

ABSTRACT

A Discussion of the Choral Music of Samuel Barber

Michael Berg, M.M.

Thesis Chairperson: Jean Boyd, Ph.D.

Within the world of music history, choral music seems to drop off of the map with the end of the Baroque era, and only a handful of major works, such as masses and oratorios, are typically studied in an academic setting. As a result, many exquisite pieces are often largely neglected in many music history courses and textbooks, and it is my firm belief that such a neglect is to our detriment. With that in mind, I have undertaken a study of the published choral music of Samuel Barber (1910-1981). In this thesis, I undertake a study of Barber's music by observing stylistic techniques in his choral music, particularly those techniques that remain consistent throughout his choral works.

A Discussion of the Choral Music of Samuel Barber

by

Michael W. Berg, B.M.

A Thesis

Approved by the School of Music

William V. May, Jr., Ph.D., Dean

David W. Music, D.M.A., Graduate Program Director

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Approved by the Thesis Committee

Jean Ann Boyd, Ph.D., Chairperson

Eric C. Lai, Ph.D.

Laurel E. Zeiss, Ph.D.

Wallace C. Christian, Ph.D.

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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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Soli Deo Gloria

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Within the world of music, especially college-level music history, choral music seems to vanish at the end of the Baroque era. True, major oratorios and masses are often mentioned in history classes, but more modest works tend to fall by the wayside. This is often simply a matter of judicious selectivity on the part of educators; given the limited class time available, most tend to focus on larger works in order to fully develop the students' understanding of the given period. I do not presume to pass judgment on those who make such decisions, for I fully understand how precious class time is in these circumstances. However, the fact remains that choral music is often largely neglected in all but its most grandiose incarnations in many music history courses and textbooks. As understandable as this tendency may be, I believe that it is detrimental in that many exquisite pieces go unnoticed and unappreciated by most students of music. Further, I believe that studying smaller scale choral music can, along with song traditions and instrumental chamber music, provide a more intimate glimpse into the stylistic development of many composers.

With that in mind, I have undertaken a study of the published choral music of Samuel Barber (1910-1981). I have in the past performed both choral and solo pieces by Barber, and during my first semester here at Baylor (Fall of 2006) I researched evolving trends within his song literature. In this thesis, I continue this study of Barber's music by observing stylistic techniques in his choral music, particularly those techniques that

remain consistent throughout his choral works. While Samuel Barber is not known principally as a writer of music for the chorus, he did compose several enchanting pieces for the vocal ensemble. These works, which span the length of his career, have not gone unnoticed by critics and students of music, but they have rarely been discussed in any considerable depth. It is my hope that the analyses provided in this thesis will help fill this gap in Barber scholarship.

The primary focus of these analyses, as mentioned previously, is stylistic continuity; there are several elements of Barber's compositional style that remain consistent throughout his choral output. Features such as harmonic language, structural tendencies, and text setting are of particular interest to me and comprise a large part of my observations. In order to provide historical background, I have included biographical sketches that describe the general circumstances under which Barber composed each piece, as well as brief biographies of the poets and writers whose texts he used, and often adapted. I have also included information about commissions and first performances where particularly important, but most of these works were simply composed on Barber's own volition; if no commission information is included, please assume that this is the case. With this in mind, the primary purpose of this thesis is analytical, not biographical. As such, I have attempted to keep these discussions fairly limited, and have provided some bibliographical suggestions for interested readers.

In addition, I have limited the choice of pieces to published choral works originally written for the independent choral ensemble. Barber wrote some choral pieces which were never published and exist only in manuscript form; he also arranged many of his own works in other genres for choral ensemble, and both of his operas include

numbers for chorus. While these works may provide fertile ground for further study, I have chosen to eliminate them from this thesis in order to impose some semblance of brevity on the discussions herein as well as to provide a more cohesive theme for my research.

The resulting selections included in this study are arranged chronologically in three chapters in order to provide a clear view of Barber's growth as a composer. In the first chapter, I discuss Barber's first three choral pieces (*The Virgin Martyrs*, *Let Down the Bars*, *O Death*, and *God's Grandeur*) and highlight important trends that continue in later works. In the second chapter, I demonstrate how the next two pieces (*A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map* and *Reincarnations*) illustrate the further development of these trends which Barber synthesizes in his first large work for chorus, *Prayers of Kierkegaard*. The final chapter begins with a discussion of the two pieces of Opus 42 ("Twelfth Night" and "To Be Sung On the Water"), which function as a stylistic bridge of sorts between *Prayers of Kierkegaard* and *The Lovers*, Barber's final choral piece and the culmination of the stylistic trends described throughout this thesis. In closing, I include a brief "coda" in which I warn against an overly systematic approach to Barber's music, citing his *Easter Chorale* as an example of a piece that simply does not fit into the stylistic trends I describe in the main chapters of the thesis. Taken together, it is my hope that these discussions adequately describe Samuel Barber's choral works and engender in the reader a desire to become more familiar with these pieces.

CHAPTER TWO

Searching for a Voice

The Virgin Martyrs, Let Down the Bars, Oh Death, and God's Grandeur

During the 1930s, Samuel Barber found himself struggling to define and come to terms with his place in the musical world. In practical terms, this meant providing for himself economically. Teaching “involved him too deeply,” thereby distracting him from the work of composing, and performance opportunities were scarce; as a result, Barber was forced to rely upon family members and wealthy friends such as Mary Louise Bok, the founder of the Curtis Institute.¹ In musical terms, this meant striving to find a compositional style that could serve as his unique voice. The three choral pieces from this time period, *The Virgin Martyrs*, *Let Down the Bars*, *O Death*, and *God's Grandeur* reflect the artistic and spiritual journey of these years in their musical construction as well as their mystical themes. In this chapter, I will introduce technical and thematic features of these three pieces that remain consistent throughout Barber's later choral works.

