What Makes Finzi Finzi? The Convergence of Style and Struggle in the Life of Gerald Finzi and in His Set Before and After Summer, op. 16

Trevor Dangerfield Smith
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WHAT MAKES FINZI FINZI?

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by

Trevor Dangerfield Smith

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

December 2012
ABSTRACT

WHAT MAKES FINZI FINZI?

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by Trevor Dangerfield Smith

December 2012

The purpose of this dissertation is two-fold: to discuss the nationalistic characteristics in Gerald Finzi’s life and in his mature compositional style, and to discuss both the beliefs he held and the struggles he faced during his life, and how these themes are integrated into his work for voice and piano Before and after Summer, op. 16.

Before and after Summer was not conceived as a cycle, but its songs are tied together by similar poetic themes and emotional impact, so despite the fact they were composed as individual entities they form a coherent collection from beginning to end.

Chapter II will discuss British nationalism as a way of life for Finzi, as exhibited in his day-to-day living, his values, and his music. Finzi’s nationalism will be explored in his music through discussion of the pastoral stylistic tendencies found in his cycle Before and After Summer, a mature work for Finzi, comprised of songs written primarily within the mid to late 1940’s (Finzi died in 1956). His style will be discussed in terms of poetry choice, melody, texture, accompaniment, and atmosphere.

Chapters III, IV, and V will discuss themes of inner conflict that resonated throughout Finzi’s life and are likewise reflected in Before and after Summer. Some of the most salient aspects of Finzi’s identity, these themes include religion and dogma, war and pacifism, and youth versus the passing of time. The events that shaped these themes
will be discussed as will the means by which they were translated into artistic terms. The presence of these themes in *Before and after Summer* will be traced as will the style and compositional techniques Finzi uses to effectively communicate the themes.
The University of Southern Mississippi

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A Dissertation
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December 2012
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................................... v

LIST OF EXAMPLES ........................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

II. NATIONALISM AND PASTORALISM ........................................................................... 5

III. RELIGION AND DOGMA .......................................................................................... 23

IV. WAR AND PACIFISM .................................................................................................. 32

V. YOUTH AND THE PASSING OF TIME ......................................................................... 39

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................... 68
LIST OF EXAMPLES

Example
1. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 6-9 .......................................................... 14
2. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 23-24 ..................................................... 14
3. “Overlooking the River,” mm. 1-6 ................................................................. 15
4. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 1-6 ......................................................... 16
5. “Amabel,” mm. 1-11 ....................................................................................... 16
6. “Epeisodia,” mm. 7-9 .................................................................................... 17
7. “Before and after Summer,” mm. 1-4 ............................................................. 18
8. “The Too Short Time,” mm. 1-8...................................................................... 18
9. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 7-15 ....................................................... 19
10. “Overlooking the River,” mm. 9-13 ............................................................. 20
12. “Before and after Summer,” mm. 1-8 .......................................................... 21
14. “Epeisodia,” mm. 5-23 ................................................................................. 21
15. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 1-9 ....................................................... 44
16. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 5-10 ..................................................... 45
17. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 22-27 ................................................... 46
18. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 31-33 ................................................... 46
19. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 54-55 ................................................... 47
20. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 61-69 ................................................... 47
21. “Overlooking the River,” mm. 1-4 .............................................................. 49
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>“Overlooking the River,” mm. 17-26</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>“Overlooking the River,” mm. 37-39</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>“In the Mind’s Eye,” mm. 1-4</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>“In the Mind’s Eye,” mm. 36-45</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>“Channel Firing,” mm. 1-3</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>“The Too Short Time,” mm. 1-11</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>“The Too Short Time,” mm. 21-24</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>“The Too Short Time,” mm. 31-37</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>“Before and after Summer,” mm. 44-51</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>“Before and after Summer,” mm. 52-60</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>“The Self-unseeing,” mm. 17-27</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>“Channel Firing,” mm. 1-3</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>“In the Mind’s Eye,” mm. 1-4</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>“In the Mind’s Eye,” mm. 44-51</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>“The Too Short Time,” mm. 6-11</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>“The Too Short Time,” mm. 21-24</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>“Epeisodia,” mm. 19-28</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>“He Abjures Love,” mm. 121-134</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this dissertation is to provide insight to some particularly resonant themes in the life of Gerald Finzi and to explore how these themes are manifested in his song cycle, *Before and after Summer*, op. 16. These themes include a penchant toward English nationalism and musical pastoralism, disdain for religion and rejection of dogma, struggle as a pacifist who enlisted during World War II, and obsession with the passing of time. Each chapter will explore Finzi’s life as it correlates to each theme and will discuss how Finzi applies these themes to *Before and after Summer*. This mature work of Finzi’s is comprised of songs written primarily within the mid to late 1940’s (Finzi died in 1956). His style will be discussed in terms of poetry choice, melody, texture, accompaniment, and atmosphere.

At first glance Finzi’s music might seem simple and perhaps lacking in complexity; however, by his later works he had reached the height of his compositional craft and had developed a unique musical language. His songs’ seeming simplicity resulted from both skill and intent. Through understanding Finzi’s compositional style, personal motivations, and connection with the poetry and poet, a more complete understanding of Finzi and his music will be achieved. For example, why he chose those particular texts, his state of mind while composing them, and how knowledge of certain stylistic tendencies used often throughout *Before and after Summer* might reveal clues about how a singer and pianist might craft a more authentic presentation.

Chapter I contains a basic level of historical and contextual information about Finzi’s life, his music, and information about *Before and after Summer*. Chapter II will
explore British nationalism as a way of life for Finzi, as exhibited in his day-to-day living and his values. Finzi’s nationalism will be explored in his music through discussion of the pastoral stylistic tendencies found in his cycle *Before and After Summer*.

Chapters III, IV, and V will discuss the themes of religion and dogma, pacifism and war, and the passing of time. Each chapter will explore Finzi’s life in the context of each theme, and will trace how Finzi’s style and compositional technique allow him to integrate these themes into *Before and after Summer* to effectively communicate their message.

Gerald Raphael Finzi (1901-1956) was a British nationalistic composer. An avid reader, collector of books, and lover of poetry, Finzi single-handedly amassed one of the most significant libraries of eighteenth-century literature to date. He was born in London of Jewish parents whose families were both prosperous. Finzi’s early years were at times traumatic. He was no stranger to death and was faced with feelings of abandonment that accompanied the loss of many of his loved ones. After his father died at an early age, his eccentric mother cared for Gerald and his siblings. His strong convictions regarding religion, war, and obsession with the passing of time were formative factors in a young man searching for answers to difficult questions. Later, as a young man and composer, he was accepted by Ralph Vaughan Williams and his conservative, English musical circle. Ultimately, Finzi’s identity and music would become a reflection of his love for all things English, and his beliefs, passions, struggles, and life understanding.

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Finzi’s music is firmly rooted in the relatively-conservative pastoral\textsuperscript{2} English tradition of Hubert Parry, Edward Elgar, and Ralph Vaughan Williams.\textsuperscript{3} During his lifetime, his works were largely overshadowed by the more-progressive works of his contemporaries, such as Benjamin Britten, who appealed to a larger, international audience. It was only after his death that Finzi began to be recognized as a significant composer with the eventual publication, recording, and dissemination of his collected works. Regardless of his conservative style, Finzi’s music stands apart from other pastoral composers because of the serious nature of the poetry he chooses to set – its introspection, and its, at times, fatalistic perspective – particularly evident in his songs that set the poetry of Thomas Hardy.

Stylistically, Finzi’s songs generally contain melodies that are lyrical and almost exclusively syllabic, though he had a penchant for employing large leaps for effect. He generally avoids thick accompanimental textures, preferring instead continuo-like bass lines with simple, occasionally contrapuntal realizations above. Finzi was not an accomplished pianist, but his experience conducting and arranging for small orchestral ensembles is evident in the accompaniment of his later songs, which suit the text and help Finzi create the appropriate atmosphere. Generally, accompanimental rhythms are simple and motivic. At times Finzi uses gently shifting rhythmic patterns that resemble those of Brahms or Schumann (e.g., repeating patterns of eighth-note, quarter-note, eighth-note combinations). Rhythmic and textural patterns in the accompaniment often shift suddenly, either to emphasize a particular fragment of the text or to create clearly-defined

\textsuperscript{2}Pastoral music is meant to evoke the imagery of the pastoral setting, landscape, or scene.

\textsuperscript{3}Stephen Banfield, \textit{Gerald Finzi: An English Composer} (Boston: Farber and Farber, 1988), 105.
sections of a song as dictated by text, where conventional means of sectioning music might not otherwise be useful.

Finzi wrote several larger works of varying size and scope. The most familiar are for choir (often including soloist(s) and orchestra), including *Dies Natalis*, *Intimations of Immortality*, *In terra pax*, and *Lo, the full, final sacrifice*. His well-known concerti for clarinet and cello are regularly programmed as well. Finzi’s songs, however, show him at his best; they remain the most significant part of his oeuvre and his lasting legacy to English music.

