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Five Songs by Armstrong Gibbs (1889-1960):
From Nostalgia to Christian Hope and the Assurance of Heaven

James Kellogg Richardson

A Doctor of Musical Arts document submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

School of Music

December 2021

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

Committee Chair: Kevin McMillan, M.M.

Committee Members/Readers:

John Peterson, Ph.D.

Katherine Axtell, Ph.D.

DEDICATION

For my wife Dana and our four children, MacRae, Jack, George, and Katherine. Armstrong Gibbs was a family man through and through, and you have graciously welcomed him into ours. Thank you for the lingering thesis-related conversations around the dinner table and for inviting new song repertoire into our nighttime routines. You flatter me with your requests as it always excites me to share Gibbs's songs with you, particularly since he wrote so many of them with his own family in mind.

Dana, yours has been the greatest support of all. Thank you for inspiring this Gibbs journey; thank you for your help at the Britten-Pears Library; and thank you for your encouragement throughout the entire process. I am fairly certain that delicious Aldeburgh Fish & Chip Shop from across the pond is calling our name. Repeat visit?

Soli Deo Gloria.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Countless colleagues and mentors have helped bring this DMA document to fruition. First and foremost, I would like to thank my doctoral committee: Dr. Katherine Axtell for her research expertise and scholarly acumen; Dr. John Peterson for his exceptional guidance and insights concerning all-things music theory; and my adviser and committee chair, Prof. Kevin McMillan, for encouraging and supporting my interest in Armstrong Gibbs, not to mention the positive impact you have had on my life in many other spheres. Thank you for being such an outstanding voice pedagogue, mentor, and friend.

Special thanks to the four adult grandchildren of Armstrong Gibbs who oversee the Armstrong Gibbs Society: Jane Hill, Chair; David Rust, vice-chair; Clare Monro, Secretary; and Philippa Howard, Treasurer. Your help has been integral to my research, and I very much appreciate the permission to study and use your grandfather's primary sources. Furthermore, I have enjoyed getting to know you through our correspondence.

I would also like to thank authors Angela Aries, Lewis Foreman, and Michael Pilkington for your well wishes, affirmation, and for entertaining all my questions. Your Gibbs scholarship has been an invaluable contribution to the landscape of British music, and I cannot imagine writing this DMA document without it.

I wish to thank the following archives and staff for their help unearthing countless manuscript scores, lectures, letters, and other historical documents related to this study: Laura Schmidt, Archivist at the Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL; Caitlin Mathes, Access Services Supervisor, Sidney Cox Library of Music and Dance, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY; and Dr. Nicholas Clark, Librarian, Britten-Pears

Foundation, Aldeburgh, UK. In particular, Dr. Clark, your hospitality at the Red House was second to none.

Here, at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, VA., where I teach voice, I would like to thank colleague Jennifer Ulrich, Technical Services Librarian at our Sadie Hartzler Library. Jennifer, your Interlibrary Loan savvy never ceases to amaze, especially when the requested items are spread across the globe. I am also much obliged to EMU Professor Emerita (Psychology), Dr. Judy Mullet. I value your wisdom as it concerns Gibbs's childhood adversity and subsequent creativity.

Finally, my dear friends James Clemens and Dr. David Berry have been a major part of re-introducing Gibbs's missing songs, "Before Sleeping" and "Quiet Conscience," to new audiences. Thank you, Jim, for beautifully engraving them—you are the first; and thank you, David—EMU music department chair and pianist extraordinaire—for exquisitely bringing these scores to life.

I am indebted to all of you.

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ABSTRACT

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, prolific composer, teacher, and conductor, Armstrong Gibbs (1889-1960), was well-regarded for his contribution to the landscape of English art song. However, against the backdrop of Modernism and the tumult of the Second World War, his musical style was deemed “out of touch.” In a 1943 chain of correspondence with fellow songwriter Roger Quilter, Gibbs describes feeling “exceedingly sore and discouraged at neglect at the hands of the critics.” He further explains, “Just because we both write music that is intelligible & frankly tries to aim at beauty, we are considered beneath the notice of the clever young men who are wholly occupied in boosting the [newer generation].” Indeed, England’s sensibilities had changed, and its spotlight turned to a list of younger composers. Gibbs’s songs—many of them steeped in Romanticism, childlike imagination, and magic—were criticized for avoiding bleak subjects. However, the intentional wide-eyed wonder in his songs is anything but escapist. Gibbs’s ideals concerning beauty had everything to do with a lifelong progression of Christian theological thought that evolved from an orientation of Nostalgia to the hope and future of Heaven. In this vein, Gibbs’s songs—including some missing ones that I recently discovered—very much confront harsh realities such as the composer’s troubled childhood and the tragic death of his son in the Second World War.

Analysis and appreciation of Gibbs’s music demand sensitivity to the following four themes: 1) Gibbs’s spoiled childhood; 2) the wars that bracketed his adulthood; 3) Nostalgia as the shaping force behind his concept of beauty; and 4) evolving Christianity as its guiding light. The first two are biographical realities. The latter two are lenses through which I assert Gibbs worked and through which scholars and performers can

achieve the richest understanding of Gibbs's songs. To that end, this DMA document includes five analyses of songs that span Gibbs's career, woven into a biographical narrative that examines various aesthetic philosophies that undergird Armstrong Gibbs's maturing Christian worldview. These selections are: "Ann's Cradle Song," "The Splendour Falls," "Before Sleeping," "Quiet Conscience," and "The Oxen."

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, prolific composer, teacher, conductor, and music festival adjudicator Armstrong Gibbs (1889–1960) was well-regarded for his contribution to his native England’s musical landscape.¹ His compositions were enthusiastically championed by the leading musicians of the day, including his teacher and mentor Ralph Vaughan Williams and conductor Adrian Boult.² Subsequently, Gibbs’s vast catalog of works became a regular fixture of London’s concert halls, the consistent topic of “lengthy reviews,” and a routine part of radio broadcasts.³ His oeuvre ranges from intimate chamber music and solo piano works to large-scale symphonies and concertos; and that is not to mention all the vocal music in between—a substantial number of cantatas, operettas, theater, and sacred music. However, it is his more than 150 art songs that have secured his legacy as a composer and his place in the so-called “Second Golden Age of English Song.”⁴

¹ The composer’s full name is Cecil Armstrong Gibbs; but, according to his daughter Ann Rust, “My father ... hated [his forename] and always liked to be called by his other Christian name, Armstrong.” Consequently, sources vary as to their use of Gibbs’s first name. Ann Rust, introduction to *Armstrong Gibbs: A Countryman Born and Bred* by Angela Aries, Lewis Foreman, and Michael Pilkington (UK: EM Publishing, 2014), 1.

² “About Armstrong Gibbs,” The Armstrong Gibbs Society, accessed 5 May 2021, <https://armstronggibbs.com/life-and-work/>.

³ Angela Aries, Lewis Foreman, and Michael Pilkington, *Armstrong Gibbs: A Countryman Born and Bred* (UK: EM Publishing, 2014), 184.

⁴ Trevor Hold, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2002), ix. The “First Golden Age” of song in the British Isles spans roughly two generations of lutenists who straddle the turn of the seventeenth century and include John Dowland, Thomas Campion, and Philip Rosseter. Shortly after,

Be that as it may, the success of Gibbs's youth waned over the latter half of his life, and until recently, he was all but forgotten. On several occasions, the composer labeled himself and his closest friends and musical allies as belonging to the "conservative modern school."⁵ This tight circle includes composers Herbert Howells, Arthur Bliss, and Arnold Bax, and the author Walter de la Mare, for all of whom the self-described label is fitting. Gibbs's songs have one foot rooted in the nineteenth-century Romantic past and another in his present day. However, against the backdrop of Modernism and the tumult of the Second World War, qualifiers such as "conservative" and "modern" were at odds. Between the two, Gibbs's musical aesthetic was decidedly the former and eventually deemed "out of touch."⁶

their work was crowned by the songs and arias of Henry Purcell (1659–1695), "the last great English composer before" the "Second Golden Age." Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*, Rev. ed. (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2006), 351.

This "Second Age," also called the era of "English Romantic Song," began with a revival of British vocal music in the late nineteenth century led in part by Roger Quilter (1877–1953), Percy Grainger (1882–1961), and Cyril Scott (1879–1970) with the help of influential teachers Hubert Parry (1848–1918) and Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924). The latter trained the second school of art song enthusiasts that famously includes Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958), Gustav Holst (1874–1934), John Ireland (1879–1962), and Herbert Howells (1892–1983). The majority of their songs are written for voice with piano accompaniment and form the heart of British vocal literature. For more information about the "Second Golden Age of English Song" and its influence on subsequent generations of song composers, see Carol Kimball's "Introduction to British Song" in *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature* (351–52) and Trevor Hold's preface to his *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* (vi–xi).

⁵ Armstrong Gibbs, "Modern Music" (lecture; audience unknown; the script is undated but was likely written in the 1950s given the composer's handwriting, style of prose, and reference to being "elderly"), 19, reference GB 1111 GBS, Britten-Pears Foundation Archive (hereafter cited as B-P Archive).

⁶ Stephen Banfield and Ro Hancock-Child, "Gibbs, Cecil Armstrong." *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root. Accessed 7 April 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.11093>.

As English song scholar Stephen Banfield puts it, the century progressed, at which point Gibbs's aesthetic voice was no longer "distinctive enough ... to keep its head above mediocrity."⁷ In a 1943 chain of correspondence with fellow songwriter Roger Quilter, Gibbs describes feeling "exceedingly sore and discouraged at neglect at the hands of the critics." He further writes:

The truth is, & I think it applies to your work as well as mine, just because we both write music that is intelligible & frankly tries to aim at beauty, we are considered beneath the notice of the clever young men who are wholly occupied in boosting the Brittens & Tippets [sic] & Lennox Berkeleys of our time.⁸

After the war, England's spotlight indeed turned to Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippett, and a new generation of composers. By his own admission, Gibbs was not interested in breaking new ground in the vein of younger musicians for whom anything "traditional [was] automatically suspect."⁹

The majority of Gibbs's songs unabashedly concern traditional subjects that were popular at the turn of the century: Britain's bucolic landscapes, romance, the world experienced through children, and magic.¹⁰ Along these lines, his early songs are steeped in a kind of nostalgia that was very much a part of England's literary fabric at the time—

⁷ Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*, paperback ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 223.

⁸ Letter from Armstrong Gibbs to Roger Quilter, 25 May 1943, B-P Archive.

⁹ Armstrong Gibbs, "The Trend of Modern Music" (lecture, Royal Institution of Great Britain, London, 25 March 1938), 6. Gibbs's brand of originality was closely tied to his sense of integrity. In a lecture from the 1930s for The Royal Institution of Great Britain he explains, "True originality can only be the product of a truly original mind which will be original—not because it is forever self-consciously striving after novelty, but because it can't from its nature be otherwise." *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰ Ro Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker: The Life and Songs of C. Armstrong Gibbs* (London: Thames Publishing, 1993), 38.

nostalgia such as that found in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* or Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*.¹¹ Armstrong Gibbs is a composer of mystery and dream, and when such themes became old-fashioned, he only dug in his heels. If Ezra Pound's 1934 imperative was to "Make it New," then Gibbs's mantra was arguably to "make it beautiful."¹²

Today, the Britten-Pears Archive in Aldeburgh, England, oversees Gibbs's large collection of lectures, letters, essays, manuscripts, and an unpublished autobiography *Common Time*.¹³ In them, one observes the composer's developing interest in theological matters, spiritual conviction, and Christian fervor. In addition, I have found and pieced together a chain of wartime correspondence between Gibbs and Christian academic Dorothy L. Sayers in which they discuss the creative urge as mirroring the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. That is the thesis of her book which Gibbs had just read, *The*

¹¹ Barrie's character Peter Pan has become a symbol of youth, innocence, and escapism—qualities often used to describe Gibbs's work. He makes his first appearance in *The Little White Bird* (1902), parts of which were later published in *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906). There is also the better known stage play *Peter Pan; or, the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904) which expanded into the 1911 novel *Peter and Wendy* (often simply referred to as *Peter Pan*).

Christopher Robin Milne, son of *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926) author A.A. Milne, writes of Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*, "This book is, in a way, two separate books put into one. There are, on the one hand, those chapters concerned with the adventures of Toad; and on the other hand, there are those chapters that explore human emotions—the emotions of fear, *nostalgia*, awe, wanderlust. My mother was drawn to the second group.... My father, on his side, was so captivated by the first ... that he turned these chapters into the children's play, *Toad of Toad Hall*. In this play one emotion only is allowed to creep in: *nostalgia* [emphasis added]." *The Enchanted Places*, Macmillan 1974.

¹² Ezra Pound, *Make it New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1934).

¹³ The Britten-Pears Archive is located on the grounds of the Red House, the home of composer Benjamin Britten and tenor Peter Pears, in the coastal town of Aldeburgh, Suffolk, England. "It offers a comprehensive archive of the music, photographs and letters of both musicians" and a few of their contemporaries. "About Britten Pears Arts," accessed 12 August 2021, <https://brittenpearsarts.org/>.

Mind of the Maker (1941).¹⁴ The point being, throughout his life, Gibbs's music continued to cultivate a robust sense of wonder despite the progressive sensibilities of his modernist colleagues that were occupied with the tensions of the day. However, the intentional wide-eyed quality of his music is anything but escapist. Instead, it is very much a product of his lifelong, evolving Christian worldview and closely connected ideals concerning beauty.¹⁵

A handful of scholars and performers have rediscovered Gibbs in the very late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but the bulk of recordings privilege his early period. Subsequently, he is painted as “a composer of ‘light conceits’” and sentimental longing.¹⁶ Though he excels at “delightful” and nostalgic music, the early work is only part of a much larger story.¹⁷ He wrote songs throughout the entirety of his career, and while they are “traditional” compared to those of Lennox Berkeley, they do not all concern babbling

¹⁴ Letter from Armstrong Gibbs to Dorothy L. Sayers, 10 January 1942, Dorothy L. Sayers Collection, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL. And a letter from Sayers to Gibbs, 12 January 1942, B-P Archive.

¹⁵ Armstrong Gibbs, “Leisure and the Fine Arts” (lecture, audience unknown, 11 October 1942), B-P Archive. In a lecture written during World War II, Armstrong Gibbs extensively quotes paragraphs from *Masters of Reality* by literary critic and lay theologian Una Ellis-Fermor (1942). He profoundly connects with her idea of exercising the imagination and contemplating beauty with reverence and awe. In both their estimations, cultivating wonder is an act of Christian discipline.

¹⁶ Hold, Parry to Finzi, 264.

¹⁷ Paradoxically, this “light” nature for which Gibbs is often now admired, has equally been his biggest stigma. A 2016 review of *A. Gibbs Suites* (a recorded album of “light orchestral music”) from *Gramophone* magazine quips, “Slight, sentimental, and a little faded, if you wanted to be unkind. Charming, well crafted and warmly melodious, if you’re more generously inclined.” Richard Bratby, “*A. Gibbs Suites* Review,” *Gramophone*, accessed 1 June 2021, <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/a-gibbs-suites>.

brooks and pastures. There are visceral and virtuosic gems from his middle and late periods, such as “The Witch” or the dark and anxious “Hypochondriacus.”

In the course of my research, I found some missing, unpublished song manuscripts—“Before Sleeping” and “Quiet Conscience”—that were written, along with “The Splendour Falls,” in the weeks following the 1943 death of Gibbs’s son on the front lines in Italy.¹⁸ These wrestle with the horror, dread, and pain of war and spotlight a composer who was profoundly *in touch* with the unpleasant realities of his day. Examination of Gibbs’s later songs, including these recently discovered ones, enables a new understanding of the composer and his work.

At best, Armstrong Gibbs is misunderstood, and at worst, he is overlooked. He was caught between two wars which simultaneously prompted his deepest reflections *and* cost him the chance for a flourishing career—or at least for fuller recognition—in the sense that the period of the Great War brought such a profound shift away from Gibbs’s innate stylistic orientation. Nostalgia was the shaping force of Gibbs’s early aesthetic, and ripening Christianity emerged as its guiding light. Nonetheless, this important narrative is largely missing from the present scholarship concerning the composer. God’s glory became Gibbs’s defining telos, and his ideals concerning beauty had everything to do with a lifelong progression of Christian theological thought that evolved from an orientation of nostalgia to the hope and future of Heaven.

¹⁸ C. Armstrong Gibbs, “Before Sleeping” (1944), Manuscript, Music Library Locked Press (Reference Desk) ML96.G442 B4; and “Quiet Conscience” (1944), Manuscript, Music Library Locked Press (Reference Desk) ML96.G442 Q6, Sidney Cox Library of Music and Dance, Cornell university Library, Ithaca, NY.

As a present reality, the idea of Heaven—a place where the soul goes when the body dies—provided the composer with comfort while grieving the earthly loss of his son. However, over time, Gibbs’s concept of Heaven broadened and more fully resembled its depiction in *Revelation*, the final book of the Christian Bible. There, Heaven is a forthcoming holy city that will accompany Christ’s future return when all things in a broken world will be set right.

Paradoxically, this future Heaven is rooted in the past incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. New Testament scholar George Eldon Ladd suggests this Kingdom of God is “not only an eschatological gift belonging to the Age to Come; it is also a gift to be received in the old aeon.”¹⁹ In this sense, Christianity equally looks to the past (the cross) and the future (Christ’s return). For Gibbs, this paradigm is almost cyclical, and his maturation as a composer is marked by an aesthetic that increasingly escaped nostalgia’s confines by viewing the coming (the return) of the past. However, to be clear, Gibbs believed the Christian’s ultimate destiny—the Heaven to come—will be greater than any past yet experienced in history. As lay theologian C.S. Lewis puts it, “There are better things ahead than any we leave behind.”²⁰ This theological continuum is at the heart of Gibbs’s unfolding Christian worldview and this present DMA document as it offers a compelling lens for a rich understanding of his songs.

¹⁹ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 70.

²⁰ Letter from C.S. Lewis to Mary Willis Shelburne, a lady who was (thought to be) dying, 17 June 1963. *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis, Volume 3: Narnia, Cambridge, and Joy, 1950 – 1963*, ed. Walter Hooper, UK: Harper Collins, 2007.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I first encountered the songs of Armstrong Gibbs as a Master's student in the early 2000s when the late English bass-baritone John Shirley-Quirk introduced them as part of a British vocal literature class.²¹ In that course syllabus, they shared equal billing with the work of others from the same generation: i.e., Roger Quilter, John Ireland, Ivor Gurney, and Peter Warlock; and they were taught without the prejudices or complaints of sentimentality that have characterized much of Gibbs's reception.

In addition to performing Gibbs's work, our class listened to a smattering of finely recorded songs.²² At the time, I did not realize these few selections constituted virtually the entirety of available recordings of Gibbs's music. Moreover, rather than single-composer albums dedicated to Gibbs's songs, many were part of larger compilations such as Janet Baker's *An Anthology of English Song*, Felicity Lott's *Favourite English Songs*, and Sarah Walker's *Dreams and Fancies: Favourite Songs in English*.²³

²¹ Spring 2002, The Peabody Conservatory of Music of The Johns Hopkins University.

²² A handful of the early songs have never truly left the canon, although one sometimes has to dig to find them. They include "Silver," "Five Eyes," "Song of Shadows," "The Bells," and any of the songs from the fairy play *Crossings*.

²³ Janet Baker, contralto, *An Anthology of English Song*, with Martin Isepp, piano; UK, Saga Stereo, STXID5213, 1963, Vinyl.

Felicity Lott, soprano, *Favourite English Songs*, with Graham Johnson, piano; recorded 24–26 October 1988 at The Maltings, Snape, UK, Chandos Records Ltd., CHAN8722, 1990, CD.

Sarah Walker, mezzo-soprano, *Dreams and Fancies: Favourite Songs in English*, with Roger Vignoles, piano; CRD Records Ltd., 1991, CD.

I soon learned that scholarly literature on Gibbs was nearly non-existent. For instance, his entry in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* contains fewer than 350 words and has not been revised since 2001.²⁴ Standard song anthologies and surveys, like Carol Kimball's seminal *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*, have only mentioned the composer in passing.²⁵ However, as the *Grove* entry itself points out, in certain circles, since about the 1990s, the tide of scholarship has begun to change.

In 2021, that tide continues to swell. A couple of summers ago, I visited the Britten-Pears Archive where daughter Ann Rust, née Gibbs, deposited the bulk of her father's primary sources in the early 1980s. Gibbs's music manuscripts from the Boosey & Hawkes Archive were added to the collection in 2001 and 2006. Dr. Nicholas Clark, archive librarian at the B-P Foundation, reports a "considerable increase of interest in [Gibbs's] music during the past few years."²⁶ Expanded numbers of recent performances, recordings, and articles about Armstrong Gibbs all support this claim.

This "Review of Literature" will examine all these in the upcoming pages. It is organized in two parts. The first half will consider recordings of Gibbs's songs, while the second section will survey written scholarship concerning the composer.

²⁴ That being said, its authors posit, "His substantial output of songs, many of them high quality, ensure his continuing recognition as a fine exponent of the genre. Banfield and Hancock-Child, "Gibbs," *Grove Music Online*.

²⁵ Carol Kimball, *Song: A Guide to Art Song Style and Literature*, Rev. ed. (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2006).

²⁶ Nicholas Clark, Librarian, B-P Archive, email message to author, 28 June 2019.

Recordings

Wife and husband, pianist and baritone Rosemary and Nik Hancock-Child, were among the first to rediscover the array of Gibbs's music, and they recorded an entire compact disc of 25 songs for the Marco Polo label, issued in 1993.²⁷ Their interpretations are impressive, and it is particularly fortunate they undertook the project, reintroducing almost-forgotten repertoire to newer generations. Furthermore, nearly thirty years later, it remains one of only two albums completely dedicated to Gibbs's songs.

In 2003, a year after I finished my song course, Hyperion Records published a substantive CD, *Songs by Armstrong Gibbs*.²⁸ It contains a swath of varied repertoire—36 tracks (almost 80 minutes)—and high-caliber performances from acclaimed vocalists Geraldine McGreevy, soprano; Stephen Varcoe, baritone; and collaborative pianist Roger Vignoles. It received significantly wider recognition than the Hancock-Childs' LP, has been well-reviewed, and ranks in the top tiers of art song albums featuring any composer—not just Gibbs.²⁹ The Marco Polo and Hyperion recordings together present 49 individual songs by Armstrong Gibbs (twelve tracks are duplicates). Most of these are

²⁷ Nik Hancock-Child, baritone, *Cecil Armstrong Gibbs (1889–1960) Songs*, with Rosemary Hancock-Child, piano; recorded July 1990 and July 1991 at the University of Keele in England, Marco Polo, 8.223458, 1993, CD.

²⁸ Geraldine McGreevy, soprano and Stephen Varcoe, baritone, *Songs by Armstrong Gibbs*, with Roger Vignoles, piano; recorded 14–16 March 2002 in London, Hyperion Records, CDA67337, 2003, CD.

²⁹ *Gramophone Magazine*, “Editor’s Choice, 2003.” To read further evaluations of the Hyperion album, see “Selected Highlights of Reviews of Recordings,” Armstrong Gibbs Society website, accessed 29 May 2021, <https://armstronggibbs.com/selected-highlights-of-reviews-of-recordings/>.

from Gibbs's early period; however, both CDs contain a few examples of his later work. Michael Hurd's brief liner notes for the Hyperion collection report a catalog of 162 songs.³⁰ Unfortunately, two-thirds of it remains unheard.

With some digging, one might find additional songs represented on various out-of-print, hard-to-find albums and anthologies. For example, a vintage 1920s recording on a 10-inch 78 includes "Song of Shadows" and "When I was one and Twenty" performed by an early advocate of the composer's work, Anne Thursfield, mezzo-soprano.³¹ In addition, bass Robert Lloyd, and pianist Nina Walker's 1978 LP, *Sea Fever*, features one of Gibbs's few cycles, *Songs of the Mad Sea Captain*, alongside his standalone song "Sailing Homeward."³² Finally, for better or for worse, a YouTube search yields videos of various recital performances from mostly amateur vocalists and students, yet occasionally one may come across a polished interpretation from a veteran singer.

The focus of this DMA document concerns Gibbs's songs; however, as mentioned earlier, his oeuvre is extensive. *The Armstrong Gibbs Society* website chronicles the two song CDs above plus a discography of at least 35 available albums dedicated to all kinds

³⁰ Michael Hurd, liner notes to *Songs by Armstrong Gibbs*, Hyperion Records.

³¹ Anne Thursfield, mezzo-soprano, with Daisy Bucktrout, piano; recorded 26 January 1926 in London, The Gramophone Co. Ltd., analog, 78 rpm, mono., 10-inch.

³² Robert Lloyd, bass, *Sea Fever*, with Nina Walker, piano; UK, His Master's Voice, ASD3545, 1978, Vinyl.

and combinations of instrumental music.³³ The list of recorded music keeps expanding, yet easily more than half of Gibbs's output remains untouched.³⁴

Scholarship

Little biographical information was written about Armstrong Gibbs during his lifetime. Only two brief essays from this era remain available; however, two years before his passing, the composer penned a 244-page autobiography entitled *Common Time* (1958). It was never published or circulated, but the typescript resides at the B-P Archive. For a season, it seemed no more would be printed on the topic. Like the recordings, most

³³ "Recordings," The Armstrong Gibbs Society, accessed 1 June 2021, <https://armstronggibbs.com/recordings/>.

³⁴ Highlights include Marco Polo's release of Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3 *Westmorland*. The latter was conceived during 1944 within a year of his son David's tragic death in the Second World War, and the work represents Gibbs at his very best. The album's liner notes describe the symphony as "a potent reaction to wartime peril, personal loss and natural beauty." David J. Brown, liner notes to *Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3 "Westmorland,"* with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland and Andrew Penny, conductor; Marco Polo, 8.223553, 1994, CD.

Its recording was followed several years later by Dutton Epoch's significant undertaking of the Second Symphony *Odysseus* for soprano and baritone soli, choir and orchestra. Until recently, the mammoth work remained unheard as it missed its scheduled premier due to the outbreak of war (*Grove Music Online*). *Odysseus* with Susan Gritton, soprano; Mark Stone, baritone; the London Oriana Choir; the BBC Orchestra; and David Drummond, conductor; Dutton Epoch, B0070LIAM2, 2009, CD.

In addition to the songs, Hyperion has released an entire disc of orchestral chamber music that includes *Dale and Fell. Dale and Fell; A Spring Garland; Threnody for Walter de la Mare; Prelude, Andante and Finale;* and *Suite for Strings*, with the Guildhall Strings and Robert Salter, conductor; recorded February 1999 in Henry Wood Hall, London, Hyperion Records, CDA67093, 1999, CD.

In 2007 the London Piano Trio recorded the complete piano trios and later in 2010, the complete works for violin and piano. This is all in addition to the theater music, flute, or piano suites—among others—that have also fared well. *Complete Piano Trios*, with the London Piano Trio; CD Baby, 13 March 2007, CD; and *Complete Works for Violin and Piano*, with Robert Atchison, violin, and Olga Dudnik, piano; Guild, GMCD7353, 15 November 2010, CD.

scholarly literature concerning the composer has emerged since the 1980s—notably four eminent song surveys and biographies. (Each varies significantly in depth and size.) I will examine the combined total of these seven sources—from Gibbs’s lifetime to the present—in the order in which they were written.