In 1935, Samuel Barber withdrew to his aunt's vacation house at the Pocono Lake Preserve in Pennsylvania; while on this personal retreat from the demands of his daily life, Barber began work on *The Virgin Martyrs* for four-part a cappella women's voices.² Published in 1939, this piece demonstrates many stylistic traits that remained with Barber throughout his career, most notably the use of third-based chord progressions, paired imitation, and motivic development. Whereas this is the only choral piece in which

¹Nathan Broder, *Samuel Barber* (New York: Schirmer, 1954), 23-27.

²Ibid., 29.

Barber utilized a translated medieval poem, he would later use similar texts for his 1953 song cycle, *Hermit Songs*. The mystical and intimate nature of the poem represents a common theme in many of Barber's choral settings, even though this is the only text written before the nineteenth century.

The text for this piece was originally written by Siegbert of Gembloux (1035-1112), a Benedictine historian who lived in the Abbey of Gembloux in the Namur province of Belgium. While his principal occupation was biography, during the latter years of his life he became embroiled in the struggles between the empire and the papacy. In the three treatises that he wrote regarding the conflict, he attacked many of Pope Gregory VII's actions as "unchristian and contrary to the Scriptures."³ At another point, he staunchly defended the right of priests to be married, a matter that the pope flatly refused to acknowledge.⁴ "The Virgin Martyrs," however, had little to do with such a politically charged situation, and rather came as the result of his studies of the lives of the saints, particularly those who gave their lives for the Church. The sheer fact that Barber was familiar enough with the work to set it to music is a testimony to the translator, Helen Jane Waddell (1889-1965). While a prolific writer and poet in her own right, Waddell was known principally for her translations of medieval poetry, especially in her books *The Wandering Scholars* (1927) and *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (1929), the latter of which contains the translation of this poem:

Therefore come they, the crowding maidens,
Gertrude, Agnes, Prisca, Cecily,

³Klemens Löffler, "Siegbert of Gembloux," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume XIII, ed. Remy Lafort, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13783c.htm> (accessed 2 April 2008).

⁴Ibid.

Lucy, Thekla, Juliana,
Barbara, Agatha, Petronel.

And other maids whose names I have read not,
Names I have read and now record not,
But their soul and their faith were maimed not,
Worthy now of God's company.

Wandering through the fresh fields go they,
Gathering flowers to make them a nosegay,
Gathering roses red for the Passion,
Lilies and violets for love.⁵

Both the poem's three-stanza form and lack of a consistent rhyme scheme are true to the original Latin; the first of the four-line stanzas names the maiden martyrs, the second describes their devotion to God, and the third and final stanza recounts the blessed state in which they gather flowers for their Lord. Barber's setting of this poem is in "two parallel sections, the second being merely a variant of the first," as well as being significantly shorter due to its containing only the third stanza; while many of Barber's choral pieces follow the form of the text more closely than this, it is not entirely unusual, as we shall see in later works.⁶ Harmonically, *The Virgin Martyrs* is typical of Barber's music. The tonality revolves around C, both the major and minor modes, with a brief excursion to the E^b Phrygian mode in the middle of the first section.⁷ This diversion is short-lived, and C major reasserts itself with the closing text of the second stanza, "Worthy now of God's company" (see Example 1).

⁵Helen Waddell, *Medieval Latin Lyrics* (London: Constable, 1935), 159.

⁶Russell E. Friedewald, *A Formal and Stylistic Analysis of the Published Music of Samuel Barber* (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1957), 106.

⁷*Ibid.*, 108.

Example 1. *The Virgin Martyrs*, measures 21-27.⁸ A third-based progression from E^b to C.

The musical score for measures 21-27 of *The Virgin Martyrs* is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 21-24) features a piano accompaniment and four vocal parts. The piano part has a 'poco allarg.' marking. The vocal parts have lyrics: 'But their souls and their faith were maimed not, —'. The second system (measures 25-27) features the same vocal parts with lyrics: 'Wor - thy now of God's com - pa - ny.' The tempo is marked 'Tempo 1º ♩ : 66' and 'rit.' (ritardando) is indicated at the end of the vocal parts.

This motion from C to E^b back to C not only represents a restrained harmonic digression typical for Barber, but also serves as an example of a third-based chord progression, an undulating sonorous pattern that remains a favorite tool throughout his works. This progression is also highlighted in the *animando* imitative section at the beginning of the work in which the paired voices move in lines that are based on similar third-based progressions. The first moves from G major to A minor through chords that are a third apart; the second moves from D minor back to G major in preparation for an authentic cadence to C in the same manner.

Another feature that recurs throughout Barber's oeuvre is represented within *The Virgin Martyrs*, namely the use of a recurrent motto that is stated at the opening of the piece. In this instance, the opening rhythmic motto (see both soprano parts in the opening two measures of Example 2) resurfaces throughout "The Virgin Martyrs," often

⁸Samuel Barber, *Complete Choral Music* (Milwaukee, WI: G. Schirmer, 1979), 7. All subsequent references to Barber's choral scores are from this edition unless otherwise cited.

fragmented and usually in only one voice at a time; thus disguised, it provides a subtle unity throughout the work (see Example 2 for two instances of this motive). Its reiterations do not appear to be tied to any particular poetic idea, but rather simply provide a continuous thread throughout the piece.

Example 2. Two instances of the rhythmic motive in *The Virgin Martyrs*.

A. *The Virgin Martyrs*, measures 1-3. The first iteration of the rhythmic motive.

Andante, un poco mosso ♩ : 66

Soprano I
There-fore come they, — come — they, the

Soprano II
There-fore come — they, — come — they,

Alto I
There-fore come — they, — come —

Alto II
There-fore come — they,

Piano (Only for rehearsal)
Andante, un poco mosso ♩ : 66

The musical score for measures 1-3 of *The Virgin Martyrs* features five staves. The vocal staves (Soprano I, Soprano II, Alto I, Alto II) and the Piano staff (marked 'Only for rehearsal') all share the same tempo and meter: 'Andante, un poco mosso' with a quarter note equal to 66 (♩ : 66). The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are 'There-fore come they, — come — they, the' for Soprano I, 'There-fore come — they, — come — they,' for Soprano II, 'There-fore come — they, — come —' for Alto I, and 'There-fore come — they,' for Alto II. The Piano part provides a harmonic accompaniment.