*Before and after Summer* was not conceived as a cycle, but its songs are tied together by similar poetic themes and emotional impact. Despite the fact that they were composed as individual entities they form a coherent collection from beginning to end. All ten songs use poems of Finzi’s most beloved poet, Thomas Hardy. The set was completed, had its first performance, and was published in 1949, though only half of the ten songs were written that same year: “Childhood among the Ferns,” “Before and after Summer,” “The Self-unseeing,” “In the Mind’s Eye,” and “The Too Short time.” The others were written sporadically across a seventeen-year period: “Epeisodia” and “Amabel” in 1932, “He Abjures Love” in 1938, and both “Overlooking the River” and “Channel firing” in 1940.
CHAPTER II
NATIONALISM AND PASTORALISM

Finzi grew up during the period of post-World War I English nationalism, when English music flourished under the leadership of pastoral composers like Elgar and Vaughan Williams.\(^4\) Englishness permeated many aspects of his life and thoughts, and often appeared in conversation with friends, including Vera Somerfield, a one-time close friend of Finzi’s sister Kate. The two exchanged fiery correspondence, often highlighting topics of race and nationality.\(^5\) For example, in one letter Finzi quoted an article by Ralph Vaughan Williams from the July, 1920 issue of *Music & Letters,\(^6\)* in which Vaughan Williams defends the English nationality of Gustav Holst. Like Vaughan Williams, Finzi made the argument that despite Holst’s name (of both Swedish and Russian origins), he “remains an Englishman,” pointing out that his family had been settled there for over one hundred years.\(^7\) Finzi wanted to make the point that everyone is of mixed race: “Holst was no more German than Grieg was Scottish.”\(^8\)

Finzi believed that the artist is the truest representative of a civilization. Thus, the young Gerald Finzi dedicated his time and craft toward the cultural advancement of English music.\(^9\) He had little patience for mainstream British composers who wrote specifically for an international audience – composers such as Benjamin Britten, whose


\(^{6}\)Ralph Vaughan Williams, “Gustav Holst, I.” *Music & Letters* vol. 1, no. 3 (July 1920).


life intersected with Finzi’s several times in his late twenties and early thirties. The two viewed each other as “young contemporaries,” without either fully appreciating the music of the other.\textsuperscript{10} Ironically, the music of both would occasionally be programmed in the same concert.\textsuperscript{11} Finzi noted, “I’m allergic to Britten’s music! . . . his works (with the exception of\textit{ Peter Grimes}) are derelict and dead.”\textsuperscript{12} Finzi actually composed one of his most famous, intrinsically pastoral works, \textit{Dies Natalis}, in reaction to what seemed was an artistic selling-out of English culture by English composers.\textsuperscript{13} Though Britten clearly was and remains the more recognized and performed of the two, Finzi took pride in pointing out that Britten was once employed by Finzi as a copyist.\textsuperscript{14}

Finzi was enamored with the English countryside because of its connection with particular pastoral composers. In the 1920s he spent time composing in the “south country,” which includes the towns of Churchdown, Gloucester, and Painswick, all areas with strong connections to Elgar, Parry, Vaughan Williams, and Holst.\textsuperscript{15} Occasionally Finzi would embark on adventures he nicknamed “walking holidays,” an idea he borrowed from Gustav Holst.\textsuperscript{16} Finzi would reserve days at a time just to stroll along the rural English countryside.\textsuperscript{17} For example, Finzi was drawn to the poet and composer


\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 101.


\textsuperscript{13}Stephen Banfield, \textit{Gerald Finzi: An English Composer} (Boston: Farber and Farber, 1988), 323.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 101.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 60, 62.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 162 and 165.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 117.
Ivor Gurney, whose “Sleep” he once heard sung in a voice lesson with Edward Bairstow, one of Finzi’s composition teachers. Finzi absorbed Gurney’s music and poetry, most significantly “Severn and Somme” and “War’s Embers,” which recall memories of Gurney’s own travels through England’s west country. The impressionable young Finzi followed in Gurney’s footsteps on his own visit to the west country in an attempt to more closely identify with him.

The preservation of English folksong and their subsequent use in the compositions of the English composers was a key element of English nationalism. Although the generation of composers before Finzi completed much of the task, he recognized the importance of folksong in the training of young composers and in the preservation of the English pastoral cultures. Speaking about the importance of folksong and traditions Finzi wrote, “[folksong] is something with which he [a composer] wishes to be identified, and which he also wishes to share,” and tradition is “a communal thing, and not to be confused with maypoles, varsity ties and blood. It is like a cable along which one can speak to infinity, and like a cable it must be charged and alive, for once the life ceases, tradition becomes convention.”

In a letter to Frank Howes Finzi wrote, “Folksong has been to me like food, grammar or counterpoint, it helped me to build up.”

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18 Stephen Banfield, Gerald Finzi: An English Composer (Boston: Farber and Farber, 1988), 393.


Finzi believed local communities and English composers could both benefit through the encouragement of musical amateurism. Concerning the 1920 Glastonbury festival he notes: “[its] music-making was not an attempt to compete with professionalism: its importance was that the people made music themselves. How wonderful it w[oul]d be if every village were a Glastonbury.”\textsuperscript{22} Finzi believed such events as the one at Glastonbury are where composers could “bring music into the life of the people.”\textsuperscript{23} Through these festivals British composers at one time could find an audience, cultivate music making, and remind localities of their rich musical past. They left a lasting impression on town’s inhabitants and a legacy for their descendants.\textsuperscript{24}

Finzi was deeply convicted about fostering music as a part of provincial life. In a letter to his friend Anthony Milner he says, “The real worry to me is . . . the danger of a great art being narrowed down to a very few people and the consequent withering of its roots.”\textsuperscript{25} Thus Finzi began the amateur chamber group the Newbury String Players in 1940.\textsuperscript{26} By starting the Newbury String Players, Finzi became a conductor as well as a scholar of eighteenth-century music. In order to provide an adequate amount of literature for the ensemble, Finzi researched and prepared previously unedited baroque works. He led the group to excellence and helped them earn a reputation as one of the best string ensembles in the nation.\textsuperscript{27} Finzi used the Newbury String Players as a platform for some

\textsuperscript{22}Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield, June 16, 1920.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{24}Stephen Banfield, \textit{Gerald Finzi: An English Composer} (Boston: Farber and Farber, 1988), 31.


\textsuperscript{26}Diana McVeagh, \textit{Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music} (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 118.
of England’s brightest young composers and performers, a model that was atypical for the small-town, amateur organization. The Newbury String Players brought the “classical string repertoire” to localities who had never heard it before; it helped revitalize local music festivals and sparked an interest music-making in the local schools.

The English nationalistic movement was not specific to musical or visual arts; e.g., the preservation of the English landscape was an important goal innate within the movement. British architects designed new buildings and renovated existing facades to mimic much older buildings. Finzi and his wife, Joy, made their own personal contribution. They built a fairly modest estate at Ashmansworth, near Newbury, a picture-perfect pastoral setting. Here he cultivated an orchard of apple species native to England and in the process ensured the survival of several species for subsequent generations. Vaughan Williams recognized Finzi’s nationalistic parallels and drew comparisons of Finzi’s preservation of apples for posterity with folksongs. “Indeed,” he wrote, “he was almost as keen on reviving forgotten varieties of apples as the works of forgotten English composers.”

On his first trip to the Glastonbury Festival in 1919, he heard his first Vaughan Williams’s cycle, *On Wenlock Edge*, an event that helped ignite his passion for

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29Ibid., 282

30Ibid., 69.


pastoralism. Subsequently, Finzi became gripped with Vaughan Williams’s music. Even when he was young, Finzi’s tastes tended toward the mainstays of English nationalism in music – Vaughan Williams, Holst, etc. In 1920, Finzi and his mother left for one of his earliest pastoral pilgrimages – a walking holiday to Down Ampney, the birthplace of Vaughan Williams. He was soon welcomed into this circle of pastoral composers, an unofficial group that was led by the elder composer, Vaughan Williams, but had included important figures such as Hubert Parry, Ivor Gurney, George Butterworth, and Edward Elgar. In conversation with Finzi biographer Diana McVeagh, Vera (Somerfield) Strawson recalled “at Glastonbury Vaughan Williams handed Gerald an unsealed note (which Gerald naturally opened) to give to [Rutland] Boughton ‘to introduce Mr. Finzi. He is one of us.’ Heady moment for an aspiring composer!”

As a young man and student of composition eager to absorb all he could, Finzi spent much of his youth in the company of his teachers and mentors and their families.

“Every alternate Sunday morning, he [Finzi] would turn up at my house, and the other Sundays in between he would turn up either at Ralph Vaughan Williams’s house, in Dorking in those days, or at R. O. Morris’s, in Chelsea; and he would pick our brains, quite legitimately . . .” It was not just the quality of music he valued in the composer of the nationalistic circle, but a quality of character. McVeagh recalls

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35Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield, April 4, 1921.