The earliest known biographical summary of Gibbs dates from the 1930s and was written by the composer’s former teacher at Cambridge, the opera scholar and music critic Edward J. Dent. His article, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” details “an extraordinary ferment of activity, chiefly in music and drama, among the younger generation at Cambridge” from about 1908 to 1914.³⁵ It characterizes him as a “bright figure” within a circle of intimates that included famed poet Rupert Brooke, composers Arthur Bliss and Denis Browne, tenor Steuart Wilson, and French painter “Jacques Raverat who had brought the first copy of Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande* to Cambridge.”³⁶ (This is fascinating since Gibbs, on several occasions, recounts being “bewildered” and eventually “smitten” by Debussy’s “modern harmonic language.”)³⁷ Dent also highlights the importance to the young Gibbs of Ralph Vaughan Williams’s visits to Cambridge in the decade.³⁸ Dent’s brief essay is favorably biased, but it is valuable because it is a firsthand account.

³⁵ Edward J. Dent, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” in *Selected Essays: Edward J. Dent*, ed. Hugh Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 85–91.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁷ Gibbs, “The Trend of Modern Music,” 5.

³⁸ Years later, Gibbs himself enthusiastically recalls hosting Vaughan Williams in his apartment. “I have good reason to remember this for he brought with him the manuscript of part of the *London Symphony* on which he was still working, and sitting down at my small upright piano, he played over the slow movement. So I presume I may

In like manner, David Brook's six-page biographical sketch in his *Composers' Gallery* (1946) offers an eyewitness narrative based on an interview with Armstrong Gibbs.³⁹ The author's survey of forty "contemporary composers ... of international reputation" includes all the heavy weights—Britten, Vaughan Williams, Bartók, Copland, Schönberg, and Stravinsky, just to name a very few; and his biographies are shaped around conversations with the composers or "quotations from recognized authorities because I feel that my own preferences should not be allowed to obtrude."⁴⁰ Consequently, the chapter on Gibbs largely contains the composer's own voice. In addition to recording Gibbs's traditionalist thoughts on the topic of "modern music," Brook highlights his "strong love of the country and a corresponding dislike of town life; a trait which is reflected in much of his music."⁴¹ The composer's musical language is undeniably consumed with accessibility in its opposition of elitism and the avant-garde which he associated with "London snobbery."⁴² Brook's sketch appropriately hones and

claim to be one of the first people to hear a part of that noble work." Armstrong Gibbs, *Common Time* unpublished autobiography (typescript 1958), B-P Archive, 34.

³⁹ Donald Brook, "Armstrong Gibbs" in *Composers' Gallery: Biographical Sketches of Contemporary Composers* (London: Rockliff Publishing, 1946), 64–69.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 64. These sentiments go a long way in explaining Gibbs's affinity for England's "musical festivals movement" which, in his mind, had done more than anything else to inspire rural, amateur "music-making of a reasonably high standard." *Ibid.*, 68. Gibbs hoped that Britain's unique music culture would "regionalize and decentralize" after the war. "In pursuit of this end," Gibbs contends, "London must stop imagining that it is the only real centre of music in Britain. The word *provincial* should be shorn of its slightly contemptuous connotation." *Ibid.*

⁴² In a conversation with biographer Angela Aries, music journalist Peter Andrews recounts a reception at Albert Hall following the premier of a Gibbs work. There, he overheard some snide remarks from "one of the leading lights of musical

develops these themes concerning Gibbs's ruralness and passion for amateur music making.

That same down-to-earth approachability pervades Gibbs's autobiography and is epitomized by its title, *Common Time*.⁴³ Gibbs admits being worried that writing it would be pretentious, but "the balance was tipped by the realization that, while I enjoy reading about great men, I take almost equal pleasure in the letters and diaries of lesser ones. . . . One feels closer to them, and their experiences are more like one's own."⁴⁴ Arguably, Gibbs is *not* one of those "common" or "lesser men," and, unfortunately, his art suffered from this kind of self-effacement as he could have done more to promote himself. However, Gibbs's bravely transparent prose evokes empathy when the reader learns the details of his unusually difficult life and bouts with debilitating anxiety. One can appreciate the composer's not venturing far beyond his tight, familial sphere. Close relationships were paramount to Armstrong Gibbs; family shaped his work; and teachers and colleagues became like family.

In terms of his psyche, Gibbs bares all. He had a disturbed childhood, and war shaped his time on earth. Surprisingly, however, his outlook is exceptionally optimistic, and his demeanor, particularly winsome. He is a master storyteller, and the book reads like a collection of deeply personal, often humorous, and inspiring anecdotes instead of an exhaustive biography. As the latter, it contains many holes. Moreover, despite

society" as he puts it, complaining that "the trouble with Armstrong is he is so rural." Recorded in Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 190.

⁴³ Armstrong Gibbs, *Common Time*, unpublished autobiography (typescript with annotations and corrections, 1958), B-P Archive.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

including an essay entitled “My Philosophy of Music,” Gibbs avoids discussing his craft—at least in a technical, theoretical sense.⁴⁵ Rather, the memoir’s overall strength has to do with its accessibility and lack of musical jargon. He writes for the amateur music lover. For “the moment we start to philosophize about [music], we have to use words to analyze thoughts and feelings which often lie beyond words to express,” and that, Gibbs posits, is as things ought to be.⁴⁶ Consequently, the chapter reads more like a philosophy of beauty. He concludes his book with a “Philosophy of Life.”⁴⁷ In it, one learns about his Christian faith and the peace he sought in the hope of Heaven.

Well after Gibbs’s death, musicologist Stephen Banfield assessed Gibbs’s songs as part of his hugely influential, comprehensive, two-volume study *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*.⁴⁸ His text is notable for its integration of literary, historical, and musical scholarship, alongside his particularly cerebral aesthetic critique. Banfield evaluates Gibbs’s work in connection to his colleagues Herbert Howells, Benjamin Burrows, Michael Head, and Ivor Gurney, whom he collectively labels the Georgian school given their fondness for the so-called Georgian

⁴⁵ Ibid., 224–34.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 224. Throughout his life, Gibbs kept his cards close to the chest when it came to the topic of his own music. In a lecture delivered during the Second World War he explains, “A piece of great music is like a great poem or butterfly. If you take a Red Admiral or a lyric of Shakespeare and start by dissecting it and analyzing it minutely, are you not bound to kill completely under your microscope the magic in it that spells Beauty?” Armstrong Gibbs, “Music in Education” (lecture, audience unknown, delivered sometime during WWII), 7, B-P Archive.

⁴⁷ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 235–44, B-P Archive.

⁴⁸ Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early Twentieth Century*, paperback ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

poetry of the 1910s.⁴⁹ In particular, Walter de la Mare's wildly imaginative, supernatural, childlike poems captured the group's attention—perhaps most successfully Gibbs's.⁵⁰

Banfield explains there are 23 song settings of de la Mare's poem "Silver," "though only those by Armstrong Gibbs (1920), Britten (1928), and Berkeley (1946) are at all well known. Gibbs seems to understand the poem's rhythm and atmosphere so completely as to come as near as is possible to what one might desire as a 'definitive' setting of the text."⁵¹ However, a dozen pages later, Banfield's praise is mixed and more subdued. He concludes:

[Gibbs's] de la Mare settings are most memorable for their tunefulness, their professional tidiness of technique, and their performability. On the whole those that employ a rich Romantic or chromatic texture to articulate warmth of feeling or colouring, such as "Dream Song," "Lullaby," and "Music unheard," are more effective than those plainer settings, such as "Nod" and "Five Eyes," where the influence of Vaughan Williams is not always beneficial. His success in setting both de la Mare's and others' poetry is unpredictable.⁵²

⁴⁹ In the strictest sense, Georgian poetry has to do with a series of five anthologies named *Georgian Poetry* published in the second decade of the twentieth century. The title—having to do with the reign of King George V—is meant to distinguish itself from the strict classicism of the previous Victorian era and the budding rejection of aestheticism that was beginning to characterize new literary and artistic trends (Modernism). For further information, see Neil Powell, "Georgian Poetry," in *The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry*, ed. Ian Hamilton and Jeremy Noel-Tod (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; published online, 2013), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199640256.001.0001/acref-9780199640256-e-1465>.

⁵⁰ Writing to Gibbs in 1951, Howells praised his friend, "You've never yet failed in any setting you've done of beloved Jack de la Mare's poems." Letter from Herbert Howells to Armstrong Gibbs, 30 June 1951, B-P Archive.

And a couple months later, Howells writes of the de la Mare settings "Silver," "A Song of Shadows," and "To One Who Passed Whistling:" "These move me every time I hear them and always will. And because they are so complete, there are no reservations of any kind in one's love of them." Letter from Herbert Howells to Armstrong Gibbs, 21 August 1951, B-P Archive.

⁵¹ Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 214.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 226.

The author's summation of "unpredictable" helps explain the uneven, late-twentieth-century reception of Gibbs's work. Depending on the context, Banfield himself toggles between approval and indifference. For instance, a few years prior, he authored the original Gibbs entry for the first edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* which describes the composer's songs as "exquisite, especially those to poems by his friends Sir Mordaunt Currie and de la Mare."⁵³ To crassly paraphrase the prevailing view, "when Gibbs is on, he's on," though that is not always the case. Despite their being varied, Banfield's scholarly assessments have gone a long way in legitimizing Gibbs's contribution to the world of art song.

Stephen Banfield's research was broadened by his Oxford student Rosemary Hancock-Child, who wrote *A Ballad-Maker: The Life and Songs of C. Armstrong Gibbs*.⁵⁴ The slim volume's publication coincided with the 1993 release of her and her husband's aforementioned recording of songs. It is painfully limited in scope—69 pages (not counting the appendices), and it is organized around two themes—Gibbs's life and his songs. The exceptional latter half is by far its strength: it is tremendously insightful, and it contains some of the very best theoretical observations of Gibbs's style, paying special attention to the musical techniques, "thumbprints," and harmonic qualities found

⁵³ Banfield, Stephen, "Cecil Armstrong Gibbs." *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), 357–58.

⁵⁴ Ro Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker: The Life and Songs of C. Armstrong Gibbs* (London: Thames Publishing, 1993).

consistently throughout his song repertoire.⁵⁵ Her short-sighted biographical sketch, on the other hand, skims the surface, is not well researched, and neglects to explain how the important details of Armstrong Gibbs's life are connected in any meaningful way to his music.

Towards the end of his life, Trevor Hold authored a full-length survey of English Romantic song, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* (2002), and devoted one of his twenty chapters to the topic of Gibbs.⁵⁶ His essay stands on the backs of his predecessors, Banfield and Hancock-Child, as it paraphrases much of their work. His writing, like theirs, is dense and particularly analytical. While he considers several of the same songs, he also adds some fresh ones to his investigation. As an accomplished song composer himself, Hold's take on Gibbs adds yet another twist—an insider's perspective. Of Gibbs's craft, he writes:

As with Quilter, [Gibbs] was the supreme professional. His piano accompaniments are deft and expressive, written by someone who understood the instrument; his vocal lines, though often far from simple, are always eminently

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 39. In addition, Hancock-Child's text masterfully summarizes Gibbs's literary hallmarks. She argues—in the vein of Banfield—the poems that most attracted Gibbs “included nature and the elements, thoughts on love (never sad or depressing), [and] the world seen from a child's point of view. ... He was fascinated by the borders of reality, the ill-defined line between wake and sleep, and between the genuine and the make-believe.”

She also concedes, Gibbs's “refusal to tackle such serious and time-honoured topics for song composition as death and unrequited love may in some people's minds render him frivolous and lightweight; Gibbs' music *is* light, but only in the sense that it is uncluttered and direct and there is often great humour and joy.” Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 38.

I sympathize with Hancock-Child's advocacy of Gibbs's “light” music, but respectfully disagree with her overall evaluation which fails to consider the songs that *do* examine loss, hardship, and uncertainty.

⁵⁶ Trevor Hold, “Armstrong Gibbs,” in *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2002), 252–265.

singable. He is an expert technician, knowing how to vary word-setting, whilst finding the unexpected but invariably “right” rhythmic shape for a line.⁵⁷

This DMA document’s concluding chapter will address some of Hold’s ideas regarding text setting as well as his interpretation of Gibbs’s late song, “The Oxen.”

Since the 1940s, there has been a sobering lack of available information on Armstrong Gibbs, notwithstanding the stellar work of Banfield, Hancock-Child, and Hold. Combined, their collective work about the composer barely totals 100 pages. Fortunately, in 2014, Angela Aries, Lewis Foreman, and Michael Pilkington published their exhaustive, much needed, 401-page biography *Armstrong Gibbs: A Countryman Born and Bred*.⁵⁸ Divided into three parts, Aries’s portion concerning Gibbs’s life occupies the first half of the text. Lewis Foreman’s comprehensive survey of Gibbs’s oeuvre involves a fourth, and Pilkington’s “complete list of works” takes up the remaining quarter. This is all preceded by a touching introduction from Gibbs’s daughter, Ann Rust, who sadly passed just before the book’s completion.⁵⁹

Aries describes herself as an avid vocalist who became acquainted with Gibbs’s music while singing with the Lingwood Consort in the composer’s hometown of Danbury. That is reflected in her warm, familial prose with its slew of first and second-hand accounts. Fortunately, the author conducted her research when she did. As she explains to me via email:

⁵⁷ Ibid., 253.

⁵⁸ Aries, Lewis Foreman, and Michael Pilkington, *Armstrong Gibbs: A Countryman Born and Bred* (UK: EM Publishing, 2014).

⁵⁹ This introduction closely resembles a short “personal memoir” Rust penned for the *British Music Society Journal* in 1989. E. Ann Rust, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs: A Personal Memoir,” *British Music Society*, no. 11 (1989): 45–66.

I was privileged to be able to interview people who had known Armstrong Gibbs, many of whom have now passed on. Of course, I also got to know [daughter and son-in-law] Ann and Lyndon Rust well, and as the then Secretary of the Armstrong Gibbs Society, living in Danbury, was in touch with a lot of musicians and academics, both locally and nationally.⁶⁰

Her detailed biography makes extensive use of primary sources. For example, like many of his contemporaries, Gibbs wrote an enormous quantity of letters, many of which have found their way into her text, and she heavily borrows from Gibbs's *Common Time*.⁶¹

Lewis Foreman is a giant in the world of British musicology, having authored more than 100 works in over 340 publications in three languages, and his involvement with Gibbs's biography lends the text an enormous level of credibility. This is particularly helpful since Aries's part lacks the musicological-analytical acumen of Banfield or Hold. Foreman arranges his study of the music into twelve chapters, each devoted to a genre—i.e., theatre music, orchestral music, music for strings and small ensembles, chorus and orchestra, and so on. His complimentary survey is exceptionally well-researched, but the theoretical analysis is superficial. His discussion reads like an even-handed critique of Gibbs's output written in the style of accessible program notes.

Michael Pilkington's "Complete List of Works" is similarly organized by genre, and its importance cannot be overstated. It must have been a colossal task given its

⁶⁰ Angela Aries, email message to author, 25 November 2019. Aries's research has been archived with the Essex Record Office in Chelmsford, England. Records relating to Armstrong Gibbs used by Angela Aries in her biography of the composer including 6 cassettes of recorded interviews, reference A14354, Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, UK.

⁶¹ Correspondence mainly between family of Armstrong Gibbs and publishers, e.g. Boosey & Hawkes, Oxford University Press, Anglo-American Music Publishers, Cambridge University Press, Stainer & Bell Ltd. and Britten-Pears Library, reference A14176, Essex Record Office, Chelmsford, UK.

roughly 875 entries. “Like many composers, Gibbs was not very methodical in his use of opus numbers,” and his record keeping left something to be desired.⁶² Each listed item contains a wealth of related information, including—when known—dates, performance history, dedications, publisher, print status, and each manuscript’s whereabouts. It is based on a 1994 compilation from Ann and Lyndon Rust, who by their own admission were not musicians, and it has been revised a few times since.

Armstrong Gibbs has an increasing online presence, as a Google search will quickly illustrate, and the quality and quantity of online sources have markedly improved just over the past couple of years. Though *Wikipedia* is by no means a scholarly source, it is telling that Gibbs’s entry has recently evolved from a paragraph to a full-blown, well-cited article that outshines the *New Grove*.⁶³ Furthermore, during the course of my research, the Armstrong Gibbs Society, formed in 2003, updated its website to something more contemporary, comprehensive, and visually appealing. The tenor of both sites has recently shifted toward a much more positive assessment of Gibbs’s work. Defensive qualifiers and concessions such as “little-known composer” have deservedly fallen by the wayside. I suspect much of this has to do with the most recent authors quietly working behind the scenes, or perhaps their biography and an influx of performances—news of which are scattered online—have inspired new waves of interest. In an increasingly tight market, Armstrong Gibbs has benefited from performers seeking to set themselves apart

⁶² Michael Pilkington, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 313.

⁶³ “Armstrong Gibbs” in *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, last modified on 14 May 2021, 10:25, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armstrong_Gibbs.

with distinctive repertory rather than the old warhorses and from an ongoing mandate within musicology to look and listen beyond the canon.

Writing for the British journal *Music and Musicians* in 1989, the centenary of Gibbs's birth, David J. Brown summarizes the historical shifts surrounding the composer:

In the last half century, critical reaction in this country to English music like Gibbs'—conservative, fluent, approachable, tuneful—has swung from extravagant overpraise (to the detriment of more radical styles) through savage vilification (as a reaction in support of the avant-garde) to a further reaction back in its favour. Dare we hope that the pendulum might now settle somewhere in the middle?⁶⁴

Brown can rest assured, it has. His vision of a “truly pluralistic” music culture is spot-on, and tensions pertaining to musical style are no longer an “either-or” matter as they tended to be in the twentieth century.⁶⁵ “Both-and” better describes today's paradigm in which Quilter and Gibbs can legitimately share the recital stage with Britten, Tippett, and Berkeley—each composer doing what he does best without apology. Interest in the music of Armstrong Gibbs has steadily grown in this new century. “Times have changed,” Lewis Foreman writes in his 2014 evaluation of Gibbs's entire catalog, “and this music only needs to be performed to find an audience.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ David J. Brown, “A Paradoxical Figure, Armstrong Gibbs (1889–1960),” *Music and Musicians* (1989): quoted in Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 192.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Lewis Foreman, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 211.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

All the previously cited sources have profoundly shaped our present understanding of Armstrong Gibbs, and I am immensely grateful to the authors for having written them. The landscape of British musicology is a better place because of their scholarship. That being said, I believe there is still much to uncover in terms of the composer's worldview. What makes him tick, and how is that heard and reflected in his songs? Of course, I can only explore that question *because* of others' hard labor, which is primed for another level—and narrower focus—of investigation.

Thus far, scholarship has mainly examined the composer's life and music as separate silos, and attempts at integration have only scratched the surface. At that, the literature downplays Gibbs's Christianity which completely informed all that he believed to be true and how he made sense of life and a war-torn world. This may be, in part, a byproduct of larger cultural trends toward secularity over the past century. In other words, academics and advocates have had their hands full reintroducing Gibbs to the twentieth-century canon even without having to defend his staunch—and perhaps embarrassing—Christianity. Then again, maybe Gibbs's faith has been overlooked because of scholars' overall preference for and familiarity with his early work, where it is less apparent. In this case, the paradigm from which Gibbs operates seems less theological and more related to nostalgia and the childlike imagination—motifs that are equally integral to the composer's creative process.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ As Hold puts it, "There is a childlike quality in nearly everything he sets." Hold, 253. Or, as Gibbs's first music teacher explains, he "writes well because he understands the child's mind, though his 'children's music' has nothing namby-pamby about it." Dent, 90. In light of Gibbs's own spoiled childhood, it is interesting—and perhaps not surprising—the early songs are consumed with the innocence of childhood

My core argument is that analysis and appreciation of Gibbs's music demand sensitivity to the following four themes: 1) Gibbs's spoiled childhood; 2) the wars that bracketed his adulthood; 3) nostalgia as the shaping force behind his concept of beauty; and 4) evolving Christianity as its guiding light. The first two are biographical realities. The latter two are lenses through which I assert Gibbs worked and through which scholars and performers can achieve the richest understanding of Gibbs's songs.

To that end, this DMA document is structured around six upcoming chapters, four of which culminate with song analyses that exemplify Armstrong Gibbs's stylistic evolution and the maturation of his Christian worldview across the course of his career. Chapter 2 examines the composer's early life and "Ann's Cradle Song," one of Gibbs's first successes from the fairy play *Crossings* of 1919. Chapter 3 explores Gibbs's affinity for nostalgia and narratives related to Englishness. Chapter 4 discusses Gibbs's midlife and "The Splendour Falls," written in response to his son's tragic death in the Second World War. Chapter 5 highlights my discovery of two missing song manuscripts, "Before Sleeping" and "Quiet Conscience," that similarly concern Gibbs's loss in November of 1943. They show a new and unknown side to the composer. Chapter 6 looks at Gibbs's Christian hope in light of England's growing secularization—tensions present in "The Oxen," which Gibbs penned on Christmas Eve 1951 within the last decade of his life. Finally, the concluding epilogue, Chapter 7, recaps the prevailing themes of this DMA document.

and landscapes that evoke a sense of home. Such themes also explain Gibbs's affinity for Walter de la Mare whose poetry does the same and comprises the majority of Gibbs's early songs.

CHAPTER 2

ARMSTRONG GIBBS: FROM TROUBLED CHILD TO BUDDING COMPOSER

Armstrong Gibbs blames his early years for the crippling anxiety, nervous attacks, and host of phobias that dogged him throughout life.⁶⁸ As biographer Hancock-Child puts it, “such insecurities compounded to produce a permanently open wound.”⁶⁹ Gibbs’s frail mental health partly explains his natural affinity for country life, and it is no wonder his early music is preoccupied with pastoral themes and unspoiled childhood.⁷⁰ Gibbs’s

⁶⁸ In private letters to their adult daughter Ann Rust, Gibbs’s wife Honor refers to her husband’s diagnosis as “agoraphobia,” and she recounts having “to give Daddy phenobarbitone to calm him down.” (Letter from Honor Gibbs to daughter Ann Gibbs, summer of 1951, B-P Archive).

⁶⁹ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 12.

⁷⁰ In his autobiography, Gibbs details the comfort he experiences at “home” and in “the country” as opposed to the dread of travel and the mental “breakdowns”—as he calls them—which ensue in almost “any situation in which I feel I am not in control.” For example, “up to 1929 ... I enjoyed train travel. ... [However,] one day a sudden urge came to me to open the carriage door and jump out. After this, whenever I entered a train, the fear that it might return was always at the back of my mind, with the result that it did so with increasing frequency. The climax came one day when I had to travel from Chelmsford to London on a Bank Holiday. I was alone in an incredibly dirty non-corridor compartment. Between Ilford and Liverpool Street the urge arrived with such force that I broke into a violent sweat and my mental agony was indescribable. I had to force myself to lie down on the filthy floor. I got home safely, but I could not face trains any more. Nor could I go on board ship or walk over a bridge of any length. It was not that I wanted to commit suicide. What I feared was that the urge, which was as if some outside power were taking control of me against my will, would force me to obey it.” *Common Time*, 149.

Years later he hoped the phobia had passed, and he tried taking a train again. Unfortunately, he had the same experience which handicapped him throughout life. Paradoxically, he could drive a car. Though he intellectually recognized the illogic of this, he describes a sense of “control” behind the wheel. After all, in a car, he could stop and get out. In a train, I “*must* remain in it [Gibbs’s emphasis].” *Common Time*, 150.

“In other words,” he writes, “in the train compulsion is present, in the car it is not, just as when I went [horse] riding with my father compulsion was present, and when I rode my bicycle, it was not.” *Common Time*, 150. Unlike his fear of horses for which he

aesthetic sensibilities were primed by “childhood adversity,” and his notions of beauty crystallized by the time he graduated from Cambridge University.⁷¹ Shortly after, he crossed paths with Walter de la Mare, a poet whose artistic instincts profoundly complemented and further inspired his own. This chapter will examine the composer’s early life from childhood to the “big break” that launched his career, and it will conclude with a theoretical analysis of “Ann’s Cradle Song”—a de La Mare setting that typifies Gibbs’s early period, which is largely born from trauma.

The Vineyards

Gibbs was born in 1889 to Ida and David Cecil Gibbs, the head of the famous family-established firm of soap and toothpaste manufacturers.⁷² Subsequently, he was brought up in affluent circumstances and lived in a large Georgian country mansion called The Vineyards. The old red-brick house stood surrounded by six acres of garden “in the middle of the then pleasant village of Great Baddow, two miles east of

credits his father, he taught himself to ride a bicycle all on his own. Thus, he was able to bicycle—and enjoy it—throughout life.

⁷¹ The often-touted link between creativity and mental illness has not been empirically supported. See James C. Kauffman, *Creativity and Mental Illness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Nonetheless, there is an increasing consensus among psychology scholars that high achievers in their fields statistically have a higher incidence of trauma in their past. Paula Thomson and S. Victoria Jacque, “History of Childhood Adversity and Coping Strategies: Positive Flow and Creative Experiences,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 90 (April 2019): 185–192. Furthermore, acute emotions connected to childhood adversity are often processed and expressed via intense creative work as an adult. Thomson and Jacque, “Childhood Adversity and the Creative Experience in Adult Professional Performing Artists,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 9, (February 2018), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00111/full>.

⁷² Hurd, liner notes to *Songs by Armstrong Gibbs*, Hyperion, 2.

Chelmsford.”⁷³ Oddly, Gibbs exclusively devotes the first four pages of his autobiography (1958) to its mundane history, grounds, and architecture.⁷⁴ He clearly has much affection for the place, though his first chapter also reads as if he is delaying the considerable details of his troubled childhood.

It is particularly fascinating that the estate, which later changed hands, was neglected in the mid-twentieth century, razed in the early 1960s, and replaced with a six-story apartment building named Marrable House. The latter was out of character from its historic surroundings and eventually voted one of England’s ugliest buildings. It has been described as “one of the worst examples of town and country planning in the country.”⁷⁵

Granted, this may not *seem* to matter in the grand scheme of understanding Armstrong Gibbs; yet, the drama surrounding Great Baddow’s city planning typifies England’s postwar “urban modernism” (1945–1970) and its shedding of the past.⁷⁶ The changes in this small village are a microcosm of rapid and profound transformations happening throughout Western society during the twentieth century. In fact, they have everything to do with understanding Gibbs’s philosophies and craft.

Throughout life, Gibbs’s affections would more and more align with the “old guard.” Despite an unhappy upbringing, he *loved* The Vineyards and its aesthetic

⁷³ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 2.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1–4.

⁷⁵ “Protestors triumph as Vineyards plan rejected,” *Chelmsford & Mid Essex Times*, ed. Daren Francis, 25 June 2010.

⁷⁶ Simon Gunn, “The Rise and Fall of British Urban Modernism: Planning Bradford, circa 1945–1970,” *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 4 (October 2010): 849.

qualities. However, in the years to come, he would have to contend with the many English artists, authors, and musicians who were actively “break[ing] with the past and ... search[ing] for new forms of expression.”⁷⁷ The fate of his first home uncannily mirrors the public’s relationship with his music. Ironically and tellingly, Marrable House has since been destroyed, and at the writing of this DMA document, the town center is being redeveloped with a new public green and domestic-scaled buildings that architecturally reflect and compliment traditional ones nearby. Its name? Armstrong Gibbs Court.

