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Lawrence Set to Music

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Introduction

Composers have been inspired by Lawrence for over a hundred years, assimilating his works – and indeed his life story – into their music. In the Appendix to her recently published monograph *D. H. Lawrence, Music and Modernism* (2019), Susan Reid presents the results of her initial search for music of this kind, and the list is staggering. There are over fifty items, from Peter Warlock's (lost) 'Red o'er the Moon' in 1914 to Howard Skempton's 'Man and Bat' in 2017, testifying to the way numerous composers have glimpsed rich possibilities for the creative fusion of literary and musical forms. Despite the extent of her findings, Reid emphasises the provisionality of this research: inevitably the list will expand considerably over forthcoming decades as unknown works are unearthed, and new ones are composed. The list also contains a disproportionately large number of very recent settings, simply because these are easier to identify and locate. Some composers listed, such as Benjamin Britten and Arnold Cooke, are highly renowned with long-established reputations, while other names are less familiar.

It is also important to emphasise that the composers mentioned here have adopted a wide range of approaches to their task. Many works are firmly located within the classical tradition of 'art song', in which a composition based on a literary text is (usually) scored for solo voice with piano and intended for concert performance. Yet other Lawrence settings broaden the scope of this definition, using multiple singers and/or instrumentalists; crossing borders between genres and styles; exploiting digital resources and other technological innovations; and even drawing on text as inspiration for a purely instrumental work.

Before explicitly addressing these numerous strategies, I will explore musical attributes within a number of Lawrence poems which have been selected by composers for musical setting, focusing on sound, silence, rhythm, repetition and movement. I will then discuss selected compositions in which an isolated Lawrence poem has been set to music. Next I will analyse settings in which several poems from within one specific collection by Lawrence have been brought together within a song cycle, before moving on to discuss settings in which poems from a range of Lawrence's verse-books have been selected. The following section focuses on settings in which Lawrence's poetry is brought into conjunction with verse by other writers, such as A. E. Housman, Alfred Tennyson and Isaac Rosenberg. This chapter primarily considers poetry setting, but the concluding part will touch on instances where Lawrence's prose works and plays have inspired diverse musical arrangements. This study is the first to make use of Reid's research as a springboard for detailed investigation of the relationship between words and music in this context.

The Soundscapes of Lawrence's Poetry

The following composers have selected individual poems by Lawrence – from across his entire poetic oeuvre – to set to music:

Arthur Walter Kramer – 'Green', 1916
James McAuley – 'Green', late 1940s
Christopher Rathbone – 'Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers', 1966
Will Ogdon – 'River Roses', 1969
Herbert Elwell – 'Service of All the Dead', 1971
Andrew Downes – 'Piano', 1985; 'Butterfly', 2014
John Joubert – 'Autumn Rain', 1985
Hans Gefors – 'Whales weep not!', 1987
David Matthews – 'The Ship of Death', 1988–9
Gary Bachlund – 'To women, as far as I'm concerned', 1991
Evan Hause – 'The Ship of Death', 1993–6
Howard Skempton – 'Man and Bat', 2017
(Reid 2019: 221–7)

My contention here is that these composers, among others, have responded to specific aspects of the poems that make them especially suitable for setting: these include the dichotomies of sound/silence and motion/stasis, rhythmic impetus, repetition, humour and pathos, as well as a more explicit engagement with musical tropes and 'sound effects'. The soundscape of chosen poems will therefore be explored in some detail before I proceed to consider the musical settings themselves.

In 'River Roses' the narrator is 'wandering and singing' with a companion and later hears frogs singing by the riverside (*1Poems* 175–6). An antithesis is evident in this poem as the 'ringing' of 'pale-green glacier water' which 'filled the evening' accompanies (and perhaps obscures) the whispering of the narrator and their companion, who are made fearful by alienation. The ringing, resonant glacial water might also be contrasted with the 'soundless, ungurgling flood' evoked in 'The Ship of Death', which encompasses, in its portrayal of oblivion, a 'deep and lovely quiet' (632, 630). Song is foregrounded in 'Service of All the Dead' (an early version of 'Giorno dei Morti') where 'chaunting choristers' process along rows of cypress trees to the graves where mourners (most poignantly a father and a mother) lament those they have lost (188–9). In 'Autumn Rain' the narrator 'hear[s] again / like echoes even / that softly pace // heaven's muffled floor, / the winds that tread / out all the grain // of tears' (221). This nature poem is symbolically resonant: men slain at war are portrayed as sheaves being winnowed 'on the floor of heaven', while the leaves and rain fall onto the narrator's face and the ground. The echoes here are tentative and muted, in keeping with the drizzling rain and the autumnal character of the stanzas. In this poem the muffling of sound remains constant, whereas 'Piano' begins with music being played softly but later bursts into more strident and voluminous sound.

Composers have also chosen poems (both serious and comic) where Lawrence debunks false utterance and advocates silence as a preferable alternative. 'To women, as far as I'm concerned' contains the line 'The feelings I don't have, I won't say I have' (*1Poems* 435), indicating that refraining from speech may be beneficial in preserving one's integrity. It is arguable, then, that some songwriters have responded to a poetic

interplay between sound and silence, finding ways to reflect such tensions in their musical settings. Where sound is present in a poem it can be emulated or encompassed in the vocal or instrumental line; where absent, it can be creatively supplied or represented through rests or gaps in the music.

'Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers' is a poem that commands us to listen. In so doing it provides us with an example of a poem whose soundscape is foregrounded in a way that can both facilitate and problematise the act of setting it to music. Its wonderfully audacious and playful rhetoric is inseparable from its musical rhythms and repetitions. These features are evident from the beginning and highlighted by the reiterated command to pay attention to the sound effects created by the poem: '*Hark! Hark! / The dogs do bark! / It's the socialists come to town*' (*1Poems* 266). These lines (varied in later iterations) function as a chorus while the 'rags' and 'tags' curiously absent from the socialists' attire become motifs scattered through the poem. Yet while repetition enhances irony and derision here, elsewhere in the poem it enhances a wistful tone: 'Alas, salvia and hibiscus flowers. / Salvia and hibiscus flowers. // Listen again. / Salvia and hibiscus flowers' (267). In contrast to the strident '*Hark!*' the injunction to 'Listen again' is gentle and earnest. Through this emphasis on an auditory act of attention, we are made to feel that the *sound* of the flowers' names is as important as their vivid colours.

Lawrence's late poems, including 'Whales weep not!', 'Butterfly' and 'The Ship of Death', illustrate how repetition may be used for incantatory effect. For instance, the motion of coupling whales is captured in the phrases 'And they rock, and they rock' (*1Poems* 607), while a similar rhythmic pattern occurs in 'it is warm, it is warm' from 'Butterfly' (~~*1Poems*~~ 610). 'The Ship of Death' contains (and repeats) the poignant line 'We are dying, we are dying' (631), with growing urgency. Like 'Salvia and Hibiscus Flowers' this late poem is lengthy and contains a unifying 'chorus' – 'O build your ship of death'. Yet its gentle sea-rhythm contrasts with the harsh juxtapositions, rage-fuelled momentum and jagged satirical edges (offset by moments of beauty and calm) of the earlier poem.

Many of the chosen Lawrence poems convey movement, whether measured, sporadic or even explosive. 'Man and Bat' stands out as the real 'motion' poem among those discussed here. This poem vividly portrays the erratic, circular flight of the frightened creature: 'Round and round and round / In an impure haste / Fumbling, a beast in air, / . . . / About my room!' (*1Poems* 296). The repetitions used throughout this long poem work brilliantly in conveying the frenzied movement of the bat and its growing exhaustion as it staggers and falls. To borrow appropriate musical terms, this is a poem of *accelerando* and *rallentando*, contrasting rapid movement with faltering flight and immobility.

Setting a Single Lawrence Poem

The above section has focused on the 'verbal music' of Lawrence's poetry; this section moves on to explore the effects achieved by supplementing or replacing these word-sounds with music.[1] The composer Michael Tippett has argued that the 'music of music', created when a poem becomes literal song, destroys the 'verbal music' previously achieved through the text's specific combination of words (1989: 32). It is principally the melodic line of a song that lingers in memory, while harmony and texture convey the pervasive mood. 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. Lawrence himself composed the vocal line for ten short songs intended to accompany performances of his play *David* (discussed in Susan Reid's chapter on 'Music'), with an indication of the required accompaniment on pipe, tambourine and tom-tom drum (see Jones 2012: 157–61). Even when (more typically) a different composer creates the music, and even when this compositional process is chronologically displaced from the poem's composition by many years, the interpretative act of attention may have highly positive results. A musical, rather than critical or scholarly, engagement with a poem (or sequence of poems) can exist as a truly creative fusion of related art forms: one that changes with every performance and acquires the 'living' freshness Lawrence associated with 'poetry of the present' (Lawrence 1992: 266–70).

Peter Warlock's lost setting 'Red o'er the moon' (1914) exemplifies a strategy in which an individual poem is chosen as the basis for a song. All the poems discussed in the section above have been selected for this purpose, and the rich diversity of these poems is echoed in the style and instrumentation of the musical settings they have inspired. Decisions reflect each composer's interpretation of the poetry but may also be dictated by practical considerations such as available resources, funding and (if applicable) the terms of their commission. For instance, the Cantamus Girls Choir (based in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire) has commissioned a number of Lawrence settings, thus providing a large (and highly proficient) body of young female singers for subsequent performances.[2] A popular choice is the simple 'art song' combination of voice and piano, exemplified in Gary Bachlund's setting of 'To women, as far as I'm concerned' (using tenor voice). For the poem 'Piano', Andrew Downes chooses a soprano supplemented by other high voices and a piano. Will Ogdon's setting of 'River Roses' is still relatively small-scale but more unusual in employing flute and double bass to accompany the soprano voice. Hans Gefors uses a mixed voice choir singing *a capella* for his setting of 'Whales Weep Not!', while John Joubert combines choir and piano for 'Autumn Rain' (commissioned by Cantamus). Two of the most substantial works – in terms of duration and the musical forces involved – have been based on sustained narrative poems. Christopher Rathbone's 'Hibiscus and Salvia Flowers' is a Cantata for tenor and bass soloists, treble choir, six wind soloists, strings and percussion. Evan Hause's 'The Ship of Death' – the composer's 'Symphony no. 1' – uses dramatic soprano, contralto, tenor, baritone, large chorus and orchestra.