On the back of a small, black-bordered sheet of Birkholt paper, Gerald wrote three times the initials RVW and the name Holst, and added Butterworth, Parry, Elgar, Gurney – and “Hurrah!” On the front he pasted a cutting: ‘If the British people have a defect it is that they are wanting in industry – Lord Robert Cecil,’ and in his own hand ‘Like the British workman, it is thoroughly efficient – it does its job well – advertisement for Sunlight soap.’ The paper is from a collection he was gathering of comments on the English character, some cut out, some copied from books, periodicals, newspapers. They show Gerald’s wide, serious reading, his curiosity, his observation of contradictions, his instinct to hoard and preserve, and his conscious investigation of what it means to be English.38

The elder Vaughan Williams became a mentor to Finzi. It was Vaughan Williams who conducted Finzi’s Violin Concerto, his London concert debut.39 He also supported the younger composer by programming Finzi’s music in concerts he was conducting that featured his own works.40 Sybil Eaton (for whom Finzi wrote his Violin Concerto) wrote to Finzi’s mother: “I don’t know if I will have told you that VW made a speech to the orchestra saying that he very much wanted the work to go well, for although the composer from youth & inexperience had miscalculated his effects in places he liked the work, & believed that he (g.) [Gerald] would do great things some day. Wasn’t that nice?”41 Finzi learned much of his meticulous and laborious working routine from Vaughan Williams, who taught him his most creative moments would emerge from the seemingly most barren of times; he must be prepared for them when they arrived.42 As he came to respect and solicit Finzi’s ear and opinions of his own works, Vaughan


40Ibid., 113.

41Sybil Eaton, letter to Lizzie Finzi, February 6, 1928. Quoted in Ibid., 113.

Williams invited Finzi to private hearings of his latest orchestral works in piano reductions. Their friendship and the junctures between their families increased as time passed. Finzi referred to him as “Uncle Ralph,” until the very end.43

Finzi was obsessed with his search for “paradise in Pastoral England . . . his quest for roots and community, for spiritual and enduring verities in a romantic image of a united past and present.” Finzi’s love of the traditional Pastoral England reflected his near myth-like, utopian view of its aspects. “His” England was pastoral England, and “Music was central to this merrie England myth.”45

Naturally, such a deep sense of English nationalism, including the cultivation of relationships with the figureheads of nationalism in music, affected Finzi’s compositional traits. Finzi’s early music is easily and often characterized as pastoral; yet, even Before and after Summer, whose songs were almost exclusively composed during the last fifteen years of his life, retains many pastoral characteristics.

Pastoral music is meant to evoke the imagery of the pastoral setting, landscape, or scene. Finzi has chosen texts for this song set which largely focus on this kind of imagery. The majority of “Childhood among the Ferns” is scene-driven; the author recalls vivid imagery of his past self in an idyllic nature setting. “Overlooking the River” contains equally vivid imagery of birds playing as the author’s eye catches their reflection in the water. Hardy’s morning scene contains references to still-closed flowers dripping with dew, the morning sun already revealing their golden color, attracting the


45Ibid., 34.
bees. “Epeisodia” contains imagery of more traditional pastoral elements: hills, sheep, brushwood, trees, shade, and the like, but sets it against contrasting images within a city setting. Ironically, Finzi also chooses imagery which is vivid without always being happy, and evokes feelings that eschew peacefulness. For example in “Before and after Summer,” in which the author longs for the sun of the summer to return amidst descriptive imagery of winds, sleet, and snow. “The Self-unseeing” reveals its author to be an adult who returns to his childhood home, now haunted with vivid pictures of his happy past he then took for granted. In “The Too Short Time” the author uses metaphor to compare his life to the summer (here more person than season), who did what she could when she was in her short prime. Finzi’s metaphor is set in the context of falling autumn leaves, the scene that follows summer and signals winter, a clear metaphor for being past one’s prime. Even the darkly humorous “Channel Firing” contains imagery of nature – worms, a mouse, etc. – and provides the pastoral backdrop, presumably of a cemetery, within sight and sound of gunnery ships at sea – a dark twist on imagery that is usually reserved to invoke feelings of peacefulness.

Pastoral music suggests several qualities of rhythm and meter, including fast triple meters or compound meters with moderate tempi, often with notes in groups of three. “Childhood among the Ferns” exhibits clear pastoral characteristics through rhythm and meter. This poem’s first section recalls a scene from the author’s youth where a child sits in the lea among its tall ferns. As it starts to rain, the ferns provide shelter for the child, who proudly notes that as the rain strengthened, he stayed dry (or he at least pretended to). Its two primary tempo markings are “Andante sostenuto,” and “Andante con moto
(Piu mosso);” the latter becomes the dominant tempo throughout. With the introduction of this dominant tempo in measure six, Finzi uses a $\frac{3}{4}$ meter (Example 1).

Example 1. Gerald Finzi, “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 6-9.

In section B, beginning at m. 23, Finzi now shifts to a compound meter, $6/8$, to fittingly convey the quickening and strengthening rain in the right hand accompaniment, and its subsequent dripping from the ferns, accomplished with a lilting rhythm in the bass (Example 2).

The set’s fourth song, “Overlooking the River,” is appropriately marked “Lento placido,” the dominant tempo throughout. Often Finzi employs shifting meters to reflect Hardy’s frequently uneven, or asymmetrical texts; though this song is almost exclusively written in simple meters, he occasionally groups notes in threes (Example 3). Finzi is careful to maintain his syllabic text-setting, but he uses the triplets within the duple meter to help soften what might otherwise be more jagged rhythms, serving the desired pastoral quality.

Despite the large melodic leaps that often occur throughout most of Finzi’s songs, several songs in Before and after Summer retain lyrical qualities that reflect pastoralism. The tender vocal melody of “Childhood among the Ferns” (Example 4) incorporates a generally-balanced melodic rise and fall, while still containing several leaps for which Finzi is known.


The opening melody from “Overlooking the River” is similar (see Example 3 above). “Amabel” (Example 5) and “Epeisodia” (Example 6) also contain melodies with clear, lyrical pastoral qualities. The latter’s melody is noticeably more conjunct and balanced, with fewer of Finzi’s intervallic leaps.
Pastoral music is also known for its lilting melodies above drones in the bass. However, because “drone” would more accurately imply a duration that lasts for a significant portion of a piece of music, and because drones are more often 5ths or octaves, the examples in Finzi’s songs may more appropriately be labeled pedal tones. Nonetheless, clearly Finzi draws from the pastoral drone to bring a particular quality to sections of his songs. The set’s second song, “Before and after Summer,” contains such a pedal tone (here a 6th) in its opening measure and in the transition between stanzas (Example 7).

“Too Short Time” contains a similar pedal tone in its opening measures, one that eventually grows into a walking bass. This example is a particularly effective image of falling leaves. The right-hand accompaniment is solely representative of the falling leaf, while the pedal tone serves dual purposes: to tie the horizontal harmonies together and to represent the ground as the leaves fall (Example 8).

Other examples of pastoral qualities that Finzi incorporates include temporary parallel thirds in the right hand accompaniment of “The Self-unseeing” (mm. 30-34), and the strophic treatment of the stanzas in “Amabel.”

One of the hallmarks of English pastoral music during the first half of the twentieth century is the use of pentatonic scales. In Finzi’s songs, the pentatonic scales are often derivatives of the major diatonic scale, meant to “allow the diatonic scale with its tonal heritage to be the basis of most of the piece, yet with a focus that is distinctly different from the diatonic music [of other composers].”\(^{46}\) The diatonicism (read major mode) in the relevant songs seems to be drawn from the pentatonic scale, however,

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\(^{46}\) Joel Lester, *Analytic Approaches to Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Norton), 117.
giving the impression of less-formal tonal organization while still maintaining the
fundamentals of tonal function. Examples of this phenomenon can be found in nearly
every song, including “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 7-15 (Example 9).


Finzi expands the potential of the pentatonic scale by writing melodic passing tones that
are contained within the E flat diatonic scale, in this case, A flat. By writing melody this
way he expands the pentatonic scale into major-mode diatonicism, creating a melody that
makes sense within the context of the pentatonic scale and the diatonic key of E flat
major. This treatment of melody occurs throughout the set and often will include similar
traits, including the more frequent use of the subdominant scale degree to expand
melody, as he does with the A flat in “Childhood among the Ferns.” Other examples
include “Overlooking the River,” mm. 10-15 [E flat, F, G, B flat, C] (Example 10) and
“The Too Short Time,” mm. 33-end (Example 11).
Finzi also alters notes within the traditional pentatonic scale for musical effect. Examples are the introduction and opening vocal melody of “Before and after Summer,” mm. 1-8, with an unexpected C flat (Expected: [A flat, B flat, C, E flat, F]; Actual: [A flat, B flat, C flat, E flat, F]) (Example 12).

Other examples of the use of pentatonic scales are in “The Self-unseeing,” mm. 25-27 (Example 13); and “Epeisodia,” in which the melody (save for the one appearance of C, again the subdominant scale degree) is constructed using only the pentatonic scale (Example 14).