Childhood

Just two days after Gibbs’s second birthday, his mother died after delivering a still-born son. “A child’s earliest years are normally the responsibility of its mother,” he writes in his autobiography.⁷⁸ “It is sad that I have so little to tell about mine. ... I cannot remember her at all and, as will be seen, her loss from my point of view was tragic.”⁷⁹ Consequently, Gibbs’s father enlisted five aunts to assist with the rearing of his then only child and with all The Vineyards’ domestic affairs. He arranged their work into a rotating schedule of individual, three-month shifts. This lack of stability and continuity had a “devastating effect on the lonely and highly-strung child.”⁸⁰ To make matters worse,

⁷⁷ Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. “Modernism, art” 24 March 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Modernism-art>.

⁷⁸ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 5–6.

⁸⁰ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 12.

David Cecil felt a responsibility to toughen up his artistic son to prepare him for the rigors of the family business.

Whatever ailed Gibbs, his father would exploit. The composer explains:

Child-psychology had not been heard of as such in those days. The only method [my father] knew was the Spartan discipline of his own boyhood which certainly had the merit of simplicity. If a child feared something, you rubbed his nose in it till he ceased to fear it. ... It wrecked my nervous system so thoroughly that I am still suffering from its results today.⁸¹

In her memoir, Gibbs's daughter Ann speaks of her father quite literally being "thrown into deep water and expected to swim" or "forced to ride a horse" and constantly put back up whenever he fell.⁸² Additionally, when "the sensitive, imaginative little boy" expressed fear of the dark, he was given a bed in the far-away attic where he was locked without any light.⁸³

The child showed clear evidence of musical talent, and the aunts urged David Cecil to send him to Germany for a musical education.⁸⁴ Instead, the boy's father, who had himself studied abroad, "was determined to give his son the benefit of an English public school education."⁸⁵ Accordingly, the young Armstrong was sent to The Wick preparatory school on the Hove/Brighton border and then to Winchester College.⁸⁶ The

⁸¹ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 9.

⁸² Rust, "Personal Memoir," 46.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸⁴ "About Armstrong Gibbs," The Armstrong Gibbs Society, accessed 5 May 2021, <https://armstronggibbs.com/life-and-work/>.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

experience was, at first, brutal, and as an adult, Gibbs affirms feeling entirely “miserable.... I was unpopular ... [and] at once marked as a victim because I was stupid enough to show how much I hated being beaten.”⁸⁷ Hazing was a somewhat common part of Britain’s boarding-school culture at the time, but that did not make things any easier for Gibbs who had no sanctuary from it. Upon returning home for the holidays, he had to deal with a harsh, new stepmother—who was not fond of him—and eventually several jealous stepsiblings.⁸⁸

The Cambridge Years

From Winchester, Gibbs moved on to Trinity College, Cambridge, where he won a considerable scholarship to pursue a degree in history—a course of study approved by his father. Like many financiers “of his generation David Cecil did not take a career in music seriously.”⁸⁹ Rather, “at that time,” Gibbs explains, “music was regarded as a somewhat degrading profession for a man and liable to lead to long hair, an aversion to soap and water and to general laxity of morals.”⁹⁰ In his father’s mind, Cambridge was conversely meant to prepare Armstrong for a career in either business or academia.

All that being said, university life afforded the student a newfound sense of freedom, a group of close friends, and the opportunity to engage in the arts as he chose.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 15.

⁸⁸ Rust, “Personal Memoir,” 46.

⁸⁹ Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 39.

⁹⁰ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

A letter from E.T. Sweeting, Gibbs' former music teacher at Winchester, "ensured an introduction to the eminent [Cambridge] musicologist E.J. Dent," who took Gibbs under his wing.⁹² In order to circumvent David Cecil's tight control over the purse strings, Dent—recognizing his pupil's potential—graciously "refused to take a single penny" from Gibbs for the composition lessons and mentoring he provided."⁹³

The best tribute to what Edward Dent did for [my music] is the fact that for years after I had left him, whenever I had solved some tiresome technical difficulty, I automatically asked myself, "Would Dent pass this?" and if, as often happened, I felt sure he would not, I would scratch the passage out and try again.⁹⁴

Dent introduced Gibbs to the Cambridge arts scene where the young musician quickly proved himself. Before long, he was studying counterpoint with Charles Wood, taking organ lessons from Alan Gray, and singing in the chorus of the Cambridge University Musical Society. Gibbs flourished and later ranked his time at Cambridge among the highlights of his life.⁹⁵ He completed the History Tripos in 1911, after which Gibbs's father dropped his rigid opposition, allowing his son two further years of Cambridge study for a Bachelor of Music degree.

Seven Cambridge Expressionists

Gibbs left his mark on Cambridge, not only as a budding composer; additionally, he and a tight circle of friends hold infamous standing in the annals of *Cambridge Student Pranks*, which—believe it or not—is actually the title of a well-researched

⁹² Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 40.

⁹³ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 31.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁵ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 55.

book.⁹⁶ The text confirms “a truly great hoax” from 1913, also recounted by Gibbs several times throughout his life.⁹⁷ Specifically, Gibbs used his unique tale—a kind of aesthetic experiment—to demonstrate “the view that the public is always gullible, especially if the way has been prepared in advance by skillful propaganda.”⁹⁸

He and his peers were riled up after visiting the “Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition” in London. Of the first, which took place a few years earlier, Virginia Woolf famously quipped, “On or about December 1910 human character changed.”⁹⁹ In her estimation, Roger Fry’s attempts to introduce the British to the work of Manet, Matisse, Gauguin, and Van Gogh signified the arrival of Modernism. At the time, the art only served to baffle most critics who “were still digesting the Impressionism of Monet and Renoir.”¹⁰⁰ For Gibbs, the shows “were simply too avant-garde.”¹⁰¹ He questioned “the sincerity ... of the more outrageous artists.”¹⁰² Meanwhile, friend E.D. Adrian (“later Lord Adrian, who would come to serve as Master of Trinity [College] from 1951–65, and Chancellor of the University from 1967–75”) felt “very angry with the whole school,

⁹⁶ Jamie Collinson, “The Post-Impressionist Exhibition,” in *Cambridge Student Pranks: A History of Mischief and Mayhem* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2013), 93–101.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁹⁸ *Common Time*, 51.

⁹⁹ Virginia Woolf, *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1924), 4.

¹⁰⁰ Collinson, 94.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Common Time*, 51.

with their labored crudity and their willful neglect of all that had been won for them by past generations of artists. ... It appeared that the less one knew of drawing, the more likely one would be to produce a picture with the true post-impressionist spirit.”¹⁰³

In any case, the progressive movement had its following, inspiring similar exhibitions throughout the country. Gibbs’s circle, led by classmate Archibald Don, decided to spoof their own, which they titled “Seven Cambridge Expressionists.”¹⁰⁴ The young men—most of whom had never painted—were soon buying unfamiliar brushes, tubes of paint, and oils and turpentine. They did not tell anyone their knockoff was making fun. Rather, they faked complete and earnest conviction.¹⁰⁵ Soon the silliness inadvertently became a “serious attempt at criticism, to show that crudity and ugliness are not necessarily the product of an inspired artist, but may simply result from someone who is unable to produce finesse and beauty.”¹⁰⁶

The show was marketed with posters, letters, and announcements in the press; and it was even reviewed by London’s *Morning Post*, the *Cambridge Chronicle*, and *Cambridge Review*. For the most part, the critics were taken in, though James Grieg from the London paper indicates some skepticism.¹⁰⁷ Of his own role, Gibbs explains:

One of my few efforts was a crude affair in pastel; behind a dark heap of stones in the foreground stood a recognizable steam-roller under a queer tree with

¹⁰³ E.D. Adrian’s account, quoted in Collinson, 95.

¹⁰⁴ Charles Sayle, *Archibald Don: A Memoir* (London: John Murray, 1918), Appendix II.

¹⁰⁵ Hugh Carey, *Mansfield Forbes and his Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 28.

¹⁰⁶ Collinson, 95.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

triangular leaves of red, blue and yellow. The title given to this masterpiece was ‘Elgar’s First Symphony,’ and the catalogue [authored by Walter Lamb, later Secretary of the Royal Academy of Arts] appraised it thus: “The symbolism is violent, almost crude. His subject has inspired the artist with emotions of anger and disgust.”¹⁰⁸

Surprisingly, the “artists’” efforts tested popular, even turning a sizeable profit that they donated to charity. Gibbs concludes, “None of us would have been so foolish as to argue that the success of the exhibition proved that all modern art was bogus. . . . But I think it did prove that, once the right atmosphere has been created, the public will swallow almost anything.”¹⁰⁹

Another of the “seven,” Mansfield Forbes, later became a historian-Fellow of Clare College, Cambridge. For him, the Expressionist exercise, light-hearted though it had been, “was a fascinating insight into his own prejudices and those of his friends and the general public.”¹¹⁰ Never had money been more dishonestly acquired, and the experiment had ethical implications. That is to say, Forbes—an outspoken traditionalist—used the experience as a springboard for discussing “art’s moral impact. People with bad values,” he argues, “will produce bad art and bad art helps to make bad people.”¹¹¹ From a twenty-first-century vantage point, these accounts may grossly misrepresent the new artistic developments of the day. However, they certainly highlight the twentieth-century

¹⁰⁸ *Common Time*, 52.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹⁰ Carey, *Mansfield Forbes*, 28.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 111.

tensions surrounding Modernism and Gibbs's ideals of "beauty and sincerity," which he viewed as two sides of the same coin.¹¹²

Perhaps the most memorable part of the entire affair concerns the undergraduates' recruitment of Philip Burne-Jones, son of veteran Pre-Raphaelite artist Edward Burne-Jones.¹¹³ Given his aversion to the post-impressionists, the artist enthusiastically submitted his own, anonymous parody. Like his father, the younger Burne-Jones famously championed the conservative aesthetic ideas of his godfather, the nineteenth-century polymath and leading art critic John Ruskin.¹¹⁴ "Sincerity and truth to nature" was his and the Pre-Raphaelites' rallying cry.¹¹⁵ For instance, the first volume of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* instructs "artists to be truthful to nature's forms as truth in

¹¹² *Common Time*, 232.

¹¹³ The "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" is a name adopted in 1848 by a school of young English artists who "shared a dismay at what they considered the moribund state" of contemporary painting. They hoped "to recapture the sincerity and simplicity of early Italian art, i.e. before the time of Raphael." "Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, ed. Ian Chilvers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, published online, 2004), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198604761.001.0001/acref-9780198604761-e-2832#>.

¹¹⁴ Kimberly Eve, "An Englishman in New York: Philip Burne-Jones (1861–1926), Dollars and Democracy!" *Victorian Musings*, 9 November 2013, <https://kimberlyevemusings.blogspot.com/2013/11/an-englishman-in-new-york-philip-burne.html>.

¹¹⁵ "Ruskin, John" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*, ed. Ian Chilvers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, published online, 2004), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198604761.001.0001/acref-9780198604761-e-3059>.

appearance leads to higher truths—moral, spiritual, and truth of ideas.”¹¹⁶ In other words, “truth” in the context of art is both moral and material. (“Bad art is insincere and immoral.”)¹¹⁷ Art is meant to ennoble and express a kind of spiritual truth in coordination with a visual truth.

Amusingly, Burne-Jones’s *pièce de résistance* did not sell, nor was it admired by the critics who said it “lacked the spontaneity and abandon” of the exhibition’s other paintings.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, to this day, “The Velvet Glove”—Don’s Picasso-inspired caricature of the Master of Trinity, Montagu Butler—still hangs “above the stairs beyond the Great Drawing Room” of the Master’s Lodge.¹¹⁹

Walter de la Mare

In 1913 Armstrong Gibbs pursued a career in teaching after completing degrees in history and music at Trinity College, Cambridge (BA 1911, MusB 1913).¹²⁰ Despite his family’s fortune, he decided he could not make a living as a professional musician and instead imagined school-mastering would provide him the opportunity to compose during the long holidays.¹²¹ As it turned out, the breaks were not as productive as he had hoped

¹¹⁶ “Truth to Nature” in *The Making of the Hudson River School: Part 6*, Albany Institute of History and Art, accessed 10 June 2021, <https://www.albanyinstitute.org/truth-to-nature.html>.

¹¹⁷ “Ruskin” in *Oxford*.

¹¹⁸ Collinson, 100.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹²⁰ Banfield and Hancock-Child. “Gibbs, Cecil Armstrong.” *Grove Music Online*.

¹²¹ Rust, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” 48.

given his need to recuperate. Nonetheless, he enjoyed the hard work at his alma mater, The Wick preparatory school, Hove, where he taught Classics, History, English, and conducted the choir which became popular among the boys.¹²² He wrote several settings of poems for them by Walter de la Mare (1873–1956), including “A Song of Shadows” (1917) and “Five Eyes” (1917). Ironically, these were first rejected by the publishers but now rank among Gibbs’s most successful compositions.¹²³

According to his daughter Ann Rust, “This contact with the poet began a friendship which lasted until de la Mare’s death.”¹²⁴ Several decades later, upon his friend’s passing, Gibbs explains:

Every composer would agree that some lyrics positively cry out for music. Thus it was with me when I first met [the poems of de la Mare] over thirty-five years ago. In very truth they opened magic casements. They drew music out of me as a magnet draws steel. Some of my best settings of them were achieved with a minimum of effort; the songs seemed almost to write themselves.¹²⁵

Throughout his life, Gibbs was attracted to a wide range of at least 50 poets from various eras; however, he set the poems of de la Mare more than any other lyrics—particularly in the early period of his songwriting.¹²⁶ British song scholar Trevor Hold likens this relationship to Gerald “Finzi with [Thomas] Hardy or [C.W.] Orr with [A.E.] Housman. Gibbs’s songs will always be associated with de la Mare’s poetry.”¹²⁷

¹²² Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 18–19.

¹²³ Rust, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” 48.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ C. Armstrong Gibbs, “Setting de la Mare to Music,” *Books: The Journal of the National Book League*, no. 301 (1956): 80.

¹²⁶ Hold, 252.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

Gibbs characterizes the author as having “more uncanny insight into a child’s mind and imagination than anyone else I know...”—an assessment widely held by many literary critics.¹²⁸ After all, Walter de la Mare’s first collection of poems is named *Songs of Childhood* (1902), a title that consciously places him in a tradition stretching “back to [William] Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and the ideals of the Romantics.”¹²⁹ That is to say, in the spirit of eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Walter de la Mare’s writings favor the innocence of childhood, a unique time of “vision uncontaminated by adult perceptions.”¹³⁰

De la Mare spoke on this topic at length in a lecture given just after the Great War concerning poet *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*. He describes the “peace and wonder” of the world inhabited by children that is “peculiarly their own, so much so that it is doubtful if the adult can do more than very fleetingly reoccupy that far-away consciousness.”¹³¹ The author believed that children, by nature, are visionaries; that is to be celebrated. They are “contemplatives, solitaires, fakirs, who sink again and again out of the noise and fever of existence and into a waking vision.”¹³² Gradually, however, the

¹²⁸ Gibbs, “Setting de la Mare,” 80.

¹²⁹ “Walter de la Mare,” The Poetry Archive, last modified 2005, Accessed 8 Apr. 2021. <https://poetryarchive.org/poet/walter-de-la-mare/>.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Walter de la Mare, “Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination” (lecture, Rugby School, 27 March 1919; London: Sidgwick & Jackson Limited, 1919), 7.

¹³² Ibid., 9.

external world intrudes upon the naïve mind and the “childish self” must adapt or “retire like a shocked snail into its shell.”¹³³

Given Armstrong Gibbs’s particularly difficult childhood, one might have expected his childlike spirit to have “retire[d]” like that “shocked snail.” Nothing could be further from the truth. However, to suggest he “adapt[s]” almost seems an understatement. Rather, he adapts, and *then some*. Everything from his chosen profession as a teacher at a school where he had been bullied as a student, to the music of his early career, all seem a way of his addressing significant wounds. The songs from this period are marked by childlike qualities—an aesthetic he intentionally cultivates. Moreover, his painful youth largely explains his affection for the poet, “whose poems” Gibbs writes, “especially the earlier ones, appeal irresistibly to something deep down in myself, and the appeal is basically an emotional one.”¹³⁴

Crossings

Gibbs continues, “This was peculiarly true of the exquisite lyrics that de la Mare included in the fairy play *Crossings* which he wrote specially for me at the end of 1918.”¹³⁵ In the autumn of that year, the headmaster of The Wick, Lawrence Thring, announced his June retirement, and to honor the occasion, Gibbs decided to mount a play that would feature newly composed music, singing, and dancing.¹³⁶ He and de la Mare

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹³⁴ Gibbs, “Setting de la Mare,” 80.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 57.

were then strangers; nonetheless, Gibbs decided to approach the famous author with what he felt was an audacious request for a specially-written script.¹³⁷ To his surprise, de la Mare warmly agreed, responding, “my writing a fairy play ... has been hovering in my mind for some little time past.”¹³⁸ De la Mare’s biographer Theresa Whistler recounts an air of enthusiasm surrounding the composer and author’s collaboration, and “for the next term and a half the play [titled *Crossings*] became the centre of life at the school.”¹³⁹ As things panned out, the June 1919 production came to celebrate the coming of peace as much as it lauded Thring’s many years in education.

Apart from J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1904), very little in England at that time had been staged for children except for pantomime.¹⁴⁰ The show’s original cast was almost entirely comprised of boy students aged fourteen and under. Nonetheless, in terms of its audience, this collaboration is *not only* for children. The same can be said of it as has been said of de la Mare’s poetry: *Crossings* “makes no sharp distinction between child and adult audiences, appealing to the childlike in the adult and to the serious, questioning element in the child.”¹⁴¹ At least four of its songs have found a “grown-up” life of their

¹³⁷ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 19.

¹³⁸ Letter from Walter de la Mare to Armstrong Gibbs, undated, B-P Archive.

¹³⁹ Theresa Whistler, *The Life of Walter de la Mare: Imagination of the Heart* (London: Duckbacks, 2003), 293.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁴¹ Grevel Lindop. "de la Mare, Walter." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Accessed 8 Apr. 2021. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195169218.001.0001/acref-9780195169218-e-0131?rskey=fivlOI&result=130>.

own as arrangements for adult medium voice and piano.¹⁴² One of these includes “Ann’s Cradle Song,” the topic of an upcoming analysis.

In his seminal text *Sensibility and English Song*, author Stephen Banfield asserts that the overall effect of *Crossings*

is to make us yearn for such simplicity of acceptance ourselves, to cross over into the world of children. This is surely the significance of the title of the play, which concerns a family of children. Left alone in a strange, empty country house, they play at being adults, whilst the only adults who naturally befriend them, the tradespeople and a beggar, are those who are not enmeshed in society’s formalities and can share in their unfettered imaginations.¹⁴³

Leading British opera scholar Edward J. Dent, who had taught and mentored Gibbs at Cambridge, voluntarily came to The Wick for an entire month to help produce the play. He brought with him a young up-and-coming conductor, Adrian Boult, which freed the composer to play piano in the chamber orchestra next to his wife, Honor, of fourteen months, who played violin. The score’s accompaniment also includes flute, viola, and cello. To everyone’s delight, de la Mare joined them all for the final performances.¹⁴⁴ Among others in the audience were a music critic from *The Times* and the acclaimed composer Ralph Vaughan Williams.¹⁴⁵ Banfield points out, “Rarely can so many significant personages have worked together in such an unpretentious environment.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 224.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 225–26.

¹⁴⁴ Rust, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” 49.

¹⁴⁵ Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 60.

¹⁴⁶ Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 224.

The circumstances surrounding the play's unassuming origins are almost as magical as the plot itself. All were so impressed by Gibbs's music to the point that Boult generously offered to cover his tuition at the Royal College of Music in order to study composition with Ralph Vaughan Williams. Additionally, he, Boult, would train Gibbs as a conductor.¹⁴⁷ It meant abandoning his new career at The Wick, a difficult decision as he now had a wife and baby son to consider. However, Honor ultimately persuaded him to leave his secure job and devote his vocation to composing. A couple of decades after Gibbs's death, his daughter explains, "Armstrong never ceased to be grateful to [Honor] for her unswerving love and devotion."¹⁴⁸ Throughout their marriage, she was his rock, and everything about *Crossings* proved to be transformative in their lives. In her slim biography, Hancock-Child puts it this way: "If Boult had not taken part in *Crossings*, Armstrong Gibbs might have remained a schoolteacher all his life."¹⁴⁹

AN ANALYSIS OF "ANN'S CRADLE SONG"

The following analysis specifically deals with Gibbs's arrangement of "Ann's Cradle Song" for medium voice and piano, though he originally scored it—and all the songs from *Crossings*—for unchanged treble voice and chamber orchestra. In both versions, the protagonist, Sallie, sings to her youngest sibling, Ann, during the children's first evening alone in which they encounter ghosts and fairy mobs; or perhaps, as the play's author has hinted, they are dreaming. It is next to impossible to discern where

¹⁴⁷ Rust, "Cecil Armstrong Gibbs," 49.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 20.

reality ends and imagination begins, and it is in this liminal and enchanted nightscape that Gibbs's music excels. Examples abound throughout his career. Notably, his most famous song, "Silver" (1920)—a de la Mare setting written the following year—illuminates this penchant for magic, moonlight, and shadows.

In the broad scheme of art-song history, there is nothing radical regarding Gibbs's approach to Sallie's solo; instead, his craft is subtle by design. It stands in opposition to the Continental avant-garde and looks to Schubert for inspiration as opposed to Schoenberg. As Banfield posits, "In all the songs [from *Crossings*] one finds a childlike simplicity of technique which accepts devices of musical colouring without hackneying them."¹⁵⁰ In that vein, Gibbs's thick Schubertian atmospheres are palpable and often evoked through a cumulus of understated—but creative—details. This is exemplified by "Ann's Cradle Song" which, Hancock-Child explains, is "full of sights, sounds, and scents."¹⁵¹ Some of these are unsettling, as in the case of the song's through-composed stanzas that are juxtaposed with a repeated lullaby refrain whose images conversely elicit comfort and release tension. That contrast between foreboding and calm is the overall narrative for best understanding everything from the song's large-scale structural shifts to its many nuanced, local details.

The opening C-sharp-minor bars immediately establish a sense of time and place with a two-measure basso ostinato in the spirit of Schubert's millwheel and water motives—i.e., *Die schöne Müllerin*. As the text suggests, this is the hypnotic "clacking mill" which eerily falls silent throughout the first stanza with the rapid approach of a

¹⁵⁰ Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 225.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

sinister evening. As seen in Figure 1, its fading begins in the fifth bar when the bass line is no longer doubled by a strong, lower octave; and in m. 7, the ostinato gravitates to the piano's treble voice. By mm. 9–10, one must strain to hear the wheel's last and weakest musical turn that is obscured by its displacement between treble and bass voices. Here, the two-bar motive's melodic sequence of falling, lilted thirds becomes the accompaniment's prominent, aural feature.

1 *Andante ma con moto.* *mp*
 Voice. Now si - lent falls the
 Piano. *p*
 Millwheel motive

4
 clack - ing mill; Sweet - sweet - er smells the
 Millwheel lacks the lower octave

7
 briar; Millwheel in treble voice The dew wells big on bud and twig; The
 Displaced millwheel

Figure 1. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 1–10.

For this first page, Gibbs’s musical language is otherworldly, or at least medieval, like a fantastical trope from a J.R.R. Tolkien novel. The wheel is constructed of Anglican-sounding, gymel-textured parallel thirds against a dominant G-sharp pedal in the pianist’s right hand. This organum not only paints a tangible landscape with a mill, but it also transports the listener to a dream-like past.

Speaking in a 1938 lecture concerning aesthetics, Gibbs explains his fondness for ellipses such as this, which he viewed as “typical of the music of [his] time.”¹⁵² He proposes they serve as a vehicle for breaking from the age-old “routine treatises on Harmony.”¹⁵³ Thus, “many chords technically discords can and do now stand as concords.”¹⁵⁴ This stanza also demonstrates the composer’s fondness for “sliding up or down in patterns.”¹⁵⁵ Ironically, however, this particular ellipse is unconventional for its day, not because it charts new harmonic territory; rather, its “rule breaking” harkens backward.

For example, one might expect Gibbs’s opening chord progression to employ a major dominant as a means of cycling back to C-sharp tonic at the start of the third measure. The narrator’s vocal line even hints at this harmonic function with its beginning leap from the fifth to tonic scale degrees. Instead, the third and fourth beats of m. 2—and coordinating moments throughout the first two systems—outline a minor modal dominant. The composer forgoes all use of the leading tone; consequently, much of the first page involves the C-sharp Aeolian mode (Figure 2).

¹⁵² Gibbs, “Trend of Modern Music,” 1.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

Figure 2. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 1–3.

However, to be clear, harmonic ambiguity prevails, particularly in the bottom system (Figure 3) which points to tertian relationships surrounding C sharp. The submediant chords that begin m. 7 and m. 8 briefly highlight A major, yet the vocal line and final beats of mm. 8 and 10 point to the relative key of E major.

Figure 3. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 7–10.

At first, the opening vocal melody seems to work in much the way one would expect from a nineteenth-century art song with a two-measure subphrase beginning in m.

2 followed by another two-measure unit beginning in m. 5. Collectively, these mm. 2–7 form a type of antecedent phrase, but Gibbs expands its quasi-cadential counterpart in mm. 8–13 to five measures against the previous four. Such disequilibrium is not unusual in and of itself, but it does contribute to an overall sense of instability, particularly compared to the security and well-balanced proportions of the upcoming lullaby.

Furthermore, the first stanza's relationship between the accompaniment and voice recalls Schubert's style of creating tension in lieder such as "Gretchen am Spinnrade." In m. 2, the singer's line starts with the word "Now" on beat four at the end of the turning, two-measure mill motive. Whereas, with the vocalist's next small unit, the entrance with the text "Sweet" aligns with beat three in m. 5, and it is now in the middle of the first bar toward the beginning of the wheel pattern rather than its being in a roughly analogous position at the end. In other words, the mill is winding away while the narrator in the foreground pays it no attention. This lack of coordination adds another layer of imbalance to the song's beginning. Figure 4 highlights the seeming randomness of these overlapping units.

1 *Andante ma con moto.* *mp*
 Voice. Now si - lent falls the

p
 Piano.

4
 clack - ing mill; Sweet - sweet - er smells the

Figure 4. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 1–6.

The accompaniment’s expanded cadential progression at the end of the first stanza in m. 11 through the downbeat of m. 14 is very much a product of Gibbs’s current year 1919, and it highlights his technical mastery (Figure 5). Here, the transition from the first stanza’s C-sharp minor key to its parallel, enharmonic, D-flat-major refrain manages to “avoid the banal with its frank sequence of 7th chords in the manner of [Roger] Quilter.”¹⁵⁶ The tension escalates in m. 13 with a succession of two dominant seventh chords repeated in m. 14, whose roots share an unsettling tritone relationship. In fact, in light of the A-flat pedal in the bass, the first of these is aurally characteristic of a French-

¹⁵⁶ Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 224–25.

sixth chord. And at a corresponding moment, several pages later in m. 43, Gibbs *does* use a true augmented sixth chord.

