The Main Solo Songs of the 1930s

Introduction

Whereas the main interest in the songs of the 1920s is the development of the initial material of each song, the main point of interest in the 1930s songs, apart from developmental issues, is the more individual style. The songs of this period display three main areas of musical style. Firstly, a style influenced by the English ayre, melismatic decoration and chordal figuration. Secondly, a language using features derived from English folk-song such as modality, repeating melodic units and phrases and lighter textures. Thirdly, a more progressive style involving tonal/modal ambiguity, juxtaposed sections of differing character, greater use of chromaticism, more angular melody with wider ranges, greater use of dissonance, increased harmonic experimentation, constantly changing time patterns (albeit through attention to poetic metre), and wider dynamic and tempo ranges.

Details of the main middle period songs are shown below:

Song	Poet	Date	Publication	Original Publisher
'Daybreak'	Donne	1930	1931	OUP
Four Songs with Piano Accompaniment: 'So sweet love seemed' 'Elegy' 'Love on my heart'	Bridges	1933	1933	Novello
Cradle Song	Blake	1935	1936	OUP
Four Hardy Songs: 'To Sincerity' 'The Colour' 'If it's ever spring again' 'Tolerance'	Hardy	1938	1939	OUP
'The Pink Frock'	Hardy	1938	1939	OUP
'I will not let thee go'	Bridges	1939	1940	OUP

In addition to Milford's ever-increasing professional life, the 1930s also saw the happy arrival of Robin's and Kirstie's only child, Barnaby, in 1935. A happy marriage, Barnaby's birth and profound friendships created an anchorage during which Milford composed the bulk of his main published songs. These years did not, of course, alter his temperament; they simply served as a buffer for his nervous state.

Writing of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Alice Pennant (née Stainer - the youngest of the three sisters for whom Kirstie was governess and companion) gave a glimpse of the young composer whose roots lay in an Edwardian background. She depicted a man of absolute gentleness and thoughtfulness in his dealings with people, musical and otherwise:

> When I was about eighteen, I paid happy visits to Robin and Kirstie in their small house in Epsom, for composition lessons. I called it my 'home from home'. Robin would be agitatedly playing 'Jenifer's [sic] Jingle', with his tongue out. It was glorious - but Robin's fingers were far too stiff to perform well, and even Nora Ford had to give him up as an impossible violin pupil. Sometimes he would play us his latest compositions (he worked on them at the piano a lot), and once, to my great joy, he went through 'The Prophet in the Land', with Kirstie singing all the solos.[1]

Mrs Pennant's final comment says a great deal about Robin's gentle diplomacy and reserve. She wrote: "I saw Robin once during the time when he was teaching at Downe House, when I took my instrument to try out his clarinet concerto with him. It was written in his "modern" period, and I could make nothing of it. Kindly, and characteristically, all Robin said was: "If I may say so, you play that instrument very well".[2]

In later years, reflecting on the Robin Milford she knew during the 1920s, Alice Pennant wrote, "Robin was modest and always kind; he gave nicknames to many, and had an earthy sense of humour and a fund of well worn jokes of innocent vulgarity".[3] She remembered happy family gatherings at the Milford home and continued: "He and Kirstie gave an annual family party after Christmas. Robin stirred the hot punch, and gleefully recited the ingredients: no one who was there could forget his nasal pronunciation of "vin ordinaire". At this point in time, the Stainers and Milfords spent part of Christmas and all their summer holidays together. Happy days."[4] Mrs Pennant, however, also recounted the darker times: "There were clouds on the horizons too when Robin lay on a couch very white, waiting for a thunderstorm to pass; or later, when he was convinced he was being followed, and could be seen, head down, haring along to escape, and recognising

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1 Alice Pennant programme commentary for family concert

2 Ibid

3 Alice Pennant, post-1959

4 Ibid

nobody."[5] Milford, himself, noted of these times, "Nerves are a perfect curse and often make life scarcely tolerable".[6]

The songs of this period show the extremes of Milford's emotional temperament. The years from 1930 to 1939 were a period of relative emotional calm, tranquility and security for Milford. He was happily married to Kirstie, and Barnaby, his son, was born in 1935.

Following 'Daybreak', songs reflecting the continued happiness of married life are 'So sweet love seemed', 'Love on my heart' and 'Cradle Song'. 'The Colour', 'If it's ever spring again' and 'The pink frock' demonstrate the composer's good spirits at this period. 'Elegy', however, shows Milford in a pensive mood and, probably, reveals the insecure part of his nature which cannot quite accept that good things will last. By 1938, however, the storm clouds were rapidly gathering over Europe. Milford was very much aware of the seriousness of the situation and the various repercussions of events in Europe wrecking the security of his calm existence, not to mention the uncertainty that possible war would bring to his life. 'To Sincerity' and 'Tolerance' are darker songs, showing Milford's wide range of mood and style, including pensiveness. The songs from 1939 onwards display a shift in musical language to a more developed form of style with more angular melodies, greater chromaticism, thicker textures, wider tonality and dissonance - features which Finzi felt did not represent Milford at his best. 'I will not let thee go' is the final published song to demonstrate this shift as Milford made no effort to have published any of his songs written after 1940 – nor, indeed, did he discuss these works with Finzi.

Milford's main 1930s published songs are contemporaries of the Finzi songs written before 1939 (Finzi collected his songs into sets for publication, dating from the 1920s). The songs of this period fall into particular categories: ayre-influenced, cradle song, folk-influenced, and dramatic. Three songs fall under the first category, 'Daybreak', 'So sweet love seemed' and 'Love on my heart'. With reference to the influence of the Elizabethan ayre on twentieth-century English song, Hold highlights the fact that Vaughan Williams' first song of importance, 'How can the tree but wither' (published in 1934 but written at the end of the previous century) was "a deliberate attempt to recreate the Elizabethan Ayre".[7] This idea (also used by Warlock and Finzi) was taken up by Milford when he employed characteristics of the Elizabethan ayre (such as repeated chords and delicate textural figuration) in a number of songs (e.g. 'Daybreak'*).