The stylistic connections Finzi shares with the pastoral tradition are clear. Finzi identified with the English folk-elements that defined pastoralism and sought ways to live a life that was altruistically pastoral. Nevertheless, there are elements of his life and music which are more complex than whether his music is pastoral or not. These elements can also be found in his music and help define what made Finzi distinctively Finzi.
CHAPTER III
RELIGION AND DOGMA

At the heart of Finzi’s religious views was the rejection of dogma. He believed the acceptance of a strict, non-flexible code was incompatible with the open-mindedness, rationale, and logic that guided educated humanists. In a letter to Robin Milford he admits, “Those of my friends with fixed beliefs are certainly none the worse for it. If one believes in freedom of thought one sh[oul]d be prepared to allow freedom to believe in dogma . . . Though no rationalist c[oul]d ever be a fanatic, fanatics are not necessarily Hitlers & Co . . . I think the spirit sh[oul]d be like a weather-cock, blown by the winds of feelings & ideas, & I hate the idea of fixing the weather-cock to N. S. E. or W. . . .”

Finzi was an admirer of fellow pastoral composer Hubert Parry, in whom he recognized a man of both deep feeling and deep religious convictions. He was, in Finzi’s words, “fundamentally religious while avoiding every form of dogma.”

Finzi found in Parry not necessarily two conflicting ideals, but rather a man who viewed the personal truths of religion in the light of an enlightened rationalist. To Finzi the result of this combination was admirable: “He cared for the thing itself, rather than for the appearance of the thing.” Of course, as a composer Finzi found it particularly useful to avoid subscribing to any particular dogma: “If you accept the authority of the C of E [Church of England] you can hardly write a liturgical mass. If you accept the authority of the R. C. [Roman Catholic] church you can hardly write an Anglican service. But if you accept

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49Ibid., 165.
neither & in their place put the duties of man & artist, you can, like V.W., write both.”

He also rejected the idea that art was only worthy when subjugated to worship, or any power, religious, political, or otherwise: “The idea that the arts should act as handmaidens to worship, and that they are graven images if considered sufficient in themselves, is a great fallacy, a dangerous one and, in some cases, an evil one . . . Oh, how much bigger music is than all this and why should it be tied down to earth by a Communist rope, or a Fascist rope, or a Church rope, or a Chapel rope, or a pagan rope, or any bloody rope.”

He found dogma, in its unwillingness to compromise, as dangerous. This paradigm of music and “man & artist,” is how Finzi found he was best able to worship a higher power, at least in the absence of any traditional religious structures.

In a letter to close friend Antonio “Toty” Navarro, Finzi testifies, “In these days, when one is feeling that mankind was Nature’s greatest mistake, it’s good to have a reminder, by way of Rodin and Michelangelo, of mankind’s possibilities.”

He continues with a quotation from William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: “The worship of God is honouring his gifts in other men, and loving the greatest men best.”

It is noteworthy that Finzi was largely disconnected from his family’s Jewish heritage – Finzi’s mother was born and raised as a Jew in Germany, and his father

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51Gerald Finzi, letter to Robin Milford, December 30, 1940.


53Gerald Finzi, letter to Antonio “Toty” de Navarro, December 17, 1938.

54Ibid.

55Ibid.
descended from centuries of prominent Italian Jews. His rejection of any organized religion (including his own Jewish heritage) developed into a source of intense internal conflict in light of the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party. Though his Jewish heritage was never known to anyone outside his family, in the years leading up to World War II Finzi became furiously obsessed with Jewish persecution and the increasingly-frightening level of anti-Semitism. Just like his earlier, obsessive attempt to answer the question “What makes one English,” this fixation took the shape of endless newspaper clippings, books and other literature – even Nazi propaganda. He also made lists of some of the most important composers and musicians, all Jewish. This obsession was perhaps the way Finzi could externalize the manifestation of an internal struggle that had no other outlet.

Stephen Banfield, author, professor, and expert of British music of the 19th and 20th centuries, notes that to Finzi, “both music and environment were to be pursued as wholly indigenous English constructs.” Finzi had formed his life and career within the paradigm of Englishness, while at the same time disregarding his Jewishness. Perhaps Finzi was not consciously rejecting his heritage as much as he was choosing to ignore the parts of his heritage he believed others might use to justify hatred. Finzi embraced the message of universalism because of its wide inclusiveness, and imagined how music might exist in a truly universal environment. Perhaps he found hope not in a religious truth, but rather, in the hope that one day all “agnostics, R.C.’s, Anglo-C’s, Jews, Chapel, and C of E were all gathered together, seeing a beautiful sight, listening to decent music

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57 Ibid., 89.
& with all their ridiculous differences dropped for at least an hour. At the same time, Finzi was sensitively aware of what his ethnic heritage might denote, particularly in a pre-World War II environment. He made preparations for potential invasions and the threats that would accompany them, for example he built a secret room behind his cupboard at Ashmansworth. Also, during a 1938 trip to Suffolk to visit his mother, he spent much of the time destroying papers and documents that would prove his family’s Jewish lineage.

Finzi’s religious views were paired with his belief that all people are much more the result of nurture rather than nature; culture or environment rather than biology or heredity. In correspondence with his friend Vera Somerfield, “Now, types are caused by custom and climactic conditions. In other words, environment. (Heredity, in this case, is only ‘rooted environment).” His own nationalism, when viewed in context of his hidden ethnicity and heritage, is the realization of this view. Surely his most significant source of angst, the rise of the Nazi party, was tied to the same argument, understanding they were basing their slaughter of millions largely upon faulty theories of genetic superiority. Finzi points out, “The crime in Germany was in preventing assimilation of the enlightened Jews – the Nazi concept of race was “what you were you are, what you are you shall always be . . . There is no Jewish race and no Jewish type, except where environment has made it.”

59Gerald Finzi, letter to Robin Milford, December 30, 1940.
60Stephen Banfield, Gerald Finzi: An English Composer (Boston: Farber and Farber, 1988), 240.
61Diana McVeagh, Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 93.
62Gerald Finzi, letter to Vera Somerfield, January 22, 1923.
Despite his avoidance of organized religion in general, he recalled with fondness the peacefulness of Christmas and the sounds of approaching carolers early on Christmas morning.\textsuperscript{64} He embraced the child-like magic of Christmas: Finzi, posing as Father Christmas, would climb to the roof of Ashmansworth in order to shout to the children below through the chimney.\textsuperscript{65} Indeed, Finzi was not immune to the spirit of community and humanness inherent in Christian holidays; he wrote a substantial amount of music that celebrates or tells the story of Christmas. He would, however, make his own adaptations to texts in order to ensure their focus was not on dogma. For example, in \textit{In terra pax} (for soprano and baritone soloists, choir, and orchestra), based on “Noel: Christmas Eve, 1913,” by English poet Robert Bridges, Finzi focuses on the recreation of nativity imagery. Finzi succeeds in making \textit{In terra pax} a musical picture by completely removing Bridges’s third strophe (referencing English Christians and lauding their prayers) and replacing it with the Biblical story of the angels appearing in the fields to the shepherds, a natural adjustment to an anti-dogmatic, English pastoral composer.\textsuperscript{66} Banfield calls it “the perfect analogue for his susceptibility towards the season’s atmosphere and celebrations, musical and other, and epitome of his childlike serenity of style.”\textsuperscript{67} Regarding another well-known anthem for SATB choir with organ, “Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice,” Finzi expert and author, Diana McVeagh, states “plainly Finzi was

\textsuperscript{63}Diana McVeagh, \textit{Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music} (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 97.

\textsuperscript{64}Stephen Banfield, \textit{Gerald Finzi: An English Composer} (Boston: Farber and Farber, 1988), 96; 168.

\textsuperscript{65}Ibid., 430.

\textsuperscript{66}Ibid., 454.

\textsuperscript{67}Ibid., 455-456.
not drawn to the poem for its Christian content, but for its intensity, imagery, and passionate language.” 

Because Finzi’s father died while he was still a child and his relationship with his mother was distant at best, it is feasible to believe Finzi sought a parental model for his religion elsewhere. Perhaps this model was found in Montague Richard Leverson, his paternal grandfather. Though not much is known about the nature of their relationship, Finzi revered Leverson’s story enough to make note of it. Finzi wrote of him, “he through [sic] off Judaism & celebrated the event by dinner of all the forbidden foods.”

Leverson’s home would later become a safe-haven for refugees, political or otherwise, anarchists, and general “lovers of freedom.” Another model could be Raphael Meldola – friend of Jack, godfather to Finzi, and the source of Finzi’s middle name. Their parallels are significant, from their love of cats, nature, and the countryside, to their mutual belief that “every scientific man should justify his existence and add to the accumulation of knowledge.” Whether or not Finzi modeled himself after someone he esteemed, it is clear he never meaningfully connected with his ethnic heritage. Finzi’s son, Kiffer, said “he simply did not feel Jewish.” Only an immediate family member

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70 Ibid., 5.

71 Ibid., 4.

can offer this perspective, as very few people even knew of his ethnicity, including Finzi’s closest friend, Howard Ferguson.

While these family members may have laid the groundwork for Finzi’s viewpoint of religion, it was the poet Thomas Hardy with whom he found his deepest connection. Rarely is Finzi’s vocal music discussed without Hardy being a significant part of the discussion. More than 2/3 of his nearly eighty songs set poems of Hardy, with many other sketches existing. Finzi admitted there were a hundred more that attracted him that he would never have the chance to set.