11 *cresc.*
glow-worm's wrapt _____ in fire.

cresc.
m7 ø7 m7 ø7 Ab pedal a tritone below D₅

14 *mf* *pochettino piu mosso.*
Then sing, lull-y, lull - ay, with me, And

PAC

mf *pochettino piu mosso.*
D_b Major: V⁷ I

Figure 5. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 11–16.

All culminates with the song’s first—and much needed—perfect authentic cadence which crosses the bar from m. 14 to m. 15 and coincides with the beginning of a harmonically tight-knit lullaby refrain (Figure 5). As it turns out, the first verse is no musical exposition. It is more of a prelude meant to provide contrast to the stability of D-flat major. Through the use of overlapping phrases centered around the word “sing,”

Gibbs concludes the song's opening 14 bars while simultaneously initiating new tonal security, and the effect of the PAC and refrain is one of pure diatonic comfort that is suited for a lullaby. Even with wooing witches lurking around the corner, and subsequent musical turbulence, the D-flat major tonality centers "Ann's Cradle Song." Unlike before, the score's phrases are now refreshingly symmetrical with balanced, four-measure units, and the accompaniment is perfectly synced—and mostly doubled—with the singer. As previously mentioned, the four stanzas of this setting are through-composed, but the assuring refrain will return for the piece's conclusion.

The "clacking mill" has gone to bed for the evening and the remainder of the song; nonetheless, it does function as a seed for the refrain. With regard to melodic contour, a parallel can be made between it and the refrain's treble accompaniment in mm. 15–18, which is largely doubled by the voice. The latter is twice as long, but both can be understood as an ascending stepwise motive followed by a three-part sequence. Also, both cooperate with a dominant pedal. The sustained G sharp is rather placid on the first page, while on the second, the A flat is fittingly syncopated. In that way, the lullaby takes on a gentle, rocking sway (Figure 6).

14 *mf* pochettino piu mosso.
Then sing, lull-y, lull - ay, with me, And

mf pochettino piu mosso.
lilting syncopation

17 *p*
soft - ly, lill - lall - lo, love, 'Tis high time, and wild time, And

syncopation continued

Figure 6. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 14–20.

Gibbs’s critics suggest he avoids all manner of unpleasant topics. Hancock-Child concurs: “He ha[s] no taste for anything bleak.”¹⁵⁷ That is true to a certain degree, particularly of his early work for which he is most well-known. For instance, here is a song that evokes the sweetness and naivety of childhood, and its opening harmonic color reaches back to an idealized English past. Nonetheless, de la Mare’s lyrics are not devoid of trouble. Even within the safety of Sallie’s lullaby refrain, Gibbs cannot resist the spice

¹⁵⁷ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 38.

of a couple, ominous chromatic chords in m. 20 (Figure 7). At first, they seem out of place except that they mirror the motion of the previous measure and correspond with Sallie's contemplating the "wild time" of evening.¹⁵⁸

Figure 7. "Ann's Cradle Song," from *Crossings*, mm. 17–20.

Rather than danger being absent, Gibbs skillfully filters and handles it in a sanitized manner in much the same way Sallie is presently doing for Ann. The fright of *Crossings* is comparable to the catharsis of a children's campfire ghost story. Despite Hancock-Child's rosy assessment, Gibbs had a proclivity for the macabre as evidenced by songs such as "Five Eyes," "John Mouldy," "The Witch," and "Hypochondriacus." He even authored an unpublished thriller titled, *The Chillingham Casket*.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Also note the planing parallel fifths in the manner of Vaughan Williams, a trait similarly found throughout Gibbs's oeuvre.

¹⁵⁹ Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 59.

One cannot help but think of Armstrong Gibbs's role as a nurturing teacher, and how—over the past several years—he had been filtering the horrors of the First World War for the same boys for whom he had composed this music. Though willing to serve, he had been refused by the army for medical reasons related to his lifelong struggles with anxiety and chronic colitis.¹⁶⁰ However, as he expressed in a June 1915 letter to a friend, “I know perfectly well I am doing work far more useful where I am.”¹⁶¹ Perhaps, on another level, he was also attempting to right the challenges of his own childhood. Ultimately, Banfield interprets “de la Mare’s ghosts (and there is one in *Crossings*)” as representing “the idea of secret self-knowledge, like the revelations of private destiny in J.M. Barrie’s *Dear Brutus* of 1920: such knowledge entails the recognition of loss and separation, of the unattainable.”¹⁶² We cannot stay children forever; a war had just proven that. Innocence, dream, and romance are transient and meant to be savored.

The brief moment of evening’s “wild time” angst is quickly and safely resolved with the refrain’s concluding PAC (Figure 8).

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁶¹ Letter from Armstrong Gibbs to Edward J. Dent, June 1915, quoted in Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 54.

¹⁶² Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 226.

21

no time, no, love!

PAC

cresc.

p

poco rit.

Figure 8. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 21–24.

Nevertheless, the tender piano interlude of mm. 22–24 (also seen in Figure 8) is short-lived as peril returns, ending the serene mood with an unexpected half-step modulation, new musical material, and a drastic change of texture in the piano. A distressing third stanza ensues while arpeggiated chords rapidly shift and outline chromatic scales in mm. 25–30. Note the pianist’s ascending left-hand progression: G—A flat—A—B flat—C flat—C—D flat (Figure 9). It very quickly wipes away any sense of tonality and wellbeing established in the preceding lullaby, and the listener is no longer sure where the song is heading in terms of its harmony. Melodic and harmonic sequences, modulations, whole-tone segments, and a series of seventh chords conjure the spirit of the text which paints a daunting, midnight landscape outside the safety of the children’s home: “Cries in the brake, bells in the sea: the moon o’er moor and mountain cruddles her light from height to height....”

25 *mf* a tempo.
Cries in the brake, bells in the sea: The

27
moon o'er moor and moun - tain Crud - dles her

Figure 9. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 25–28.

Here Gibbs’s aural landscape recalls the lush passages of *mélodies* by Reynaldo Hahn or Gabriel Fauré. Undeniable text painting abounds, and the bulk of this verse—mm. 25–30—takes on the character of an extended upbeat or transition to m. 31’s D-major moment of arrival at the word “bedazzles.” Hancock-Child describes this “harmonic shift, as resplendent as the sudden glow of moonlight which it represents.”¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 59.

However, the sonority is almost as far away as it could possibly be from the D-flat tonality and sanctuary of the lullaby. Figure 10 features this D-major moment of arrival.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the piece "Ann's Cradle Song" from *Crossings*, measures 29-32. The first system (measures 29-30) features a vocal line in treble clef and piano accompaniment in grand staff. The vocal line includes the lyrics "light from height to height, Be -". A handwritten red circle around the F# note in measure 29 is labeled "leading tone". The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system (measures 31-32) begins with the dynamic marking *mf dolce* and the lyrics "daz - zles pool and foun - tain." The word "daz - zles" is underlined in red. The piano accompaniment continues with a similar eighth-note pattern, and the key signature changes to D major, indicated by a handwritten red "D major" at the bottom of the system.

Figure 10. "Ann's Cradle Song," from *Crossings*, mm. 29–32.

In some respects, Gibbs functions like a film director in the mode of Alfred Hitchcock who knows exactly how to pace the suspense for his public. Listeners are given just a brief moment to catch their breath during the glory of mm. 31–32 (Figure 10). This precedes the song's creepiest fourth stanza in which he applies yet another unique color from his palette—a new, repeating ellipse comprised of several half-

diminished seventh chords chromatically moving in parallel motion against a tonic D pedal (Figure 11). It creates a strand of parallel tritones, the *diabolus in musica*, in mm. 33–36. It is the Devil’s night, so to speak, and everything seems to unravel. All sense of tonal place is completely lost. The singer anxiously calls upon the warbler to wail, the owl to hoot, and the fox to leap as “midnight now’s a-brewing.” The melody does just that; it leaps twice in mm. 34–35.

The image shows a musical score for "Ann's Cradle Song" from *Crossings*, measures 33-36. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower two staves. The piano part features a series of diminished seventh chords moving in parallel motion, creating a strand of parallel tritones. Red annotations highlight these tritones in the piano part and melodic leaps in the vocal line. The lyrics are: "Leap, fox; hoot, owl; wail, warbler sweet, 'Tis".

Figure 11. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 33–36.

In the measures leading to the concluding refrain, Gibbs further exploits tritone relationships, this time the tonic D with A flat (Figure 12). For example, the beginning of the forenamed one-measure ellipse in m. 33 hints at the sound of a ninth chord because of its tonic D drone. By the time the “mob” appears in m. 40, the same pitches clearly *do* function as a D ninth chord, and in the following measure, D becomes the root of a dominant chord. However, the chord is spelled over an A-flat just as it was earlier in m. 13.

40

mob is all a - broad, And witch-es at their woo - ing.

pp parlando

pp

Dominant sonority over Ab pedal (tritone relationship)

D9

43

Then sing, lull-y, lull - ay, with me, And

p

PAC

pp

Fr +6

Db Major: V⁷ enharmonic spelling I

Figure 12. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 40–46.

As before, the composer treats the audience to an imaginative modulation, this time from the far away world of D back to D-flat major. In m. 43, a previously mentioned French-sixth chord proceeds to an enharmonic spelling of an A-flat dominant seventh chord—a tritone away—in the following m. 44 (Figure 12). In turn, the dominant resolves as expected to D flat in mm. 44–45, and this PAC that connects the last stanza to the concluding, repeated lullaby refrain assuages even more than it did the first time around in mm. 14–15. That is by virtue of its being familiar, unlike everything else in the

song, and because of the respite it provides from greater surrounding turmoil. At heart, “Ann’s Cradle Song” has everything to do with this striking disparity—tension and calm. Sallie’s refreshing lullaby turns Ann’s thoughts away from the evening’s prowling evil and host of malevolent beings. Diatonic stability suggests that Sallie has sung her part well, and the children can rest secure.

The refrain’s vocal line ends with a PAC that simultaneously marks the beginning of the piano’s closing six-bar codetta in mm. 53–58. The song began with a wheel motive that toggles between minor tonic and modal dominants, but here, it ends with a couple repetitions of the refrain’s lulling motive and its stronger sway between major tonic and dominant harmonies. Its function is much-welcomed tonic prolongation. However, just as one relaxes into its reassuring predictability, Gibbs plants a hint of uneasiness in the second from last measure—a half-diminished chord with a descending, chromatic triplet (Figure 13).

51

And no time, no, love.

PAC

cresc.

dim.

55

"fairy mob" motive

Figure 13. “Ann’s Cradle Song,” from *Crossings*, mm. 51–58.

To be fair, this chromaticism does not strike the ear as dissonant. Instead, this hint of evil is more alluring and deceptively sweet like the Erlking, a Lorelei, or a siren. Maybe all is *not* as it should be. Similar descending chromaticism appeared earlier in the vocal line with the text “fairy mob” in mm. 39–40. Although the audience does not know it yet, Ann has every reason to be afraid as this same “mob” will kidnap her later in the play. Gibbs is keenly mindful of the spirits, ghosts, and danger that haunt the imagination of a child, as well as feelings of loss and overpowering fear. *Crossings* enjoins its

audience to relish and preserve the magic and wonder of youth as long as possible, despite its fragility and the dangers that threaten it.

CHAPTER 3

THE PARADOX OF NOSTALGIA

There is no denying Armstrong Gibbs's mastery at handling Georgian poetry, fantasy, and Arcadian scenes: "church bells, the moon, birds, flowers, trees, [and] joy for their beauty," not to mention "land[s] of enchantment—the faraway land of dream and romance," and "the past."¹⁶⁴ The composer had a "peculiarly English penchant for gently wistful nostalgia."¹⁶⁵ These are the hallmarks of Gibbs's more familiar early period, and one can hear such themes throughout *Crossings* which is characteristic of his work from 1917–1933. The fairy play is steeped in nostalgia—a nostalgia that was very much a part of England's artistic and literary aesthetic prior to the World Wars. Some label "Gibbs's music ... charming, ... an escapist art," but this argument fails to consider the gravitas that defines Gibbs's brand of nostalgia.¹⁶⁶ For example, even "Ann's Cradle Song" has an air of melancholy concerning the transience of beauty and youth. Gibbs's pursuit of transcendence and the world of childhood via an aesthetic involving nostalgia, eventually ran its course—just as it did for England. As it would turn out, nostalgia, for Gibbs, had a certain hopelessness because it never provided the comfort he desperately sought. This chapter will define nostalgia in terms of its cultural and aesthetic significance and explain its evolving place in Gibbs's music over his maturation between the two wars.

¹⁶⁴ Hold, *Parry to Finzi*, 264.

¹⁶⁵ Nick Barnard, album review of *Armstrong Gibbs: Complete Works for Violin and Piano*, MusicWeb International, accessed 26 August 2021, http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2011/Feb11/gibbs_gmcd7353.htm.

¹⁶⁶ Liner notes to *Cecil Armstrong Gibbs Orchestral Music*, with the BBC Concert Orchestra and Ronald Corp, conductor; Dutton Epoch, CDLX7324, 2016, CD.

Merriam-Webster defines nostalgia as “a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for return to or of some past period or irrecoverable condition.”¹⁶⁷ Greek in origin, the word combines *nóstos*, “return to the native land,” and *álgos*, meaning “pain or ache;” and it was coined in the seventeenth century by a young Swiss physician Johannes Hofer to medically describe the anxieties displayed by Swiss mercenaries fighting away from home.¹⁶⁸ This debilitating condition of homesickness—a form of melancholy—was considered life-threatening if left untreated.

In his influential 1966 discourse on nostalgia, phenomenological literary critic Jean Starobinski finds contemporary insights from Hofer’s long list of symptoms. These ailments specifically include the young soldiers’ longing for “the loving care with which their mothers surrounded them,” their missing the music of the Alpine valley, and their wanting the tastes and smells of broth and thick milk from their homeland.¹⁶⁹ Starobinski writes, “The modern psychiatrist should be thankful to Johannes Hofer for underlining straight off the role of this deprivation: the loss of childhood, of ‘oral satisfactions,’ of motherly coaxing.”¹⁷⁰ Such voids closely resemble the wounds that afflicted Gibbs. Hofer imagined nostalgia’s life-saving cure involved a return to the place of one’s childhood—home.

¹⁶⁷ Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “Nostalgia,” accessed 19 April 2021, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nostalgia>.

¹⁶⁸ Robert Hemmings, “A Taste of Nostalgia: Children’s Books from the Golden Age: Carroll, Grahame, and Milne,” *Children’s Literature* 35 (2007): 54.

¹⁶⁹ Jean Starobinski, “The Idea of Nostalgia,” *Diogenes* 54 (1966): 87.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Cultivating a sense of home or place—a “New Jerusalem” on earth—became a defining quality of Britain’s “Victorian and Edwardian cultural movement that embraced ... rural England, a pastoral counterpoint to industrialization and modernization.”¹⁷¹ This rural-past “Englishness” is woven throughout the nation’s art songs, hymns, literature, and paintings from the early twentieth century, and is akin to “setting up house”—one for which the country collectively longed.¹⁷² It is evident from Cecil Sharp (1859–1924) and Vaughan Williams’s folk song revival and effort to preserve rural music, in addition to the agrarian landscape and opening organum of “Ann’s Cradle Song.”¹⁷³ It is even typified by the subtitle of Angela Aries and Lewis Foreman’s recent Gibbs biography: *A Countryman Born and Bred*. These are self-descriptive words first used by the composer in his unpublished autobiography to describe his distaste for “all large cities. This particularly applies to London.”¹⁷⁴ He loathed “the crowds, the noise, and the petrol fumes,” which he considered a blight on the “true England” with which many musicians had become out of touch.¹⁷⁵

In this sense, English nostalgia—home—involves an Edenic countryside, a national character that evolved alongside the “rise of the great cities,” “transportation,”

¹⁷¹ Hemmings, “A Taste of Nostalgia,” 54.

¹⁷² Peter Mandler, “Against ‘Englishness:’ English Culture and the Limits to Rural Nostalgia, 1850–1940,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 7 (October 1997): 155.

¹⁷³ Kimball, *Song*, 351.

¹⁷⁴ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 156.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

and the significant “movements of the population.”¹⁷⁶ It is consumed by Hofer’s seventeenth-century pining for the “fatherland.” By the end of the 1700s, philosopher Immanuel Kant partly agreed with Hofer’s assessment and recognized that homesickness—to a certain degree—can be cured by returning home.

However, Kant’s writings did much to excise the now familiar term from its pathological roots, and, in contrast, he understood that the aim of certain desires could not be revived or achieved. “At its very roots, nostalgia is linked with the trauma of deprivation and loss;” it is not only a function of *place*, but of “the *imagination* [emphasis added].”¹⁷⁷ Ultimately, the nostalgic expectation cannot be sated because the imagination’s longing is for childhood itself.¹⁷⁸

By his own admission, Armstrong Gibbs was robbed of a childhood, which became a source of lifelong grief. His mother died when he was only two years of age, and he regretted never being able to remember her. The responsibilities of child-rearing fell on his father who was a strict disciplinarian, to put it kindly.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, it makes sense that Gibbs’s early work bears the thumbprints of childlike naivete, open-eyed wonder, and longing. This is how he viewed the world. For him, the nostalgia that characterizes his early career became an attempt to find or create what he had lost. His music evokes the childhood he wished he could have had.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁷⁷ Hemmings, “A Taste of Nostalgia,” 55.

¹⁷⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. R.B. Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 71.

¹⁷⁹ Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 1.

Starobinski's article further chronicles the development of nostalgia, a key symbol of Romanticism, by examining its two dimensions—place and time (imagination)—which are not necessarily at odds. The desire for place, a “native land” or “place of birth,” however, is simply a manifestation of something deeper related to imagination or “personal development.”¹⁸⁰ Gibbs's impulse to thwart trends towards urbanism with his choice of pastoral, innocent literary themes and musical language is very much related to a larger ambition—his preservation of childhood. In Starobinski's words:

In the case of civilized man, who is no longer rooted in a particular place, it is not the uprooting which causes trouble; it is rather the conflict between the exigencies of integration into the adult world and the temptation to conserve the unique status of the child. The literature of exile, more abundant than ever, is, for the most part, a literature concerned with the loss of childhood.¹⁸¹

Arguably *Crossings* is music and “literature of exile,” a theme also at the heart of Robert Hemmings's essay, “A Taste of Nostalgia: Children's Books from the Golden Age: Carroll, Grahame, and Milne.” The title could just as easily include de la Mare's name in its list of British authors. He describes “golden age” literature from the mid-nineteenth century through the First World War as perpetuating a paradox “rich in retrospective longing for a past not as it was, but as it might only have been.”¹⁸² The point being, the idea of return is futile but wistfully contemplating what “might only have been” occupies much of Gibbs's early oeuvre. Depending upon one's philosophical perspective, such reflection is arguably hopeless.

¹⁸⁰ Starobinski, “Nostalgia,” 103.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Hemmings, “A Taste of Nostalgia,” 57.

By default, nostalgia always involves melancholy because of its orientation—looking backward to a place we can no longer visit. Hemmings points out, it is no coincidence that the “golden age of children’s literature” closely coincides with the popularity of Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis and theories of regression.¹⁸³ In de la Mare’s previously referenced lecture on the topic of imagination, he describes the source and origin of art and poetry as “the world within.”¹⁸⁴ In a sense, nostalgia’s orientation towards the past works hand in hand with introspection. Contrarily, Modernism favors extrinsic knowledge and experience. “Ann’s Cradle Song” is notably introspective, if not insular, with a lullaby that does its best to shut out the menacing, external world. Some have consequently dismissed Armstrong Gibbs as an introverted composer of escape, a belated Romantic ignorant of the intricacies of modern life.

Sadly, however, Gibbs was well acquainted with the complexities of living and intimately familiar with suffering. (Some of his greatest anguish was yet to come.) As a response, he intentionally cultivated an aesthetic marked by simplicity which, on a certain level, became a means of addressing his childhood trauma. That is not the same as being a naïve composer, which he was not. Though, it certainly is a complicated matter since nostalgia—as a stylistic technique—is a dead end of sorts. For the composer who yearns for the child’s innocence and “imaginative insight and yet must remain both an adult and

¹⁸³ Ibid., 55.

¹⁸⁴ De la Mare, “Intellectual Imagination,” 13.

a conscious artist, it is devastating.”¹⁸⁵ Either one must submit to a completely “childlike vision and form of musicmaking or “admit one’s failure as a mature artist.”¹⁸⁶

In upcoming years, Gibbs’s nostalgic simplicity was often interpreted as a shortcoming—if not a lack of skill—when viewed through the lens of modern sensibilities. By the 1930s, Gibbs was well attuned to nostalgia’s drawbacks, both as it concerned his status as an English composer, and on a deeply personal level. That is to say, despite nostalgia’s immediate appeal, there is no turning back the clock—no utopia in the past. In the case of Walter de la Mare’s work, contemporary critic Shane McCorristine explains, youth is basically a place “from which the child is called away, sometimes naturally, sometimes surreptitiously, sometimes traumatically, but always with the hope of a return someday.”¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, childhood as the chief end to which we all travel is an impossibility. Even if the preservation of childhood were attainable, it comes at a cost. For *Peter Pan*, for example, it meant isolation from the Darling family.¹⁸⁸

Armstrong Gibbs’s family has described him as a generous, loyal, “warm and affectionate man,” who was also “headstrong” with an “explosive temper” when it came to his aesthetic ideals.¹⁸⁹ One easily observes this latter quality from the passion and

¹⁸⁵ Martha Bremser, “The Voice of Solitude: The Children’s Verse of Walter de la Mare,” *Children’s Literature* 21 (1993): 84.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Shane McCorristine, “The Ghostly Place of Children and Childhood in the Short Fiction of Walter de la Mare,” *The Lion and the Unicorn* 34, no. 3 (September 2010): 348.

¹⁸⁸ Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song*, 226.

¹⁸⁹ Rust, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” 54.

determination that mark his lectures, articles, and letters devoted to the topic of beauty. Awe, magic, and wonder remain defining features of the art songs written throughout Gibbs's life, even when such traits fell out of favor amidst the growing cynicism of avant-garde movements in literature and art that challenged traditional ways of thinking. In a lecture given during the Second World War, he argues, "To get the best out of this marvelous world in which we live and move and have our being, it is absolutely essential that we regard it with reverence and wonder."¹⁹⁰

However, nostalgia—in the sense of wistful pining—no longer bore Gibbs any worthwhile fruit in the music of his middle and late career. Before 1933, most of his songs employed lyrics by de la Mare; whereas, afterward, setting de la Mare's poetry became the exception. Despite the unpopularity of Gibbs's ideas, in the latter half of the 1930s through the remainder of his life, he spoke more and more adamantly about the hope that "art and Christianity" afford, "which, to me, are but two facets of the same Ultimate Reality."¹⁹¹ Gibbs's awe and wonderment increasingly had less to do with an introspective or past-oriented belief in the salvific role of childhood. Instead, the "reverence and wonder" found in Gibbs's musical language closely mirror his growing hope, confidence, and desire for the future Paradise portrayed in the Christian scriptures. A "Heaven," that English author and lay theologian C.S. Lewis explains, "once attained will work backwards and turn even agony into a glory."¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Gibbs, "Leisure and the Fine Arts," 4.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹² C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946), 64.

CHAPTER 4

A MATURING COMPOSER: FROM *CROSSINGS* TO THE CROSS

Crossings—or crossroads of many kinds—are an exceptionally fitting metaphor for Armstrong Gibbs’s life. For instance, the fairy play *Crossings* radically transformed the trajectory of his vocation from schoolteacher to composer, and as the latter, he stood at England’s harried “crossings” of late Romanticism and Modernism. Shortly after the success of the play, Armstrong and his wife Honor built a house they named Crossings. True to its name, their home became a bustling intersection of artistic activity between the two wars, and here, the hospitable family crossed paths with neighbors, musicians, and authors who became dear friends. This close-knit, “extended family” came to define Gibbs’s career. Moreover, Gibbs’s developing Christianity became the most significant *cross-ing* in his life as it connected him to a sense of purpose and hope, even—and perhaps more significantly—in the wake of his son’s tragic death in the Second World War. This chapter will explore Gibbs’s maturation as an artist from his “big break” with *Crossings* to his embracing of the Christian cross in his midlife, and it will culminate with an analysis of “The Splendour Falls,” written at the height of the Second War.

The Royal College of Music

In September of 1919, following the success of *Crossings*, Armstrong Gibbs began his studies at the Royal College of Music, commuting to London three times a week from his small home in Danbury, a village three miles from his birthplace.¹⁹³ His

¹⁹³ Rust, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” 49.

lessons included composition with Ralph Vaughan Williams and conducting and score-reading with Adrian Boult.¹⁹⁴ Gibbs, his wife Honor, and baby son David were Vaughan Williams's neighbors for a season. They all "shared each other's company, went for motoring trips around the Essex lanes in [Gibbs's] car," and together strolled the English countryside.¹⁹⁵ When the Gibbises built Crossings, they hosted an even greater array of visitors, and their home was soon known for its open door. The family—including daughter Ann, born in 1922—lived there until the outbreak of World War II.

Vaughan Williams's final report for his student at the RCM favorably hailed Gibbs as "a finished composer." This assertion tickled Gibbs, who later wrote, "I could but hope he did not mean one half of the double entendre."¹⁹⁶ Hancock-Child counters Gibbs's self-deprecating joke in her brief biography: "Finished as a composer he certainly was not. At the age of 30, his career was only just beginning...."¹⁹⁷ Hugh Allen, the director of the RCM, observed Gibbs's strengths as both a composer and teacher and, upon his graduating, invited Gibbs to join the faculty. Gibbs held a part-time position at the school from 1921–39, and his duties brought him in contact with some of the outstanding figures of the English music scene, including his hero, Edward Elgar.¹⁹⁸

Armstrong Gibbs gained wide recognition during this early period of his music career. He was a prolific composer, and in addition to writing art songs, he supplied

¹⁹⁴ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 20.

¹⁹⁵ Rust, "Cecil Armstrong Gibbs," 49.

¹⁹⁶ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 98.

¹⁹⁷ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 20.

¹⁹⁸ Rust, "Cecil Armstrong Gibbs," 52.

music for the stage, sacred works, symphonies, orchestral suites, and a substantial amount of chamber music.¹⁹⁹ His accomplishments from the 1920s also include a long account of awards and consistent air time on the British Broadcasting Corporation. He conducted much of his work in London's leading venues, and his songs were championed by many of Britain's esteemed singers, among them Dorothy Moulton, Gladys Moger, Anne Thursfield, and Steuart Wilson.²⁰⁰

Amateur Music Making and The Festival Movement

Regardless of his burgeoning prestige, much of Gibbs's enthusiasm centered around amateur music making, which often happened behind the scenes. Back home, he founded the Danbury Choral Society which eventually took part in the Essex Musical Association Festivals in Chelmsford. This exposure to the "Festival Movement" had a lifelong impact on his vocation, and he became an adjudicator and ultimately Vice-President of the National Federation of Music Festivals. Gibbs's proud association with the organization spanned over 30 years.²⁰¹ From there on followed a particularly busy life touring the country, conducting, and composing music for various musicians from students to eminent professionals.²⁰² On numerous occasions, Gibbs lamented the artistic "developments" of his day that were "confined to the privileged few," characterized by

¹⁹⁹ "About Armstrong Gibbs," The Armstrong Gibbs Society, accessed 5 May 2021, <https://armstronggibbs.com/life-and-work/>.