B. *The Virgin Martyrs*, measures 27-32. A subsequent appearance of the rhythmic motive.

Tempo I° ♩ : 66

pp rit. pp p a tempo

Wor - thy now of God's com - pa - ny. Wan-d'ring through the fresh

pp rit. pp p a tempo

Wor - thy now of God's com - pa - ny. Wan-d'ring through the fresh

pp rit. pp a tempo

Wor - thy now of God's com - pa - ny.

pp rit. pp a tempo

Wor - thy now of God's com - pa - ny.

Tempo I° ♩ : 66

rit. a tempo

The musical score for measures 27-32 of *The Virgin Martyrs* features five staves. The tempo is marked 'Tempo I°' with a quarter note equal to 66 (♩ : 66). The time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are 'Wor - thy now of God's com - pa - ny. Wan-d'ring through the fresh' for the vocal staves. The Piano part provides a harmonic accompaniment. The score includes dynamic markings (pp, p) and tempo markings (rit., a tempo, pp a tempo).



In his biography of Samuel Barber, Nathaniel Broder remarks that while this piece is tasteful and eloquent, it “contains no unusual features” and therefore merits little further consideration.⁹ This characterization of the piece is accurate, as Barber does little that is unexpected; yet it is precisely this typical quality that makes *The Virgin Martyrs* an important part of Barber’s output. It serves in many ways as a distillation of his choral style, providing a summary of techniques and preferences that he utilized in different fashions throughout his career. Viewed in such a light, this early piece becomes the “opening motive” of Barber’s choral compositions as a whole, providing in minute detail many of the recurrent musical themes that will be discussed through the course of this thesis, particularly the use of third-based progressions and recurring motives to provide unity.

Upon winning a scholarship from the American Academy in Rome in 1935, Barber traveled to Italy with his companion Gian Carlo Menotti, where lodging was provided as part of his winnings. The two of them began a leisurely sojourn across Europe, during which they spent the summer months in the town of St. Wolfgang, near

⁹Broder, 67.

Salzburg. The sparse cabin that they rented in the nearby woods provided an “idyllic spot at the foot of a mountain”; thus surrounded by Alpine grandeur and serenity, Barber composed several pieces, among them the song *I Hear an Army*, the String Quartet, op. 11, and *Let Down the Bars, O Death*, a choral setting of the eponymous poem by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886).

A mystical aura surrounds the life and works of Emily Dickinson, held by many to be “a model for all women poets who followed—an example of eccentricity, autonomy, and rebellion.”¹⁰ As is often the case with artists thus elevated, approaching Dickinson’s life can be a hazardous affair, one in which a reader must learn to avoid “the seductive pitfalls of rumour and legend.”¹¹ For instance, there is little evidence to support the popular conception of her father as tyrannically cruel and her mother as pitifully weak; they were both of devoutly conservative Puritan stock, but nonetheless committed themselves to providing their daughter with an education at the Amherst Academy in their hometown in Massachusetts, an education which was both thorough and progressive for the time.¹² Likewise, the fact that in her thirties Dickinson donned a uniform of perennial white and withdrew from public contact is much debated and often romanticized, with theories abounding as to the cause. Psychotic breakdown or romantic rejection are two of the most frequently suspected culprits, but it is entirely possible that she took up her solitude as a vehicle for her creativity, absorbing and transforming the

¹⁰Wendy Martin, *The Cambridge Introduction to Emily Dickinson* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

¹¹Maria Stuart, “Dickinson, Emily, 1830-1886,” *Literature Online*, http://lion.chadwyck.com/searchFulltext.do?id=BIO000656&divLevel=0&trailId=119D9AEBA5D&area=ref&forward=critref_ft (accessed 2 April 2008).

¹²Ibid.

Victorian custom of confining pregnant women from society “in order to give birth to her poetry.”¹³

The truth is that the motives for her reclusion are unknown and unknowable, regardless of the romanticized theories that proliferate around this mysterious decision; as a result, it is infinitely more profitable to focus on the facets of her life that can be concretely ascertained. Both her body of poetry and her correspondence reveal that, like the Transcendentalists, she feared that “the country’s new focus on profit was replacing personal craftsmanship and alienating people from their communities and natural surroundings.”¹⁴ Consistent themes of death, love, and the intermingling of the two are found throughout her poetry, as is an exhaustive and subtle knowledge of Scripture that belies the common perception of Dickinson as a religious rebel.¹⁵ The interest in Dickinson’s poetry and life has scarcely abated since the speedy publication of her works after her death, and the genuinely mysterious nature of her life combines with her fascinating poetic insight to ensure that this interest will not wane in the immediate future. “Let Down the Bars, Oh Death,” like many of Dickinson’s poems, deals with the notion of death as a positive force, a potential for ultimate rest, rather than a terrible and loathsome fate:

Let down the Bars, Oh Death -
The tired Flocks come in
Whose bleating ceases to repeat
Whose wandering is done -

¹³Martin, 19.

¹⁴Ibid., 32.

¹⁵Stuart.

Thine is the stillest night
 Thine the securest Fold
 Too near Thou art for seeking Thee
 Too tender to be told - ¹⁶

The two-stanza poem quoted above is striking in its simplicity and emotive power. The rhythmic pattern of three stresses in the first, second, and fourth lines contrasts with the four stresses in the third line, a common pattern that serves to unite the two stanzas. Otherwise, they are markedly different in both tone and address; the first lingers over the image of the “tired flocks” who seek their final resting place, while the second extols the restful qualities of Death. Dickinson further emphasizes the yearning quality of this second stanza by making it more “traditional” in its poetic mechanics. It contains the poem’s only rhyme (fold / told), and the first and second groupings each begin with the same word. This direct artfulness reinforces the speaker’s passionate longing for the idyllic state of ultimate rest.

Example 3. *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*, measures 10-13. The transition between the A and B sections.