'Piano', as the most explicitly musical of all these poems, has attracted much attention among composers. It is about retrospect and nostalgia: the way in which listening to music for voice and piano in the present poignantly evokes the narrator's childhood experience of sitting beneath the piano at home 'And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings' (*1Poems* 108). The inherently musical theme and character of the poem creates a wealth of opportunities for musical appropriation. This is exemplified in the highly expressive recent setting by Andrew Downes, which has been creatively animated by Paula Downes and broadcast on Youtube (Downes 2016). The music harks back to the foundations of vocal polyphony in medieval times, using plainchant to suggest retrospect and time past. There is no obvious tonal centre (though major and minor intervals do occur): instead, the vocal lines (often in unison octaves or a fourth or fifth apart) tend to converge onto a single note. Chorale-like

textures are employed, particularly at the point where hymns are being sung in the 'cosy parlour' (*1Poems* 108). At the opening, both low and high piano chords are struck and then sustained: left to merge and resonate. The high chords are played percussively, as though marking clock-time, in keeping with the poem's theme. The setting begins with a single, soprano voice but introduces a second, high voice at the first mention of 'child' (suggesting the coexistence of the narrator in the past and present). Further vocal lines are introduced expressively at significant moments, such as the reference to the 'insidious mastery of song'. The piano bursts into prominence at 'clamour' and 'great black piano appassionato', creating textural and dynamic contrast while wrenching us out of the past and back to the poem's present time and place. The shifting, extended tonalities ultimately create a sense of irresolution, evident in the single, unaccompanied note that brings the song to a close.

Downes's setting of 'Piano' has been chosen here as an effective, readily available work that treats the poem in isolation and that also indicates the multi-media possibilities available to composers and their collaborators in the twenty-first century. In subsections below I will briefly consider musical versions of 'Piano' by William Neil and Phillip Rhodes, in which the poem is integrated into longer sequences, evidencing a different approach.

Herbert Elwell's setting of 'Service of All the Dead' and Gary Bachlund's setting of 'To women, as far as I'm concerned' are based on less commonly chosen Lawrence poems. The composers have responded to strikingly different types of poem and the resulting compositions contrast utterly. 'Service of All the Dead' is a sombre processional poem in which villagers, priests and choristers move slowly towards a place of collective mourning:

> And all along the path to the cemetery
> The round dark heads of men crowd silently,
> And black-scarved faces of women-folk, wistfully
> Watch at the banner of death, and the mystery.
> . . . (*1Poems* 189)

This poem contains a subtle dynamic contrast: the singing of the choristers conflicts with the 'silence' of the respectful villagers. Interestingly, Elwell resists the kind of plodding rhythm that is traditionally used for processional music. There are hints of a pulse here, but momentum is generated to a greater extent by the fluent, melodic vocal line at the points where the choristers move between the cypress avenues. Rather than mimicking the progressing footsteps through a conventional musical gesture, Elwell appears to convey the feeling experienced by the mourners. The minor chords emphasise darkness and grief while the octave leap up to 'mystery', accompanied by an outburst on piano, situates this concept at the heart of the musical interpretation.

'To woman, as far as I'm concerned' employs repetition for ironic and humorous effect, progressing through shifting, modulating phrases:

> The feelings I don't have I don't have.
> The feelings I don't have, I won't say I have.
> The feelings you say you have, you don't have.
> The feelings you would like us both to have, we neither of us have.
> The feelings people ought to have, they never have.
> . . . (*1Poems* 435)

The message is unequivocal, bluntly asserted through the accumulating negatives ('don't have', 'won't say', 'never have'). Bachlund (1991) describes his highly subjective response to the poem as follows:

> The setting begins simply, and the alternation between the 6/8 and 3/4 'feeling' – a perfectly normal hemiola[3] – in this instance beats out a theme meant to underscore obstinacy. The vocal line rises to the negation of 'feelings' which women . . . assure men they have, when they know full well they do not . . . Lawrence has created a wonderful poem to capture it all for a solo singer. It is meant to be interpreted aggressively.

There is certainly justification for an aggressive interpretation of this kind, yet there is also absurdity and playful humour within the poem's stubborn rhetoric and convoluted 'argument'. Bachlund's version therefore highlights the way in which musical setting may alter both musical and non-musical aspects of the poem. This setting serves as an example of the way the 'music of music' (as Tippett puts it) can replace the 'music of poetry' when the composition has been provoked by a strongly personal reading.

Many settings of individual Lawrence poems are not readily available. Some have never been performed; others have received rare performances but have never been recorded. Some are available as musical scores but have not appeared on CD. However, more recent settings are being made available online or on CD. One example is Howard Skempton's setting of 'Man and Bat', which aims to 'reflect the rich, varied, and at times frenetic narrative of the text' (2017: n.p.). This work received its world première in July 2017 in Sheffield and was released by First Hand Records in the autumn of 2019, along with other works including *The Moon is Flashing* (which includes a setting of Lawrence's 'Snake', FHR 2019).