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5 Alice Pennant, post-1959

6 Milford diary entry, 1 June, 1929

7 Hold (2002), *Parry to Finzi*, p 103

The Songs

<u>Daybreak</u>

'Daybreak' (1930) serves as a "bridge" between the early and middle period songs through its similarities with the songs of the 1920s and its melodic, harmonic and textural developments. With the epigraph "For My Wife", 'Daybreak', is a through-composed song. It is one of only two songs (the other being 'Tolerance') in Milford's published songs to make use of extended melisma. The composer's main published songs are mostly syllabic.

After the repeating tonic chords at the beginning of the song (suggesting constancy), the most memorable aspects in 'Daybreak' are the emphasis on the words "Stay! Stay!" in bars 17 and 18 through long durational chromatic harmony and the impressive word-painting of "perish" in bars 22 and 23, suggesting a gradual process. The composer's setting in the early and middle songs are mainly monosyllabic. Melisma of this scale for word painting next appears in the later unpublished songs, for example, 'Song of St. Mary the Virgin'.

Finally, Milford creates the image of the lover remaining in the poet's presence throughout 'Daybreak' by employing (i) slow harmonic movement (one harmony and, at the most, two harmonies per bar) and (ii) repeated identical chords.

Four Songs with Piano Accompaniment (1933)

<u>So sweet love seemed</u>

Although 'So sweet love seemed' (1933) is in strophic form, Milford creates an accompaniment of quite diverse character for verses one/two, three and four, thus ensuring constant interest to match that of the poet. This song is also, like 'Daybreak', set in Bb major. The simplicity of the accompaniment and its diatonic harmony suggests the apparently simple observation of the poet – that love changes (Ex.36). Yet Milford is able to bring many touches of imagination to the unexpectant ear. The subtle gentleness of added-notes and inversions adds further interest to the accompaniment.

Ex.36

The overall poetic message of 'So sweet love seemed' is gentleness and sweetness. After the arpeggiated introduction, verse three is striking in its change from well-established homophony (using a minim/crotchet rhythm) to quaver-dominated texture, poetically differentiating between the present and the future (Ex.37).

Ex.37

The final verse appropriately returns to homophony, now within a majestic *forte* setting, emphasising the definite conclusion that young love is sweet (Ex.38).

Ex.38

It is through these unobtrusive textural changes that Milford creates a lasting musical canvas. He shows his ability in subtlety moving from one texture to another while creating the impression of remaining within a basically unified texture. The false-relation which Milford introduces in bar 46 suggests the Elizabethan period (Warlock, of course, favoured this device, as, for example, in 'Cradle Song').

'Elegy' (1933) is dedicated to the composer's wife, Kirstie. Having attended a performance of Finzi's choral setting of Bridges' poem 'Clear and Gentle Stream', Milford seeks Finzi's advice regarding his own beautiful solo song:

> I should value your opinion on my Elegy ['Clear and Gentle Stream'] very much if you could bear to hear it when you come here – I've lost all confidence in knowing about my work now; I mean, if the ideas themselves (the essentials) are decent at all, or just awful.[8]

Considering Milford as an equal, Finzi compared both settings of 'Clear and Gentle Stream' and comes to a gracefully diplomatic conclusion, "The fact that we have both done settings and can listen to each other's with pleasure, only helps to show the good sense of Blake's 'There's no competition in Heaven'.[9]

'Elegy' is a four-verse progressive-strophic song in which verse two is strophic until bar 33, when additional material is inserted; verse 3 contains additional material; and verse 4 is strophic. The twelve-line verses of Bridges' poem have an elaborate rhyme-scheme, consisting of the following pattern: abba, cdcd, eeaa. This is employed in verse one, the strophic part of verse two, verse three and verse four. This scheme also assists in the effect of lilting forward.

The introduction consists of a triplet figure in the right hand of the piano, centred on the note B, against rolling 3rds in the left hand (Ex. 39).

Ex. 39
Moderato ♩ = 112

Clear and gen - tle stream!

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[8] Milford letter to Finzi, unknown, 1939

[9] Finzi letter to Milford, unknown date May, 1939

It becomes an ostinato, suggesting the continuous flow of the stream. Thus, as in Schubert's 'The Brook's Lullaby', the introduction instantly sets the scene of a running stream.

'Elegy' is the first of Milford's songs to employ a true and developed dialogue between voice and piano. The gentle rhythms throughout 'Elegy' also contribute to the idyllic setting painted by Bridges. The texture is quite uncluttered, giving the impression of clarity and gentleness. This becomes all the more poignant when 'Elegy' is considered alongside other composers' songs such as Schubert's 'The Brook' or Gurney's 'The Boat Is Chafing' (1920). In these cases, the flowing water is depicted through a thick texture of flowing semiquavers and all manner of accidentals. How much greater is Milford's achievement created through his use of lighter textures.

'Elegy' is similar to 'Old Age' in its use of personification. In this case, the piano accompaniment represents the flowing stream through triplet figuration. As in 'Old Age', a dialogue takes place between voice and piano but now involving rhythmic variation between the verses, adding to the delicate and varying figuration. Other memorable features include a canon between the piano and voice depicting a lazy summer day in verse three [when the ostinato dramatically ceases] (Ex.40);

Ex.40

low register open F and C chords with a falling melodic contour (now, in reversed canon) suggesting "the deep bell hums/From the Minster tower" (Ex.41);

Ex.41

a rising melodic contour and sharpening chromaticism depicting the arrival of evening "Creeping up the glade" (Ex.42);

Ex.42

and rising inner textural 6ths suggesting the brightening moon (Ex.43).