Whose wan-der-ing is done. Thine is the still - est night,

Whose wan-der-ing is done. Thine is the still - est night,

Whose wan-der-ing is done. Thine is the still - est night,

Whose wan-der-ing is done. Thine is the still - est night,

¹⁶Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R.W. Franklin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998), 972.

In his SATB setting of this poem, Samuel Barber uses a variety of formal, harmonic, and expressive techniques to emphasize the weariness that permeates Dickinson's text. Some of these methods are fairly obvious, such as the crescendo at the end of the A section that blurs the end of the section by pressing toward the B section (see Example 3). Other devices, such as frequent use of the plagal progression discussed below, are more subtle. The overall effect of Barber's arrangement is one of resigned exhaustion; the speaker seems to long for death not only as an escape from tribulations but also as an appropriate and well-earned repose.

Barber emphasizes this yearning quality in both the harmonic and formal aspects of his setting. It is in rounded binary form with an abbreviated second A section repeating the music and text of the first seven bars of the original A with little variation; this recollection of the opening apostrophe emphasizes the theme of homecoming in the poem as the music returns from its harmonic journey to the familiar chords of the A section (compare Examples 4 and 5). The only true change in the music is the rhythmic augmentation the second time around, perhaps representing either the weariness of the "tired flocks," the rest that they find in their homecoming, or both.

The A section, the text of which corresponds to the first stanza, is set in G minor, while the B section, which corresponds to the second stanza, eventually settles on E major after beginning with the parallel minor. Both the A and B sections maintain a sense of tonal uneasiness, as neither is confirmed by an authentic cadence; in fact, there are no "dominant" chords anywhere in the piece.

Example 4. *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*, measures 5-11. The final phrase of the A section.

The tired
The tired
The tired
The tired

flocks come in
flocks come in
flocks come in
flocks come in

Whose bleat-ing ceas-es to re - peat, Whose wan-der-ing is done.
Whose bleat-ing ceas-es to re - peat, Whose wan-der-ing is done.
Whose bleat-ing ceas-es to re - peat, Whose wan-der-ing is done.
Whose bleat-ing ceas-es to re - peat, Whose wan-der-ing is done.

cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.

Example 5. *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*, measures 22-30. The A¹ section, the final phrase of the piece.

Let down the bars, O Death! The tired flocks come in.
Let down the bars, O Death! The tired flocks come in.
Let down the bars, O Death!... The tired flocks come in.
Let down the bars, O Death! The tired flocks come in.

p *rit.* *pp*
p *rit.* *pp*
p *rit.* *pp*
p *rit.* *pp*

This sense of instability, almost of hesitancy, within the harmonies is accentuated by the cadences of each section. The A section ends with a shift from an E^b augmented chord to the tonic, while both B and A¹ end with plagal cadences (see Example 6 for the end of the B section and Examples 4 and 5 for the ends of the A and A¹ sections). Through these somewhat uneasy harmonic patterns, Barber emphasizes again the restless yearning imparted by the text.

Example 6. *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*, measures 17-21. The final phrase of the B section.

near thou art for seek-ing thee, Too ten-der to be told. _____

near thou art for seek-ing thee, Too ten-der to be told. _____

near thou art for seek-ing thee, Too ten-der to be told. _____

near thou art for seek-ing thee, Too ten-der to be told. _____

Barber pays careful attention to the declamatory style of the poem, choosing to set stronger syllables on stronger beats with longer note values, while unstressed syllables fall on weaker beats with shorter note values. For example, the second phrase of the A section contains three strong syllables interspersed with weaker ones; the stressed syllables each fall on beat one of their respective measures, while the unstressed syllables occupy the final eighth notes of theirs (see Example 4). While this style of declamatory writing continues throughout the piece, the rhythm inherent in the text is not the only facet of the poetry that Barber seeks to emphasize. He often brings out important words with unusual harmonies: both the words “bleating” and “wandering” are emphasized with augmented chords; the final cadence of the B section on the words “too tender to be told” is accented with an F[#] added to the A minor chord. Barber also employs a subtle mimetic pattern during both iterations of the phrase, “The tired flocks come in.” Each concludes with a new voicing of the G major chord that descends toward the bass, so that the parts “come in” closer together as the phrase comes to a close (see Examples 4 and 5). Such careful attention to the text emphasizes the weariness of Dickinson’s poetry to the point

that the quiet but powerful desire for rest that courses through the poem permeates the music as well; like the motivic and harmonic qualities of *The Virgin Martyrs* discussed previously, this attentiveness to the rhythmic and emotive aspects of the text is a quality that remains consistent throughout Barber's career.

The award from the American Academy in Rome was one of the first signs of Barber's growing fame. In the years immediately following, he received a number of important commissions, including one from the Westminster Choir School to compose a piece for their annual winter tour in 1938.¹⁷ For his text, Barber chose the poem "God's Grandeur" by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89), a British poet whose works were already familiar to the young composer, as he had previously sketched plans for another choral setting of one of Hopkins's poems as well as composing a setting of Hopkins's poem, "A nun takes the veil," in the *Four Songs* of 1937.

Like Barber, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was born into a privileged home where his artistic gifts were valued and encouraged. His father was a maritime insurance adjuster by trade, but enjoyed composing poetry himself, while his mother, sister, and brothers were all skilled amateur artists or musicians.¹⁸ Surrounded with both physical comforts and an environment that encouraged him to pursue his artistic gifts, it is no surprise that the young Hopkins developed into a skilled poet during his early life. He attended Balliol College at Oxford, where he responded to the liberal leanings of his

¹⁷Barbara Heyman, *Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 179.

