult and child, man and mortality. (William Neil Website)

Neil's statement above indicates that the cycle is holistically conceived, with the "relationship" theme providing unification and also scope for contrast and variation. The cycle includes a setting of Lawrence's most ostensibly "musical" poem—"Piano"—which has also been selected for musical interpretation by Phillip Rhodes in his work Visions of Remembrance. As it would be impossible to discuss these song cycles in their entirety in this context, I will focus on analysing the way in which Neil and Rhodes approach this one poem, highlighting aspects of the settings which illuminate elements of Lawrence's poem through a unique creative response.

It is well known that the poem "Piano" is a duet of past and present, focusing on a mother-son relationship. In the present a woman gives a passionate and elaborate recital on a concert grand; in the past a child sits beneath a parlour-piano and presses the feet of his mother as she plays and sings. Neil's use of female voice and piano for the setting points to a literal response to Lawrence's premise (though this choice is also limited as the song is one of twelve employing the same combination), and indeed it is possible to identify musical gestures which relate to specific aspects of the poem. A descending cascade of notes accompanies the word "flood" while the piano becomes buoyant on "tingling" and "tingling." The term
“appassionato” is repeated with flamboyant elaboration (arguably, here, the piano is used orchestrally in the tradition of Chopin and Liszt). At the opening of the song an ingenious technique is employed: the piano left-hand forms simple broken arpeggios, as if the mother is playing. Above, we hear a selection of dissonant notes, as though the child is pressing random keys as the mother plays and the notes do not quite fit. Alternatively, this disparity could simply indicate that the piano is being practised at home, rather than played in a public performance. At this stage, the piano appears to be deliberately divorced from the voice (perhaps highlighting the past/present divide), and it is not until the words “Taking me back” that the instrument really begins to accompany the singer. In other words, the song begins with three apparently disconnected strands which then cohere when the poem’s protagonists are brought together in the past. The piano itself starts as a parlour piano at home, and gradually evolves into a concert grand by the beginning of the second verse. The voice is made prominent and featured, recitative-style, at the reference to the “insidious mastery of song,” with the piano playing complex arpeggios as accompaniment. With the reference to the “old Sunday evenings,” the music reverts to a traditional, harmonious, tonal pattern of simple chords. Yet this moment of peace and simplicity is short-lived, and tension is soon introduced between the voice and piano, moving us back into the present. The piano takes over, asserts itself with a clear musical gesture on “clamour” and becomes extravagant. At the mention of “manhood” the opening arpeggios reappear but now they are more complex and disturbed, marking the progression from innocence to experience. The song concludes on an “e”—the point to which it has frequently returned—yet the ending undeniably feels unsettled.

In *Visions of Remembrance* (1979), the American composer Phillip Rhodes sets “Piano” at the end of a cycle containing four poems, the first three by other authors. The instrumentation differs from Neil’s in that he employs two female voices—soprano and mezzo—as well as an ensemble of twelve instruments. The work is structured as follows: 1. Flashback; 2. Grown-Up Relatives; 3. My Grandmother’s Love Letters; 4. Piano and Epilogue. While Neil’s work derives its thematic coherence from the focus on relationships of varying kinds, Rhodes’s cycle is bound together through the poems’ exploration of reminiscence and memory. The first movement, “Flashback,” uses a poem by Douglas Worth which evokes the distant recollection of a happy childhood summer, though Rhodes’s musical interpretation also conveys the uncertainty of memory. The choice of two singers usefully provides two different perspectives on the act of recollection with the voices hauntingly intertwining. The second movement functions more as a comic diversion: employing a text by the composer’s twelve-year-old daughter, Anna Jean. Rhodes gives it a jaunty, jocular instrumental accompaniment, complete with “funny” noises. The final two songs, “My Grandmother’s letters,” using a text by Hart Crane, and “Piano and Epilogue,” using texts by D. H. Lawrence and the composer, recapture some of the moods of the opening song.

The setting of “Piano” is more abstract than Neil’s, particularly as orchestral instruments replace (or supplement) the piano to create specific effects. The bells are very prominent and are used, for instance, to represent the tingling/inkling of the piano. This setting evokes a Modernist and Expressionist sound world (that of Mahler, Wagner and Schoenberg), though Rhodes also incorporates much simpler styles in conveying retrospective scenes. The movement is essentially tonal but employs an extended tonality in a highly expressive manner. A tonal centre is established, then removed through dissonant progressions—a strategy that seems highly effective in conveying the loss described within the poem.