²⁰⁰ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 21.

²⁰¹ Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 93.

²⁰² Gibbs Society website.

“much snobbery” and entirely disconnected from the “solid mass of the public.”²⁰³

Gibbs’s festival work and preoccupation with accessibility for the lay-musician often resulted in criticism from the musical elite to which he argued:

There is a type of professional highbrow which professes to regard amateurs as “lowbrows” and their musical opinions as valueless. With this view I cordially disagree. These amateurs are the salt of the musical earth. Without them music-making in this country would almost cease to exist.²⁰⁴

In a short memoir, Gibbs’s daughter Ann reflects on these years: “[Gibbs] used his influence to persuade many well-known artists to appear as soloists [with the amateur choir in Danbury], and sometimes his students came to try their wings.... On one occasion the young Michael Tippett came to deputise as conductor.”²⁰⁵ Other talented visitors to the choir’s annual concerts included Hugh Bean, Jack Brymer, Elsie Suddaby, and Astra Desmond.²⁰⁶ In a letter to Ann, close family friend and baritone Keith Falkner recalls “warm summer evenings, tennis, strawberries from the garden, walking home, and listening to the nightingales. The concerts were always in the festival spirit. A good time was had by all.”²⁰⁷ Gibbs similarly describes “these as happy and unforgettable days.”²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 226.

²⁰⁴ C. Armstrong Gibbs, *The Festival Movement* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1946), 44.

²⁰⁵ Rust, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” 50.

²⁰⁶ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 22.

²⁰⁷ Letter from Keith Falkner to Ann Rust, 23 January 1989, B-P Archive.

²⁰⁸ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 14.

Cricket

Even with a frantic schedule of music responsibilities, let alone his completing a Doctorate of Music at Cambridge (1931), Gibbs managed to carve out time for his favorite recreation—cricket. Such a topic may seem far afield for a composer’s biography; however, Gibbs approached the sport with the same time and zeal as he did music making. Cricket matches occupied much of the Gibbises’ family and community life. Although his teaching regularly brought him to London, he went out of his way to avoid the pompous, hobnobbing, social aspects of the city’s music scene—even to the point of being unrecognized at his concerts. Consequently, cricket allowed him more meaningful engagement with artists and intellectuals. As Hancock-Child writes, “The cricket was enthusiastic, amateur and often gloriously mediocre, but the socializing was scintillating” and all marked by exceptional good humor.²⁰⁹ One stanza of the team’s fight song, whose melody was composed by Gibbs, portrays him as:

...Gibbo the Hamstrung,
The Red One, the Ruthless,
His hair flowing free,
Far floating as fire flakes,
The berserker fury
Near bursting his byrnie.²¹⁰

Indeed, Gibbs’s mates teased him about his bright red hair and the fiery temper that matched.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 23.

²¹⁰ Clifford Bax, *The Old Broughtonians Cricket Weeks* (Kensington: Favil Press, 1927).

²¹¹ Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 103.

He played with “The Old Broughtonians,” a team hosted by notable brothers, composer and author Arnold and Clifford Bax, and their games brought him in contact with a litany of England’s *Who’s Who*. One of Gibbs’s favorite memories involved a post-match dinner with the writer, art critic, and Christian academic G.K. Chesterton.²¹² In following years, Gibbs’s array of lectures and writings covering topics from aesthetics to matters of Christianity read—in part—like the prose of Chesterton’s apologetics and art and social criticism.

Gibbs’s Middle Career and The War

As time wore on—particularly nearing the Second War—his music was largely deemed “naïve.” *The New Grove* author and English music critic Roderic Dunnett explains that many composers like Gibbs who worked in the 1920s–30s were “affected or unjustly simply ditched from radio or subsequently concert programs. ... A number—and only a modest number—of Armstrong Gibbs’s works are what might be termed lighter music, often characterized by fanciful or fey titles.”²¹³ The composer was subsequently written off on the whole, an “infuriating process by which music moves on—so that works are only rediscovered ... later as the new ‘modern’ era in turn falls out of fashion.”²¹⁴

²¹² Gibbs, *Common Time*, 147.

²¹³ Roderic Dunnett, “Unjustly Neglected: Armstrong Gibbs’ Re-discovered *Passion According to St. Luke*,” *Classical Music Daily*, May 2017, accessed 4 May 2021, <http://www.mvdaily.com/2017/05/gibbs.htm>.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Armstrong Gibbs's concept of beauty went against the spirit of pessimism that—in his mind—characterized the ultra-moderns' "loss of faith" and search for meaning.²¹⁵ He balked at the "hopeless kind of attitude which informs so much [of their] creative work."²¹⁶ "Beauty is an exploded legend," an RCM student of his once argued within the year preceding Adolf Hitler's invasion of Poland.²¹⁷ "Life is ugly, and we are out to express life."²¹⁸ That quotation from his pupil may seem a mischaracterization of new trends among the arts, yet those sentiments concerned Gibbs throughout his career and largely describe his perception of the cultural changes occurring around him. For Gibbs, the best art is "conceived against a spiritual background" regardless of how "cerebral and clever [it] may be."²¹⁹ Undeniably, he considered modern art and music to be clever, but often, from his vantage point, that was not enough. It was lacking or misguided. By the end of his life, he felt "the younger generation of intellectuals" had "degraded music as an art."²²⁰ This "coarsening and brutalizing of men's minds is the direct consequence of two world wars."²²¹

In November 1943, Gibbs would taste that "ugliness of life" described by his former student. His son David, a captain in the Essex Regiment, died on the front lines in

²¹⁵ Gibbs, "Modern Music," 7.

²¹⁶ Gibbs, "Trend of Modern Music," 8.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 7.

²²⁰ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 225.

²²¹ Ibid.

Italy. By all accounts, Gibbs's relationship with his son had been one of profound warmth and tenderness, and in his own words, the news was a "more than staggering blow."²²² Just a few years prior, he and Honor had thrown David a raucous twenty-first birthday cabaret for which Gibbs penned the words and music for "Grade A." In it, one hears an air of paternal affection, and its refrain jokingly admonishes:

Drink more milk! Drink more milk!
That is the craze we hear about today.
In Piccadilly and Leicester Square
As in days gone by the bars are there,
But instead of Port and lemon and beer
They all sell milk!²²³

In November 1943, however, such merriment must have felt worlds away. Gibbs recounts:

The manner of [David's] death was extraordinary. After a sharp battle there was a lull, and the weather for once was fine and calm. David was holding a section of trench with his company. Everything was quiet except for an occasional shell. He made his dispositions and lying down in the trench, he went to sleep. The Germans fired a shell which hit a haystack some 75 yards away to the left. It was a dud, but it ricocheted off the stack, came down the trench, hit him as he lay and killed him instantly—a million to one chance, indeed, but a wonderful passing for him.²²⁴

"Life often is ugly," Gibbs eventually conceded to his RCM student on the eve of war.²²⁵

"But, life is only ugly when people ... become completely materialistic in outlook.

²²² Ibid., 187.

²²³ Armstrong Gibbs, "Grade A (Drink more milk!)," for David Gibbs's 21st birthday, 1939, unpublished, B-P Archive.

²²⁴ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 177–88.

²²⁵ Gibbs, "Trend of Modern Music," 8.

Beauty is of the Spirit and to deny beauty is to deny the reality of spiritual values and deliberately to choose the way of the beasts that perish.”²²⁶

Beauty and Christian Hope

The “creative spirit” for Gibbs was in many contexts synonymous with the Spirit of the Christian Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy *Spirit*. In 1941, English detective novelist and Christian scholar Dorothy L. Sayers published her ground-breaking theological book, *The Mind of the Maker*. In it, she likens the creative process in art to the nature and work of the Christian Trinity—a concept that profoundly resonated with the composer. In January the following year, Gibbs wrote to the author:

... I have been reading and re-reading your book ‘The Mind of the Maker’ & I am so profoundly grateful to you for having written it So often when I have been reading some deep philosophical work ingeniously expounded I have had the feeling ‘How brilliant and original that is.’ With ‘The Mind of the Maker’ I have felt this very often, but, what is far more important, I have at the same time felt, and it is true as well.²²⁷

Sayers and Gibbs’s letter exchange discusses some of her book’s concepts, such as free will in connection to divine, predestined sovereign will. Gibbs sometimes railed against the Calvinistic leaning Rector of his Danbury Parish.²²⁸ Nonetheless, he loved Sayers’s idea of there being a predestined sense to the music he composed, down to the last phrase, which, in turn, served a larger exigency he would not fully realize until much after the fact. He believed his ability to intuit such things had everything to do with “the

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Letter from Armstrong Gibbs to Dorothy L. Sayers, 10 January 1942, Dorothy L. Sayers Collection, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL.

²²⁸ Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 111.

Creator of the Universe,” who had made Gibbs in His image.²²⁹ In other words—and at the risk of oversimplification—Gibbs understood his creativity as mirroring the Godhead. This is reflected in Gibbs’s developing dogma concerning objective, aesthetic standards—standards that, for him, reflect the attributes of God, “the source of beauty.”²³⁰

Writing to the present author, Armstrong Gibbs’s adult grandson David Rust explains, “As a Christian, I am encouraged by my grandfather’s uncompromising faith in an era when most composers were atheist, agnostic, or exploring other spiritual roots.”²³¹ That is famously true of the composer’s mentor Vaughan Williams, for example. From Gibbs’s writings, lectures, and music written throughout the Second World War, one observes a theological inquisitiveness and Christian fervor as opposed to the spirit of nostalgia that characterizes his earlier songs during the First World War. Suffice it to say, Gibbs adopts an orientation that is now directed toward the future, specifically Heaven—a new way of healing his wounds.

In describing the ordeal of David’s death, Gibbs writes of being “given the strength to meet it, and [being] acutely conscious at the time of a Power outside myself bearing me up and helping me to carry through.”²³² An email to author Lewis Foreman from the late Christopher Kingsley—a church musician and former chairman of the

²²⁹ Gibbs, *Common Time*, 244.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

²³¹ David Rust, email message to author, 19 November 2019.

²³² Gibbs, *Common Time*, 244.

Armstrong Gibbs Society—highlights the significance of the Christmas Carol “Oxen cribbed in barn and byre” from 1943, composed shortly after the tragedy:

... Christmas 1943 must have been a very sad time for him. Gibbs wrote the words himself and the first two verses are very much on the usual facets of Christmas. Mother, babe, heavenly choir, stable, etc. However, the third verse has a different focus:

Saviour Christ, whose love divine
 Brought Thee to Thy bitter tree,
 Make this love on us to shine
 Draw us in its bands to Thee.
 Look with pity on a world
 Torn by misery and strife,
 Let Thy banner be unfurled,
Lead us to eternal life [emphasis added].

It is true that quite a few Christmas carols reflect on the crucifixion and some on the parlous stage of the world ... but believing that an artist might be led to express his grief in his art form, whatever it might be, I wonder if that is what is behind this carol. The last two lines seem to indicate a measure of stoicism.²³³

This is not to say, Armstrong Gibbs suddenly had a radical change of heart and started writing nothing but sacred music. That would be too pat. Most of his art songs are secular, but the fantastical magic in the later ones hints at something more divine. In them, there is hope in the cross and “eternal life” that he referenced in his carol.

AN ANALYSIS OF “THE SPLENDOUR FALLS”

In addition to the Christmas carol, Gibbs composed three songs within days of each other shortly after his son’s November 1943 passing. The first is “The Splendour Falls,” a setting of the widely-known poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), which the composer completed on New Year’s Eve 1943. Though the lyrics were penned

²³³ Christopher Kingsley, email message to Lewis Foreman, 20 May 2010, quoted in Aries and Foreman, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 295–96.

in the nineteenth century, one can imagine the composer feeling they had been written for his present circumstances. Gibbs intimately wove his son's death into a score that evokes considerable grief and agony to a degree that had never been heard in his songs before—sentiments far-off from the nostalgia expressed in “Ann's Cradle Song.” Gibbs's passionate elegy is laden with lament, and yet, it is not without hope. The poem contemplates eternity through the metaphor of “echoes” that are left behind when a soul passes from this world—“echoes [that] grow forever and forever.” In the music, one can hear this seeming contradiction related to death and eternity. Sparse, barren intervals and dissonant chords convey desolation, while rich consonant sonorities arouse a kind of magical euphoria. These juxtapositions practically step on top of each other, and at times, it is almost impossible to separate one from the other. Gibbs's “The Splendour Falls” simultaneously expresses the emptiness of death and the glory of eternity.

Earlier in the century, Tennyson's “The Splendour Falls” had inspired lush settings by Vaughan Williams (1905) and Frederick Delius (1923), among many others. The songs were likely familiar to Gibbs. In light of the war, Benjamin Britten must have shared Gibbs's connection to the poem as he also used it in the third movement for *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings*. Britten's work had premiered only a few months prior at London's Wigmore Hall, 15 October 1943. It is highly unlikely that Gibbs would have heard it before writing his version since he was away from London at the time, and the *Serenade* was not recorded or broadcast until April of 1944.²³⁴ Neither composer had much admiration for the other, and the two settings are very different.²³⁵ One wonders if,

²³⁴ Nicholas Clark, Librarian, B-P Archive, email message to author, 1 March 2021.

in small part, news of Britten's work provoked Gibbs's setting as the latter composer may have wanted to prove he was more attuned to Tennyson's aesthetic sensibilities. After all, the poet's powerful visual imagery had earned him a place among the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood's list of admired "Immortals"—a nineteenth-century artistic movement with which Gibbs was simpatico.²³⁶ Regardless, Gibbs's major impetus certainly had to do with his recent loss.

The protagonist of Tennyson's text finds himself in a landscape of absolute splendor with snowcapped mountains, castle walls, and lakes all illuminated by the shifting sunlight. Surely Gibbs must have garnered some insight from the majestic scenery of North West England's Lakeland, where he and Honor spent the war years.²³⁷ The poem's setting is a magical place where the veil between worlds is particularly thin.

²³⁵ In a late lecture on modern music Gibbs writes, "Quite recently I was talking about Britten to a friend of mine who knows him intimately. I said I find Britten's work highly irritating. Here is a young man of quite exceptional gifts. His technical mastery is breath-taking. But when I listen to his music I have two feelings. First that he would be writing better and deeper music if his path to success had not been so easy and so short. Secondly that time and again he develops a passage which promises a climax of surpassing beauty and originality and then just as he arrives at the moment when that beauty should flower, he tears the whole thing to pieces by some ghastly and flippant cacophony. 'Ah well, you see' replied my friend, 'the trouble with Ben is he's always been terrified of his emotions.'" Gibbs, "Modern Music," 11, B-P Archive.

In diary entries from his time at RCM—decades earlier—Britten expresses delight in his mother's performance of Gibbs's "To One Who Passed Whistling," (9 January 1932). However, he also describes Gibbs's comic opera *The Blue Peter* as "awful tripe" (11 December 1931) and some of the string quartets as "competent [but] dull as ditchwater, v[ery] unoriginal." *Journeying Boy: The Diaries of the Young Benjamin Britten, 1928–1938*, ed. John Evans, London: Faber and Faber, 2009, 140.

²³⁶ Dinah Roe, "The Pre-Raphaelites," British Library website, 15 May 2014, accessed 6 May 2021, <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-pre-raphaelites#>.

²³⁷ Gibbs's Essex home Crossings had been requisitioned as a hospital. Gibbs Society Website.

It is a borderland or entryway into Elfland where one can hear the echoes of bugles, and the beauty is so immense it leaves the poet with an ineffable ache.

From its opening bars, the song creates simultaneous rapture and raw, visceral angst through two alternating motives. The first—heard in m. 1—is harmonically consonant while the second—in m. 2—is more turbulent (Figure 14).

The image shows a musical score for the first four measures of "The Splendour Falls." The score is for VOICE and PIANO. The tempo is "Con moto" with a quarter note equal to about 69. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score shows four measures. The first measure is labeled "strong" and features a C minor triad. The second measure is labeled "weak" and features a French sixth chord (F#6). The third measure is labeled "etc." with an arrow pointing to the right. The fourth measure is labeled "C minor". Red annotations include circles around the notes in the second measure and arrows pointing to the notes in the third measure.

Figure 14. “The Splendour Falls,” mm. 1–4.

Specifically, motive 1 begins with a bold and stable C-minor triad followed by arpeggiated leaps of a perfect fifth and fourth that propel it to the downbeat of m. 2 and the start of the second motive—a jarring, incomplete French-sixth sonority. This augmented chord is quickly made complete with the addition of a raised-sixth B natural in the bass line. In turn, the bass voice proceeds with a nonharmonic E flat and consonant G that anticipate the return of the opening C-minor motive, and the cycle continues. This energetic, measure-by-measure pairing of strong and weak bars permeates much of the selection with an almost relentless harmonic rhythm and drive.

The instability of m. 2 can also be understood as a collection of neighbor tones to the first measure’s C-minor triad, which greatly increases the second motive’s volatility

(Figure 15). For example, the D flat of m. 2 is an upper chromatic neighbor to the previous root C; F is the upper neighbor to E flat; and B natural is the leading tone. In other words, the C has two neighbors, and the E flat has one.

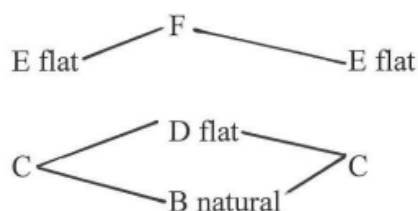


Figure 15. Neighbor tones in mm. 1–3 of “The Splendour Falls.”

This is especially interesting because it draws attention to the fact that E flat is left out of the arpeggiated half of the first motive (Figure 14). For example, Gibbs could have easily replaced the first measure’s sixteenth-note C with the E-flat third, in which case, the agitating F of m. 2 would stand out less. Instead, he makes a point to sound a hollow open fifth in the first bar. Here that interval expresses a void or emptiness aroused by death, and hollow sonorities occur throughout the following pages. Such intervals are often adjacent to notably full chords, concurrently portraying the sting of death *and* the wonder of Elfland.

The pitches of this entire second measure collectively comprise a whole-tone pentachord: B—D flat—E flat—F—G. This instability—or something like it—occurs during every even-numbered measure for the bulk of the poem’s first stanza (mm. 1–20), with one exception, a dominant seventh chord in m. 14. Even here, however, the A-flat root is an unsettling tritone away from the previous measure’s D-major triad. During the

first eight bars, the dissonant measures are dependably flanked by a solid, tonic C minor sonority in all the odd-numbered bars. After a modulation to E-flat Major, the corresponding m. 10 sounds a complementary set of whole tones: B flat—C—D—F flat—G flat. Compare m. 2 with m. 10 in Figure 16.

Con moto ♩ about 69

VOICE

PIANO

C minor *B D^b E^b F G* *C minor*

5 The splen-dour falls on cas - tle walls And snow - y - sum-mits old in

9 *E^b major* *B^b C D F^b G^b* *E^b major*

sto - ry: The long light shakes a - cross the lakes, And the wild.....

Figure 16. “The Splendour Falls,” mm. 1–12.

This motivic formula and its pairing of strong and weak measures return for the latter half of Tennyson's second stanza over mm. 32–44, and throughout the third, mm. 48–60. To be fair, the song's opening two motives do not always coordinate back to back. In such instances, Gibbs exclusively uses a succession or sequence of just one of the two motives (Figure 17). Additionally, the composer sometimes fills bars with fragments of both motives, as in mm. 24–25 of Figure 18.

63 15

ver. *Blow, bugle, blow,*

motive 1 *motive repeated* *repeated*

Figure 17. “The Splendour Falls,” mm. 63–66.

When the protagonist enjoins the bugle to “blow [and] set the wild echoes flying,” it becomes clear, these motives have been the clashing of horn calls ever since the song's beginning (Figure 18).

21 *p rall* *più p* *pp Tempo I*
 dy-ing, dy-ing, dy-ing.....
p rall *più p* *pp*
 horn call fragments

25 *p*
 O hark, O hear,..... how thin and clear, And
f *p*

Figure 18. “The Splendour Falls,” mm. 1–12.

Gibbs’s setting is entirely through-composed except for a slightly changing refrain at the end of each stanza. Consequently, after the tighter-knit first page, and whenever these motives work in tandem, they organically meander through a variety of tonal centers every two measures as though they have a mind of their own. This is most obvious in mm. 32–44 (Figure 19). Outside the refrain, their harmonic paths are not repeated with any kind of obvious plan. Like the raging war, or the inevitability of death, they incessantly forge ahead—sometimes major or minor, occasionally forte or piano. At times, the strong downbeat triad of the paired measures is replaced with a less-stable half-diminished seventh chord; however, this mainly happens during the refrain as in mm. 38, 42, and 44. The first half of this section, contained in Figure 19, functions as a precarious middle to the piece.

29
thin-ner, clear-er, far-ther go-ing! O sweet and far from cliff and

33
mf scar The horns of Elf-land faint-ly blow - ing! *p*

38
f Blow, let us hear the pur-ple glens re-

43
mp largamete - ply - ing. *p rall.* Blow, bu-gle, an - swer, ech-oes, dy-ing,
mp largamente *p rall.*

F# minor

A major Bb minor

Fø7 C minor Cø7

Bbø7

Figure 19. "The Splendour Falls," mm. 29–46.

The repeated refrain serves as a harmonic anchor to it all, yet, ironically, it is among the song's least stable portions. Closely observe mm. 15–23 (Figure 20); 40–48; or 65–76. Between bookends of C minor triads, as in m. 15 and m. 23, the refrain's chromatically descending vocal line—C chromatic scale—conveys the anguish of death in the fashion of Henry Purcell's renowned basso ostinato from "When I am laid in earth." Of course, that is not to mention countless other composers who do the same.

The image shows a musical score for three systems of music, numbered 12, 17, and 21. The key signature is C minor (three flats). The score includes vocal lines and piano accompaniment. Handwritten red annotations highlight specific features:

- System 1 (mm. 13-16):** The word "Refrain" is written in red above the vocal line. The notes C and B \flat in the vocal line are circled in red. The piano accompaniment has a C minor triad (C, E \flat , G \flat) circled in red.
- System 2 (mm. 17-20):** The notes B \flat , A \natural , A \flat , and G in the vocal line are circled in red. The piano accompaniment has a G triad (G, B \flat , D \flat) circled in red.
- System 3 (mm. 21-24):** The note C in the vocal line is circled in red. The piano accompaniment has a C minor triad (C, E \flat , G \flat) circled in red.

Performance markings include *mf largamente*, *p rall*, *più p*, and *pp Tempo I*.

Figure 20. "The Splendour Falls," mm. 13–24.

Additionally, the poem addresses the dying echoes of the bugle which are clearly a metaphor for humanity's mortality, made obvious with a couple falling lament motives that set the word "dying." These lilting fifths are perfectly "echoe[d]," as explained in the text of mm. 20–22 (Figure 21).

The image shows a musical score for the piece "The Splendour Falls," measures 21 through 24. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line begins in measure 21 with the lyrics "dy-ing," and continues through measure 24 with "dy-ing, dy-ing, dy-ing...". The piano accompaniment consists of a right-hand part and a left-hand part. The right-hand part has a melodic line with a falling fifth interval in measures 21 and 22, which is circled in red. The left-hand part has a bass line with a rising fifth interval in measures 21 and 22, also circled in red. Red arrows point from the vocal line to the piano accompaniment, indicating the relationship between the two. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p rall.*, *più p*, and *pp Tempo I*. The piano part ends with a *pp* marking in measure 24.

Figure 21. "The Splendour Falls," mm. 21–24.

There are countless more examples of text painting throughout the piece. For example, note the “splendour” that “falls” in mm. 5-6; the “snowy summit” with its steep precipice in mm. 7-8 (Figure 22); and the “wild cataract” of mm. 13-14 that “leaps in glory” (Figure 23).

Figure 22. “The Splendour Falls,” mm. 5–8.

Figure 23. “The Splendour Falls,” mm. 13–14.

The most interesting image involves the song’s contrasting accompaniment for the second, middle stanza that concerns the “thin and clear ... horns of Elfland faintly

blowing.” This is apparent in the aforementioned m. 24 of Figure 18. The poet’s mundane parlous world bumps against one that is transcendent. Therefore, the piano texture breaks from its dense patterns and is surprisingly sparse. The score is marked *pianissimo* and later *piano*, and the bugles’ fourths and fifths delicately bound in unison as though they are sounding off in the distance. Fragments of the song’s first motive roll for a full measure before a homophonic horn chorus sounds a major third (built on a chromatic G flat) followed by an open fifth in mm. 24–25. The roots of each share a tritone relationship that resolves up, evoking the ethereal nature of Elfland that the protagonist hears spilling into his earth. Humans are mortal while elves live forever, and in Gibbs’s hands, their supernatural horns climb by half-step in contrast to the somber, descending refrain. For example, the fragments of m. 24 are repeated a half-step higher in m. 31.

This juxtaposition between mortal and enchanted realms is at the core of the poem’s following and final stanza that more poignantly explores the paradox of death and eternity. Barring the distant Elfland, Tennyson paints a paling landscape. Even the valley’s turning “purple” implies the setting sun. As if the metaphor were not obvious before, the author now personifies the fading bugles with lines that read, “O love, they die in yon rich sky, | They faint on hill or field or river.”

David Gibbs’s recent death in the war, one among hundreds of thousands, certainly impacted his father’s interpretation of the text. In such a context, these lyrics that address the “sky,” “field,” and “river” conjure a devastating scene of fallen men from the air force, army, and navy. Likewise, when the protagonist addresses “love” in Figure 24, Gibbs must envision his son. The vocal melody surges an octave to the baritone’s

highest note of the score marked fortissimo. The large interval conveys immense affection, and the climax is made all the more compelling given the piano's tonal shift to C major in mm. 48–50.

Figure 24. “The Splendour Falls,” mm. 47–50.

Furthermore, m. 49’s augmented major seventh C chord is quite literally an expanded sonority. As heard from the song’s beginning, augmented chords abound. In her analysis of Gibbs’s earlier work, Hancock-Child argues, “He associates the augmented chord with other-worldly affairs, eg, the fairy horns in *Titania*.”²³⁸ Does this kind of enlargement communicate growing love, depth of emotion, and rapture? Or is this dissonance that is more becoming of death, particularly as such sounds punctuate the word “die” in m. 51? In the case of Gibbs’s 1934, sensual dreamscape *Titania*, the augmented harmonies are just as enigmatic, and that seems to be the very point—

²³⁸ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 46.

heightened uncertainty. Therein lies the mystery and wonder of Gibbs's "The Splendour Falls."

"Our echoes roll from soul to soul," concludes the final stanza, "and *grow* for ever and for ever" [emphasis added]. In other words, "our echoes" do not die like the bugles'; rather, they connect people in a way that points beyond mere, earthly physical experience. In light of Gibbs's worldview and the songs he wrote only a few days after this one, he conceptualizes something even more profound than memories and the legacy David had left behind. That is definitely part of it, but here Tennyson addresses the concept of eternity, or at least an idea that "grow[s] for ever."

"The Splendour Falls" has all the characteristic magic of Gibbs's early work right down to the wild imagining of Elfland. However, it feels less naïve than Gibbs's vintage fairytale music as it charts new territory—death and bereavement. One might banter, this is Gibbs on steroids. The stakes are higher. Does he really believe in the mythology of the poem? Yes, in a sense, because the magic points to a transcendence beyond the metaphors, which for Gibbs is tangible and real.