¹⁸Matthew Campbell, "Hopkins, Gerard Manley, 1844-1889," *Literature Online*, <http://lion.chadwyck.com/searchFullrec.do?id=1084&area=authors&forward=author&trailId=119D9B4370D&activeMultiResults=authors> (accessed 29 March 2008).

friends and professors by becoming increasingly conservative, especially in his religious views . The result of this growing conservatism was an eventual conversion to Catholicism, capped by his induction into the Jesuit order in 1888.¹⁹

The rigorous training of the Jesuits prevented Hopkins from continuing to write poetry for some time, but the meditative exercises demanded by his new order certainly fit with Hopkins's mystical poetic style. In addition, his contemplations led him to develop a new system of verse that explored innovative uses of punctuation and diacritical marks that he labeled "sprung rhythm," a technique designed to force the reader to encounter the described object on its own terms. This emphasis on the idea of "otherness" eventually became one of the central themes of Hopkins's poetry, a centrality that was magnified by his desperation over the plight of the destitute souls that he encountered at every turn during his years of ministry throughout England and Ireland. While most of his work was unpublished during his lifetime, his friends and colleagues began to collect both his poetry and letters in the years following his death in 1889 in an effort to preserve the intellectual and artistic legacy of the troubled priest. The English poet laureate Robert Bridges finally published his collected manuscripts in 1918, a collection which not only included poetry but incisive commentary and criticism on English poetry and classical literature that proved to be highly influential to a number of twentieth-century poets and artists.²⁰

Hopkins wrote "God's Grandeur" in the summer of 1877, one of nine sonnets written while Hopkins was working in the countryside of Wales. The profound beauty of

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

his surroundings influenced the poet to incorporate more natural imagery into his poetry, including “God’s Grandeur,” “The Starlight Night,” and “The Lantern out of doors,” than had been present in his previous works. “God’s Grandeur,” the text of which can be found below, deals with the exploitation of the natural world as a result of humanity’s greed contrasted with Hopkins’s musings on the sustaining power of God:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And, for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.²¹

The sonnet is divided into two thematic stanzas: the first stanza, consisting of the first two quatrains, describes the peril wrought by humanity’s carelessness; the second stanza, consisting of the closing three couplets, gives voice to the amazing regenerative power of nature and the constant presence of God in the person of the Holy Ghost. The rhyme scheme is one of the conventional variants of the Italian style: *a-b-b-a a-b-b-a c-d-c-d-c-d*. This poem also represents a short-lived interest in descriptive indentation that Hopkins abandoned by the end of the year; in the manuscript of this poem, the *b* and *d*

²¹Norman MacKenzie, ed., *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1990), 139.

lines are indented, thus visually illustrating the structure of the poem.²² Hopkins makes frequent use of internal rhymes, such as “bleared, smeared” in the sixth line, and “wears” and “shares” in the seventh; he also uses frequent alliteration, pairing words like “shining” and “shook” in the second line and “last lights” in the eleventh.²³ These poetic devices are found consistently in the texts Barber chose for his work, and the theme of spiritual melancholy which pervades both this work in particular and Hopkins’s poetry as a whole must have acted in concert with these attractive techniques to inspire the composer in choosing to set this work for double chorus.

Barber’s setting of this poem begins with a fanfare on the sonnet’s first two lines. This opening section is rendered in a double-period with four phrases of four bars each, succeeded by a brief “coda” that brings the introduction to a close. In the first period, the basses move downward in thirds, while the upper three voices fill in chords that begin with triads but quickly shift to increasingly dissonant sonorities (see Example 7). The second period begins transposed a whole step up, but uses the same voice-leading to achieve an identical harmonic pattern. After the first phrase, however, the bass switches between a C and an F[#], finally coming to rest on a C major triad in measure 21 after a four-bar phrase expansion that repeats the closing sonorities. The aforementioned bass motion in thirds that characterizes this opening section calls to mind the third-based progressions mentioned in connection with *The Virgin Martyrs*; such harmonic movement is consistent throughout Barber’s choral output (see Example 7).

²²Ibid., lx.

²³Ibid., 139.

Example 7. *God's Grandeur*, measures 1-9.²⁴ The opening fanfare of *God's Grandeur*.

Andante mosso ma maestoso

ff

Soprano
The world is charged with the gran - deur of God. It

Alto
The world is charged with the gran - deur of God. It

Tenor
The world is charged with the gran - deur of God. It

Bass
The world is charged with the gran - deur of God. It

Piano
(for rehearsal only)

Andante mosso ma maestoso

5

will flame out, it will flame out, _____ The unis.

will flame out, it will flame out, _____ The unis.

will flame out, it will flame out, _____ The unis.

will flame out, it will flame out, _____ The unis.

will flame out, it will flame out, _____ The unis.

The final section of the introduction begins with quieter dynamic markings than the previous phrases, but retains the same descending third pattern present in its predecessors. After meandering through several fairly dissonant chords, the section comes to “rest” on a particularly unstable sonority, a G[#] diminished seventh chord with

²⁴Samuel Barber, *God's Grandeur* (Milwaukee, WI: G. Schirmer, 1994). All subsequent references to the score of “God's Grandeur” come from this edition.

an A[#] in the bass (see Example 8, measure 31). Barber uses the tension created by this chord to propel the music forward into a dramatically contrasting section on the text of the second line of the sonnet, “It will flame out.”

Example 8. *God’s Grandeur*, measures 31-34. The transition into the melismatic passages on the text, “It will flame out.”

The musical score for Example 8, measures 31-34 of "God's Grandeur", is presented for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and piano. The score is in the key of F[#] major and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked "allargando" and the dynamics are "ff". The lyrics are: "crushed. It will flame out, will flame out, it will flame". The piano part features a complex harmonic progression with antiphonal polyphony.

This new material features antiphonal polyphony that begins in the key of F[#] major and quickly rotates through G[#] minor, C[#] major, and B major before returning to the original tonic of the section; in both choirs, the basses hold long notes above which

Example 9. *God's Grandeur*, measures 42-47. The descending pattern that marks the transition into the third section.

With the closing of the antiphonal melismas, Barber reintroduces the descending thirds from the opening, this time with new text (the fourth line of the poem, “Why do men then now not reckon his rod?”) and a thinner texture (see Example 9). This textural change is caused by the release of each voice after its first entrance in the section, an

At this point, the setting of the poem becomes notably more brisk, as fewer lines are repeated with none displaced from the original sequence. The remainder of the second stanza of the poem is rendered in alternating sections of full homophony (see Example 10) and three-part homophony above a pedal in the bass (see Example 11).