Setting Multiple Lawrence Poems: New Sounds and Sequences

For a song cycle, 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, though they did at times adopt the alternative strategy. In the twentieth century, Benjamin Britten combined poems by a range of authors in his *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings* (opus 31) and *Nocturne* (opus 60). Yet he also composed *Winter Words* (opus 52) using a series of poems by Thomas Hardy only, and the ~~Michelangelo Sonnets~~ (opus 22).

A further distinction that can be made is between those composers who have chosen poems by Lawrence from a specific verse-book and those who have 'mixed and matched' across the author's numerous collections. The former are decidedly in the minority, yet there are at least two notable examples that will be discussed here. In addition to setting 'Autumn Rain' (discussed above), John Joubert has used five poems from *Look! We Have Come Through!* in a song cycle for baritone and string orchestra called *The Instant Moment* (opus 110). The sequence is as follows: 1. 'Bei Hennef'; 2. 'Loggerheads'; 3. '"And oh—that the man I am might cease to be—"'; 4. 'December Night'; 5. 'Moonrise'. As the title suggests, the poems represent a series of snapshots from within the evolving relationship portrayed. The composer does not adopt a sequential group from within *Look!*, but selects poems scattered through the collection, thus creating new juxtapositions and a new trajectory for the story.

The opening poem – 'Bei Hennef' – is gentle, evocative and poignant, offering a quiet celebration of love that is 'whole like the twilight' and possesses the balance emulated in the lines 'You are the call and I am the answer / You are the wish, and I the fulfilment, / You are the night, and I the day' (*1Poems* 164). Nonetheless, the allusions to a state that is '*almost* bliss', alongside 'perfect *enough*' and 'What more—?' (my emphasis), culminate in the more explicitly bleak line 'Strange, how we suffer in spite of this!'. This bleakness is captured in Joubert's setting, with its prominent lower strings and shifting tonalities. Initially there is a sense of calm achieved through bird-call motifs that reflect the 'twittering' of the river, but these develop into aggressive string attacks for the line 'Troubles, anxieties and pains'. There is also a decidedly turbulent, ironic, dark quality to the music even when the words convey the balance in 'call'/'answer', 'wish'/'fulfilment' and 'night'/'day'. In the sequence created within this song cycle the puzzling awareness of compromised happiness leads neatly into 'Loggerheads', which intensifies the suffering through accusation, insecurity and bitterness: 'Have a real stock-taking / Of my manly breast;/ Find out if I'm sound or bankrupt, / Or a poor thing at best' (193). This poem concludes with resigned exasperation: an assertion that although despair might be the 'portion' of the couple, 'I don't care'. The music here is strident and disjointed, using pizzicato, tremolo and stabbing chords to convey the discord within the relationship.

As this poem segues into the next ('"And oh—that the man I am might cease to be—"'), the bitterness mutates into a nihilistic desire for utter, obliterating darkness: darkness that is distinct from grey sleep and aching death. Like the much later poem 'Phoenix', it conceives of 'obliterati[on]' as the precursor to profound change (*1Poems* 165). The imagery of this poem is interestingly reminiscent of 'Autumn Rain'. Rather like the downward movement of wet, black leaves, here the darkness falls (and rises) 'with muffled sound'. Yet the descent is intensified through the alliterative phrase 'hurling heavily down' in keeping with the apocalyptic tenor of the poem (166). The falling motion is reflected by Joubert in descending glissando figures and downward leaps. There are also rapid and dramatic crescendos early on while the low register and extended tonality are used to convey the impression of intensifying darkness.

The next juxtaposition works through contrast in terms of the poetic imagery. 'December Night' returns to peace and harmony tentatively achieved in 'Bei Hennef': 'The wine is warm in the hearth; / The flickers come and go. / I will warm your limbs with kisses / Until they glow' (*1Poems* 193). The darkness of the preceding poem is counterbalanced by the images of heat and light, while the shedding of outdoor clothes prior to drawing closer to the hearth reflects comfort. Joubert's warm sonorities (reminiscent of Messiaen) create a setting that is gentler and quieter than the preceding songs, using repetition to highlight the most intimate descriptions. There is still evidence of dissonance, but the song resolves onto a major chord at the close, emphasising peace and resolution. Interestingly, the final poem in the sequence – 'Moonrise' – moves away from such harmony to a more impersonal or abstract setting, yet it serves as an appropriate conclusion to this cycle due to its rhetorically positive conclusion:

> . . . we are sure
> That beauty is a thing beyond the grave,
> That perfect, bright experience never falls
> To nothingness, and time will dim the moon

> Sooner than our full consummation here
> In this odd life will tarnish or pass away. (*1Poems* 155)

However, it is arguable that through describing life as 'odd' and ending the poem with words associated with loss or decay, even this poem celebrating eternal love possesses a hint of the ambiguity underlying the entire collection (see Jones 2006: 137–52). The musical version emphasises the beauty of the moon through its prolonged upward trajectories, climbing out of the low registers of the previous songs, and through the vibrancy of its oscillating wave motif. It ends with a long string coda settling on a serene major chord, fading out – yet there is also dissonance present. Combined, the words and music testify to the oscillations characteristic of *Look!*, resisting sentimentality and revealing the shifting, turbulent, unsettled dynamic of human relationships.