Thomas Hardy is considered one of the most important early-twentieth-century British poets, yet the form and rhyme scheme of his poems often prevented them from being set to music. Finzi’s syllabic treatment of text and flexibility of meter and rhythm lent themselves perfectly to Hardy’s often jagged and asymmetrical writing. But it was the beliefs that resonate throughout Hardy’s poetry that attracted Finzi – poetry that speaks about the worth of all mankind, pacifism, and the rejection of dogma and dogmatic convictions. Hardy’s poetry conveys a general message of humanistic universalism, all at the core of Finzi as well. Diana McVeagh asks

What drew Finzi to Hardy so compulsively that he left over fifty completed song settings of the poems? . . . Finzi admired Hardy’s dignity, his compassion, what he considered to be his rationalism, and above all his freedom from religious bigotry.


76Ibid., 173.
Finzi wrote in September, 1940, “His [Hardy’s] outlook, from my point of view seems all that an artist needs. He has ideas & feelings, but no beliefs.” Finzi quoted a Hardy biography written by William Rutland: “The first, manifest, characteristic of the man who wrote ‘The Dynasts’ is his detestation of useless suffering, and his loathing of cruelty. The suffering that fills the world, and the thought that it is unnecessary, are to him a nightmare. This was the long tribulation of Hardy’s life.” Outside the shared rejection of dogma and mutual respect for rationalism and humanism, it seems the two men had similar obsessions as well, including the passing of time and war’s senselessness, both themes that resonate throughout Before and after Summer.

“I love two people this side of idolatry – Thomas Hardy and my Joy,” Finzi wrote in his journal in September, 1938. Finzi shared Hardy’s views of humanism and pacifism, his obsession with the passing of time, and most importantly, his general rejection of religious dogma. It is no wonder Finzi developed a rapport with Hardy, his spiritual kin. Though the two never met, he felt a deep connection because of their shared world-view and because the vivid imagery contained in the message of Hardy’s poems resonated with Finzi’s very core. Because Finzi almost exclusively chose to set Hardy’s poetry, Finzi became closely familiar with Hardy’s, specifically their asymmetry,

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77Gerald Finzi, Personal Journal Entry (dictate of a personal letter to Robin Milford which presumably no longer exists), September 20, 1940. Quoted in Diana McVeagh, Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 116.


79Ibid., 174.

contexts, and subtexts. The result is a body of work that is more powerful than it might otherwise have been.

Finzi wished to share very specific messages through his music. He went to great pains to ensure this message could be conveyed with integrity, without sacrificing his intended message for the sake of perhaps a poem’s secondary message. For example, Finzi sometimes cut, added, or substituted texts, as he did in works such as “In Terra Pax.” But it was unnecessary in his vocal music, for he found a poet who was also a kindred spirit. Thomas Hardy wrote poetry filled with vivid imagery in a non-traditional manner, and he and Finzi shared a common set of ideals. For these reasons, Hardy was Finzi’s poet; their connection ensured sets like *Before and after Summer* contained the message and music Finzi wished to convey.
CHAPTER IV
WAR AND PACIFISM

Finzi likely became a pacifist for a number of reasons, perhaps the same ones that led to his rejection of dogma and organized religion – logic and reason, guided by universalism, agnosticism, and his unquenchable thirst for literature. The loss of both Ernest Farrar, his beloved teacher, and his youngest sibling Edgar in World War I undoubtedly affected his opinions of war. Diana McVeagh speculates Finzi’s turn towards pacifism was a reaction to Farrar’s death and perhaps World War I in general.\(^{81}\)

Regardless, by the time World War II began, Finzi struggled to reconcile his pacifism with what he saw as a necessity to enlist. But he would deal with much more than just the basic issue of enlistment: “You must know what I feel like. It’s like watching a man done to death, only this is a civilization and the last stand of central European culture.”\(^{82}\)

Indeed, knowing what was at stake, there was never a question about whether he would serve, just how.

Finzi was convinced from the outset of war that service in any traditional sense was useless, an “utter waste of time.”\(^{83}\) His thoughts were mirrored in a letter that had been printed in the March 4, 1940, edition of the Daily Telegraph, sent to Finzi by his good friend Howard Ferguson: “artists are of more value to their country in their trained


capacity, often in key position, than serving generally with the fighting force . . . Our art is a measure of our civilization, and our artists its guardians.”

He goes on:

I feel that our work, if not ourselves, is about the only justification for mankind’s existence! And for being the ultimate representatives of our countries & civilization, well, the point’s not with discussing, for there never have been any others [emphasis given by Finzi] . . . All I feel is that no self-respecting person (unless he’s an out and out pacifist) can claim exemption on account of his own importance. His country must make that claim for him.

Finzi believed strongly that the creative artist could best serve the war in his career field and attempted to sway the minds of policy makers in response to the jailing of fellow composer Michael Tippett. Tippet had declared it was “his moral duty to serve the community as a musician;” he refused to claim the typical alternatives to joining forces, e.g., religion. Finzi wrote and sent a letter to fellow composers to read and sign – a letter that both denounced the jailing and supported Tippett’s argument. Banfield sums up Finzi’s particular situation: “he was neither a conscientious objector nor . . . a performer. The former might be left in peace, the latter could in many cases continue playing or singing for the nation’s entertainment or edification . . .,” so he went.

Though it was his belief that his role in the war should be that of an artist, his battle to justify serving in the war effort as a composer was made all the more urgent because he feared his compositional skill would be lost. Joy noted in her journal of Finzi’s “fear of never again recapturing it”, the “it” being his easier writing

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84 Diana McVeagh, Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 110.
85 Gerald Finzi, letter to Howard Ferguson, March 13, 1940.
86 Diana McVeagh, Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 133.
87 Ibid., 133.
Knowing he would soon be called up he wrote, “there is so much music I want to write and I can’t with the sword hanging over my head.”

His fears of war-time writer’s block were realized as he struggled to compose while he served in his eventual role at the Ministry of War Transport.

His inability to produce was exacerbated by the fact that he lacked an inner peace to work while Hitler’s regime was at war against civilization; the Nazis were always in the back of his mind. Finzi was forced to face this particular conflict as it became clear that war was imminent. Perhaps his acceptance of universalistic views was the impetus; after all, the Nazi views of race were based on faulty theories of genetic superiority.

Finzi had made his feelings of environment and culture over heredity abundantly clear, specifically that “There is no Jewish race & no Jewish type, except where environment has made it.”

His decision to negate his pacifism was also deeply rooted in his role as a creative artist. McVeagh explains

His letters show how deeply concerned he was to guard what Britain was fighting for against the Nazis. He had had to overcome his natural pacifism to reach the conclusion that he should serve the war effort – there was one conflict. Deeper than that, to him the first was to preserve civilization; civilization meant above all the creative arts; and he was a creator. But while ‘fighting’ he was not creating.

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92Ibid., 107.

93Gerald Finzi, letter to William Busch, November 14, 1938.

Finzi’s conflict was certainly due more to an internal struggle rather than an outward threat. He was never truly in any kind of imminent danger, as he was never far from Ashmansworth. And unlike his immense personal losses in World War I, there were no deaths of those close to Finzi.  

Nonetheless, he did wrestle with his decision to enlist, both because of his inclination toward pacifism and because he knew what would be lost as a composer/creative artist. When the war had subsided Finzi reclaimed his pacifism. He became part of organizations that advocated peace and represented the interests of artists within the context of war in both the Musicians’ Organization for Peace and the National Peace Council.

Finzi wrote to his friend Robin Milford in April, 1942 that he thought of his service within the War Transport Ministry as “utterly fruitless & sterile an occupation.” Though his compositional output immediately preceding and during the war was, indeed, comparatively sterile, there were a few bursts of productivity. Among the works produced during these burst were Finzi’s setting of the Frank Laurence Lucas “June on Castle Hill,” three of the Clarinet Bagatelles, “Absalom’s Place,” and “Channel Firing.”  

By the end of August 1940, bombs reached as far inland as near Ashmansworth. At that point, with invasion expected at any time, the Home Guard was put on emergency alert. Now a sergeant, Finzi was on duty several nights a week. “Channel Firing” was birthed out of the pressure of this environment. Work had actually begun earlier in 1939

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96 Ibid., 234.
97 Gerald Finzi, letter to Robin Milford, April 30, 1942.
when a friend suggested Hardy’s macabre poem to Finzi. He had read it several times in the past but at this reading was moved to set it to music. Perhaps the looming war allowed Finzi to connect with it in a way he previously had not. “Channel Firing” was finished by mid-September of 1940.99

Finzi was encouraged by long-time trusted friend Antonio “Toty” de Navarro to publish “Channel Firing” immediately, in order that it might fully benefit, financially or otherwise, from the war. His response reflected both his pacifism and his integrity:

You’re wrong about publishing “Channel Firing” – it’s quite the wrong time. One has to choose between recognition of the absolute insanity of all war & recognition of the necessity of this particular one. Anything that preaches the former vitiates against the practice of the latter. So you can count the withholding of “Channel Firing” a part of my war-effort! But seriously, I put a lot of store on the value of the artist of the community – even if the community doesn’t want him – & however insignificant, even a small thing like this counts.100

It was eventually published in 1949 as the centerpiece of Before and after Summer.