Ex.43

'Elegy' bears similarities to Turnbull's 'In Fountain Court' in that both songs personify running water with an "ostinato" (Milford's consisting of running triplets superimposed on rolling thirds and Turnbull's employing a haunting winding melodic figure) as a backcloth to the overall poetic reflection. Milford's song has a definite tonal centre while Turnbull's song employs tonal uncertainty which is

eventually resolved. Both songs, however, successfully shroud their reflection with a sense of mystery. Jeremy Dibble describes Turnbull's song as "a fine song". [10]

Vaughan Williams, of course, employs personification in his song cycle *On Wenlock Edge* (examples include the semiquaver figuration representing the wind in 'On Wenlock Edge' and the variants of bell-like units in 'Bredon Hill') but many of the songs by Milford's direct contemporaries also employ accompaniments with 'thematic' or personification accompaniments. Examples of Turnbull's use of the feature include 'Guess, Guess' in which the falling quaver figuration suggests a "mystic maid" ending with a rising interval; "The Rainy Day" where the semiquaver figuration represents the constant fall of rain; and "If doughty deeds" (in which the semiquaver/quaver figuration represents the movement of the poet's steed). Examples of Gibbs' songs which employ "thematic" or personification material include 'The Bells', 'The Rejected Lover' and 'Araby'. In 'The Bells' Gibbs also withdraws the ostinato (similar to Milford) for the evocative lines "And stillness make more lovely seem/Soon night hid horses, children, all/In sleep deep and ambrosial …". As with Milford in verse three of 'Elegy', Gibbs also employs an "open" bass chord in 'Take heed, young heart' (1925) in the depiction of a clock – on this occasion, the pendulum! Perhaps the most impressive Gibbs parallel can be found, however, in 'The Ballad of Semmerwater'. Milford's personification of water is gentle and idyllic while Gibbs' is large and threatening. Warlock employed a minor 3rd unit in 'Ha'nacker Mill' to suggest desolation and a dotted rhythmic unit to suggest the men in 'The Cricketers of Hambledon'. Warlock, on the other hand, does not use not use personification material in 'Sleep'. (Gurney's setting of Fletcher's poem is a fine example of personification in the accompaniment). Here, Warlock's style is simply too subtle to include such an obvious device. Rather, he relies much more on delicacy of harmony and chromatic figuration. Finzi also employs a dotted rhythmic unit to paint a ghostly presence in 'The Phantom'. Other examples of Finzi employing personification material can be found in 'Summer Schemes' and 'Proud Songsters'.

Love on my heart

'Love on my heart' (1933) is the third song of this period which is influenced by the English ayre.   In his poem of the same name, Bridges explains that love has descended on him and compares this to a process of nature – the dew refreshing flowers. The poem is a joyful love poem presented in religious terms. Milford employs an interesting rhythmical setting through a series of time changes in each verse, showing his dedication to the poet's metre.

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10 Dibble (2001), *The Songs & Part Songs of Percy Turnbull*, Somm CD 020

As in 'So sweet love seemed', the overall poetic message of 'Love on my heart' is one of gentleness. Milford instantly sets this scene through the use of a rolling arpeggiated figure in the bass. The climax of this song is in verse three. Here, Milford creates a canon between the piano and voice, highlighting the phrase "Nor any other joy than his" (Ex.44).

Ex.44

Aspects of Milford's 'Daybreak', 'So sweet love seemed' and 'Love on my heart' can be found in Warlock's 'The Contented Lover' (1929). These include prolonged harmony (i.e. one harmony per bar) which sustains arpeggiation and quaver figuration in the accompaniment, and long melodic notes (e.g. dotted minims). Similarly, Warlock's song concludes with extended word-painting on "favourite" reflecting Milford's conclusion to 'Daybreak' with its melismatic writing on "perish". 'The Contented Lover', of course, employs a much higher level of chromaticism, reflecting the influence of both Delius and van Dieren. Warlock's 'There is a lady sweet and kind' also reflects parallels with Milford's ayre-styled songs but to a lesser degree than 'The Contented Lover'. Warlock, of course, is the obvious master of ayre-styled (or neo-Elizabethan) songs amidst Milford's contemporaries. Gibbs included an ayre-style middle section (the refrain) in 'Ann's Cradle Song' beautifully painting the delicate lines "Then sing, lully lullay with me/And softly, lill-lall-lo, love …"

Finzi registered his approval on receipt of Milford's settings of Bridges' poems in the collection *Four Songs with Piano Accompaniment*, "The Bridges songs are lovely & I don't wonder at Cuthbert Kelly's enthusiasm. Nos 1 & 4 ('So sweet love seemed' and 'Love on my heart') seem to be the most obviously attractive, but they're all equally fine & I can't think how I've missed them all the five years they've been published".[11] Milford was pleased, "I'm so glad you like the Bridges songs. Yes, 1 & 4 are the best, perhaps as good as anything I shall do".[12] This final comment

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11 Finzi letter to Milford, 29 June, 1938

12 Milford letter to Finzi, 2 October, 1938

highlights the fact that Milford was completely unpretentious, if not damagingly self-critical, regarding his music and totally wrapped in self-doubt. He continued, "Now I am more ambitious still, one can only write as one feels, can't one".[13]

Even in the 1940s, Finzi was still expressing his admiration for Milford's 'So sweet love seemed'. He wrote to Milford, asking, "What about scoring So Sweet Love Seemed for strings"?[14] The following week, Finzi returned to the matter of scoring 'So sweet love seemed' in relation to a performance at one of the Newbury Strings Concerts, "You certainly ought to score 'So Sweet Love Seemed' (and any of the others if you think they would score). We should certainly love to do it, for you can't imagine how difficult it is to find contemporary songs for soprano and strings that are worth doing".[15]