[illegible]

pp

nor can foot feel — be - ing shod. —

pp

nor can foot feel — be - ing shod. —

pp

bare — now, —

The first two lines of the closing couplets are imitative, while the third line is set to a variant of the accompanied three-part homophony shown in measures 78-83 above, with the basses and tenors accompanying the rhythmically unified women's voices to produce a blended texture (see Example 12).

Example 12. *God's Grandeur*, measures 127-132. The blended texture of the third line of the second stanza.

The image shows a musical score for measures 127-132 of 'God's Grandeur'. It features five staves. The first four staves are vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) and the fifth staff is the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'last lights off the black West went, And though the'. The music is in D major and 4/4 time. The vocal parts are in a homophonic texture, with the piano accompaniment providing harmonic support. The score is marked with measure numbers 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, and 132.

The final 22 measures of the piece are devoted to the three closing lines of the poem, for which Barber reuses the melismatic style found earlier in the piece. Other than the key, now roughly centered on D major but eventually shifting to C major, the principal musical difference is that Barber stretches the material for a longer span, keeping the basses true to their fundamental role far longer than previously in order to provide support for the acrobatics in the upper voices. The piece closes with a dramatic $^b\text{VII} - \text{V} - \text{I}$ cadence in C major made all the more emotionally pressing by the

decrescendo; as the music reaches the stability of the final triad, it fades into the distance, becoming as ephemeral as the “bright wings” of the Holy Ghost described by the text.

Despite some powerful moments, “God’s Grandeur” is in many ways inferior to much of Barber’s output. The remarkable restraint that characterizes so much of his music, especially his choral music, is notably absent: he introduces new thematic and harmonic content continually; the melismatic passages are somewhat overbearing; four lines of text (the second and final three) receive an inordinate amount of attention, thereby robbing much of the remainder of its import. Absent, too, is the prevailing tonal center found in most of Barber’s music, and with it the subtle machinations of harmonic expectation that typically accompany his deceptively simple settings. Here the harmonic shifting is both blatant and constant, so that by the end of the piece it loses its typical emotional impact by virtue of repetition. While there are individual ideas that are quite stunning, notably the tense, dramatic introduction, the polyphonic setting of lines nine and ten (“And, for all this, nature is never spent,” et cetera), and the receding final cadence, “God’s Grandeur” nevertheless is not one of Barber’s most appealing choral pieces. Regardless of its appeal, this piece does represent a transition of sorts in Barber’s choral output. The intimate ambiance and traditional mechanics of his earlier two pieces are here abandoned in favor of a broader compositional palette, a trend that will continue in a more tempered fashion as Barber’s compositional voice continues to develop.

The three pieces discussed above share many features, both textually and musically. All three of the poets were, to some degree, outcasts: Siegbert of Gembloux locked in his futile war with the pope; Emily Dickinson bound by her self-imposed withdrawal from the world; Gerard Manley Hopkins horrified by his impotence in the

face of the degradation of both his fellow man and the natural world. The poems that Barber selected all deal with the supernatural in some sense, be it the mystical contemplation of the martyrs, the restless longing for the embrace of death, or the sorrowful, sustaining power of God. Musically, the first two are markedly different from the third, but common bonds remain. Barber's reluctance to use authentic cadences is spelled out in all three pieces, as is his fondness for third-based chord progressions. The first and third pieces exhibit his affinity for shifting textures, a trait which remains constant throughout his choral output. While all three are markedly different in form, they all demonstrate to some extent his talent for subtle variation. Lastly, the most consistent feature of these early works, and the one that remains the most constant throughout Barber's career, is his concern for musical representation of his texts.

To address the issue of text setting, I would like to introduce two terms that, as far as I know, are my own: "microtext-painting" and "macrotext-painting." The former refers to instances in which a composer pays particular attention to a single word or phrase, such as using sharp dissonances to highlight painful or sorrowful words or ascending melody lines to illustrate triumphant phrases; the descending lines in the madrigal "As Vesta was Descending" by Thomas Weelkes (1575-1623) would be an example of this technique. The latter refers to the manner in which a composer takes into account the general "mood" of the work, using musical features to create an overall ambiance. Examples of macrotext-painting include the incendiary "Dies Irae" of Mozart's *Requiem*, the luscious tenderness of Durufle's *Ubi Caritas*, and the sighing exhaustion of Barber's *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*.

All three of the pieces discussed in this chapter involve both of these techniques to some degree. For instance, in *The Virgin Martyrs*, Barber sets the text “Wandering through the fresh fields go they, gathering flowers” to polyphonic music that indeed seems to “wander,” depicting the maidens searching for and finding flowers in the lilting, independent contrapuntal lines (see Example 13).

Example 13. *The Virgin Martyrs*, measures 29-37. The wandering of the Virgin Martyrs: an example of microtext-setting.

The musical score for Example 13, measures 29-37 of *The Virgin Martyrs*, is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 29-34, and the second system contains measures 35-37. The score is in 3/4 time and features four vocal parts. The lyrics are: "Wan-d'ring through the fresh fields, go they, Gath-'ring flow'rs, gath-'ring flow'rs, Wan-d'ring through the fields, Gath-'ring flow'rs, gath-'ring flow'rs, Wan-d'ring through the fresh fields, Gath-'ring flow'rs." The music is characterized by independent, lilting contrapuntal lines. Dynamics include *pp*, *p*, *mf*, and *p dolce*. Tempo markings include *'a tempo* and *'pp a tempo*.

This attention to the microtext is complemented by the quiet, meditative nature of the setting as a whole, in effect, its “macrotext.” Measures ten and eleven of Example 3 show another instance of microtextual setting in “Let Down the Bars, Oh Death”: the augmented harmony on the word “wandering” returns to the tonic on the word “done,” succinctly representing both the travels and homecoming of the “tired flocks.” Finally, “God’s Grandeur” is rife with instances of microtext-painting; two of the more apparent instances are the charged, grandiose nature of the opening fanfare (Example 7) and the

setting of the text, “And for all this, nature is never spent.” The thickening contrapuntal texture with which Barber illustrates this particular line of poetry echoes the poet’s perception of Nature’s endless powers of regeneration (see Example 14).