The movement opens in a Romantic vein, with oboe and cor anglais evoking a homely, warm scene. The second line broadens outward with strings added, and the journey “down the vista of years” is reflected in a descending melody. The “boom” described by Lawrence resonates on both
piano and bells, while the thick, wide texture gives the impression of a child somewhere within the sound. The pressing of feet beneath the piano is reflected in low individual notes on the piano—and Rhodes supplies an extra adjective—"small child" to emphasize the innocence and create a fluid melodic line. The minor addition is representative of the license used by the composer here: this is also evident in the repetition of words such as "softly" and "singing" to serve musical purposes. Ascending intervals create prominence on certain words such as "dusk," "boom," "smile," and "glamour" and when these are wide intervals the effect tends to be uncomfortable. At the beginning of the second section, a thicker texture is created through the striking introduction of the second voice and also brass instruments. A curious duet between the present-day performer or narrator and the mother in the past ensues, in which the two lines do not quite match up. The section in which the phrase "Betray me back" occurs is dissonant, as though the mother's song torments the narrator as a painful memory.

A wonderful moment, poised and poignant, occurs with the pause before "old summer evenings," followed by the consonant, peaceful, pure chord on "old." The setting of "cosy," too, achieves a brief settled feeling of peace. This does not last long, however, and is disturbed by the awareness of winter outside, along with the sense of missing the past and the futility of trying to recapture it. The tempo becomes increasingly agitated and the texture thickens, with no solo instruments figuring. Oddly, Rhodes decides to omit the section of the poem in which the most overt musical references appear—the singer's glamour and the "great black piano appassionato"—which feature so prominently in Neill's version. Perhaps Rhodes felt that a setting of these words would be less suited to his more abstract and metaphorical approach. The phrase "Glamour of childish days" achieves simplicity and sweetness, in part achieved by a reversion to a thinner texture, although the wide interval leap up to "past" is uneasy. Naturally, in speech, our intervals fall, so this rising feels strained, reflecting the general tension between the

domestic musical space and the present-day concert room which pervades the movement. The setting of "Piano" interestingly segues into the epilogue, written by the composer himself, which acts as a summation of the work's key idea:

Time present...time past...time future
...ever...and forever lost...
visions of memory....

For this Epilogue, the two female voices occupy extremes of pitch, one very high and the other very low, representing the past/present division: the chasm that memory can only partially breach. Dissonance is carried through into the bell chords that resonate into silence.

Michael Tippett has argued that the "music of music" created when a poem becomes song destroys the "verbal music" previously achieved through the text's specific combination of words (32). It is certainly the case that it is principally the melodic line of a song that lingers in memory, while harmony and texture convey the pervasive mood. It is also the case that a good setting of a poor poem can be attractive and have real musical value, while a bad setting of a good poem is disastrous, suggesting that the music that has developed from the words dictates the reception and response. Yet it is more productive to think in terms of creative synthesis than to focus on the process of loss through which the poem forfeits its unique and distinctive sound. Such synthesis is undeniably at work when a composer sets his or her own words and the two are conceived together, as exemplified in Lawrence writing his music for David, or Rhodes composing words and music for his epilogue. Yet even when (more typically) a different composer creates the music, and even when this compositional process is displaced from the original by many years, the interpretative "act of attention" may have astonishing results. A creative rather than critical or scholarly engagement with a poem (or sequence of poems) can exist as a visionary fusion of two
related art forms: one that changes with every performance and acquires the “living” freshness Lawrence associated with true poetry of the present.

Notes

1 The quotation in the title comes from Lawrence’s poem “Piano.”
2 These are the opening words of Edvard Grieg’s Hangtussa, in a translation by Rolf Kr. Stang for the Gesamtausgabe.
3 This translation is by David Fanning, whose texts were used, for example, for the audio CD Grieg Songs: Lieder (1993).
4 Lawrence began writing Paul Morel—a novel full of passion, violence and intensity—during the same year.
5 Ironically, Lawrence had decided he was “not keen on Grieg” by September of the following year (see L 1 306). Mellown attributes this to his “maturing taste” or to “his appreciation of the [implicitly negative] judgment of the socially superior [B. M.] Forster” (51). It also seems typical of Lawrence’s reaction to writers or artists whom he admired and lauded unservedly at the outset (such as Whitman or Keats), but subsequently dismissed, perhaps feeling the need to separate himself from their influence through a more balanced or negative judgement.
6 I arranged the music written by Lawrence for the designated combination of voices and instruments. For performance details see Plays 588 and note 8.
7 Communication from Mrs Lisa Smith.
8 For a musical score of the songs, including lyrics, see Plays, Appendix V, 590–601.
9 I have considered the problematic implications of trying to split or categorise particular sequences in Jones 23–32.
10 For further analytical strategies see Cook.
11 The analysis is based on an oral rather than score-based approach. I am very grateful to the musicologist Elaine King for her contribution to this process.
12 I am also very grateful to Nigel Osborne for supplying me with information about recordings of this work, and to Pamela Cook who kindly provided me with a CD of the Cantamus Choir’s performance which she conducted in 1985.
13 In the commercial CD produced by Composers Recordings Inc. in 1997, this work was performed by the Carleton Contemporary Ensemble with Carol Wilson (soprano) and Lorraine Manz (mezzo-soprano), conducted by William Wells.
14 Contained in the Programme note, see note 13.

Works Cited

Neil, William. The Composer Studio. 27.5. 2012.