<u>Cradle Song</u>
'Cradle Song' (1935), an individual song, is a setting of a five-verse poem by William Blake. The poem involves contrasts between innocent joy and sorrow, light and darkness, and sub-consciousness and consciousness. In verse one, the poet establishes an innocent rocking image during the first three lines, with sorrow appearing in the fourth line. Having established such contrasts in the reader's mind, Blake returns to the theme of innocence in verses two and three. In verse two, the speaker is merely a watcher; in verse three, he touches the treasured baby who smiles. Such smiling can be interpreted as either a subconscious awareness of the safety of being with a trusted adult or the existence of some mysterious secret motive for joy – perhaps, even, holy. Blake's poetry was often inspired by mysticism and frequently prophetic in nature. In verse four, the darker aspect, first introduced in line 4 of verse one, returns. Less innocent thoughts are now insinuated as the baby sleeps, resulting in distressed awakening. Having changed the poet's final line of verse four from "lightnings break" to "night shall break", Milford omits Blake's fifth verse and returns to the repetition of the third and fourth lines of verse one. This serves as a codetta to the song. The poetic imagery in 'Cradle Song' is profound and is achieved through the poet's thematic contrasts.

Similar to Ireland in 'The Holy Boy' and Warlock in 'The First Mercy' (1927) and 'Cradle Song' (1928), Milford employs a swaying crotchet/quaver figure and a dotted quaver/semiquaver figure in the painting of Blake's poem (Ex.45).

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13 Milford letter to Finzi, 2 October, 1938

14 Finzi postcard to Milford, 10 February, 1942

15 Ibid

Ex. 45

Poco lento (2 slow beats)

Sleep, sleep, beau - ty bright, Dream - ing in the joys_ of night;_

Numerous composers have employed the "Barcarolle" rhythm in cradle songs (e.g. Gibbs in 'Lullaby') but Milford, in responding to Blake's poem, strengthens the development of his 'Cradle Song' through the use of dramatic and dark contrasts which paint the more sinister aspects of the text. Whereas Gibbs' 'Lullaby' continues its "rocking" rhythms amidst a flow of evocative harmony Milford's various tensions are created through dissonance, adding much to his song (Ex.46).

Ex.46

Then _____ the dread - ful night shall break._____

It is not only the rocking rhythm which is characteristic of 'Cradle Song' but, also, the angular contours created by the numerous neighbour-note structures. These foretell and then depict the future horrors in Blake's poem. Although the dotted quaver/semiquaver unit serves as a profound melodic feature, its subtle use within middle texture is equally effective, giving a profound sense of wholeness to the song. Another particular feature of Milford's song is the many harmonic side steps within its F major tonality.

Four Hardy Songs (1938)

The next series of songs display the influence of English folk-song (through modal implications, melody, harmonic movement by step and part-writing) and folk poetry (in terms of poetic themes and construction).

'To Sincerity' (1938) is a dramatic and ballad-type song, employing a more progressive musical language. Milford's setting of Hardy's six-verse poem makes 'To Sincerity' the largest and most dramatic song to date through its use of juxtaposed sections and a coda. It is rhapsodic in character due to its harmonic and chromatic wanderings, and use of tonal and modal implications.

In the poem, 'To Sincerity', the poet considers the value of reality and different form of opposites. He is sceptical of the effects of the modern age on man's views and values. Milford responds to these poetic aspects through the use of a varied series of musical features, including long and short durational notes, conjunct and disjunct movement, small and large intervals, gentle and angular contours, large and small melodic ranges, tonality, modal implications, light and thick textures, diatonic harmony, and chromatic harmony – all underpinned by a series of juxtaposed diverse sections. Organic development involves a triplet rhythmic unit. Other memorable features include juxtaposed chromatic key shifts (e.g. sudden shift to an Eb minor suggestion, representing the voice of youth) and unaccompanied phrases emphasising particular phrases.

Armstrong Gibbs also employs specific keys during 'Araby' in the representation of the two sides of the conversation between master and the "dark brown sailor". Milford's use of juxtaposed varying sections (with different tonal implications) also assists in the presentation of differing viewpoints between the old and the new in 'To Sincerity'. Similar to Milford in 'To Sincerity' (and also in later songs such as 'I will not let thee go' and 'Magnificat'), Gibbs also employs a declamatory vocal line to paint the phrases "In vain do you, with all your stars/Make wood or river bright".

Dedicated to Gerald Finzi, 'The Colour' (1938) shows Milford at the height of his powers in song-writing and illumination of poetic imagery where folk-tale is set to folk-like music. The poem captures the true essence of Wessex folk-tales with which the poet was so familiar. Gittings connected Hardy's family home at Bockhampton Cottage and the "rhythms of folk-songs from his father and mother" to poems such as 'The Colour'. He stated, "One West Country folk tune, which he had already used for a poem in the early months of the war, provided the basis for two more poems ... 'Meditations on a Holiday' and 'The Colour' ".[16]

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16 Gittings: *The Older Hardy*, 1978, p 253

In the poem, the questioner attempts to find an appropriate colour for his lover which will represent the current stage of their love. She rejects his first four suggestions. In verse one, the poet considers the colour white, but as this is generally associated with weddings, that will not do. In verse two he suggests red, but that is for soldiers, while in verse three the colour blue is also unacceptable as is green in verse four. Blue is for sailors, while green is for Maying. In the final verse, we find that it is only black which is suitable due to its association with mourning. Thus, throughout the poem, Hardy uses colour to hint at an unstated story through the recurrent poetic technique of question and answer. Although Milford's setting is a five-verse song in strophic form, the text and each colour are illuminated through a series of variations in the accompaniment of verses two, three and four, with verses one and five both being unaccompanied.