Example 14. “God’s Grandeur,” measures 85-97. The endless energy of nature: an example of microtext-painting.

The musical score for Example 14, measures 85-97, is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 85 to 90, and the second system covers measures 91 to 97. The vocal parts are Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B), and the piano accompaniment is shown at the bottom of each system.

Measure 85: Soprano enters with the text "this, na - ture is nev - er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts are silent.

Measure 86: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 87: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 88: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 89: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 90: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 91: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 92: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 93: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 94: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 95: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 96: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

Measure 97: Soprano continues "er spent, na - ture is nev -". The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts remain silent.

The piano accompaniment provides a harmonic and rhythmic foundation for the vocal lines, featuring a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more complex, syncopated pattern in the left hand.

In terms of the macrotext, Barber's setting is in one sense too long and contains too many contrasting sections to be considered unified in expressing one overall mood; all the same, the overriding urgency and building tension do serve to express Hopkins's distress at the plight of God's creation.

Diverse as the pieces discussed in this chapter may be, they are nevertheless united both by poetic themes and stylistic tendencies that are common throughout much of Barber's oeuvre. As such, these three earliest choral pieces represent a starting point for understanding Barber's choral music, presenting an introduction to his musical vocabulary that serves as a foundation for discussing his subsequent choral contributions. In the next chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate that, over the next decade and a half, he began to experiment with less conventional techniques while retaining his essentially traditional approach to harmony and form.

CHAPTER THREE

Searching for Balance

A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map, Reincarnations, and Prayers of Kierkegaard

At first glance, the pieces discussed in this chapter share little in common. The first, *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map* (1939), is a strikingly original piece, especially in instrumentation; additionally, its thematic content is politically and socially charged, a trait that it shares only with *God's Grandeur* within Barber's choral works. The second, the set *Reincarnations* (1936-40), is a return to Barber's lyrical roots as a composer and the more personal poetic content of both *The Virgin Martyrs* and *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*. The third, *Prayers of Kierkegaard* (1954), is both significantly later than the other two and markedly different in tone, being both his first large-scale choral work and the most overtly religious in theme. However, when taken as a group, these pieces provide an important insight into Barber's compositional development in that the third piece represents a synthesis of the differing styles of the previous two; in addition, each piece in this group in some fashion continues the stylistic trends discussed in the previous chapter.

In 1939, Randall Thompson asked Barber to return to the Curtis Institute to conduct the newly formed Madrigal Chorus, a position that Barber held for three years. While in charge of the ensemble, Barber composed several pieces specifically for their

voices, including *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*.¹ Stephen Spender wrote the poem in 1939 as a response to the Spanish Civil War. Shortly thereafter, the poet gave it to Samuel Barber as a token of their newfound friendship; within six months, Barber finished his setting for four-part men and three kettledrums.² The piece was hailed by one critic as “a strange and moving echo from the Spanish Civil War ... a fine page of choral technique that is modern, original, and expert.”³

The British poet Stephen Spender (1919-1995) was, in a sense, born to be a literary figure. His family was moderately wealthy and very involved in the intellectual life of England; his father was a journalist and biographer, while his uncle was the editor of the *Westminster Gazette*.⁴ The enterprising young man set up his own miniature printing press during his adolescence, with which he earned a modest income printing labels for chemists. While attending the University College of Oxford, Spender put his press to work printing the poetry and critical works of several of his friends, including W.H. Auden, Louis MacNeice, and Christopher Isherwood. This group, dominated by the forceful Auden, became known as the “Oxford Poets” and quickly became a powerful force in British literary life. Critics and readers “welcomed Spender’s gentle lyricism in contrast to Auden’s more acerbic and aggressive style,” but expressed concern that the

¹Barbara Heyman, *Samuel Barber: the Composer and his Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 180.

²Ibid., 186.

³ Ibid., 187.

⁴“Spender, Stephen, 1909-1995,” *Literature Online*, http://lion.chadwyck.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/searchFulltext.do?id=BIO002893&divLevel=0&trailId=119DA7B5748&area=ref&forward=critref_ft/ (accessed 8 April 2008).

young poet was devoting too much time to criticism, editorial work, and sitting on various committees to truly develop a unique poetic voice.⁵

In 1937, Spender attained an appointment as a delegate to the International Writers' Conference at Barcelona, where he witnessed the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. In addition to instilling a deep commitment to pacifism in the young poet, the war convinced him to broaden the previously intimate and personal themes of his poetry to include political and social topics. By 1939, Spender had returned to England, where he continued to participate in various causes and literary movements until his death in 1995. Although his personal worldview was perennially left of the mainstream, Spender was loved and appreciated by his people, earning the title of Commander of the British Empire in 1962 and a knighthood in 1983.⁶

While known primarily as a poet, many of Spender's most important works are prose. The critical collection entitled *The Destructive Element* (1935) was hailed at his death as "one of the few volumes of ... Thirties literary criticism which is still worth reading," while his ideological musings in *Forward From Liberalism* (1936) provide a poignant depiction of a soul torn between liberalism and socialism.⁷ Perhaps his most important work of prose is his autobiographical memoir, *World Within World* (1951), praised for its endearing honesty and candid insight. His collections of poetry, which were published at regular intervals throughout his life, depict a shift in perspective and priority. His earliest works are personal and naïve, while as he grew older, his poetry

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

became more pessimistic as well as politically charged. In his later years, he returned to the gentler tone of his youth and “wrote movingly of what it is like to grow old, and see younger generations usurping the active roles.”⁸

It was during the politically active stage of his life that Spender encountered Samuel Barber, who was visiting London at the time.⁹ Like many of his poems during the 1930s and 1940s, “A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map” (text below) is a blistering indictment of militarism and the glorification of violence; Spender was so pleased by Barber’s faithful reproduction of the spirit of the text that the two of them maintained an active correspondence over the next several years.¹⁰ Using the moral and social outrage of his newfound friend as inspiration, Barber composed a piece that expresses both the horrors of the conflict and the shattering impact of the war on the individuals who endured it:

A stopwatch and an ordnance map.
At five a man fell to the ground
And the watch flew off his wrist
Like a moon struck from the earth
Marking a blank time that stares
On the tides of change beneath.
All under the olive trees.