The poem’s first two stanzas describe the scene and the action, narrated by one of the dead buried in the cemetery. The dead have been awakened from their sleep by the firing of loud guns, mistaken for the judgment day. As they rise and prepare, presumably, to ascend toward heaven, the voice of God is heard: “No; It’s gunnery practice out at sea.” God continues:

Just as before you went below;  
The world is as it used to be:  

All nations striving strong to make  
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters  
They do no more for Christés sake


100Gerald Finzi, letter to Antonio “Toty” de Navarro, November 15, 1940.
Than you that are helpless in such matters.

That this is not the judgment-hour
For some of them's a blessed thing,
For if it were they'd have to scour
Hell's floor for so much threatening . . .

Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need).

It is clear why this poem struck Finzi as poignantly as it did. There are two powerful messages; one that is blatantly anti-war, and another that, at the very least, doubts the ability of religion to fulfill its own promise of salvation and peace; both of these messages resonated with Finzi. God himself delivers the anti-war message. He admonishes man for fighting war on religious grounds, and states man should be thankful today is not the judgment day, lest they all be sent straight to hell for war mongering. God’s “Ha, ha” is perhaps more human than divine; God either finds humor in the honest mistake of the dead (mistaking gunnery ships for the judgment day) or God laughs of exhaustion while he watches man’s reckless warring. Either way, God speculates the conditions in which he might one day bring about the Judgment Day; he even states it would perhaps be in tired man’s best interest if he did not. In another ironic statement, Parson Thirdly ponders whether he wasted his life’s calling as a preacher, suggesting he should instead have “stuck to pipes and beer.” The secondary message here is one that calls the power of religion in to question: firstly, whether or not religion has the means to

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101 Finzi, Gerald, *Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including 8 Cycles or Sets* (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 24-27.

102 Ibid., 29.
solve the world’s problems, much less end or prevent war, and secondly, whether or not God is either able or willing to bring about salvation.

Finzi has applied his full palate of creativity and care to “Channel Firing,” considered by many to be his greatest song. Only Hardy could produce a poem that contained all the elements Finzi would find necessary – vivid imagery, dark humor, and an anti-war/anti-religion (or perhaps anti-dogma) message – all rooted in humanistic universalism. Finzi chose to place “Channel Firing” as the central song in Before and after Summer, a choice that was hardly random. In the center of a set that includes songs of disillusioned youth, both experiencing and casting off love, and facing the end of life, sits “Channel Firing,” the only song that deals with war, and notably, the paradox of passing time and eternity, in a religious milieu.
CHAPTER V

YOUTH AND THE PASSING OF TIME

Finzi was surrounded by loss as a child and young man. He was the youngest of five children (Kate (b. 1890), Felix John (b. 1893), Douglas Lewis (b. 1897), and Edgar (b. 1898)). He and his lone sister, Kate, were the only two siblings still living by the time he was an adult. After suffering for years his father, Jack, died of lung cancer in 1909. Finzi was only eight years old.¹⁰³ Four years later the eldest son, Felix, died (a likely overdose of sleeping drugs).¹⁰⁴ While in attendance at Bradford College in 1912, Douglass contracted and died of pneumonia.¹⁰⁵ And Edgar, the next to youngest sibling and member of the Royal Air Force, was killed in action in September 1918.¹⁰⁶

Finzi once commented about the loss of his wife Joy’s aunt Lily, that she was loved not because she was Joy’s aunt, but because she was “splendid. . . Although I don’t know anything about the future and have pretty few hopes, it was something of a comfort to know what an empty shell was being buried.”¹⁰⁷ Yet his relationship with some family members was cordial and nothing more.¹⁰⁸ Friends (including Herbert Howells and Howard Ferguson) noticed how poorly Finzi treated his mother. Finzi shared with Joy, then his new wife, “I feel toward my Mother . . . as I feel to no one else, as a result of an enforced relationship based on kin-ship – not akin-ship. Akin-ship is more than kin-ship –

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 8.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 7.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 15.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 102
¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 102.
why else would we marry?”

Akin-ship proved to be the more powerful of the two. Indeed, the loss of non-familial friends, most notably Ernest Farrar, affected him as much if not more than the loss of so many family members.

Farrar was sent to France in 1918. A short ten days later, he was dead. Finzi was deeply affected, even more so from the loss of Farrar than his brother Edgar. McVeagh notes, “The bond between a teacher and an eager pupil is close, and Farrar was young enough to be his first real friend, a man whose ideals became his own.”

The irony must have been painful – the armistice and subsequent end of the war was only weeks after both Edgar’s and Farrar’s deaths, on November 11, 1918.

Finzi’s Requiem da camera is dedicated to the memory of Farrar, his teacher who died so young in World War I, and in Finzi’s eyes, so needlessly. McVeigh suggests Finzi wrote it for a number of other artists who lost their lives at such a young age, including George Butterworth, Ivor Gurney, and Edward Thomas. She notes, “All his life he was touched by the pathos of artists who died young.”

It was after Farrar was gone that Finzi began to comprehend and contemplate the brevity of life and its treasure in youth. About Farrar, Finzi wrote to friend Edmund Blunden years later, in 1953, “Then I was about fourteen and he just over thirty. Now I am over fifty and he is still just over thirty.”

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111Ibid., 15.

112Ibid., 31.

113Gerald Finzi, letter to Edmund Blunden, August 23, 1953.
After the war, Finzi was told by Farrar’s widow that his dead teacher would “live on in the lovely music he [Finzi] has written.” Unfortunately for Finzi, (and certainly unbeknown to Farrar’s widow), he interpreted this statement as a charge – a responsibility – one with a heavy emotional weight. Finzi’s life and music were filled with a spirit of urgency, rooted in his knowledge that no man, no matter his inherent worth as a human or artist, no matter his influence on the young, or his legacy, and no matter what his age, is immune to the passage of time and awaiting death at the end of that time. This urgency is the dominant theme in Before and after Summer.

Finzi was fixated on the knowledge that time would never allow him to be or do all he otherwise would be able to. He believed and said (and Joy recorded), “It is unusual to find the lyrical impulse increasing after thirty & the passing of adolescent urge.” The fears of dullness that accompanied old age and the inability to ensure a lasting legacy were heightened before World War II. Both the gravity of the situation – the senseless extermination of entire peoples and cultures – in addition to his own inner conflict between staunch pacifism and eventual enlistment, led to his most impotent period of output in his life. His wife Joy wrote, “This dead life without chance of writing music means a suffering deeper than torn flesh or bruised bone. The passing of time at such a vital moment in his life, when he was just achieving an easier technique is a constant remorse and the fear of never recapturing it again. Tunes do not come to trouble him now.”

115Ibid., 15.
116Ibid., 89.
117Joy Finzi, Personal Journal Entry, June 1, 1943. Quoted in Ibid., 131.
For a man who seemed to find little except pain in his childhood, and who was obsessed about growing old as an adult, it is natural that Finzi often focused on the idealism of childhood. Perhaps through his exploration of the Romantic Child, as in “Childhood among the Ferns,” Finzi was able to reconcile his own painful past marked with loss and fears of growing old, of never having enough time, and being unable to leave a lasting legacy. He was drawn to poets who wrote about idealistic childhood, including Traherne, and his vivid, poetic descriptions of childhood; and of course, Finzi’s poet, Thomas Hardy.\textsuperscript{118} (Traherne wrote his own account of childhood in “Dies Natalis,” which Finzi later set to music.) Always on the lookout for empathetic spirits, Finzi sought those who shared his feelings, beliefs, and philosophies, those minds behind the poems he chose to set. McVeagh continues:

Finzi’s view of childhood derives first from Traherne, then from Blake and Wordsworth . . . For them, each child is unique: important for its own way of perceiving, thinking, and feeling, not simply as a diminutive adult. This prelapsarian, asexual innocence contrasts with the Christian tradition of original sin. It has dangers, if it ignores Lolita, The Lord of the Flies, the boy-murderers of the Bulger child in 1993; and if it diminishes adult achievement. But at its purest it represents the Romantic Child without being sanitized or sentimentalized, as in some turn-of-the-century Victorian and Edwardian literature.\textsuperscript{119}

“Old age is . . . dust and ashes,”\textsuperscript{120} Finzi wrote, a quote brimming with irony because he would never reach old age. By 1951 Finzi was terminally ill with Hodgkin’s disease, though thoughts about the fleetingness of time continued to surface. He gave a curiously peaceful yet vague reply to a friend who asked about the possibility of

\textsuperscript{118}Diana McVeagh, \textit{Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music} (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 43.

\textsuperscript{119}Ibid., 103.