The American composer William Neil's more recent work *Where there is no Autumn* (2012) achieves an analogous coherence through selecting poems from one collection: namely *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*. This work has an interesting and unusual compositional history. Having produced one substantial setting of Lawrence's poetry (discussed below), Neil intended to write a piece involving narrator, clarinet and digital acoustics. His plans crystallised after initial contact (followed by extensive correspondence) with Nick Ceramella, John Worthen and Bethan Jones prior to an International D. H. Lawrence Symposium at Gargnano in September 2012. This symposium furnished the opportunity to rehearse and perform Neil's work for the first time, to a combined audience of Lawrence scholars and local inhabitants of the Italian region.

Neil's composition derives its title from a letter written by Lawrence in 1924 – 'I want to go south, where there is no autumn, where the cold doesn't crouch over one like a snow-leopard waiting to pounce' (*5L* 143) – and the settings reflect the composer's fascination with Lawrence's quest for the Italian sun. As indicated above, Neil had decided on the composition of his ensemble before selecting specific Lawrence poems, aiming to create a 'rich spectrum of sonorities that orchestrate the spoken word with the full dynamic capabilities of the clarinet and piano' (Neil website b). Although many poems from *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* were suggested and considered, Neil ultimately decided upon the sequence 'Southern Night', 'Peach', 'Pomegranate' and 'Tropic', for which the chosen voice and instruments would be particularly apposite.

The group for the premiere was to consist of narrator (John Worthen), clarinet (Bethan Jones), piano (William Neil) and digital acoustics. The poetry is spoken rather than sung, and the role of the pre-recorded digital track is explained as follows:

> The acoustic sounds are cued from the composer's laptop and are really compositions in themselves inspired by the images that Lawrence evokes in his poems. Neil has composed and recorded music that he created on the Kawai grand piano in his studio that were then sculpted and processed to create the desired sonic elements that make the complete mosaic of the live performance. (Neil website b)

The digitally generated sounds are extremely evocative: an example is the sustained dissonant notes early on in 'Southern Night' emulating the persistent whine as 'The mosquitos are biting tonight' (*1Poems* 254). Concurrently, a rising figure on clarinet and piano accompanies the reiterated injunction to the red moon to 'Come up' (Musical Example 26.1).

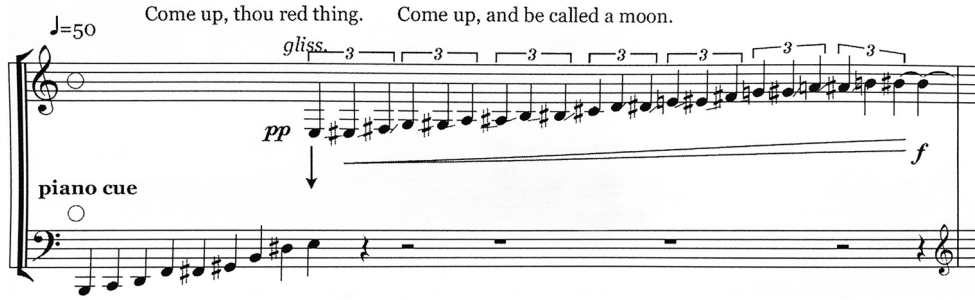

Figure 26.1 Extract from William Neil, 'Southern Night'.

In the manner of the opening solo in Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*, the clarinettist is required to bend the ascending notes so they blur into one another, creating a glissando effect. This is just one illustration of Neil's expressive use of the chosen instruments throughout these settings.

'Peach' features a version of the previous 'mosquito motif' that lasts even longer than before, accompanied in places by scurrying bursts of ascending or descending clarinet and piano phrases (often played together but occasionally alternating). The quirkiness of the poem's close – 'And because I say so, you would like to throw something at me // Here, you can have my peach stone' (*1Poems* 232) – is captured in the abrupt staccato flurry that ends the setting. 'Pomegranate' makes use of trills, grace notes, wide intervals, dynamic contrast and rapid changes in character. For the lines 'Abhorrent, green, slippery city / Whose Doges were old, and had ancient eyes' (231), the digital acoustics distort, waxing and waning in pitch, while 'dense foliage' is reflected in a thick sonic texture. The first reference to 'fissure' catalyses a change in piano technique, with the player manipulating the strings from within the body of the piano. This creates a harsher edge to the sound (reminiscent of a harpsichord) and generates a feeling of incongruity when combined with the gently moving, relatively harmonious acoustic-piano timbre at the close. 'Tropic' begins with a sustained octave chord and 'combines three manifestations of a rhythm that correspond to Lawrence's reference to the "horizontal rolling of water" with two rising themes in the clarinet that evoke the "flood of black heat"' (Neil website b). The pulsing rhythmic drive of this setting is also evident in the accompaniment of the repeated term 'rock', while the unsettled harmony creates a sinister feeling of tension and unease. The sequence as a whole is extremely effective in evoking the atmosphere of the poems and illustrates the way in which innovative performance techniques can enhance the impact of a text-setting.