Musical features which create the foundation of 'The Colour' include the opening fanfare-effect suggesting the irony in the poem and, tragically, suitable for a wedding (Ex.47);

Ex.47
Moderato ♩. = c.42

'What shall I bring you?

unaccompanied verses one and five representing the folk-tale character of the poem; the fanfare-effect at the end of the soldier verse; bass running quavers suggesting the sea for the sailors (Ex.48);

Ex.48

Blue is for sail - ors, Sail - ors, sail - ors, Blue is for sail - ors, And

f appassionato

29

upper register quavers suggesting the hidden poetic image of a green ribbon fluttering in the dance around the maypole; broken rhythmic figure suggesting the dancing around the maypole (Ex.49);

Ex.49

Please will green do Best for your wear - ing The long day through?'

p espress.

34

and the fanfare-effect now, ingeniously, in the bass register ironically sounding for mourning and black (Ex.50).

Ex.50

Black is for mourn-ing, And black will do.'

p

49

Parallels can be drawn between Milford's 'The Colour' and Turnbull's 'If Doughty Deeds' in their relationship between love and the military. In Turnbull's 'If Doughty Deeds', the composer employs a "personified" ostinato, as stated earlier, which represents the soldier on his steed. However, through the range of textural variation, Milford creates a wonderful illumination of each colour-identification and

its representation. Similar to the triplet found in the introduction to 'The Colour', Gibbs employs a triplet rhythmic unit in 'To one who passed whistling through the night' (1921) and, again, in the codetta, similar to Milford's codetta of 'The Colour'. The quasi-folk style which Milford employs in 'The Colour' can also be found in Gibbs' 'When I was one and twenty' (1921). Both poems, of course, relate a country tale.

'If it's ever spring again' (1938) is dedicated to Kirstie. Following the same construction as Hardy's two-stanza poem, this song is in progressive-strophic form. Milford instantly captures the simple joy of this folk-poem by commencing with a dotted and syncopated rhythm, appropriately announcing the arrival of spring (Ex.51).

Ex.51
Allegretto vivace (leggiero)

The introduction hints at a fanfare-effect (appropriate when compared to Gurney's 'Spring'). In its use of simple harmony, the accompaniment of 'If it's ever spring again' gently supports the folk-image of the song. Such harmony is responsible for the striking melody which rises and falls both through conjunct and disjunct movement (Ex.52).

Ex.52

Like 'The Colour', 'If it's ever spring again' demonstrates Milford's strict adherence to Hardy's metres. This involves constant time changes, including 5/8, 7/8. 3/8 in Verse 1, and 6/8, 5/8, 6/8 in Verse 2.

The climax of each verse, a top G, involves the phrases "If it's ever spring again" in verse one and "If it's ever summertime" in verse two. In each case, the unaccompanied rising conjunct 4th prepares the listener for the remarkable rising minor 7th leap which highlights the words "spring" (Ex.53);

Ex.53

and "summertime" (Ex.54) [further emphasis is created through the absence of accompaniment].

Ex.54

If it's ev - er sum - mer-time,

28

The subtlety of 'If it's ever spring again' lies in the fact that Milford was able to relate this simple country love tale using the sparest and yet most sparkling accompaniment imaginable. The unaccompanied voice, alone, perhaps hints at a folksong scenario. It is these features which constitute an enhanced level in this song, lifting it to an extraordinary level of artistry.

'Tolerance' (1938) is a progressive-strophic setting of Hardy's poem which is concerned with philosophy, will-power, shadows of the past and tombs. Milford explained that it was written after "visiting Hardy's burial-place and birthplace".[17]

An air of mystery in 'Tolerance' is instantly created by an introductory piano octave suspended dominant (Bb). Against this background, the melody and piano interact in a dialogue which involves "mirrored" neighbour-note structures (Eb-D-Eb in bar 1 and Bb-C-Bb in bar 3), melodic growth centred around the note Bb, falling octave piano figuration, and melodic growth involving two falling sets of disjunct movement [3rds, then 5ths] (Ex.55).

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17 OUP: *Book of Songs*, 1942, p 42

'Tolerance' must represent a pinnacle within all English philosophical songs. Examples of memorable features include the alteration in musical mood to happiness from the gloom of the previous verses and a textural fanfare representing the poet's success in refraining from unwise gain (Ex.56);

octave and bass register voice-coupling creating the image of the depth of a tomb (Ex.57);

Ex.57

Poco sostenuto (ma semplice)

For see, a tomb. And if it were I had bent and

and triplet and syncopation figuration representing joy and success (Ex.58).

Ex.58

Hardy's humorous poem 'The Pink Frock' (1938) suggests a Wessex folk-tale, similar to those told at Harvest-Homes. The poet takes on the character of a girl who is unable to wear her new pink frock as her husband is inconsiderately dying. She questions why he has chosen the present and feels he ought to have decided to live on. As there is no hope of recovery, she will have to closet herself. If only he had chosen July to die she would not have felt so cheated.

The introduction creates the image of this ridiculous situation of misjudged priorities through its fast semiquaver rising E minor arpeggio to a false relation, followed by a falling fourth in duplet-quavers (Ex.59).

Ex. 59

Poco lento ♩. = c.52

A following bar's silence suggests an inexperienced girl who is uncertain of both herself and of her vocal entry.

Both the melody and accompaniment depict the girl's unsophisticated station in life. Particular melodic features suggest both speech and song (Ex.60).

Ex. 60

'O my pret - ty pink frock,___ I shan't be a - ble to wear it!___

Why is he dy - ing just now? I hard - ly can bear it!

These include monotones (perhaps implying an intoxicated singer) and falling 3rds at the end of each phrase (representing speech inflexion perhaps influenced by despair). A melodic minor 7th leap suggests a wail appropriate to the final phrase of

each verse, for instance, "Why is he dying just now?" in verse one.   Effective features in the accompaniment include the swaying bass figure (perhaps suggesting the singer's skirt swaying with her body in time to the parody of her music-hall melody) and broken piano rhythms, perhaps poking fun at the singer's "Puff-sleeved and accordion-pleated" frock (Ex.61).