\textsuperscript{120}Gerald Finzi, Letter to Edmund Blunden, July 11, 1952.
composing a new piece, “I’m afraid there isn’t time.”” Banfield thinks he had by this point accepted his fate, expressed in *In terra pax*:

> Yet beyond all these, and in a sense of making them irrelevant, he was continually driven to accomplish more than he had yet learnt how to do, and to pursue interests and conserve knowledge in broader spheres and wider arcs than time and circumstances really permitted. Life simply offered too much: for him, accomplishment could never catch up with possibility, and he knew it. This was both his joy and his despair, and surely no further explanation is needed for both the great vitality and underlying pessimism, for it all followed once his character had first been set in motion. [Howard] Ferguson describes how ‘anyone who met Finzi personally will remember his bubbling sense of fun, his humor and his electric nervous energy. As I picture him in conversation he is always striking restlessly about the room, never seated at rest.’ He adds, ‘Fewer will know that beneath this incisive, buoyant exterior lay a deep and fundamental pessimism.’ He astutely couches this in terms of Finzi’s own bass-dominated music, ‘his haunted sense . . . that there would never be sufficient time for the completion of what he had in him to write,’ a thought that ‘ran constantly in his mind, like a ground-bass to his whole existence.’

Finzi perhaps found solace in his belief that “A song outlasts a dynasty,” which he repeated often; his energy was now dedicated to ensuring the legacy of his own song.

The theme of “the Passing of Time” resonates throughout the entirety of *Before and After Summer*; it is the very heart of the set. Every song conveys time’s passing in some way, though neither perspective nor feelings are constant. Hardy’s poetry conveys passing time largely through two perspectives: image-driven remembrance, and the feelings that result as a reflective adult. The poems range from vivid imagery and scenes from the author’s past, as in “Childhood among the Ferns,” “Overlooking the River,” and “Episodia,” to viewing the past and future through the eyes of the present as in “The

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Self-unseeing” and “In the Mind’s Eye.” Metaphors are incorporated, as in “The Too Short Time,” in which the falling leaves represent being past one’s prime. And “Channel Firing” offers a unique perspective, one which reveals dead souls’ anticipation for the coming judgment day. Their hope turns to dismay as they find things are the same now as when they were alive. Time, to the dead, stands still.

The author’s feelings about the past are varied as well. Despite the child-like energy in the first part of “Childhood among the Ferns,” the author becomes more pensive and wonders why the idyllic child must grow up. In both “The Self-unseeing” and “Overlooking the River,” Hardy contemplates things taken for granted. In the former his imagery is entirely within the context of a soul saddened because he took his childhood for granted, in the latter Hardy experiences the beauty of nature and vows to never again take “these less things”\(^\text{124}\) for granted. Though haunted by a phantom of one who is no more in “In the Mind’s Eye,” Hardy remains content he still has a ghost in his presence. And while “The Too Short Time” laments the process of aging, it celebrates that every leaf was once “granted her prime.”\(^\text{125}\) “Epeisodia” looks fondly back on the excitement of young love. Its message: it matters not where lovers were, in the beauty of nature or in the dark shadows of the city, what was important was that they were together (even in death, as the poem suggests at its end). The final two songs also describe love, though they both take darker turns. “Amabel” is lost and dead – only the anticipation of the afterlife awaits her still-living love. In “He Abjures Love,” Hardy suggests he wasted his own time with love.

\(^{124}\)Finzi, Gerald, *Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including 8 Cycles or Sets* (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 22.

\(^{125}\)Ibid., 39.
Finzi successfully conveys the heart of each poem, the passing of time, through his compositional technique and style choices. He uses melody, key or mode, accompaniment, and, most significant, the use of all these collectively to tone-paint individual sections in order to transition from one atmosphere to another within the same song. This transition marks the distinction between what is being remembered and the psychological underpinnings of the song. Finzi combines these elements to tone-paint the poems, or sections of poems.

Hardy’s poems often end in a different state of mind from their beginning, in this case revealing that the poem is not in the present; rather, it is a vivid memory recalled by a thoughtful, if not melancholy, adult. Finzi aptly recognized this phenomenon and his settings duly reflect these changes. Each section of poetry has a distinct atmosphere which accompanies the imagery being depicted, the feelings of the author about that imagery, or both. The entire opening section of “Childhood among the Ferns,” for example, is revealed to be a flashback to the happiness and innocence of childhood. Only late in the song when the child utters the words of a pensive adult, “Why should I have to grow to man’s estate,/ And this afarnoised World perambulate,” do we realize the song does not take place in the present; its true focus is the loss of youth to adulthood. Finzi’s setting reflects both the poem’s brilliant imagery and the contrasting perspectives. The opening section is lively and distinct. After a fanfare-like introduction Finzi marks “chiaro” to articulate the eight-note, alberti-like right-hand accompaniment figures (Example 15).

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126 Finzi, Gerald, *Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including Cycles or Sets* (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 11.

This opening passage brings to life the thrill of the child-author who sits “upon the lea” during a light rain: the eight-note pattern clearly represents the steady sprinkle.\textsuperscript{127} Finzi often adapts the accompaniment pattern to match the changes in the poem’s imagery: at “Where tall-stemmed ferns spread out luxuriantly,” the accompaniment transitions into right-hand turnarounds paired with triple-eighth not figures in the bass (Example 1).

\textsuperscript{127}Finzi, Gerald, \textit{Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including Cycles or Sets} (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 6.
Example 16. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 5-10.

The constant eighth-note figure in the right hand gives way to a diminutive sixteenth-note figure as the “rain gained strength” in measure 23 (Example 17).

Example 17. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 22-27.
The figure again changes from broken chords to passages of scales and other step-wise motion as the rain rolls down the stalks of the ferns in “slow-creeping rivulets” (Example 18).

Example 18. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 31-33.

Finzi’s simple harmonic structure means the ear focuses on these figures, creating a dream-like state of vivid remembrance.

The second section begins as Finzi’s opening fanfare returns at “The sun then burst.” As the rains slow and end, Finzi uses shifting rhythms and sparser texture to mark the author’s inward, pensive turn (Example 19).

Example 19. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 54-55.

Time slows as the rhythmic drive and lyrical melody of the first section dissolves into quasi-recitative. The texture continues to thin while motion slows to the song’s end and
gives Finzi the means to take a turn inward (from D flat major to B flat minor) to match Hardy’s pensive ending, and set up the non-too-subtle subtext of the entire set of songs (Example 20).

Example 20. “Childhood among the Ferns,” mm. 61-69.
This model of rhythmic and melodic organization set against a darker, recitative-like section of stillness is fairly consistent throughout the set. It reveals the manner with which Finzi generally handles the difference between image-driven remembrance and reflection on those images as an adult.

A similar nature-scene is found in “Overlooking the River.” Finzi’s sixteenth-note counterpoint, with abundant contrasting motion, matches the poetry’s description of the swallows that “flew in the curves of an eight/ Above the river gleam” (Example 21).


Finzi marks a new section in the poetry in measure 19, where the author turns his attention from the birds and the river to the kingcups (Example 22). The counterpoint here gives way to a less-active homophonic texture.

In the closing section of the poem, much like in “Childhood among the Ferns,” the author reveals he is not simply recalling happy memories; but rather, he uses the images as the impetus to deny the temptation to take these simple joys for granted.

And never I turned my head, alack,  
While these things met my gaze  
Through the pane’s drop-drenched glaze,  
To see the more behind my back  
O never I turned, but let, alack,
These less things hold my gaze!¹²⁸

Finzi sets almost the entirety of the poem in the key of E flat major. It is only at the end of the poem does Finzi suddenly shift from E flat major to f minor, where the song ends (Example 23). This also provides a clear key relationship between the third and fourth songs. While the texts share no significant meaning, when the songs are performed together the f minor cadences serve as the subdominant of c minor, the key of “Channel Firing,” which immediately follows “Overlooking the River.” By ending “Overlooking the River” in f minor, Finzi seamlessly pivots to “Channel Firing” from E flat major to its parallel minor, c minor.


Though sudden and short, this shift is powerful and serves the same purpose as the slower transition found in “Childhood among the Ferns:” to reveal an author not simply reflecting on joyful images from his past, but doing so through the pensive eyes of one who feels the weight of passing (or passed) time.

A similar transition occurs between the third and fourth stanzas of “In the Mind’s Eye.” The author in the first three stanzas speaks about the phantom, the ghostly image

¹²⁸Finzi, Gerald, *Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including Cycles or Sets* (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 22.
of “her,” a dead lover, we presume. The tempo is marked “allegro con passione,” and a recurring and constantly transforming pentachord figure creates an unsettled air of agitation (Example 24).


This opening five-note figure consistently avoids resolution during the first three stanzas, adding to Finzi’s musical unrest. It is in the transition into the final stanza (mm. 36-45) where the author becomes more relaxed and at ease with the phantom (Example 25).

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129Finzi, Gerald, *Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including Cycles or Sets* (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 31.
Instead of speaking about the phantom, he now speaks directly to the phantom. Finzi highlights this change with a significantly slower tempo paired with slower rhythms. Any counterpoint and busyness gives way to homophony. And notably, the recurring unresolved pentachord figure now resolves as one might expect, in both vocal melody and in the piano accompaniment. The state of agitation in which the phantom presumably left the author has faded. Hardy now states that he would never “Wish thy ghost away.”

Finzi uses the same motive throughout the song to provide unity. By adapting the original motive in the final stanza, he uses music to symbolize the deeper meaning in Hardy’s poem. The peacefulness of the last stanza is also Hardy’s acceptance that the death of this lost love cannot be undone – time marches on.