Variations on a Theme: Spanning Multiple Lawrence Collections

For the setting analysed above, Neil (like Joubert) chooses poems from the same verse-book by Lawrence. However, in his earlier song cycle – *The Waters are Shaking the Moon* – he selects twelve poems from among a number of collections, ranging across phases of Lawrence's artistic career. This song cycle, for mezzo soprano and piano, is thus the most extended composition of those considered here, comprising settings

of: 1. 'The Hostile Sun'; 2. 'Twilight'; 3. 'Mystery'; 4. 'Love Message'; 5. 'Piano'; 6. 'Tease'; 7. 'Reach Over'; 8. 'There is Rain in Me'; 9. 'Baby Songs'; 10. 'Shades'; 11. 'A White Blossom'; 12. 'To A Certain Young Lady'. Neil has explained that the cycle is holistically conceived, with the relationship theme providing unification and also scope for contrast and variation (Neil website a). For instance, the flippant, exasperating, needling tone of 'Tease' with its repetition of 'Maybe yes, and maybe no' (*1Poems* 61) is counterbalanced by the serene, poised image of the 'tiny moon' in 'A White Blossom' (36), symbolising the integrity of an early love that cannot be tainted. There are recurrent patterns of imagery throughout the cycle – notably those associated with moons, suns and rain. Yet the juxtapositions and oscillations in tone and style facilitate – and indeed require – a highly expressive, versatile performance by the soprano vocalist.

Neil can be situated among a number of composers who have combined poems from different collections by Lawrence in their song cycles. In many cases, the poems appear to have been chosen for thematic reasons. A recurrent fascination with Lawrence's sun imagery is discernible. Notably, in 1958 the Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe produced a setting entitled *Sun* in which he sets the poems 'Sun in me', 'Tropic' and 'Desire goes down into the sea—'. In 1965 he followed this with *Sun Music* for brass and strings, about which he commented: 'Lawrence . . . and also the Mexican sun, the Australian sun and my own sun are ever present in it' (quoted in Richards 2014: 41). Fiona Richards considers the extent and profundity of this influence in her article about Lawrence and Peter Sculthorpe (2014: 33–50). It is interesting to note that 'Tropic', like 'River Roses', 'Green', 'A White Blossom', 'Piano' and 'December Night', has been chosen by more than one composer for setting: a tribute, perhaps, to its vivid imagery, sonic resonance and dramatic impact.

In 1960, Vittorio Rieti selected the four poems 'Aware', 'Thomas Earp', 'December Night' and 'Quite Forsaken' for inclusion in a composition simply entitled *Four Lawrence Songs*. In 1966 Dennis Riley wrote his *Cantata I* – a setting of the two Lawrence poems 'Those that go searching for love' and 'The End, the Beginning' – for the innovative combination of mezzo soprano, tenor saxophone, vibraphone, 'cello and piano. Anthony Burgess's *Man Who Has Come Through* (1985) – scored for tenor, flute, oboe, 'cello and piano – derives its title from a chosen poem within *Look!* but combines this poem with others from different collections, including verse written as late as 1929. The resulting sequence is: Optional prelude and/or postlude; 1. 'End of Another Home Holiday'; 2. 'Song of a Man Who Has Come Through'; 3. 'Snake'; 4. 'Bavarian Gentians'. This work is discussed at length by Susan Reid in her 'Afterword: Anthony Burgess's D. H. Lawrence Suite' (2019: 214–19).

During the same year (the centenary of Lawrence's birth), the British composer Nigel Osborne wrote *For a Moment*, setting 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 Cantamus) was written for female choir, 'cello and Kandyan drum. '[The Dawn Verse]' is a short atmospheric poem of farewell and welcome, from Lawrence's novel *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), containing imagery of the dark dividing and the sun coming up. In his setting of this poem, Osborne interestingly merges Western and non-Western music traditions through combining primitive African drumming rhythms with simple plainchant. The late poem 'For a Moment' dramatises instances in which people in

their spontaneous, instinctive moments acquire attributes of multifarious gods (*1Poems* 579–80). The song is much longer than any of the others in this cycle and is highly evocative. (I have analysed this music in depth and detail in Jones 2012: 153–74.) Like Andrew Downes's 'Piano', this setting harks back to very early constructions of harmony and uses *cantus firmus*: a polyphonic strategy common in church music of the twelfth century. The poem chosen to follow this is 'Tarantella', in which the narrator dances on 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' (*1Poems* 92–3). 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' (473), but these rhymes also contribute to the overall impression of stagnation. There is a strong feeling of inertia here 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.

Two other noteworthy settings of Lawrence are by Hugh Wood and Geoff Palmer, both composed in 1998. Wood's *D. H. Lawrence Songs: For High Voice and Piano* (opus 14) uses the following five poems: 1. 'Dog-Tired'; 2. 'Gloire de Dijon'; 3. 'Kisses in the Train'; 4. 'River Roses'; 5. 'Roses on the Breakfast Table'. Palmer's title – *Snatches of Lovely Oblivion* – more explicitly indicates a thematic premise and the work is written for chamber choir with string quartet. It comprises the following poems: 1. 'Shadows'; 2. 'Dog-Tired'; 3. 'Trust'; 4. 'A White Blossom' and 'Piano', with the last two poem-settings occurring simultaneously. Both composers set 'Dog-Tired': a poem of weariness and yearning for the peace that might stem from human touch. While Wood starts with this poem, Palmer precedes it with 'Shadows', explicitly about the quest for oblivion and thus closely connected. Many of the chosen poems are about love but – as with Neil's *The Waters are Shaking the Moon* – they do not deal exclusively with romantic entanglements, as 'Piano' reveals.