Ex.61

'The Pink Frock' is perhaps one of the finest examples of Milford's small-scale settings.   Doubtless, Milford would have been well capable of lengthening this setting but, rather, he is content to portray his message concisely and efficiently.

Many of Milford's songs are settings of poems concerned with love. The composer set few comical poems on the topic but 'The Pink Frock' is an exception. There are many songs with which 'The Pink Frock' could be considered, e.g. Turnbull's wonderful 'If doughty deeds' (1927). Turnbull's song, also involving a military parallel, is altogether much more robust in character.   Set in E major, the accompaniment is characterised by the semiquaver ostinato in the piano upper register against quaver figuration in the lower register, representing the soldier riding on his steed (as suggested earlier). As in many of Milford's songs, Turnbull's melody is characterised by syllabic writing with effective leaps to top F# for word emphasis.   Harmonically, accented dissonance on dominant and subdominant chords emphasise the lines "Then tell me how to woo thee, love/O tell me how to woo thee!/For thy dear sake, nae care I'll take/Tho' ne'er another trow me".

Like Finzi, Milford was profoundly inspired by Hardy. He stated, "Of course it's Hardy too who is my favourite writer, whose poems I sent home for almost as soon as war broke out, who still remains my greatest literary solace".[18]   The composer acknowledged Finzi's influence at the beginning of 'The Colour' by inscribing the following dedication, "For Gerald Finzi, whose own settings of Hardy are at once my delight and my despair."[19]

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18 Milford letter to Finzi, 21 October, 1939

19 Milford song collection *A Book of Songs*, 1942

Milford gave Finzi prior notice of the dedication when he wrote, "One of the songs is for you, I'll send you a copy when they're out [printed]".[20] On Christmas Eve 1938 Finzi wrote to Milford, thanking him for his Christmas present - copies of the *Four Hardy Songs*:

> I really don't see why I should not be allowed to say 'thank you' for something appreciated, not only the songs as music, but also what you have written on No 2 ('The Colour'). If one can write it without being considered sentimental, it really rather moved me (which is a thing I'd rather write than say) & I think it's a lot to come from a pretty well known composer [Milford] to one who is not [Finzi]. Anyhow, appreciation (& criticism) from people whose work I admire is the only sort that gives me real pleasure, so you've given me a proper Christmas present![21]

Neither Kirstie nor Finzi was confident about the entire set of Hardy songs:

> I think Kirstie will soon get to like them. Perhaps not No 1 ('To Sincerity'), which doesn't seem quite finished & digested ('realised' is the jargon, I believe) but No 2 & No 3 ('The Colour' and 'If it's ever spring again') seem clear enough for anyone & jolly good tunes too. I think No 4 ('Tolerance') is a real beauty, much in my mind at the moment, & gets right inside Hardy's grave & gentle mood.[22]

Finzi's judgement has been borne out as No 1 is the least known song of the set and was not published in the main book of Milford's songs.

'I will not let thee go', also written in 1939, is the last of Milford's published songs. Dedicated to John Goss, a well-known singer of the day, this song is a setting of Bridges' seven-verse dramatic love poem. Forming a gateway to the more developed language of the unpublished songs, 'I will not let thee go' is an important song in the composer's output.

In the poem, the poet raises with his lover various reasons against, and various conditions for, allowing her to leave him, thus ending their month-old affair. In the first verse, he questions their relationship being simply acknowledged in a single, presumably farewell, kiss. In the second verse, the poet suggests a complete incompatibility between his lover's words and actions which now belie her wishes. In verse three, the truth of their love has been witnessed by the daylight, while in verse four, the stars have been witnesses. In verse five, the constant lovers have

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20 Milford letter to Finzi, 17 September, 1938

21 Finzi letter to Milford, 24 December, 1938

22 Finzi letter to Milford, 24 December, 1938

been at odds with the changeable moon. In verse six, the flowers' willingness to be plucked by the lovers is the reason given against the break-up and in the final verse, the poet argues that, due to all the earlier reasons, he has too great a case against their separation. The poet arrives at a firm conclusion and states "I have thee by the hands/And will not let thee go".

'I will not let thee go', the longest of Milford's published songs, requires more extensive consideration.   A rising tonic A minor triad, ascending through chromaticism to form a complete arpeggio (ACEA), introduces this turbulent song. Milford employs this gesture throughout to paint the poet's frequent dogmatic statements "I will not let thee go"(Ex.62), (Ex.63), (Ex.64), (Ex.65); and "I have thee by the hands"(Ex.66). Constant melodic and harmonic chromaticism, high register notes and falling sequences paint the urgency of the poet's message in verse one.

Ex.64

I will not let___ thee go.

Ex.65

I will not let___ thee go. I hold thee

Ex.66 poco allargando

I have thee by___ the hands, And will___ not

Sustained through the use of organic development and new ideas, 'I will not let thee go' commences its development in verse two after the opening arpeggio phrase (still suggesting A minor). Gentle quaver figuration on E minor harmony (over a pedal E) paints the phrases "If thy word's breath could scare thy deeds/As the soft south …" (Ex.67).

Ex.67 *poco tranquillo*

Falling semiquaver figuration on G minor (7), F# minor (7) and Eb major harmony paints the image of feathered seeds being tossed (Ex.68).

Ex.68

The opening arpeggio gesture is not retained at the end of verse two to paint the poet's constant determination. Rather, new chromatic material suggests the increasing determination of the poet (Ex.69).

Ex.69 *animato*

Then might I let___ thee go.

20

Verse three commences with the rising arpeggio gesture now on D. This verse employs larger homophonic writing with a Bb minor chord commencing with the phase "Had not the great sun …" (Ex.70).