Finzi uses a quasi-ritornello form for “Channel firing,” allowing sectional tone-painting for a poem made up largely of dialogue. The introduction marked “Solenne,” has a slow, repetitive walking bass that outlines online a minor 3rd. Above the bass sounds an augmented 7th chord with quick 32nd notes marked both marcato and “chiaro” (Example 26).

Example 25. “In the Mind’s Eye,” mm. 36-45.

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130Finzi, Gerald, *Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including Cycles or Sets* (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 34.

The effect is potent – a foggy, dark air with angry guns that sound in the distance. “Channel Firing” is more scena than sectional, more recitative than melodic. Finzi recognized a traditional, sectional setting would not be suitable for a song that is largely conversational. The ritornello provides structure and unity in a song that would otherwise seem to lack formal organization.

Where several songs begin with images that reflect happiness only to take a turn toward melancholy and pensiveness at or near the end, “The Too Short Time” does the opposite. Finzi’s introduction brilliantly matches the leaves Hardy describes spinning “Straight to earth” (Example 27).

A recitative-like melody is slowly prodded along by an accompaniment that lacks an internal, forward-moving motion. Like the spring of a music box that continues to wind down and be wound back up, tempos constantly fluctuate from the seemingly slow “Andante,” (quarter note = 60) with an abundance of “Ritards,” “Accelerandos,” and fluctuating meter. In the opening section Hardy tells a story through the falling leaves – he explains that their summer is over, and their fall is also the fall of life’s curtain.

The second section gathers momentum as the poet notes that, despite that the leaves’ lives come to an end, time continues to march on. Tempo becomes regular and steady, with a constant, quietly-driving walking bass. The slowly tinkering right-hand accompaniment now sounds even sixteenth notes (Example 28).

The song closes with an afterthought, as Finzi again slows the motion of the accompaniment (without slowing actual tempo). Sadness, however, gives ways to peaceful acceptance as Hardy recognizes that despite the fact that time has ushered the leaves and the summer to their close, they lived to the fullest in the time they had (Example 29).

“And yet the best/ She could, within the too short time/ Granted her prime.” After the entire song wanders ambiguously through a minor and d minor, Finzi modulates to D major to make this final statement, symbolizing the acceptance of time’s passing.

Though reflection about lost time is pivotal to the poems and Finzi’s music, Hardy and Finzi constantly remind the reader and listener that the march of time does not stop as one pauses to reflect. Finzi uses a walking-bass figure as one of his keystone motives – it is found throughout the set and represents time’s steady, youth-stealing march. Finzi uses the walking bass in the second half of “Before and after Summer,” clearly beginning in measure 44 (Example 30). By introducing the distinguishing feature here, Finzi marks the author’s change in tone from description of the weather’s sharpness (image-driven and matched with an appropriate accompaniment that creates the scene being described) to acknowledgment of lost time.

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131Finzi, Gerald, Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including Cycles or Sets (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 39.

The step-wise motion continues through to the end, though Finzi slows time’s march by augmenting the quarter-note steadiness to half-note drudgery (Example 31).

Hardy sadly recalls the vivid images of his childhood home in “The Self-unseeing.” Finzi recognizes his melancholy, arcane tone in his setting. In measure 22, as Hardy’s memory turns towards people and away from inanimate objects, Finzi’s walking-bass figure emerges (Example 32). His figure here is slightly more contrapuntal, a characteristic he takes advantage of later, as he increases the intervallic distance between the voices to transform the walking-bass figure into a delicate dance, reflecting the action in Hardy’s memory.

The most memorable walking bass of the set is found in “Channel firing.” (Example 33). Perhaps representing more, this walking bass might depict the marching of soldiers in time, or perhaps it reflects the atmosphere of ominous, pre-war fear. Regardless of its exact meaning, this walking bass still is rooted in the unstoppable passing, or march, of time, given more weight in context of the poem’s focus on eternity – whether or not a spiritual time will ever even begin in light of man’s constant warring. Finzi highlights the importance of the guns through their repeated return by way of the ritornello-like form of the song.

Example 33. Gerald Finzi, “Channel Firing,” mm. 1-3.

In “In the Mind’s Eye,” which has two clearly-defined sections, Finzi uses elements of the walking-bass figure to create symbolic unity between the sections. Its
opening two measures contain a five-note figure that avoids resolution (Example 34).

This figure is repeated as a motive throughout the first section.

Example 34. Gerald Finzi, “In the Mind’s Eye,” mm. 1-4.

The five-note motive continues until the closing section, in which it now finds resolution (Example 35). The bass does contain a slow-moving stepwise descending scale, however, which brings the figure to the forefront while highlighting its melancholy (which was largely hidden by the agitated nature of the first section).

The musical figures in “The Too Short Time” also serve dual purposes. The first, to clearly depict the falling of the leaves from the trees, found in the right hand in the song’s opening measures, but continuing into the bass’s descending scale figure in measure 6 (Example 36). The slow, unmeasured feeling of the first section (through measure 20) continues the descending, step-wise motion set up in the earlier measure.

Example 36. Gerald Finzi, “The Too Short Time,” mm. 6-11.
The bass does, however, emerge in the song’s second section (beginning in measure 21), as a more dominant, articulated bass line (Example 37). The poem transitions to a less-dreamy state; it is clear Finzi means to highlight the passing of time.


“Epeisodia” is in ABA form, unusual for Finzi, but appropriate for the poem. Its somewhat darker middle section, set in the city, is flanked on both sides by vivid pastoral imagery. The character of the A sections is clearly distinct from that of the B section. While the A sections contain bass lines that are bright and present an audible buoyancy, they are crafted with more leaps than step-wise motion. It might be more appropriate to call them “skipping” bass lines, rather than walking bass lines. Regardless, the B section
contrasts their liveliness, something Finzi achieves with a clear, step-wise, walking-bass-line figure (Example 38).

\begin{music}
\newStaff
\relative c' {\time 6
\clef bass\ \undo
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{Poco ritard.}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{A tempo}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{There}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{caressed}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{well}}}}
\newStaff
\relative c' {\time 6
\clef bass\ \undo
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{Poco ritard.}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{A tempo}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{There}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{caressed}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{well}}}}
\newStaff
\relative c' {\time 6
\clef bass\ \undo
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{Poco ritard.}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{A tempo}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{There}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{caressed}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{well}}}}
\newStaff
\relative c' {\time 6
\clef bass\ \undo
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{Poco ritard.}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{A tempo}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{There}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{caressed}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{well}}}}
\newStaff
\relative c' {\time 6
\clef bass\ \undo
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{Poco ritard.}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{A tempo}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{There}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{caressed}}}
\hspace{2\widthof{\textit{well}}}}

\end{music}


In addition to Finzi’s use of the bass line to depict the passing of time (which this poem clearly describes in terms of the journey of life through lover’s eyes), he also uses the concrete bass line in the B section to highlight the fall of the footsteps and their “pit-pat wearisome/ In its cadency/ On the flagstones drearisome.”\footnote{Finzi, Gerald, \textit{Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including Cycles or Sets} (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 42.}

Finzi brings into focus the poignant ending of “He Abjures Love” and answers the listener’s question: Will the set of songs end with symbolic peace or with melancholy? “But after love what comes?/ A scene that lours,/ A few sad vacant hours,/ And then, the Curtain” (Example 39).

It is clear the poet is expressing the miserable state in which he finds himself, “I speak as one who plumbs Life’s dim profound.” After love the poet is left with only loneliness, sadness, emptiness, and finally death. Finzi curiously allows the voice to resolve to the tonic while in the accompaniment below the harmonies remains very dissonant. These overlapping, if not contradicting, ideas allows Finzi to highlight his final, cadential, descending bass-line figure that closes the set. By using the descending bass-line figure as his final musical statement, he reminds the listener that time will continue to march (or creep) on toward our own inevitable, miserable, end. Finzi allows this final example to slowly unwind as every voice in the accompaniment drags downward by half steps toward the final cadence in b minor – its energy dissolves – its heartbeat stops.

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133 Finzi, Gerald, Collected Songs: 54 Songs Including Cycles or Sets (Boosey & Hawkes, 2008), 55.
Gerald Finzi was many things – a lover of literature, a humanist, and a husband and father. Yet, other characteristics add to the substance and intensity of much of his music. In simplest terms, *Before and after Summer* tells a story of life. Its exploration of time includes the joy of childhood, the pangs of war, and the story of love. Equally as important is the perspective with which Hardy and Finzi tell those stories, with profound pensiveness, the sadness of having taken so much for granted, the promise to never do so again, and a fatalistic view of life coming to its close, paired at times with peaceful acceptance and perhaps even eagerness to discover what may come. The themes of youth and the loss of that youth – of never having enough time – were constantly in the foreground of Finzi’s thoughts and life decisions; themes of youth, loss, and death were fixtures in his music as well. Finzi puts his stylistic fingerprint on this set of songs, including several characteristics that can be traced to his pastoral roots and love of the English folk traditions. Indeed, Finzi was a complex man – a Nationalist, a man of deep thought who swore off dogma and proclaimed pacifism. He was a man of intense internal conflict and a man obsessed with dying before his legacy was ensured. All these things made Finzi, the person, who he was and defined his music’s lasting legacy.

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