Gibbs's Christian worldview increasingly became the metanarrative through which he understood and told all other stories. Moreover, musical creativity became a means of his participation in the larger story of divine creation. Fantasy author J.R.R. Tolkien calls this the act of "sub-creation." In his lecture "On Fairy Stories," delivered in 1939 following the success of *The Hobbit*, he says, "Fantasy can ... be explained as a sudden glimpse of the underlying reality of truth. It is not only a 'consolation' for the

sorrow of this world, but a satisfaction, and an answer to that question, ‘Is it true?’”²³⁹ Along these lines, “The Splendour Falls” offers “a brief vision that the answer may be greater—it may be a far-off gleam or echo of evengelium [the Christian Gospel] in the real world.”²⁴⁰ For Gibbs, it *is* true. Tennyson’s world (what Tolkien calls a “secondary world”) has everything to do with Gibbs’s firm belief in the absolute eternal world of Heaven. As he explained to his daughter in a letter dated 11 November 1943, “We can leave [David] in God’s hands knowing that for him all will be well.”²⁴¹

Both David’s mortality and everlasting wellbeing are equally present in the remaining bars of “The Splendour Falls,” where this ambiguous tension prevails. Put another way, Gibbs’s conclusion is puzzling as it is entirely mournful *or* hopeful—or equally both—depending upon one’s interpretation. For example, it is interesting that the concluding vocal line departs from a formula established in the previous refrains. The lament motives of mm. 71 and 72 are now descending fourths instead of fifths, and they are set higher than they had been before. Here they sound less ominous and more palatable in the baritone’s higher tessitura. This alteration creates the opportunity for a more compelling ending as the melody descends from the dominant to tonic scale degrees on the last word, “dying” (Figure 25).

²³⁹ J.R.R. Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories” (Andrew Lang Lecture, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, 8 March 1939), 35, accessed 27 May 2021, <https://coolcalvary.files.wordpress.com/2018/10/on-fairy-stories1.pdf>.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Letter from Armstrong Gibbs to daughter Ann Gibbs, 11 November 1943, quoted in Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 142.

Figure 25. “The Splendour Falls,” mm. 71–76.

This strong melodic motion offers greater resolution than it had in preceding refrains, and it hints at a perfect authentic cadence. On the other hand, without any accompaniment in m. 73, the singer’s line is uncomfortably transparent and disturbingly empty.

Remarkably, this gut-wrenching goodbye is met with full assurance when, for the first time, the song’s opening motive breaks character and does not resolve down with its predictable gravitas. Instead, it reaches toward Heaven via the score’s highest and final pitch—a celestial sounding G6, and the song ends quite literally on a “note of hope.” To be clear, this is not a superficial hope in the sense of “wishful thinking. If that were the case, Gibbs’s seemingly misplaced G would sound trite. Instead, it is intentionally peaceful, marked pianissimo in the piano’s delicate register. Its subtle but profound presence is just enough to encourage the listener that death—though difficult—is not the end. The concluding ascension displays Armstrong Gibbs’s flourishing belief in the “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” outlined by the apostle Peter in 1 Peter 1:3 (English Standard Version).

CHAPTER 5

TWO REDISCOVERED SONGS: “BEFORE SLEEPING” AND “QUIET CONSCIENCE”

For Armstrong Gibbs, the year 1944 began in turmoil since his son David had just died in the front line trenches in Italy. In response, he composed three songs—three weighty “goodbyes”—within a week spanning New Year’s Eve and Epiphany. These are “The Splendour Falls,” “Before Sleeping,” and “Quiet Conscience,” each dedicated to family friend and British baritone Keith Falkner. As a pilot in the First War and a Commanding Officer during the Second, Falkner must have felt a personal connection to this intimate repertoire that wrestles with the pain of loss. “The Splendour Falls” has been recorded at least twice, but the latter songs were never published. They were known to have been written, but they “appear[ed] to be lost” until I found them in the course of my research.²⁴² After the success of *Crossings*, Gibbs never struggled to publish his work, even when his popularity waned. In fact, he was a prolific composer who published almost everything he ever left a record of having written.²⁴³ In this regard, “Before Sleeping” and “Quiet Conscience” are an anomaly. I wonder if these songs were simply too personal for Gibbs to share more broadly. Their overall aesthetic diverges from his earlier work, and the songs subsequently tell a lesser-known part of Gibbs’s story and

²⁴² The “Catalog of Works by Armstrong Gibbs” includes all compositions known to have been written by him. First compiled by daughter Ann and husband Lyndon Rust in January 1994; it was revised in 1997. The present version has been further revised by Michael Pilkington in 2006 and 2013. It is published on The Armstrong Gibbs Society website, and in: Angela Aries and Lewis Foreman, *Armstrong Gibbs: A Countryman Born and Bred* (UK: EM Publishing, 2014), 311–87.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 311.

music. Here the composer is at his most vulnerable, yet he finds hope in a Savior who also suffered.

“Before Sleeping” and “Quiet Conscience” are not among Gibbs’s archives of manuscripts at the Britten-Pears Library. As it turns out, the composer gave the original—and perhaps only—copies to Falkner. After his service in the Royal Air Force, Falkner moved to the States in 1950 to open and develop the voice department at Cornell University.²⁴⁴ There the scores now reside as part of the music library’s Falkner collection.²⁴⁵

Falkner’s relationship with Gibbs dates back to the 1920s and their playing cricket together with the Bax brothers and The Old Broughtonians. At the end of her life, Gibbs’s daughter Ann vividly recalled these years and her childhood at Crossings as filled with musical activity, fun, and entertainment. “Many of Father’s musical friends came to stay and often to sing at Danbury Choral Concerts—Keith Falkner and his wife Christabel”²⁴⁶ Ann remembers lying in bed and listening while musicians rehearsed downstairs before the concerts.²⁴⁷ “And if I was lucky they came up to say good night—

²⁴⁴ Keith Falkner, BBC interview by Richard Baker, *Comparing Notes*, 1991.

²⁴⁵ C. Armstrong Gibbs, “Before Sleeping” (1944), Manuscript, Music Library Locked Press (Reference Desk) ML96.G442 B4; and “Quiet Conscience” (1944), Manuscript, Music Library Locked Press (Reference Desk) ML96.G442 Q6, Sidney Cox Library of Music and Dance, Cornell university Library, Ithaca, NY.

²⁴⁶ Notes to author Angela Aries (2002) recorded in *Armstrong Gibbs*, 171.

²⁴⁷ Rust, “Cecil Armstrong Gibbs,” 50.

Keith and Chris were great favourites.”²⁴⁸ Somehow, it seems fitting that these newly rediscovered songs spent the past century in the Falkners’ safekeeping.

AN ANALYSIS OF “BEFORE SLEEPING”

“Before Sleeping” (4 January 1944) is exceptionally tender compared to the bombast of its older sibling “The Splendour Falls” (31 December 1943), and it is less esoteric in terms of its connection to death. Its lyrics conclude, “And if I die before I wake, I pray that Christ my soul will take.” This anonymous blessing is a nursery rhyme from at least the early seventeenth century.²⁴⁹ The first stanza reads:

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on.
Before I lay me down to sleep
I give my soul to Christ to keep.

At the risk of overromanticizing, one wonders whether Gibbs may have prayed these words with his young son David as part of a bedtime routine. Gibbs’s setting continues for three more stanzas.²⁵⁰

The song’s childlike qualities evoke the Gibbs of prior decades, but “Before Sleeping” has nothing to do with nostalgia. Rather, its restraint has more to do with a

²⁴⁸ Notes to Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 171.

²⁴⁹ It has a Round Folk Song Index number of 1704, “English Folk Dance & Song Society,” Vaughan Williams Memorial Library, last modified 7 May 2021, accessed 10 May 2021, <https://www.vwml.org/>.

²⁵⁰ Biographer Angela Aries, a former member of the Lingwood Consort in Danbury, explains Gibbs also wrote a four-part version of the prayer for the Danbury Choir’s “annual concert in 1947. ... It had an immediate impact and became a firm favourite in the village.” Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 148. She herself has sung the choral version. However, other than its lyrics, the two settings share very little in common.

seeming simplicity akin to sprezzatura, or the “art that conceals art.”²⁵¹ Its elementary words and melodies hide a great deal of harmonic complexity. Like the first stanza of “Ann’s Cradle Song,” Gibbs’s “Before Sleeping” basks in harmonic ambiguity and ranks among his most loose-knit songs. Its tonality constantly wanders, and its chords often simultaneously function in more than one key. In it, one hears a father emotionally processing the tragic death of his son, transitioning back and forth between woe, hope, and assurance, just as the harmony and lyrics do the same.

From the song’s opening, two-measure harmonic wedge, the composer establishes musical uncertainty. On the one hand, one might assume a tonal center of F major. That is based upon the opening tonic chord—the center of the wedge and the same triad with which the piece concludes. The beginning vocal line similarly outlines its own melodic wedges in mm. 3–4 and mm. 5–6 built around the F-tonic scale degree. Furthermore, halfway through the vocalist’s first phrase, the accompaniment suggests an F-major V-I chord progression in mm. 4–5 (Figure 26).

²⁵¹ Nigel Fortune. “Sprezzatura.” *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 10 May 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.26468>.

Anon. C. Armstrong Gibbs

Andante $\text{♩} = 60$

Mat - thew, Mark, Luke and John, Bless the bed that I lie on,

p

p

F Major:

V

I

Figure 26. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 1–6.

However, this very same system just as convincingly affirms the relative key of D minor. The confusion begins as soon as the latter half of the very first beat with the F-major triad’s added sixth. The added C-sharp leading tone in the second measure indicates a D-minor V-I chord progression across the bar from m. 2 to m. 3—a tonality confirmed with the downbeat of the fourth measure. The pianist’s opening harmonic wedge similarly concludes the song’s first phrase with the same V of D. However, that dominant chord now resolves with a Picardy third to the parallel key of D major, the historic key of confidence and triumph. This new tonality bookends the song’s second phrase and system whose lyrics boldly assert, “I give my soul to Christ to keep.” Note m. 7 and the downbeat of m. 12. This D minor to D major interpretation is apparent in the following Figure 27.

Anon. C. Armstrong Gibbs

Andante $\text{♩} = 60$ *p*

Mat - thew, Mark, Luke and John, Bless the bed that I lie on,

Be - fore I lay me down to sleep I give my soul to Christ to keep.

p Leading Tone L.T.

D minor: V i i V

mp *mf* *mp* *p*

D Major *D Major*

Figure 27. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 1–12.

Which of these two analyses concerning the first system makes more sense? F major or D minor? Here, thinking in a single key is a moot point; or perhaps, that very much *is* the composer’s objective. In other words, is this a somber song, or is it heartening? Arguably, the answer is yes to all of the above.

The thread throughout the song’s ambiguity—one of the few constants—concerns tertian shifts and relationships. For example, in the second system, the raised F-sharp dually functions as a Picardy and a leading tone that directs the ear to G minor. (It is interesting how throughout mm. 7–12, Gibbs toggles between F natural and F sharp.) However, Gibbs equally nudges towards B-flat major. Thus, as before, he exploits the tertian connection between relative keys. Only this time, D major’s aural hold is included

in the mix; consequently, over the course of mm. 7–12, the harmony gravitates to G minor, B-flat major, and D major, as illustrated below.

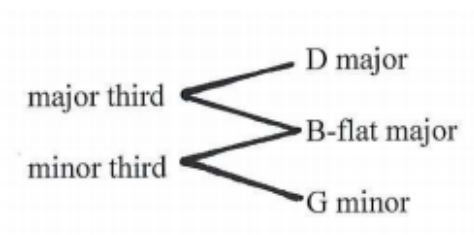


Figure 28. Tertian Relationships in mm. 7–12 of “Before Sleeping.”

At the risk of too much specificity, a closer examination of mm. 7–10 demonstrates these relationships of thirds. Note the staunch D-Major triad at the beginning of this second system. B-flat major is a major third below D, and sure enough, in m. 8 there is a passing dominant seventh chord of B flat. However, it resolves to a G-minor chord, a minor third below B flat. The final chord of m. 8—a passing dominant of F—resolves to another strong D-major triad at the downbeat of m. 9. That is, of course, a minor third below F. At first, this triad appears to affirm the phrase’s D-major tonal center. In light of the following harmony, however, this chord retroactively functions as a V of G minor that does indeed proceed to the tonic G-minor triad. This sequence continues over the bar line of m. 9 to m. 10 with another secondary dominant to tonic chord progression—this one over B-flat major, a minor third above G (Figure 29).

Figure 29. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 7–12.

Granted, this may seem unimportant as the case above unfolds within a matter of seconds. However, these bars serve as a microcosm of tonal function throughout the selection. The same continually happens on the macro scale. As mentioned previously, the song’s second phrase resolves in D major—m. 12. Over the next two mm. 12–13 it transitions an enharmonic major third above to G-flat major for the vocalist’s next phrase. Gibbs has gotten a lot of mileage out of m. 7’s Picardy, which has now become m. 14’s enharmonic tonic scale degree. As before, throughout the third phrase in mm. 14–17, one can hear tonal poles separated by thirds: E-flat minor, G-flat major, and B-flat major (Figure 30).

Figure 30. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 13–18.

Many of Gibbs’s songs are characterized by a certain kind of accessibility as it involves their performers. For better or for worse, a handful of them remains known specifically because of their place in the canon of repertoire for young singers.²⁵² However, that is “not to say,” explains Hancock-Child, “that the songs are easy. ... Anyone apart from the most experienced sight-reader would struggle to pitch many of Gibbs’s melodies accurately on first acquaintance and, even when well learned, the notes still require careful placing.”²⁵³ That is because very few of the composer’s melodies are self-contained and therefore not fitted for singing independently. Unlike his colleague Peter Warlock, who had a very different philosophy, Gibbs’s vocal lines very much depend upon the accompaniment’s underlying chords, without which, the melody appears

²⁵² For example, see “When I Was One-and-Twenty” in Jan Schmidt, *Basics of Singing* (Los Angeles: Thomson/Schirmer, 2013); “The Fields are Full” and “To One Who Passed Whistling Through the Night” in Joan Frey Boytim, *The Second Book of Soprano Solos: Part II* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer, 2004); “The Cherry Tree” in Boytim *The First Book of Mezzo-Soprano/Alto Solos* (Schirmer, 1991); and “Five Eyes” in Boytim, *The First Book of Baritone/Bass Solos: Part III* (Schirmer, 2005).

²⁵³ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 39.

“meandering and lost.”²⁵⁴ (Gibbs was exceptionally familiar with Warlock, whom he greatly admired, having been commissioned by Oxford University Press to arrange several choral settings of his songs.)²⁵⁵

This is particularly true of “Before Sleeping” with all its chromaticism, and pitching the singer’s counter melody in mm. 14–17 is the perfect case in point, as is the corresponding climax of m. 36. Its difficulty, however, should not negate its ingenuity. The pianist takes the helm in these bars, playing the main melody that the singer first presented. Compare the vocal line of mm. 3–6 (Figure 26 or 27) with the piano’s top staff in mm. 14–17 (Figure 31). In the fashion of the very best art songs, the singer and pianist of “Before Sleeping” are equal collaborative partners, and the latter half of this entire page has the aural quality of a true duet.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Before Sleeping" from measures 13 to 18. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staff. The key signature has one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked *mf*. The lyrics are: "Four cor-ners to my bed, Four an-gels there a-spread, Two to foot and". A red circle highlights a specific melodic phrase in the piano's right hand, which is a chromatic counter-melody to the vocal line.

Figure 31. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 13–18.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁵⁵ *Aries*, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 187.

It is a rather ethereal sounding one as the protagonist highlights his four guardian angels in the third system. Naturally, therefore, the piano plays in a higher register. When the singer petitions the same cherubim to “carry me when I’m dead,” he is accompanied by the pianist’s descending right hand that moves stepwise throughout mm. 18–21 (Figure 32). This is not as ominous as the descending, chromatic refrain of “The Splendour Falls;” to the contrary, it is graceful but serves a similar purpose: the piano brings the listener back to earth.

Figure 32. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 13–24.

That is assuming Gibbs has a piano in mind. Unfortunately, the manuscript gives no indication. The songs written a few days before and after this one are clearly for piano and voice, but the texture of “Before Sleeping” may imply an organ accompaniment.

Clues include the contrapuntal writing style, a bass line that has the feel of an organ pedal (sometimes the bass line is spread beyond what comfortably lies in the left hand), swelling harmonic wedges that move by stepwise motion, and suspension chains as in mm. 10–12.

It is also worth noting, these latter measures, with their shift between duple and triple meter, have the dance-like character of sacred Bach arias that often do the same. This similarly happens in mm. 32–34, and—to a certain extent—mm. 43–44. It is no accident that these are the three and only instances in which the lyrics invoke the name “Christ.” The first two examples are obvious as a 3/4 time signature temporarily marks the score. See Figures 33 and 34.

Figure 33 shows a musical score for measures 10–12. The vocal line is in 3/4 time, with a red circle around the first measure and red arcs over the next two. The lyrics are "soul to Christ to keep." The piano accompaniment is in 3/4 time, with dynamics *mf* and *p*.

Figure 34 shows a musical score for measures 32–34. The vocal line is in 3/4 time, with a red circle around the first measure and red arcs over the next two. The lyrics are "Christ, de - liv - er me." The piano accompaniment is in 3/4 time.

Figure 33. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 10–12. Figure 34. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 32–34.

The last example is less clear, but it has a distinct aural quality of two groupings of three quarters (“Christ | my soul”) with the second half of the half-note F in m. 44 acting almost like a suspension into a 2/4 measure. Compare Figure 35 with the previous examples.

Figure 35. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 43–46.

It is striking because this specific grouping is not present before m. 43’s climax. These three moments (mm. 10–12; 32–34; and 43–44) reference the Christian Trinity given the composer’s religious convictions, the spiritual nature of “Before Sleeping,” and the repeated, pronounced numerical connection of “Christ” with the number three.

Regardless of the official instrumentation (piano versus organ), Gibbs surely has the organ and sound world of the Anglican church in mind. Only, this is the church soundscape of his present day, less indebted to the old guard—Charles Villiers Stanford and Hubert Parry—and more to the new. Namely, “Before Sleeping” is an amalgam of styles analogous to the choral anthems of Gibbs’s close friend, musical confidant, church composer, regular Crossings visitor, and RCM colleague Herbert Howells who famously melded church modalities and traditions with popular song idioms.²⁵⁶ British organ scholar Jonathan Clinch says the “smouldering sensuality” of Howells’ “Like as the Hart” (1941) “almost seems more common to a slow jazz number than a setting of a psalm.”²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁵⁷ Jonathan Clinch, ““Beauty Springeth Out of Naught’: Interpreting the Church Music of Herbert Howells,” *British Postgraduate Musicology* 11, (December 2011): 6.

Of his *Missa Sabrinensis* Howells wrote, “the boundary-line between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ has nearly vanished.”²⁵⁸

Gibbs’s song is by no means “smouldering,” but it does have a certain harmonic sensuousness that balances high church reverence with the immanence of a child’s prayer addressed to “Sweet Jesus Christ.” For instance, on the one hand, the composer exploits modal ambiguities as already illustrated by the song’s mediant and submediant relationships with tonic. In turn, sections of the melody have the church-like flavor of the Phrygian scale—i.e., the vocal melody in mm. 7–12 or the right-hand melody in m. 18 through the downbeat of m. 19, yet Gibbs’s chromaticism relies less on Brahms than it does George Gershwin. Colors of jazz evoke a profound level of intimacy between the heavenly Father and the precant of this prayer, not to mention Gibbs and his son David.

In Figure 36, the song’s first half concludes with an imperfect authentic cadence over the bar in mm. 21–22, followed by a brief instrumental interlude that could easily belong to a jazz standard, mm. 22–24. Notice the subtle, ascending chromatic line—C to F natural—in the inner voices woven between dense chords in these measures. In the second half of m. 22, it turns an F-major seventh chord into an augmented triad with an added seventh. The color in the latter half of m. 23 is even more unusual—but a bit more common in the sphere of popular music. What seems to be a German sixth chord actually resolves to a dominant chord with a flat ninth built on D—all over a sustained F-natural pedal.

²⁵⁸ Herbert Howells, program notes for the first London performance of *Missa Sabrinensis* (1956).

19 *f* *p* *mp*

two to head, And four to car-ry me when I'm dead.

IAC

V I V⁴/₃

Figure 36. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 19–24.

Gibbs’s setting contains four stanzas in a kind of modified strophic form: A, B, A, B.’ That is to say, though the first two stanzas are through-composed, they are directly mirrored by stanzas three and four. However, the latter half of the song exaggerates all the ideas presented in the first. By way of illustration, the vocalist’s start to the second half of this piece, mm. 24–25, coincides with a deceptive cadence in the accompaniment. Put another way, the voice moves from dominant to tonic scale degrees while the piano progresses from a dominant to submediant—not tonic—resolution in Figure 37. The relationship between F major and relative D minor is even more confusing than on the first page.

What had been *mp* on the first page is now *f* in mm. 29–34 given the text that reads, “If any danger come to me...” If one imagines this being David’s prayer, we know very well that his life was in jeopardy and did, in fact, end in peril. The underlying harmony remains exactly the same. Compare mm. 7–12 (Figure 27 or 29) with mm. 29–34 (Figure 37). However, the accompaniment has greater vigor with fuller chords that reach an octave lower than they had. Moreover, the bass’s planing parallel fifths in mm.

31–32 add to the overall intensity, contribute to the medieval quality of this Anglican admixture, and recall the habit of Gibbs’s mentor Vaughan Williams (Figure 37).

Figure 37. “Before Sleeping,” mm. 25–36.

The seraphic ethos of the third phrase, mm. 14–17, is magnified at its corresponding moment on the second page, mm. 36–39, when the lyrics no longer entreat “Matthew, Mark, Luke and John” or even the “four angels.” Rather, they call upon the creator and highest of all beings, God himself, using language from the fifteenth chapter of John, “He’s the branch and I’m the flow’r, Pray God send me a happy hour.” Note m. 36 (Figure 37). Accordingly, everything is pitched an enharmonic third higher at this turning point. Otherwise, the chords are spelled and spaced the same as their first-page counterpart.

The prayer's final petition is among the song's softest, most delicate, and certainly most poignant, "And if I die before I wake, I pray that Christ my soul will take." These words are especially apropos because, as Gibbs explains in a letter to friends back home in Danbury, "David had a perfect end—killed instantly by a dud shell *in his sleep*—he's done his job and gone on to fresh jobs on the other side [emphasis added]."²⁵⁹ Unlike the IAC of mm. 21–22, Gibbs punctuates these concluding lyrics with greater confidence by way of a perfect authentic cadence in F major, over the bar of mm. 44–45 (Figure 38).

Figure 38. "Before Sleeping," mm. 43–49.

However, the song does not end here. A four-measure postlude—much like the chromatically thick and vague interlude—offers the most remarkable harmonic enigma of them all with its penultimate pentachord. In a sense, Gibbs is working out his mourning to the final bar, as evidenced by the preceding Figure 38. The G-minor seventh chord of

²⁵⁹ Letter from Armstrong Gibbs to Dick and Gerty Roast, November 1943, quoted in Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 142.

m. 47 proceeds down by half step to m. 48's G-flat dominant with an added A flat. Gibbs is thinking in the language of jazz in which this chord is aptly labeled a tritone substitution. As such, all resolves by half-step to F major in m. 49, including the cryptic A flat which ultimately has an A natural counterpart—surely its reason for existing in the first place. These sounds are as enchanting as they are unexpected. Observe again the bass's shifting parallel fifths that conclusively drop the octave in the last beat. The composer finally shows his cards, as if to say, you can hang your hat here, or perhaps, Gibbs has finally found a bit of peace. Either way, F major gets the last word.

AN ANALYSIS OF “QUIET CONSCIENCE”

“Quiet Conscience” is the last of the three songs Armstrong Gibbs wrote over the New Year's holiday that shortly followed his son's death. Though he continued composing in a variety of formats, he would not write another song for exactly two years.²⁶⁰ He finished composing the piece on the 6th of January, 1944 (Epiphany), and it is similar to its predecessor “Before Sleeping” in that both songs concern slumber. However, its lyrics are more sophisticated than the previous nursery rhyme. They were penned by the seventeenth-century religious poet Francis Quarles whose prose is often compared to that of his illustrious contemporary John Milton.²⁶¹ In this latter poem, rest is more specifically a metaphor for eternal security, and the song functions as an epitaph. The opening lines read:

²⁶⁰ Pilkington, *Complete List of Works*, in Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 323.

²⁶¹ “Francis Quarles,” My Poetic Side, Accessed 10 May 2021.
<https://mypoeticside.com/poets/francis-quarles-poems#block-poems>.

Close thine eyes and sleep secure.
 Thy soul is safe, thy body sure.
 He that guards thee, He that keeps,
 Never slumbers, never sleeps.

In light of the previous analyses, the following theme may seem redundant; nonetheless, each of these three songs, though very different from each other, uniquely illustrates the composer's working out his grief. With "Quiet Conscience," it is very interesting that a song all about eternal rest is simultaneously full of harmonic and melodic tension—albeit couched in a way that still conveys solemnity, warmth, and affection. In other words, the song is a lullaby, even at its most turbulent moments. As in his early work, Gibbs's musical palette evokes liminality—his calling card; and "Quiet Conscience" lives somewhere between waking and sleep, the present and eternity, and holding on versus letting go.

During the latter half of his life, Gibbs spoke articulately and at length about creativity and his aesthetic ideals, but he "never liked talking about [his] own music. Perhaps this is because music is a language in its own right which does not need words to be felt and appreciated."²⁶² Consequently, in the late 30s, Gibbs provided a rare glimpse into his craft when describing his penchant for "the chord of the added sixth."²⁶³ For example, he notated a C-major triad with an added A natural as part of a lecture given at The Royal Institution at Great Britain (Figure 39).

²⁶² Gibbs, *Common Time*, 224.

²⁶³ Gibbs, "The Trend of Modern Music," 18.



Figure 39. Added sixth chord from *The Trend of Modern Music*.

This is intriguing because it is the same chord, spread over two measures, with which he begins the song “Quiet Conscience,” and it happens to be one of the song’s more remarkable features (Figure 40).



Figure 40. “Quiet Conscience,” mm. 1–2.

Ro Hancock-Child makes a compelling case that Gibbs has a particular vocabulary of chords that have “a specially selected ‘colour’ and character’ ... into which he dips when the occasion demands.”²⁶⁴ The added sixth, for instance, with its

²⁶⁴ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 45.

“contemplative dissonance” or “brooding mystery,” is “in Gibbs’s mind inextricably linked with dreams.”²⁶⁵ She provides several examples, including excerpts from “Dream Song” (1917) and “The Mad Prince” (1921).

Gibbs very seldom indicates pedal markings in his songs unless he is grouping pitches together into a single sonority as in mm. 1–2 (Figure 40) or the ending mm. 37–38 of “Quiet Conscience.” As a result, there is no mistaking the added sixth in these bars for a passing tone; besides, it importantly functions as the held-out half-note apex of the two-measure motive. Not coincidentally, an early song, “Lullaby” (1923), similarly concludes with a pedaled falling sixth proceeding an ascending, arpeggiated major chord. In this instance, the sixth stresses Walter de la Mare’s closing lyrics, “O, be still. . . . Sleep, sleep, lovely white soul” (final bar, Figure 41).