The poem combinations and juxtapositions within the song cycles considered above clearly differ, as do the musical styles, techniques and ensembles employed by the composers. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify a common concern with human relationships, intimacy and the natural world (particularly the sun and moon). The poetry is treated sensitively and inventively in these musical works, resulting in a creative transformation of words into sounds.

New Strands and Stories: Combining Lawrence with Other Poets

The first known instance of a song cycle setting Lawrence alongside other poets appears to have met with limited success. In 1933–4, Elizabeth Lutyens composed her *Four Songs for tenor and piano* in which two poems by Lawrence – 'Thief in the Night' and 'Nonentity' – were preceded by 'Stanzas' by Emily Brontë and succeeded by Shakespeare's

'Feste's Song'. Unfortunately, a review in the *Times* dismissed this work as 'incompletely incubated and inconsequential' (23 July 1934, quoted in Reid 2019: 222). Subsequently, however, composers have been more convincing in creating a musical composition through yoking disparate poets together in a musically coherent sequence. Lawrence has been situated among poets as diverse as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning, Mary Coleridge, Hart Crane, e. e. cummings, John Davidson, Emily Dickinson, T. S. Eliot, Yetza Gillespie, A. E. Housman, Chris Newman, Isaac Rosenberg, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Sacheverell Sitwell, Howard Skempton, Alfred Tennyson and Douglas Worth. In a majority of cases, Lawrence is combined with established and highly renowned poets, but other strategies are also evident. In Phillip Rhodes's *Visions of Remembrance* (1979), the second poem, entitled 'Grown-up relatives', was written by the composer's young daughter, Anna-Jean Rhodes. The 'Epilogue' is based on a short snatch of poetry by Phillip Rhodes himself, though growing out of the Lawrence poem that precedes it. In *The Moon is Flashing* (2008), Howard Skempton begins the song cycle with his own poem from which the work derives its title.

When reflecting on the choice and ordering of the texts it appears that the sequences are rarely chronological. Instead, the chosen poems tend to adhere to a common theme or series of related images, as exemplified by Arnold Cooke's *Nocturnes: A cycle of five songs for soprano, horn, and piano* (1963). The sequence for this setting runs as follows: 1. 'The Moon' by Shelley; 2. 'Returning, We Hear the Larks' by Rosenberg; 3. 'River Roses' by Lawrence; 4. 'The Owl' by Tennyson; 5. 'Boat Song' by Davidson. Even from a glance at the titles, it is easy to recognise the nature theme that binds these poems together; with closer analysis it is possible to identify further synchronicities, particularly between the first three texts. In the initial setting, which conflates two poems by Shelley – 'The Waning Moon' and 'To the Moon' – the moon is portrayed as a 'dying lady, lean and pale', roving restlessly according to the 'feeble wanderings of her fading brain' (1977: 124). Cooke's music here is unsettled and shifting: at the opening the horn and voice arc upwards but the melodic trajectory is punctuated by slight drops in pitch. The composer also makes use of wide interval leaps (down to 'insane' and up to 'fearful'), while – by contrast – the phrase 'shapeless mass' is rendered by repeated same-pitch notes.

The following poem by Rosenberg opens with a comparable bleakness, in which the darkness – through which 'anguished limbs' must be dragged – harbours a 'sinister threat' (1977: 80). The music for the opening is faster than the previous setting – more rhythmic and dramatic, using extended tonality – though the poem's dragging image is conveyed through the horn echoing the soprano's notes but with a slight delay. The horn is also muted on words like 'dangerous'. The mood of the poem switches abruptly with the contrastingly joyful intervention of lark-song, reflected musically through a heraldic horn call over a high tremolo in piano. Nonetheless, this burst of joy is associated towards the end with naive, tainted dreams, unrecognised danger and 'kisses where a serpent hides', resulting in a residual unease (evident in the music's return to the opening material). Appropriately, the Lawrence poem that follows also ends with a serpentine image: 'Let it be as the snake disposes / Here in this simmering marsh' (*1Poems* 176), while Rosenberg's 'ringing' of larks also develops neatly into Lawrence's 'ringing' of the river. This poem is given a pastoral, melody-and-accompaniment setting in which the horn initially adds texture but then mimics the singing of the frogs and provides a literally muted threat for 'glimmering / Fear'.

Ultimately, in both poems the bright promise of reverberating sound is overshadowed by a sense of menace and uncertainty.

Tennyson's 'Song—The Owl' is a very different poem, emphasising the way in which the 'sinister dark' has been superseded by dawning light. It might be seen as particularly appropriate for musical setting due to the 'chorus' effect achieved through rhyming couplets and verbatim repetitions of rhythmic, sonically resonant lines such as 'Twice or thrice his roundelay, / Twice or thrice his roundelay' (referring to a cockerel crowing; Tennyson 1975: 8). Like Shelley's moon, the owl is 'Alone' while 'warming his five wits', but here this aloneness is not perceived as a negative, alienated condition. The music here is busy and rapid with melismatic figures in the voice; the horn is at times muted and also provides a recurrent owl call. This setting ends with a tonal flourish.