Ex.70

Had   not   the   great ___   sun

24

The phrases "Or were he reckoned slow/To bring the false to light" (bars 25-27) are wonderfully illuminated by Eb minor, D major, Eb minor, Ab major, F minor and G minor harmony with an equally effective melodic ascent (Ex.71).

Ex.71

seen, I might;   Or were he   reck - oned slow   To bring the false   to light, _

25

The ending of verse three suggests a period of reflection on the part of the poet through the use of a high register monotone (top E) in quasi-recitative style and *meno mosso, senza misura* markings (Ex.72).

Ex.72 *meno mosso   (senza misura)*

Then might I   let thee go. _____

28

For the opening and closing lines of the next two verses (verses four and five), Milford again deviates from the arpeggio-based gesture.   In verse four semiquaver/triplet demisemiquaver figuration over a repeating pedal A gently paint the "stars which crowd the summer skies"(Ex.73).

Ex.73

The final phrase of verse four, "I dare not let thee go", is dramatically painted through a "gap and fill" melodic structure which moves through G major, F major, E major and A minor harmony (Ex. 74).

Ex.74

Rising demisemiquaver bass figuration suggests the rising moon in verse five while syncopated added-note chords help emphasise the poet's comments on the moon, "rising late and setting "too soon" (Ex.75).

Ex.75 *p*

Have we not chid ___ the change - ful moon, ___ Now

39

ri - sing late, ___ and now Be - cause ___ she set ___ too soon, And

41

shall ___ I let ___ thee go?

pp (una corda)

44

C minor (6) harmony at the opening of verse six comes as a surprise. Moving to B minor and A major harmony, the verse opens in the upper melodic register suggesting near-desperation on the now well-known words "I will not let thee go". Rising and falling first inversion chromatic triads set against A major arpeggiation suggest "young flowers" (Ex.76), while the conclusion to this verse presents the most dogmatic phrase "I cannot let thee go" (Ex.77). Here the harmony starts to return the song to D minor through prolongation of the A harmony and use of dramatic figuration (including contrary movement in the piano).

Ex.76 *mf*

Have not the young flowers been _____ con - tent,

cant.

Plucked ere their buds _____ could blow, To seal _____ our

50

Ex.77 *appassionato*

I can - not let _____ thee go.

53

Milford now ceases any further development in the song by returning to the rising D minor gesture for the opening of verse seven (Ex.78). The crux of the poet's argument, "I hold thee by too many bands", is painted using sequential falling fourths in the melody with the word "too" being firmly accented. Milford paints the word "bands" through the use of D major and B minor harmony, followed by a resolution on E7 harmony (Ex.78).

Ex.78

I will not let _thee go. I hold thee by too_ ma-ny bands:_____ Thou sayest fare -

The scene is now set for the final statement of tonic harmony which Milford appropriately sounds at the poet's final statement of resolution, "I have thee by the hands/And I will not let thee go" (Ex.79).

Ex.79 *poco allargando* (non troppo rit.)

I have thee by___ the hands, And will ___ not let _____ thee go.

The wide range of dynamic and tempo/expression markings add to the drama of this song: *forte, mezzo-forte, crescendo, fortissimo, piano, diminuendo, mezzo-piano, subitato, senza rit., poco allargando, non troppo rit., andante appassionato, cantabile, poco tranquillo, stringendo, animato, marcato, meno mosso, senza misura, espressivo, poco agitato, dolce, una corda*. This song, alone, shows Milford's development in the use of "shaping forces". From the early songs through to the songs of the late 1930s, there is a definite increase in the number and range of expressive markings employed in the illumination of texts.

Milford successfully employs a wide range of piano textures in the depiction of such imagery as the stars, the moon and flowers in 'I will not let thee go' (1939), all creating memorable features of this song. In using a small recitative section at the end of verse three to emphasise the fact that, had the sun not seen the two lovers together, the poet might then have allowed his lover to leave ("Then might I let thee go"), Milford was perhaps influenced by Warlock's 'The Night' but, most certainly,

by Finzi's similar style at the beginning of 'The Clock of the Years'. He became acquainted with Finzi's songs while composing 'I will not let thee go' and wrote "I am delighted to have a copy of 'Earth and Air, Rain'. (I had intended to get it myself …) …"[23]

Although fifteen years separate Milford's 'I will not let thee go' and Turnbull's 'A Boy's Song', the two songs have similarities (although the former is a setting of a serious adult poem while Turnbull's is a setting of a poem about boyhood): firstly, in terms of a repeated poetic phrase ("I will not let thee go") in Milford's song and "That's the way for Billy and me" in Turnbull's) where each composer uses the same melodic material, and, secondly, through a different poetic comparison of activity in each verse, which uses varied textural figuration and pitches. Gibbs also employs a repeated phrase "In a King's tower and a queen's bower" which also forms an essential core to his song 'The Ballad of Semmerwater'. Warlock also employs a repeated phrase on 'Ha'nacker Mill' to suggest the prominent character Sally, while Finzi uses the same feature in 'Lizbie Browne' to paint Lizbie's character.

One of Milford's late features is the use of contrasting and juxtaposed sections. Examples include 'To Sincerity' and 'I will not let thee go'. Finzi also employs this technique to effect in 'When I Set Out For Lyonnesse' where the sections move through E minor, E, Eb and back to E minor and also in 'In a Churchyard' which moves through D minor, B minor. Db, D and B. Similarly, the drama of 'I will not let thee go' bears resemblance to the dramatic opening of Finzi's 'I say I'll seek her'.

The Relationship between the Songs and Other Genres
The influence of Hardy's poetry on Milford is obvious through his collection of settings entitled *Four Hardy Songs*. Such influence, however, commenced during the 1920s. *The Darkling Thrush,* based on Hardy's poem, was first published in 1929 as a work for solo violin and small orchestra. It was later transcribed by the composer for solo violin and piano and published in that form by OUP in 1930. It is thus the first in line of a number of works for solo instrument and piano.