The image shows a musical score for the song "Lullaby" (1923), measures 51-54. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one flat (F major), and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo/mood is marked "rit. calando". The lyrics are "sleep, love-ly white soul." The final bar (measure 54) features a pedaled falling sixth (F#4 to E4) followed by an ascending arpeggiated major chord (E4, G4, B4, D5). The piano part includes a "Ped" marking under the final chord. The score is dated "Danbury. June 1923." with an asterisk.

Figure 41. “Lullaby” (1923), mm. 51–54.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

Both songs share an affinity for each other as they concern the soul's rest and a matching harmonic palette. Furthermore, both likely involve David as it is hard to imagine Gibbs not having his young children in mind when he set de la Mare's text. His son would have been three or four years of age, and Ann had just turned one. "Lullaby" is charming and youthful and speaks of cheeping mice and birds who "sing together ... in starlight." As in other early de la Mare settings, the song points to a transcendence connected to childhood innocence (i.e., "lovely white soul") and introspective imagination.

However, "Quiet Conscience" is a grown-up's lullaby for a recently deceased David who had just experienced the terrors of war. The spiritual truth in "Before Sleeping" and "Quiet Conscience" is conversely found outside the self in Christ or some divine being that "guards thee," and the "sleep" that it references is not connected to temporal dreams of make-believe. Rather, this "rest" is permanent—eternal. Consequently, the liminality evoked by the opening, ambiguous, added-sixth "dream chord"—tension sustained throughout the song—has greater weight than it did in the songs of the 20s and 30s. For Gibbs, this is a very difficult final goodnight and goodbye to his son.

The song begins in the key of C major, with—as previously mentioned—a motive outlining the tonic triad that includes an added unstable A. In the opening bar, that important A is at the center of a pattern comprised of the measure's three most interesting pitches: an E that leaps up to A and resolves down to G. The same figure becomes more prominent in m. 2, where it is repeated and augmented (Figure 42). Despite its fair share of chromaticism, "Quiet Conscience" largely resides in C major. Nonetheless, that A

foreshadows a significant plot turn at the song's end: the seeming codetta briefly modulates to A-minor instead of affirming C Major and concludes with an A-major cadence in mm. 35–38. The point being, the sixth scale degree plays a crucial role throughout the piece.

Though subtle, the vocalist's opening melody—also visible in Figure 42—largely plays off the opening E-A-G idea. The singer's phrase begins with an E in m. 4 and then arpeggiates through the G up to the downbeat B in m. 5. This pitch is particularly unsettling and aurally uncomfortable despite its underlying B-major triad. In fact, the B resolves down to the more stable A, emphasized by its half-note status (just as it was in m. 2) and by nature of it ending the two-measure subphrase. In summary, mm. 4–5 highlight E moving up to A.

Con moto moderato

p

Close thine eyes and sleep se-cure;

p *sempre legato*

pp

C Major *

6

Thy soul is safe, thy bod-y sure. He that guards thee, He that keeps,

Figure 42. "Quiet Conscience," mm. 1–10.

The melody continues in m. 6, where it contains an upper-third embellishment but still features A; and the same pitch returns in m. 7, where it resolves down to G before concluding the phrase as it began on an E. To put things another way, although the E-A-G motive does not reappear in mm. 4–8 in its exact form, it certainly inspires and shapes the vocal line, which is built around the same scale degrees.

Notwithstanding the importance of the sixth scale degree A, perhaps the more fascinating structural aspect of that first phrase concerns the troubling B in m. 5 of the previous Figure 42. This pitch becomes a constant source of tension throughout the song. That is most obvious in the vocalist's final system, mm. 29–33. For example, the accompaniment in m. 30—an embellishment of m. 8—involves a vii half-diminished seventh chord of G which is the V in C major. Above it, the singer awkwardly leaps up a seventh to a rather transparent, dissonant B. There could be no greater opportunity to proceed with a perfect authentic cadence. The elongated leading tone in mm. 31–33 practically demands it, though it does not happen. In this case, the baritone vocalist must uncomfortably hold a lower-octave B pedal in his bottom register for almost two measures on the word “rest.” Ironically, these measures are anything *but* restful (Figure 43).

Figure 43. “Quiet Conscience,” mm. 29–33.

Returning to m. 5 of Figure 42, the vocalist’s precarious B has two options. It could resolve up by half step to C as a true leading tone. Instead, as already noted, it proceeds down to A as a kind of appoggiatura. This conflict between the B’s competing functions persists beyond this beginning line.

By way of example, the second phrase starts on an E in m. 9, just as it had before, arpeggiating through the G and up to the B in m. 10. However, instead of resolving down to A as now expected, the melody culminates with a surprise G sharp that lasts four beats between mm. 10–11. As it turns out, this G sharp points the listener to A, where the phrase does indeed eventually resolve on beat three of m. 11 (Figure 44). Once again, in terms of its macrostructure, the melody highlights pitches E and A by way of a turbulent B. Only this time, that B gains more power with the help of a G sharp. Together, the two pitches circle the A with a kind of incomplete double neighbor motion. Put another way, the B in m. 10 functions as an upper neighbor while the G sharp in mm. 10–11 is a lower neighbor, and they both resolve to A in m. 11. With respect to the big picture, that A ultimately resolves to a whole-note G in m. 13 that concludes the phrase and maintains the E-A-G contour of the song’s opening measures.

Figure 44. “Quiet Conscience,” mm. 6–14.

Of course, here, that E-A-G path is more precarious. Considering the text, that is the very point. The chromaticism of mm. 10–11 defies slumber, and in this context, that is not a terrible thing. The poet is not addressing an anxious unrest; to the contrary, Quarles’s lack of sleep has to do with an alert God eternally guarding the soul.

Furthermore, as in the opening melody, the seventh scale degree of the second phrase initially raises a couple of conflicting questions. Will the B in m. 10 resolve as a leading tone? Or will it resolve to A as an incomplete neighbor? Once again, it serves as an incomplete neighbor.

The tension between the song’s conspicuous sixth and seventh scale degrees is particularly evident during the contrasting middle stanza, so much so that an explanation almost seems pedantic. Note the tension between A and B in Figure 45. The baritone’s

melody toggles back and forth between the two pitches in mm. 15–17 except for a minor-third embellishment. It can be outlined as A—B—A—(C)—A—B—A. By the end of that system, B has undoubtedly gained the upper hand. For example, in m. 18, it is the note to which the others—including A—want to progress, and it entirely occupies the latter half of that measure. It does the same in the following m. 19. Only here, it coincides with a half cadence as a kind of concluding punctuation—the goal of the entire phrase. The tables have turned, and in this section, B is paramount. Whereas, during the song’s beginning, the seventh scale degree’s status is drawn by its proximity to the more critical A.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "Quiet Conscience" from measures 15 to 19. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in 2/4 time and begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "A qui - et con - science in the breast Has on - ly peace, has on - ly rest. The". The piano accompaniment is also in 2/4 time and starts with a *sempre pp* dynamic. The score includes dynamic markings (*pp*, *mf*, *p*) and articulation marks (accents). Red circles highlight specific notes in the vocal line, and a red arrow points to a note in measure 18.

Figure 45. “Quiet Conscience,” mm. 15–19.

The closing half of the middle section is especially interesting in light of this power struggle. After the B ascends by half step to C in m. 20, the melodic structure tracks downward over the following phrase (Figure 46). One can observe this via the descending stepwise downbeats of mm. 20–22. Note the melody’s downbeat pattern: C—B flat—A, reinforced by a bass line moving in parallel motion, a third lower. The listener anticipates the pattern’s continuing with a G in the melody of m. 23. However, the

poem's tone changes when the text speaks of a soul that is “out of tune.” Consequently, the phrase goes down to an F, and over an atypically static Neapolitan chord in the accompaniment of m. 23, the melody meanders through an A flat before landing on G—one measure later than expected. These seemingly trivial examples of text painting are actually of considerable interest as they concern the song’s structure.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Quiet Conscience," measures 20 through 28. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line begins at measure 20 with the lyrics "wis - est and the mirth of kings Are out of tune un - less she sings:". The piano accompaniment features a Neapolitan chord (F major) in measure 23, marked with a red "N6". The score continues to measure 25 with the lyrics "Then close thine eyes in peace and sleep se - cure;". The piano accompaniment includes a first inversion chord (I) in measure 26. Dynamics include *pp*, *mf*, and a tempo change from *rit.* to *a tempo*.

Figure 46. “Quiet Conscience,” mm. 20–28.

To review and put things in the larger perspective: the middle section's melody stresses E in m. 17 that moves up to B in m. 19. For a change, it seems the suddenly-important B will resolve for the first time as a leading tone to C (m. 20, Figure 46). Very quickly, however, that C gets dragged back down to A in m. 22, and its motion to G in m.

24 is emphasized by a chromatic passing-tone A flat. Again, B is de-emphasized in favor of the A resolving down to G.

Throughout “Quiet Conscience,” the seventh scale degree B longs for a substantive resolution as a leading tone, but the added-sixth A of the opening measures’ “dream chord” maintains a symbolic hold. Liminality prevails, and “Quiet Conscience” straddles this world and the afterlife as though Gibbs is not ready to let go. At the very least, he thwarts providing any sense of harmonic security despite the spirit of the text, which reads, “... sleep secure; no sleep so sweet as thine, no rest so sure.”

In that vein, the first half of the singer’s final system behaves like the phrases that precede it. The previously mentioned melody in m. 30 leaps up to a B—not in the chord—practically crying out for an upward resolution to the tonic C. Instead, the seventh scale degree resolves down to A as an *appoggiatura*. Without any hesitation, the baritone makes another disconcerting attempt with an uneasily held seventh scale degree in mm. 31–32—a passage discussed in prior paragraphs. Here, the two-measure accompaniment—the same as in mm. 24–25—offers some of the song’s more turgid and confused chords. That is to say, the pianist’s energized, sharp chromaticism communicates unrest at the very moment the vocalist literally insists upon it. All culminates with a French-sixth sonority and its plagal resolution to C major in m. 33.

Figure 47. “Quiet Conscience,” mm. 29–38.

It took forever—the entire song; but *finally*, the melody’s B satisfyingly resolves as a leading tone to C with the words “so sure.” Gibbs ostensibly heeds the poet’s advice and entrusts David’s soul to divine keeping at the work’s dramatic, structural conclusion. In one sense, “Quiet Conscience” could easily end in m. 33 or m. 34 with this long-awaited moment of resolution and harmonic C-major stability. Gibbs could have scrapped the following mm. 34–38, and none would be the wiser. Fortunately, he did not, as all is not entirely said and done.

Rather, Gibbs punctuates Quarles’s poem with a codetta that raises more questions than answers. This C-major song enigmatically ends with an A major, added sixth chord in mm. 37–38; granted, it does not sound forced. It is as though the composer is reminding the listener not to forget about the sixth scale degree A regardless of the singer’s decisive and conclusive leading tone B to tonic C resolution in mm. 32–33.

Indeed, the B in the pianist's right-hand melody of m. 35 once more resolves down to A, anticipating the song's closing A-major sonority.

Gibbs was a devout Christian who confidently and stoically wrote about his son's place in Heaven. So why does he conclude a song about eternal rest and security with a kind of giant, metaphorical question mark? Perhaps "Quiet Conscience" affords the listener a transparent peek into the composer's anguish akin to the paradoxical credo of the father in Mark's gospel who entreats Jesus to heal his son, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24, English Standard Version). Gibbs's musical expression of faith is similarly honest and vulnerable.

On the other hand, the ending A-major tonality—though puzzling—does not necessarily undermine the concept of a "quiet conscience." On the contrary, the postlude feels surprisingly tranquil, regardless of the seventh scale degree's downward resolution. The greater wonder of it all is that the song's harmonically loose and unconventional qualities—such as a cadence in the "wrong key"—feel convincingly correct. "Quiet Conscience" is arguably more satisfying as it is than had it ended six measures sooner in C major (or even six measures later in C major, for that matter). The song's last two bars are written exactly as mm. 1–2, only they are cryptically transposed a third lower.²⁶⁶ To

²⁶⁶ The Alpha and Omega function of these two-measure bookends recalls a conversation Gibbs had two years earlier with Christian academic Dorothy L. Sayers. In a letter exchange, he relates to her idea of the creative process mirroring the work of the triune Godhead, mainly the Father beholding a creation as "complete at once." Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, Meridian edition, 1956, 47. "In exactly the same way," he writes, "I have more than once in writing an extended work felt instinctively that, shall we say, the main melody of the last movement is somehow 'right' in relation to the whole work" and that it has everything to do with "the start of the work." Letter to Sayers, 10 June 1942, Sayers Collection, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College. Though he is addressing the composing of a symphony and not "Quiet Conscience," her response is just as fitting of the latter: "Being myself only musical, and not a musician, I had no idea

use Gibbs's own words regarding the creative process, the song's conclusion feels "‘right’ in relation to the whole work."²⁶⁷ It is an ending to an ending, and the musical descent is so smooth that its puzzling qualities are likely unobserved by the casual listener.²⁶⁸ Maybe, this musical burying combined with the baritone's salient denouement involving his lowest sung pitches, all depict interment.

whether a musician could have such an experience of *‘the end in the beginning’*..." (emphasis reflects the author's handwritten annotation that is not present in the unsigned, typed carbon copy held by the Sayers Collection. Whereas, the signed annotated manuscript can be found in the B-P archive). There is even a sense in which the song's closing measures could be a new beginning—this time in A major, and "Quiet Conscience" could continue like a *canon perpetuus*. This is the mystery of the cross—the Christian's belief in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Death is not the end—"the end in the beginning."

²⁶⁷ Letter from Gibbs to Sayers referenced above, Sayers Collection, Marion E. Wade Center, Wheaton College.

²⁶⁸ An argument can also be made that this postlude functions as a final "amen" cadence—a culmination of plagal motion found throughout "Quiet Conscience." For example, note the conspicuous lack of a V chord in the song's first six measures. Rather, a plagal cycle of root position triads in mm. 4–6 alternate ascending by a third and descending by a fourth—a pattern also found in mm. 13–14 and 26–27. The concluding mm. 35–38 bring to mind what Frank Lehman terms a "mixed plagal cadence" in which a minor subdominant to major tonic progression produces a half-diminished supertonic along the way. Frank Lehman, "Hollywood Cadences: Music and the Structure of Cinematic Expectation," *Society for Music Theory* 19, no. 4 (December 2013): 2, <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.4/mto.13.19.4.lehman.html>. In kind, Steven Laitz explains "plagal motion is not restricted to the subdominant" and may involve the half-diminished supertonic moving to tonic as it does in mm. 16–18. Steven Laitz, *The Complete Musician: An Integrated Approach to Tonal Theory, Analysis, and Listening* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 429. This is yet another example that anticipates the song's concluding M-PC or what Laitz colloquially labels the Hollywood Cadence "commonly heard in popular music of the 1920s through 1950s and in films today." Ibid.

As discussed in a previous analysis, Gibbs's harmonic language sometimes bears a touch of "influence from across the Atlantic" in the vein of Jerome Kern or Rodgers and Hart. See Hancock-Child, 34. That being said, Lehman highlights earlier variations of the cadence found in the works of Schumann, Chopin, and Mendelssohn given their "proclivity for modal inflection of the subdominant in order to suggest sentiment or

Whatever the case may be, “Quiet Conscience” clearly concerns David Gibbs’s passing. This epitaph is steeped in mystery, and depending upon one’s vantage point, it is even paradoxical. Is this a peaceful or restless burial? It is not difficult to argue either case. Has the composer really let go? Maybe its aura of mystery is akin to the wonder of the Christian’s cross that embodies both death *and* eternity. Questions, wonder, and mystery abound as “Quiet Conscience” is left open-ended, living between Heaven and Earth with an added sixth that evokes liminality and a leading tone that equally embraces ascension and descent.

sublimity.” Lehman, 2. In their world—and certainly Gibbs’s—it is a recoloring of the “conventional post-cadential plagal ‘Amen.’” Ibid.

CHAPTER 6

ARMSTRONG GIBBS'S FINAL YEARS: CHRISTIAN HOPE AMID POST-WAR CYNICISM

Armstrong Gibbs's Christian optimism vastly opposed the cynicism espoused by many Modern authors and composers of his day, particularly after the Second World War. Hence, it is bizarre that he set Thomas Hardy's poem "The Oxen" within the last decade of his life, Christmas Eve 1951 to be exact. At its core, Hardy's text is about doubt, drenched in longing, at the expense of Christian faith which the poet ranks among trivial childhood beliefs that are hard to accept as an adult. Hardy would have us suppose, belief in a divine Christ requires a certain naivete. For Gibbs, however, there was nothing anti-intellectual about his faith. His outspoken Christian rhetoric and convictions reached their zenith during the 1950s, and his setting of "The Oxen" exemplifies the tensions surrounding his Christian narrative and England's growing secularization. This chapter will examine these larger cultural themes through the lens of Gibbs and Hardy's worldviews related to the poem, and it will culminate with an analysis of Gibbs's song setting of the text.

The Village Atheist and the Village Idiot

Thomas Hardy's (1840–1928) well-loved and often anthologized poem "The Oxen" was first published on Christmas Eve of 1915 in the London newspaper *The Times*.²⁶⁹ It warmly depicts Christ's nativity and traditions surrounding the celebration of

²⁶⁹ Oliver Tearle, "A Short Analysis of Thomas Hardy's 'The Oxen,'" *Interesting Literature*, last modified 2021, <https://interestingliterature.com/2016/12/a-short-analysis-of-thomas-hardys-the-oxen/>.

Christmas. Religious themes are often at the center of Hardy's work, yet the author had a complicated and sometimes hostile relationship with the Church.²⁷⁰ As a child and young adult, Hardy and his family were actively involved in their local Anglican parish, and throughout life—like many Victorian agnostics and atheists—Hardy admired the institution for its aesthetic, emotional, and social function. At the same time, however, he was well-known for his outspoken rejection and criticism of Christianity which he viewed as anti-intellectual. In *The Victorian Age in Literature* (1913), G.K. Chesterton complains, Hardy is “the village atheist, brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot.”²⁷¹

Toward the end of his life, Hardy enjoyed the “gospel accounts of the nativity.” However, according to his second wife, he simultaneously held that “the biblical narratives had no definitive status as truth.”²⁷² “The Oxen,” written when Hardy was 75 years old, absolutely reflects that tension along with the poet's regret that Christian faith was “personally elusive.”²⁷³ “I have been looking for God 50 years,” Hardy wrote in his autobiography, “and think that if he had existed I should have discovered him.”²⁷⁴ Many

²⁷⁰ Timothy Hands, “Religion,” in Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy, ed. Norman Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; published online, 2011), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198604198.001.0001/acref-9780198604198-e-0268?rskey=RXM1Sx&result=268>.

²⁷¹ G.K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd., 1913; Project Gutenberg e-book, 2013), <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks13/1301651h.html>.

²⁷² Hands, “Religion.”

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Thomas Hardy and Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), 234.

of Hardy's contemporaries echoed his sentiments, including Armstrong Gibbs's teacher Ralph Vaughan Williams.

In contrast, the latter half of Gibbs's life was marked by a growing Christian fortitude. In a lecture written sometime during the Cold War, Gibbs attacks the "British characteristic" of "complete reticence on all matters relating to religion."²⁷⁵ He laments the anti-Christian rhetoric that was becoming increasingly common among the "clever people" of his day.²⁷⁶ In certain circles, he felt the stigma of Chesterton's "village idiot" given his unpopular belief in what C.S. Lewis famously labeled "mere Christianity"—the existence of God, the doctrine of the Trinity, and Christ's salvific role. (Such topics provided the basis for a series of BBC radio talks delivered by Lewis during the Second World War.)²⁷⁷ The notes for Gibbs's speech transparently describe his occasional embarrassment in such belief. Therefore, he calls himself and the listener to take greater courage.

Gibbs's discourse, which he recognized as controversial, highlights London's 1851 Great Exhibition as typifying Victorianism's emerging "philosophical warfare between science and the fundamentalist beliefs of the Church."²⁷⁸ Whereas, World War II

²⁷⁵ Armstrong Gibbs, untitled lecture attacking "reticence on ... matters relating to religion" (lecture, addressed to "Madam Chairman & friends," exact date unknown—however, given several references to world events and the author's life, the manuscript was likely written ca. 1950), 1, B-P Archive.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1952), adapted from BBC radio talks 1941–1944.

²⁷⁸ Gibbs, "...religion," 4.

reflected its culmination. The conflict with Germany had been won in part by scientific superiority. Subsequently, many religious intellectuals feared the groundwork had been laid for a post-war society led by technocrats who had little concern for England's spiritual wellbeing.²⁷⁹ Gibbs described his as an age when "Reason was elevated almost to the throne of God Himself."²⁸⁰ His reflective writings from the 1950s offer a sobering and critical view of a culture he believed had lost its creative spirit over the twentieth century. For him, the creative urge was tightly bound to his hope in a post-war moral and spiritual regeneration, and he suggests the weakened Church strengthen its Christian message. His script concludes with a quotation from Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (King James Version as quoted in the lecture).²⁸¹

Hardy's Cynicism

In Hardy's "The Oxen," the protagonist recalls his youth when he would sit with others around a fire on Christmas Eve at midnight and picture the oxen (farm animals) who—according to a local folk tradition—knelt in the manger at the birth of Christ. It was magical, and no one dared to question this story. However, with a kind of fricative alliteration, the author retorts, "So fair a fancy few would weave in these years." In other words, who would believe such a thing nowadays? In his 1999 "account of the decline of orthodox Christianity in Victorian Britain," academic A.N. Wilson put it this way, "Is our

²⁷⁹ Alan Jacobs, *The Year of Our Lord 1943: Christian Humanism in an Age of Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 12–13.

²⁸⁰ Gibbs, "...religion," 3.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

personal religion that which links us to the ultimate reality, or is it the final human fantasy...?”²⁸²

Still, Hardy muses, if someone came today on Christmas Eve to show me this miracle, “I should go with him in the gloom, | Hoping it might be so.” In the context of the entire poem, Hardy’s hope is somewhat sad or at least wistful, as though “the tendency of his heart ... move[s] in a different direction from his head.”²⁸³ This “hoping” is more of an aching to believe in something his intellect will not allow. In his autobiography Hardy ponders the Anglican liturgy: “We have to sing ‘My soul doth magnify the Lord,’ when what we want to sing is, ‘O that my soul could find some Lord that it could magnify!’”²⁸⁴

Gibbs’s Unconventional Setting

Hancock Child describes Gibbs’s setting of “The Oxen” as “intense and calculated;” it is “worlds apart from the spontaneity and vigour of the settings of the 1920s.”²⁸⁵ To be sure, Gibbs’s song “could not have been written by a young man.”²⁸⁶ Like his lecture on faith, it contains much honesty, experience, and humility. Gibbs’s doubt is present, much as it was in his WWII era “Quiet Conscience,” but that doubt

²⁸² A.N. Wilson, *God’s Funeral: The Decline of Faith in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), preface.

²⁸³ Hands, “Religion.”

²⁸⁴ Hardy, *The Life and Work*, 358.

²⁸⁵ Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 72.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

becomes a stepping stone to even greater faith. Furthermore, by the last bar, Gibbs's hope is a very sure belief, unlike Hardy's.

The poem's yearning has inspired many musical settings, from Gerald Finzi (1922) to Benjamin Britten (1968), including those of Gibbs's teachers Edward J. Dent (1920) and Vaughan Williams (1954). However, unlike the others, Gibbs's version turns the text on its head, musically erasing the lyrics' ending gloom with optimism. What Hardy "[hopes] might be so," Gibbs *knows* "to be so."

This raises the question, what is a composer's obligation to the poet? Song scholar Trevor Hold explores that topic at length with the introduction to his influential 2002 book *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song-Composers*. He ranks "fidelity to the interpretation of the text" among key factors for judging a successful art song.²⁸⁷ Hold favorably places Gibbs in his canon of leading English songwriters. However, it is not surprising that his brief mention of "The Oxen" complains the composer does not understand "the spirit of Hardy's familiar, oft-set poem; its ending spoilt by sentimentality."²⁸⁸ In Gibbs's defense, Hardy arguably leaves his work open to varied interpretations; nonetheless, Hold hits the nail on the head. Gibbs's take *is* entirely unconventional. However, what Hold perceives as weakness is an intentional sentiment of faith, and it is altogether the song's aim—even its strength.

²⁸⁷ Hold, *Parry to Finzi*, 8.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 262.

AN ANALYSIS OF “THE OXEN”

“The Oxen” has at least four recurring musical ideas that Gibbs uses to contrast the poem’s back and forth themes of gloom and hope or cynicism and belief. These appear and develop in the piano part, which anchors a vocal line that conversely meanders, barely repeating any of its musical material. This has the effect of an older, contemplative protagonist relaying his story in a stream-of-consciousness manner as assorted thoughts and memories cross his mind. In turn, Gibbs creatively uses both the piano and voice parts in a cinematic fashion to manipulate the listener’s experience of time as it concerns these varied literary themes. Disconsolate passages unfold as if in the real-time present while the clock seems to stop for the singer’s more enchanting and miraculous flashbacks.

The pianist’s first musical idea is its most prominent. Some form or variation of the opening two bars appears off and on throughout the work, including its very end excepting the final measure. For example, it comprises the bulk of the first page—six of eight bars (Figure 48). The song begins in F minor, and the chords of this opening theme shift with every quarter-note beat that is marked 60 bpm. Despite its steady harmonic rhythm, the first and third beats of mm. 1–2 (and many related measures) emphasize tonic creating a rather static sense of motion. The cyclical nature of each of the piano’s four voices reinforces this tedious movement. For instance, note the boring, back-and-forth, whole-step sway of the treble line, or the alto’s cruciform motive in m. 1 followed by its ascending and descending contour in m. 2.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is labeled 'VOICE' and the bottom staff is labeled 'PIANO'. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked 'Lento' with a metronome marking of 60. The piano part has handwritten red annotations: 'Me', 'Re', 'Sol', 'Fa', 'Re' above the notes, and 'F minor', 'i', 'i6', 'i', 'i6' below the notes. The piano part begins with a piano (p) dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes.

Figure 48. “The Oxen,” mm. 1–2.

This alto motive, specifically its first five pitches (Me-Re-Sol-Fa-Re), recalls the famous second movement of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 8, a work with which Gibbs was certainly familiar.²⁸⁹ Note the solfège labels in the preceding Figure 48. Though both selections interestingly share the same key signature, Beethoven’s melodic motive (Mi-Re-Sol-Fa-Mi) is comparatively set in the relative A flat major and asserts hope into a work that is otherwise consumed by tragic sonorities.²⁹⁰ Compare Figure 48 with Figure 49. The sonata’s notably expressive, forward-looking drama is the impetus behind the publisher’s title, *Grande sonate pathétique*.²⁹¹ Gibbs’s minor variation arguably takes its

²⁸⁹ In an interview conducted by John France, composer Richard Stoker describes Gibbs in the late 1940s as adjudicating pianists at music festivals and even himself playing movements of Beethoven sonatas “exceptionally well and... extremely musical, ...very relaxed and with great feeling” (Richard Stoker, interview by John France, September 2003), [musicweb-international.com](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2003/Nov03/Stoker_Gibbs.htm), accessed 24 May 2021, http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2003/Nov03/Stoker_Gibbs.htm.