With the final poem of the sequence, however, moonlight replaces the rising sun, illuminating 'sea-pinks', 'inborne spray' and 'tawny sands'. The 'whirring sea' of Tennyson's poem pre-empts the sea-motion of 'Boat Song' ('The Boat is Chafing' from 'Scaramouche in Naxos', Davidson 1995: 14), which conveys an urgent desire to depart and is infused with the energy of a vessel that is 'plunging deeper into night / To reach a land unknown'. In the setting the piano provides a gently rippling, meandering wave motif and even the act of 'Plunging deeper' feels paradoxically peaceful and harmonious. However, the final lone, fading note on the horn leaves us with an ending tinged with irresolution.

Later song cycles yoke poems together in order to tell their own story, creating music that unifies and connects the individual pieces. A further example is provided by the German composer Ruth Scönthal, who (as well as setting Whitman) wrote *Seven Songs of Love and Sorrow* for soprano and piano (1977), including Lawrence's 'Poor bit of a wench!—'. In 1979, Phillip Rhodes composed *Visions of Remembrance*, for two sopranos and twelve instruments, concluding the cycle with 'Piano', followed by his own Epilogue. (I have previously discussed the settings of 'Piano' by Rhodes and Neil in detail: see Jones 2012 167–71.) Joanne Forman's *Nottingham Spleen* (1988) includes four poems from *Pansies*. In the twenty-first century, *The Moon is Flashing* by Howard Skempton, *Three Partsongs* by Phillip Cooke, *Skies Now are Skies* by David Matthews and *'Are They Shadows' and Other Songs* by Richard Hundley have all included settings of poems by Lawrence alongside different writers. Also, in recent years, new possibilities have opened up for appropriating Lawrence's poetry and exposing his work to wider audiences within both classical and popular domains. Helen Grime, with her orchestral composition *Near Midnight* (2013), inspired by Lawrence's 'Weeknight Service' and premièred at the Bridgewater Hall, has shown how the 'spirit' of a Lawrence poem can be conveyed through non-referential sounds. The following year, Nick Mulvey's song 'Cucurucu' (adapting 'Piano') reached number 26 in the UK Singles Chart.

Musical Responses to Lawrence's Prose, Plays and Life

While a majority of composers who engage with Lawrence adopt his poetry for their own purposes, there are also musical works based on his prose (both fictional and non-fictional) and his plays. In 1958 Peter Sculthorpe composed *The Fifth Continent*, a radiophonic work for speaker, orchestra and recorded sound (didjeridoo and wind),

in which he uses quotations from *Kangaroo* and structures a narrative around Lawrence's time in Australia (Richards 2014: 42). Lawrence's travel writing inspired Peggy Glanville-Hicks's *Etruscan Concerto* (1954) and Thea Musgrave's *The Last Twilight* (1980), while in 2017 Fabio Furio staged a theatrical performance of text from *Sea and Sardinia* with videos and narration supplementing music for bandoneon, violin, piano and double bass. The 1941 ~~film~~ adaptation of 'The Rocking-Horse Winner' used incidental music by Benjamin Britten: the best-known composer to have responded to Lawrence through music. His score for this film is relatively sparse but highly evocative and very varied. The story's young protagonist, Paul, feels that his house is whispering when his parents are short of money: Britten reflects the whispering through discordant music, rising melodic lines and the use of tremolos, trills, clashes and distorted brass sounds. Conversely, more tonal, lyrical, minor melodies denote Paul's unhappiness, his mother's coldness and – ultimately – the boy's futile death. Subsequent theatrical adaptations of this story include a chamber opera by Andrew McBirnie with libretto by Bethan Jones (McBirnie 2002) and an opera by Gareth Williams with libretto by Anna Chatterton in 2016 (Reid 2019: 227).

Lawrence's life has itself provided composers with the impetus for creative composition. This is evident as early as 1932 in Adolph Weiss's unfinished *Sketches for David* (an opera in rhythmic declaration about Lawrence), and as recently as 2017 in Glyn Bailey's musical *Lorenzo and Lady C.* (Bailey website), which received the *New Orleans Marquee Theatre Award for Best Original Musical*.[4] It is heartening to consider the proliferation of musical compositions based on Lawrence within the new millennium: works that engage with, extend and challenge a long tradition of literary text-setting.

Notes

1. The musical analysis ~~within this – and subsequent – sections~~ has been carried out principally through an aural response to recordings of these compositions rather than an analysis of the printed scores.
2. Cantamus is internationally renowned, having won twenty-nine first prizes in choral festivals and eight Grand Prix, including BBC Choir of the Year, Choir of the World (Llangollen Eisteddfod) and World Choir Olympics (Bremen 2004 and Xiamen 2006). Thirty-two overseas tours have been undertaken, including Malaysia, Japan, China, Israel, USA, Canada and, most recently, Riva del Garda in Italy: see <https://cantamus.com/about-us/>.
3. A musical figure in which two groups of three notes are replaced by three groups of two notes, conveying the effect of a shift between triple and duple metre.
4. This musical has also appeared under its previous titles *Lawrence – the Musical* and *Scandalous!*.

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