In his poem, Hardy considers winter's effects on man and nature. The land is deserted except for "An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small …" whose cheery "carolings" brighten the air and make the writer think of "Some blessed Hope" of which he, personally, is unaware.

Milford's composition consists of a series of juxtaposed sections, with links, similar to 'To Sincerity'. The introductory material also serves as a coda (Ex.80).

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23 Milford letter to Finzi, 23 June, 1938

Ex.80

Lento ♩ = 54
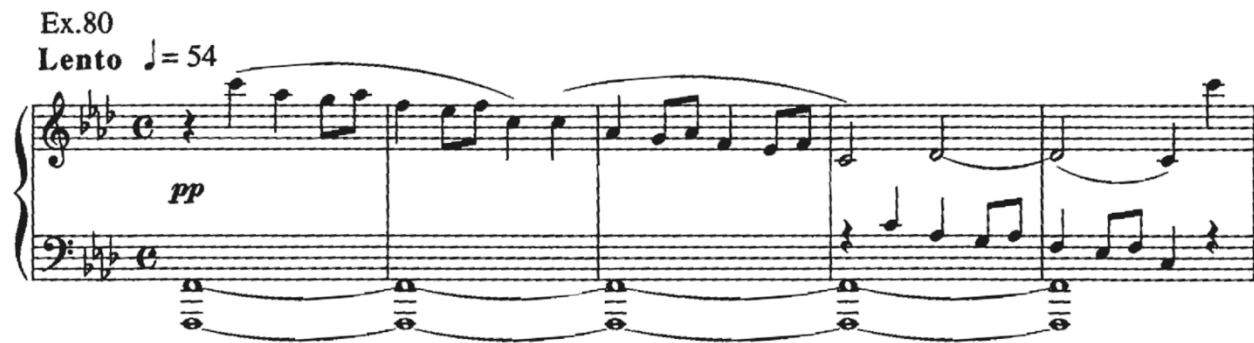
Differing time metres are employed, as in many of the songs. As in the songs before 'To Sincerity', the key structure shows a stable return to the tonic key:

Sections	Keys/implication	Time
Introduction	F minor	simple quadruple
1	C A	simple duple
2	Db	simple duple
3	Ab	simple triple
4	Ab	compound triple
2	Db	simple duple
Coda	F minor	simple quadruple

The introduction employs a falling melodic contour predicting that of 'In Tenebris', chromaticism looking ahead to *Swan Songs,* canon as in 'Elegy' and pedal points as employed in 'On His Mistress'. The themes are characterised by pentatonic shapes as, for example in section one (where the theme is underpinned by sustained harmony – another parallel with the songs which developed this feature over the years).   Other features include juxtaposed chromatic chords and harmonic movement by "step", with parallel intervals.

Prelude, Air and Finale for piano (1935) makes great use of a neighbour-note structure (a feature identified as important as early as 'The Moor'). In this piano work Milford employs this structure as a lower mordent which becomes an essential feature of the work (Ex.81).

Ex.81

'Prelude' employs an extended rondo-type form, in improvisatory style. It consists of three main alternating sections. Section A is based on the introductory lower mordent underpinned by fast-moving harmony. This leads into a B section, characterised by scalic figuration and syncopation. It moves through a series of time changes - 7/4, 3/4 and 3/2 before returning to 3/4 time (similar to Milford's freedom in time patterns in the songs). Section C is based on a folksong-styled melody suggesting the transposed Dorian mode. It also refers to the lower mordent and retains the crotchet/quaver/quaver derived from section one. This material is presented in various guises, including with a superimposed countermelody. Other features include gentle dissonance and fast-moving harmony, all features found in the songs.

The second movement, 'Air', commences with a simple but unusual nine-bar melody for the treble register only, suggesting the influence of English folksong as in 'The Colour' and 'The Pink Frock' (Ex.82).

Ex.82

The movement soon opens out into theme and variation form with some fine "workings" of the theme. These include two-part and three-part textures, gentle dissonant harmony, superimposed chromatic harmony, pivoting semiquaver figuration, the theme moving into the bass register (as in 'The Moor') with semiquaver scalic figuration above, and extended register between the hands - features found in the 1930's songs. Similar to the songs, 'Air' also shows distinct stylistic development through its more complex form of language and texture, especially when compared to 'Pastorale', 'Gavotte' and 'Jig' from the earlier *Three Dances* for piano.

The last movement, 'Finale' returns to the lower mordent as its inspiration but now within a *Lento* context (Ex.83). The original material in improvisatory style now returns.

Ex.83 Lento

Inscribed "For Barnaby (Easter 1941)", *Idyll* is written for solo violin and piano. It was inspired by a Claire Leighton wood-engraving for Thomas Hardy's novel *Under the Greenwood Tree*. Through its melodic contours, use of melodic and rhythmic motifs and modality, this work is closely related to the English countryside and English folk-song. Furthermore, *Idyll* also seems to depict a bird in flight (similar to Vaughan Williams' *Lark Ascending*) through its use of rising and falling contours, dependence on upper register and repeated notes.

The work is constructed around two themes and their individual units. The first theme (Ex.84) is introduced by unaccompanied violin, marked "quasi recitativo", at the opening of the work. It is characterised by rising conjunct movement followed by rising disjunct movement, similar to the melodic contour found in 'If it's ever spring again'.

Ex.84 Con moto (un poco lento)

mp (quasi recitativo)

The second section emphasises one of the main features of this work – a profound dialogue between the solo violin and piano, similar to the type of dialogue which exists between voice and piano in the songs; like the songs, the themes of *Idyll* are underpinned by strong harmonic colour moving in juxtaposed side-slips and varied textures involving syncopation, sustained chords and semiquaver figuration Ex.85.

Ex.85 **Più dolce** *('Where are the Songs of Spring?   Ay, where are they?')*