²⁹⁰ Charles Burkhart, *Anthology for Musical Analysis*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Thomson/Schirmer, 2004), 233.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

inspiration from the *Pathétique*, but it turns the work’s concept inside out. His song’s opening measures ironically evoke the pathos Beethoven is temporarily trying to assuage.



Figure 49. Beethoven, *Sonate Pathétique*, Adagio cantabile, mm. 1–4.

In many of the early de la Mare settings, Gibbs links these types of patterns and ostinati to a literal image such as the mill wheel discussed in connection to “Ann’s Cradle Song.” Here, that visual picture—if he intends one at all—is vague. It could be the oxen slogging around the farm on a cold winter night or the monotonous ticking “of the clock” referenced by the first verse. The tempo supports either interpretation, and the music has a pedestrian quality the composer will later contrast with the transcendence of the nativity.

Regardless of the specific illustration, Gibbs leaves no doubt as to the theme’s overall meaning. Its affect is “gloom,” described by the poet’s concluding lyrics just before the musical idea returns with a spirit of resignation in m. 39. Hardy’s “gloom” is connected to the despair of disbelief with which the protagonist wrestles throughout the poem. Consequently, the theme can be heard, as if on cue, whenever that struggle is more apparent. By way of illustration, m. 19 snaps the baritone vocalist back to his present cynicism after contemplating the nativity and faith of childhood.

At other times, this tension leans towards belief, and the gloom gives way to hope as in the major-keyed variations of m. 1 that begin in m. 24. This transition to the song's optimistic climax culminates with a G-major triad in m. 27, highlighting the poem's present-day "Christmas Eve." That chord functions as the dominant in the proceeding, new key of C major (Figure 50).

22
fan - cy few would weave in these years!

25
Yet I feel if some - one said on Christ - mas Eve,

E^b major

G major V⁷ / C Major →

Figure 50. "The Oxen," mm. 22–27.

To a lesser degree, this same tinge of hope can be heard in m. 4, which precedes an innocent reflection. Here, in Figure 51, the accompaniment's treble voice moves up by whole step, adding a major seventh to an A-flat major triad on the third beat. This may seem inconsequential, but Hancock-Child suggests that Gibbs reserves his major seventh

chords for “extra glitter.”²⁹² Several with that function are scattered throughout the piece at reassuring places.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "The Oxen" from measures 3 to 8. It consists of two systems of music. The first system (measures 3-5) features a vocal line with lyrics: "Christ-mas Eve and twelve of the clock. 'Now they are". The piano accompaniment includes triplets and a recitative section marked "Rec." with a red arrow. A red arrow points to the piano accompaniment in the second system, labeled "Ab M7". The second system (measures 6-8) features a vocal line with lyrics: "all on their knees;" An elder said..... as we sat in a flock By the". The piano accompaniment includes triplets and a recitative section marked "Rec." with a red arrow.

Figure 51. “The Oxen,” mm. 3–8.

This fourth bar (in Figure 51) anticipates the song’s second significant idea, which is not a theme; rather, it is a recurring technique. That is, mm. 5–6 function as a brief moment of recitative with an accompaniment that accordingly plays long-held chords; mm. 16–18 and mm. 35–38 act in the same capacity. Unlike the plot-advancing recitative of opera, these moments conversely slow the song’s action. The whole-note

²⁹² Hancock-Child, *A Ballad-Maker*, 46.

dominant chord of m. 5 and the half-note minor seventh of m. 6 seem to erase time by interrupting the established second-long harmonic tempo. In this way, mm. 5–6 elicit the warm memory of a prior Christmas Eve.

The latter two recitative examples similarly operate as meditative pauses. However, they come after particularly sanguine passages and reveal the protagonist's return to a pessimistic state of mind. For example, mm. 16–19 peak with the baritone's upward octave leap to his highest sung pitch on the word "doubt," driving home Hardy's poetic message. In Figure 52, the singer's F4 happens to be the flat seventh of an appropriately underlying G-half-diminished seventh chord. Its harmonic instability heightens the poem's general uncertainty.

The image shows a musical score for three measures (16, 17, and 18) of the piece "The Oxen." The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The vocal line begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a triplet of eighth notes. The lyrics are: "Nor did it occur to one of us there To doubt they were kneeling." A red circle highlights the note "To" (F4) in the vocal line. A red arrow points from the piano accompaniment to this note, with the label "Gø5" written below it. The word "Recitative" is written in red below the piano accompaniment.

Figure 52. "The Oxen," mm. 16–18.

Correspondingly, the poet's mood seems positive at the start of mm. 35–38 (Figure 53). Major tonalities underscore the voice until the mention of "gloom," which is stressed by an ominous C-minor triad that progresses to another unsettling half-diminished seventh chord. As before, the singer's descending melody begins on the

chord's minor seventh—this time an E flat. Compare mm. 37–38 with m. 18. These two instances afford the vocal melody's rare occasion of recycled material, and the downward scales of each example orient themselves around the same unique combination of whole-step, half-step, and minor-third intervals. The falling melodies indicate a mood of despair, and both resolve with the song's gloomy F-minor theme.

The image shows a musical score for the piece "The Oxen" from measures 35 to 38. The score is in F minor (three flats) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked "Tempo I". The vocal line begins at measure 35 with the lyrics "I should go with him in the gloom, Ho - ping it might be so.....". The piano accompaniment starts with a piano part marked "pp" (pianissimo) and includes a section labeled "Recitative" in red. A red arrow points from the word "gloom" in the vocal line to the word "Ho - ping" in the vocal line. Another red arrow points to a chord in the piano part labeled "Fø7". The score includes dynamic markings such as "pp", "p" (piano), "mf" (mezzo-forte), and "p" (piano) for the vocal line.

Figure 53. "The Oxen," mm. 35–38.

The piano part's third idea equally employs several half-diminished chords to a similar effect—harmonic ambiguity. Note mm. 9–11 in Figure 54 and mm. 21–23 in Figure 55. These passages emulate themes from Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*. What better way to communicate longing? That is certainly the composer's objective. Though it is subtle, the inner voices cite Isolde's yearning motive. It begins in the accompaniment's tenor voice in m. 9 and transitions to the alto in mm. 10–11.

9
em - bers in..... hearth-side ease.

Isolde

Figure 54. "The Oxen," mm. 9–11.

When the motive recurs in mm. 21–23, it remains in the tenor voice (Figure 55).

24
19
then. *mf* So fair a

mf Isolde

22
fan - cy few would weave in these years! *p*

Figure 55. "The Oxen," mm. 19–24.

Both times, it is paired with the piano treble line's repeating motive: a falling fourth that subsequently descends by half step outlining a tritone (marked in Figure 54). As described in previous analyses, Gibbs frequently uses this interval during thematically turbulent areas. Even the dominant C-Major seventh chord on the fourth beat of m. 10 proceeds a tritone away to a G-flat major triad. Compare Figures 54 and 55 with Wagner's Prelude from *Tristan und Isolde* in Figure 56.



Figure 56. Wagner, *Tristan und Isolde*, Prelude, mm. 1–3.

Unlike the Tristan chord, however, the beginnings of Gibbs's motives coincide with major triads. These exceptionally stable chords happen on the downbeats of all six measures being discussed (mm. 9–11 and 21–23); after which, half-diminished chords ensue. The sorrowful lyrics of the second example (mm. 21–23) are particularly telling, “So fair a fancy few would weave in these years!” The repeated motion away from these tonal centers expresses the poet's struggle with elusive faith in the sense that the major chords—at first—do not last.

However, in both cases, this yearning leads to positive resolutions, even if they are short-lived. That is the accompaniment's fourth and most important idea, one

specifically related to the nativity—humanity’s reason for hope. Therefore, mm. 12–15 (Figure 57) mark a complete change in character in which the listener is transported away from an age of skepticism by the singer’s recollection of a manger scene. The shift to the parallel key of F major is analogous to a cinematic flashback, and Gibbs further accomplishes this color change by adjusting the piano’s texture to compound time.

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Oxen," measures 12 through 15. The score is written for voice and piano. The key signature is F major (one flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The piano accompaniment is in a compound time signature of 6/8, which is indicated by red arrows pointing to the eighth notes in the piano part. The lyrics are: "We pic - tured the meek mild crea - tures" (measures 12-13) and "As they dwelt in their straw - y pen," (measures 14-15). The word "Incarnation" is written in red below the piano part in measure 12.

Figure 57. “The Oxen,” mm. 12–15.

Gibbs takes a comparative approach with mm. 28–34, and these two illustrations are dissimilar to the rest of the song as they summon the characteristic magic of his youthful settings. In “The Oxen,” this magic has to do with the holy mystery that the God of the universe became flesh in the form of Jesus, the son of God; and in fact, everything

about mm. 12–15 suggest incarnation. The texture is refreshingly transparent after several dense measures, and the harmony is consonant. Most importantly, divine-like triplets constantly descend as if bridging Heaven and Earth. One does not have to read music to observe this in the score since the illustration is practically as visual as it is aural in mm. 12–13. To use the language of Hancock-Child, Gibbs even adds some of that “extra [major-seventh-chord] glitter” at beats three and four of m. 12 and m. 14.

The last manger scene, the song’s climax in mm. 28–34, is just as miraculous sounding and even more exciting than Figure 57. After all, it is marked forte and “estatico,” and it unfolds in the song’s dominant-related key of C major using only tonic and mediant chords for its first five measures (Figure 58). The effect is the expansion of C-major tonic, and to a certain degree, each measure’s collective sonority recalls the luster of Gibbs’ glittery major seventh chords. The triplets now counter their previous, descending, incarnation gesture and ascend from Earth to Heaven as if in reverent worship. At this moment, the euphoric protagonist aptly imagines he can “see the Oxen kneel.”

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is the vocal line, starting at measure 28 with the tempo marking "Poco più mosso" and the dynamic "f". The lyrics "Come; see the" are written below the notes. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment, also marked "f". Red arrows point from the piano accompaniment to the vocal line, indicating harmonic support. Below the piano staff, red handwritten annotations identify the chords: "C Major I" under the first measure, "iii (C7)" under the second measure, "I" under the third measure, and "iii" under the fourth measure. The tempo marking "f estatico" appears above the vocal line in the second measure.

Figure 58. “The Oxen,” mm. 28–29.

As pointed out earlier, this adoration is fleeting. Following the final lyric, “Hoping it might be so,” the song resumes with its F-minor theme in full tow (mm. 39–40) as though the daydream is over. Given Hardy’s sensibilities, let alone the era in which Gibbs penned his version, it is exactly how one might expect a setting like this to end. According to English religious historian Clive D. Field, disbelief in God was an increasingly pervasive aspect of 1950s culture as it concerns the Church. Christianity from this era is best “understood in the context of a progressive and protracted secularization of the role of religion in British life, a process which had already started before that decade and which continued long afterwards.”²⁹³

Of this, Gibbs was well aware. Almost a decade earlier, during the Second World War, he spoke to some students—most likely at The Appleby Grammar School—in much the same manner of his previously cited, Cold Ware lecture. “Today religion is apt to be regarded as out of date and unnecessary. But believe me, that is the biggest mistake of all.”²⁹⁴ Gibbs maintained there exists in each of us an innate sense of God, an “Ultimate Source” of life and right and wrong as “sure as there is a sun in the heavens.”²⁹⁵ In terms of “what you believe” versus an “attitude of despair,” Gibbs admonishes, “This is no time for pessimism.”²⁹⁶

²⁹³ Clive D. Field, *Britain’s Last Religious Revival? Quantifying Belonging, Behaving, and Believing in the Long 1950s* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 109–10.

²⁹⁴ Armstrong Gibbs, “Moral Code Described for Young People” (lecture, most likely delivered at The Appleby Grammar School like a similar speech from the same era, exact date unknown—however, it was delivered sometime during WWII), 5–6, B-P Archive.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

The composer heeds his advice with the final measure of “The Oxen” in which he transforms gloom or despair—the song’s anticipated verdict—to belief. This moment is “pure vintage” Gibbs given his penchant for punctuating art songs with atypical cadences frequently chock-full of meaning. The last beat of m. 40 is particularly ambiguous (Figure 59). Here a half-diminished supertonic chord proceeds to an enigmatic sonority with an augmented fifth in the pianist’s right hand that at first does not seem to belong. Along with the lower voices, it forms the enharmonic equivalent of another half-diminished seventh chord cryptically built on the fourth scale degree—not what one expects for a penultimate, dominant-functioning chord.

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Oxen" by C.A.G. (Christmas Eve, 1951, Danbury). The score is divided into two systems, measures 35-38 and 39-41. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/C minor). The tempo is marked "Tempo I".

System 1 (Measures 35-38):

- Vocal Line:** Starts at measure 35 with the lyrics "I should go with him in the gloom, Ho - ping it might be so.....". Dynamics range from *pp* to *p*.
- Piano Accompaniment:** Features chords in the right hand and bass lines in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp*, *p*, *mf*, and *p*.

System 2 (Measures 39-41):

- Vocal Line:** Continues with a melodic line, ending with a fermata in measure 41.
- Piano Accompaniment:** Includes triplets in the right hand and bass lines in the left hand. A final chord in measure 41 is circled in red and labeled "F major" in red text. A red arrow points from this chord to the circled chord.
- Annotations:** The text "F minor" is written in red below the piano part in measure 39. The text "F major" is written in red below the piano part in measure 41, with a red circle around the chord and a red arrow pointing to it.

Composer Information: C.A.G. Christmas Eve, 1951 Danbury

Figure 59. “The Oxen,” mm. 35–41.

However, the treble E-natural leading tone and A flat are paramount. They are here to resolve up by half step; granted, the leading tone's resolution is displaced by its leap to the higher celestial octave.²⁹⁷ Meanwhile, there is no mistaking the last bar's A-natural Picardy third, even with its placid pianississimo marking. Gibbs gives the pitch an entire beat all to itself as if to make his point all the more obvious. The piece could have concluded just as easily as it began in F minor. Instead, "The Oxen" ends in hope in the parallel key of incarnation, F major.

²⁹⁷ Given Gibb's affinity for the *Pathétique*, his song's penultimate E natural is all the more striking as it evokes Beethoven's similar use of the same pitch as a kind of surprise in the sonata's second movement. In Beethoven's mm. 4–5, the unexpected E natural appears in the melody which resolves up to F, as if to tonicize F minor. This note is exceptionally fascinating—and seemingly out of place—as the bulk of m. 4 is spent concluding the first phrase by emphasizing the dominant chord. Its particularly strong E-flat root gains even greater strength when it drops the octave just before—and against—the treble's unforeseen leading tone. As it turns out, the following F in m. 5 is of fleeting importance. It was a tease, and the *Pathétique* continues on to a dominant chord in the same key. Whereas for Gibbs, the resolution to F with an added Picardy, is a consummation of significant consequence.

CHAPTER 7

EPILOGUE

Earlier in this DMA document, I describe nostalgia as the aesthetic paradigm of Armstrong Gibbs’s early music—one that, over time, yields to his expanding Christian narrative. This latter worldview became the metanarrative through which he understood and told all other stories from “The Splendour Falls” of his middle period, to “The Oxen” of his final years, and everything in between. However, literary editor of the *Yorkshire Times* Steve Whitaker duly interprets Hardy’s “The Oxen” as fundamentally

a poem of remembrance. The final verse’s yearning, an invocation, almost, for this strange phenomenon [the incarnation] to be real, is also a yearning for a lost past, a return to the arcadian landscape “Our childhood used to know.” ...Hardy’s verse opens a window on all our histories, on a past we think we remember.²⁹⁸

In kind, Gibbs’s mature setting of the poem unquestionably emanates nostalgia.

Over the course of his life, Gibbs came to understand that his nostalgic yearning for “the arcadian landscape” of childhood was, in fact, a longing for the *ultimate* “arcadian landscape”—Heaven itself. In a sermon delivered during World War II, C.S. Lewis labeled this desire the “weight of glory.”²⁹⁹ It is the longing of all humanity, he explains, evoked by nature, art, books, and music—“the secret which hurts so much that [we] take [our] revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and

²⁹⁸ Steve Whitaker, “Poem of the Week ‘Oxen’ by Thomas Hardy (1840-1928),” *Yorkshire Times: A Voice of the North*, article last modified 18 December 2018, <https://yorkshiretimes.co.uk/article/Poem-Of-The-Week-Oxen-By-Thomas-Hardy-18401928>.

²⁹⁹ C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” (sermon, preached at the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, 8 June 1942), 2, accessed 25 May 2021, <https://www.wheelersburg.net/Downloads/Lewis%20Glory.pdf>.

Adolescence.”³⁰⁰ These things, he suggests—in and of themselves—are “a cheat,”... merely “images of what we really desire.”³⁰¹ They direct us to something better and eventually tangible. “Beauty [and] the memory of our own past ... are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.”³⁰²

In his *Confessions*, early church father St. Augustine reasoned such aches prove the existence of God in the same way the physical sensation of hunger suggests the reality of food. Along these lines, contemporary Christian apologist Timothy Keller rhetorically asks:

Isn't it true that innate desires correspond to real objects that can satisfy them, such as sexual desire (corresponding to sex), ... tiredness (corresponding to sleep), and relational desires (corresponding to friendship)? Doesn't the ... longing evoked by beauty qualify as an innate desire?³⁰³

Whitaker's “innate desire” for an innocent, unspoiled “arcadian landscape [of] childhood” points to the reality or human need for such a place, but it is, in the words of Lewis, “a country we have never *yet* visited [emphasis added]”—“yet” being the operative word, as this is a future-oriented craving. Armstrong Gibbs increasingly realized, throughout his life, nostalgia will remain unfulfilled in this world. It will never satiate as it is only a taste of a much larger feast.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 2.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 3.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 139.

That is not to deny the contemplative, past-oriented nature of “The Oxen;” however, in it, the composer and author reflect in different ways. Hardy longs for an unattainable state of belief and childlike naïveté. Gibbs had “been there and done that” and learned it was a dead end. His former brand of nostalgia—cloaked in childlike imagination—had been stripped of its salvific role. Thus, Gibbs’s orientation extends backward *beyond* childhood—*beyond* nostalgia—to the first Christmas, the birth of a Savior. That is one of the Christian’s focal points in history, and for Gibbs, it is as mysterious and magical as it is real. One can hear it in the “manger scenes” containing all the characteristic wonder of his early music.

The Christian’s other focal point is yet to come. Theologians have used the concept of “inaugurated eschatology” to explain the Christian’s dual embrace of the past and future. That is, God’s work was inaugurated in the birth, death, and resurrection of His son Jesus, and at the same time, creation looks to its summation upon Christ’s anticipated return.³⁰⁴ Scholars often summarize this liminality as the “already” and “not yet” aspects of the Kingdom of God, and it is most evident in Gibbs’s own Christmas carol of 1943 (“Oxen cribbed in barn and byre”), for which he wrote both the music and the text. Its third stanza highlights Christ’s past crucifixion *and* the Christian’s future eternity.

³⁰⁴ *Inaugurated or realized* eschatology is a common theological concept fully realized in the Pauline epistles. But the terminology and hermeneutic approach were arguably first developed in the early twentieth century by Geerhardus Vos, particularly with his seminal work *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1930).

Gibbs's preeminent hope is in the future return of Christ and the *Heaven* yet to come, Augustine's complementary fulfillment of beauty.³⁰⁵ The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines "hope, in Christian thought," as a theological virtue "distinct from [others] because it is directed exclusively toward the future, as fervent desire and confident expectation. ... Throughout the New Testament, Christian hope is closely tied to the ultimate hope of the return of Jesus Christ."³⁰⁶ The apostle John's *Revelation*—the Christian Bible's final book—describes this messianic return in great detail. There will be a new earth; Heaven will come down, as it were; and God will make his eternal dwelling among people on the new earth (Revelation 21:1–4).³⁰⁷

Gibbs very much understood this eschatological ("last things") summation of the Kingdom of God—of Heaven—as the corresponding natural and future outcome of

³⁰⁵ Gibbs further believes *beauty* is a means of worship—in the widest sense. In a post-WW II speech, he explains that *beauty* connects every creative urge: "Now if, as I believe, the function of all Art is to reach out to the Divine Giver of all gifts through the channel of Beauty—in other words, if it is the inevitable and inescapable duty of every artist to create his work to the greater glory of God—then this common ground between all the Arts at once achieves vital significance. It means that every true artist consciously or otherwise is pursuing from his own particular angle the identical object—that is the Source of all Beauty." Armstrong Gibbs, "Music as Affected by Social and Political Conditions (lecture to an unknown audience in Essex after the Second World War), 4, B-P Archive.

³⁰⁶ Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "Hope," 22 February 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hope-Christianity>.

³⁰⁷ Keller relates Christ's second coming to the climax of J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* when "Sam Gamgee discovers that his friend Gandalf was not dead (as he thought) but alive. He cries, 'I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself! *Is everything sad going to come untrue?*' The answer of Christianity to that question is—yes. Everything sad is going to come untrue and it will somehow be *greater* for having once been broken and lost. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 33.

beauty and artistic endeavor.³⁰⁸ Thus, sometime during the Second World War, he enjoined a group of young students:

Every true creative urge is a spiritual urge. ... whether you are going to write books or music, whether you are going to paint pictures or create sculpture, carpentry or gardening, keep always in front of you the ... ideal of beauty, truth, and goodness and you will be doing your part, however humbly, to foster the life of the Spirit and thus bring nearer the approach of the Kingdom of God on this earth.³⁰⁹

Armstrong Gibbs practiced what he preached, and he dedicated his life and art to cultivating “beauty, truth, and goodness” that mirrored the joy and glory yet to come.

After a period of ill health, his wife Honor died in 1958, and Gibbs passed away two years later. At his funeral, his Danbury choir sang the choral setting of “Before Sleeping,” and his former rector Frank Hopkirk delivered the eulogy: “As a musician, as a friend, and as a true and sincere Christian we shall long remember Armstrong and the work he left behind.”³¹⁰

During the year 1944, following his son David’s death, Gibbs poured his emotional and creative energy into his Third Symphony, *Westmorland*. Like the three songs written several months earlier over Christmas, it is a clear expression of grief but also beauty and hope. At its conclusion, he wrote, “Finished ‘ad majorem Dei gloriam

³⁰⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press & Zondervan, 1994), 828.

³⁰⁹ Armstrong Gibbs, untitled speech concerning music, science, and religion (lecture, The Appleby Grammar School, delivered sometime during WWII), 4, B-P Archive.

³¹⁰ Reverend Frank Hopkirk, Eulogy for Armstrong Gibbs, 16 May 1960, quoted in Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 182.

[for the greater glory of God].”³¹¹ Though these words are meant to punctuate his symphonic “epitaph” for David, they are an equally fitting summation of Armstrong Gibbs’s life and music.³¹²

³¹¹ Armstrong Gibbs, Symphony No. 3 in B flat, op. 104, *Westmorland* (Boosey & Hawkes, 1944).

³¹² Biographer Angela Aries explains that the limited scholarship concerning Armstrong Gibbs has placed an emphasis “fairly and squarely on [his] solo songs,” and in that regard, my DMA document has followed suit. Aries, *Armstrong Gibbs*, 192. Like many of history’s finest song composers, Gibbs excels as a miniaturist and there is no denying his talent for word-setting. However, Aries continues, “The time has come, surely, for a full appraisal of the whole of Gibbs’s musical output.” Ibid.

In my opinion, the composer’s eloquent Third Symphony, *Westmorland*, stands among the past century’s finest symphonies. British musicologist David J. Brown suggests it may be Gibbs’s “Masterpiece, and certainly his most considerable, purely orchestral composition.” Brown, liner notes to *Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3 “Westmorland.”* The work exemplifies a composer who was equally well-versed at larger-scale abstract forms. Gibbs was a symphonic thinker through and through and “Westmorland” warrants greater research and recognition.

The symphony bears a touch of English composer Ernest John Moeran (1894–1950), is steeped with Elgarian sounding themes, and is indebted to the modal harmonic language of Gibbs’s mentor Vaughan Williams. However, it is also entirely original as there is no mistaking it for the work of his colleagues and predecessors, and it showcases Gibbs at his very best. “A potent reaction to wartime peril, personal loss, and natural beauty” is how Brown puts it. Ibid. The composer’s grandson, David Rust, explains to me in an email, “I am always moved by the 2nd movement of his 3rd Symphony as clearly [Gibbs] expresses his grief after David’s death.” David Rust, email message to author, 19 November 2019. There is something very special about the music from this era, and its “therapeutic importance for the grieving composer cannot be overstated,” Review of “Westmorland, *Gramophone*, accessed 16 October 2021, <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/c-a-gibbs-symphonies-1-3>.

Moreover, an analysis of the third symphony through a Christian theological lens ought to yield some worthwhile results. After all, the first movement alludes to the Bible’s 121st Psalm with the title “I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes,” not to mention the work’s concluding inscription concerning God’s glory. Gibbs’s catalog includes roughly 875 varied entries, and his evolving Christian worldview provides a compelling framework for understanding it all. In particular, I suggest that further scholarship regarding Armstrong Gibbs, could continue with the repertoire of his middle career—work that is so clearly a direct response to the tragic death of David Gibbs. For example, the intensely expressive and unique “Westmorland,” is ripe with possibilities.

APPENDIX A

“BEFORE SLEEPING”

for Keith Falkner

Before Sleeping

Anon.

C. Armstrong Gibbs

Andante $\text{♩} = 60$ *p*

Mat - thew, Mark, Luke and John, Bless the bed that I lie on,

7 *mp* *mf*

Be - fore I lay me down to sleep I give my soul to Christ to keep.

13 *mf*

Four cor - ners to my bed, Four an - gels there a - spread, Two to foot and

19 *f* *p* *mp*

two to head, And four — to — car - ry me when I'm dead. I

2

Before Sleeping

25 *f*

go by sea, I go by land, The Lord made me with His right hand. If an - y dan - ger come to

mp *f*

31 *f*

me, Sweet Je - sus Christ, de - liv - er me. He's the branch and

p *f*

37 *sub. p*

I'm the flow'r, Pray God send me a hap - py hour, And if I die be - fore I wake, I pray that

sub. p

43 *mf* *p*

Christ my soul will take.

mf *p* *pp*

APPENDIX B

“QUIET CONSCIENCE”

for Keith Falkner

Quiet Conscience

Francis Quarles, alt.

C. Armstrong Gibbs

Con moto moderato *p*

Close thine eyes and sleep se - cure;

Thy soul is safe, thy bod - y sure. He that guards thee, He that keeps,

11 *mp* *pp*
Nev - er slum - bers, nev - er sleeps.

15 *pp* *mf*, *p*
A qui - et con - science in the breast Has on - ly peace, has on - ly rest. The

sempre legato *pp*

mp *pp*

sempre pp *mf*, *p*

2

Quiet Conscience

20 *pp*
 wis - est and the mirth of kings Are out of tune. — un - less she sings:

25 *rit.* *a tempo* *pp*
 Then close thine eyes in peace and sleep se - cure;

29 *p* *pp*
 No sleep so sweet as thine, no rest so sure.

34 *p* *pp* *morendo*
 *
 Rec. ----- *

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