A stopwatch and an ordnance map.
He stayed faithfully in that place
From his living comrade split
By dividers of the bullet
Opening wide the distances
Of his final loneliness.
All under the olive trees.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Heyman, 186.

¹⁰John Sutherland, *Stephen Spender: A Literary Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 320.

A stopwatch and an ordnance map.
And the bones are fixed at five
Under the moon's timelessness;
But another who lives on
Wears within his heart forever
Space split open by the bullet.
All under the olive trees.¹¹

The poem is in three stanzas, each of which begins “A stopwatch and an ordnance map” and ends “All under the olive trees”; Barber’s setting is likewise in three sections, each of which begins and ends with similar material to emphasize the returning lines while the center portion of each stanza is given more independent music. After a brief introduction in which the kettledrum establishes a pattern of perfect fourths that remains constant through much of the piece, the first section opens with a basic homophonic choral motive called hereafter the “stopwatch motive” that returns with the beginning of each stanza (see Example 1-A). This motive returns with the beginning of the second section, but here a full measure of rest is inserted in the middle of the sentence and the dynamic levels are drastically reduced (see Example 1-B). The final stanza likewise begins with the stopwatch motive, but Barber sets it quite differently from either of the previous occurrences: the durations are longer, the dynamics more forceful, and an additional part is added in the baritone line (see Example 1-C). In this fashion, Barber takes the opening motive and gives it varying emotive qualities. The interruption and dynamic alteration that begin the second stanza provide an air of apprehensive uncertainty, perhaps representing the soldier’s growing realization of the finality of his comrade’s death. The final section begins with a forceful reminder of the immediacy of

¹¹Stephen Spender, *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 71.

the brutal conflict, with longer note values and increased dynamics that could be interpreted as representatives of the soldier's death.

Example 1. Three Statements of the "Stopwatch Motive"

A. *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, measures 4-7. The first statement of the "stopwatch motive."

The musical score for measures 4-7 of "A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map" features five staves. The first four staves are vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) in G major, each with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. They all sing the lyrics "A stopwatch and an ordnance map." The fifth staff is a piano accompaniment in G major, featuring a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand, ending with a triplet of eighth notes.

B. *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, measures 28-33. The second statement of the "stopwatch motive."

The musical score for measures 28-33 of "A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map" features five staves. The first four staves are vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) in G major. The Soprano and Alto parts have a forte (*f*) dynamic marking for the first half of the phrase and a piano (*p*) dynamic for the second half. The Tenor and Bass parts also have a forte (*f*) dynamic for the first half and a piano (*p*) dynamic for the second half. The lyrics "A stopwatch and an ordnance map." are repeated. The fifth staff is a piano accompaniment in G major, featuring a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand, ending with a triplet of eighth notes. The piano part has a forte (*f*) dynamic for the first half and a piano (*p*) dynamic for the second half, with a very soft (*pp*) dynamic marking at the end.

C. *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, measures 61-64. The third and final statement of the “stopwatch motive.”

This musical score shows measures 61-64 of the piece. It features five staves: four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor 1, Tenor 2) and one piano accompaniment staff at the bottom. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics for all parts are: "A stop-watch and an ordnance map. And the". The vocal parts are marked with *molto*, *ff*, and *ten.* (tenor). The piano part is marked with *soft sticks*, *cresc.*, *ff*, and *f*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Barber treats the closing material of each stanza in a similar fashion, altering the original chromatic polyphony slightly with the second and third iterations. The first instance of what I have labeled the “olive tree motive” occurs in the first tenor in measures 17-21, a sinuous line that descends from an F[#] to a C natural (see Example 2).

Example 2. *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, measures 17-27. The first statement of the “olive tree motive.”

This musical score shows measures 17-27 of the piece. It features five staves: four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor 1, Tenor 2) and one piano accompaniment staff at the bottom. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics for the vocal parts are: "All un-der the ol - - - - - ive trees,". The piano part is marked with *espr.* (espressivo) and *p* (piano). The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.



The second bass at first maintains a pedal on C, then takes up the motive while fragments of it appear in the upper three voices. The second bass at first maintains a pedal on C, then takes up the motive while fragments of it appear in the upper three voices. At the end of the second verse, all four parts take up the olive tree motive, beginning with duets: the second tenor and bass parts move in parallel octaves, while the first tenor and baritone lines follow suit a measure behind (see Example 3, measures 49-50).

Example 3. *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, measures 45-55. The second statement of the “olive tree motive.”

As before, the text is repeated, but this time the tenor parts double each other while the bass and baritone lines each go their own way, offset by an interval of a minor sixth and one measure of rhythmic displacement.

The final statement of this motive begins in the same manner as the first statement, with the bass holding a pedal tone and the inner voices providing contrapuntal accompaniment for the melody in the first tenor solo (see Example 4). The subsequent statement of the text, however, is reminiscent of the second iteration. The bass and baritone lines are separated by the same melodic distance of a minor sixth as before, as well as a similar rhythmic displacement. The tenor lines again begin in unison, but the second tenor line drops the motive in favor of accompanying material while a solo line shadows the first tenor part. The piece closes with a sustained C major chord underscored by a final iteration of the stopwatch motive in the second bass, a receding echo of the violence witnessed by the speaker of the poem.

Example 4. *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, measures 96-106. The final statement of the “olive tree motive.”

The musical score for measures 96-106 of *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map* is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 96-100) features a Solo Tenor part and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "All un-der the ol - - - - -". The Solo Tenor part is marked with *espr.* and *rall.* The piano accompaniment features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The second system (measures 101-106) continues the Solo Tenor part and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "ive trees.", "ive trees.", "ive trees.", "ive trees.", "ive trees. A stop-watch and an ord-nance map." The Solo Tenor part is marked with *morendo* and *mf molto allargando*. The piano accompaniment features a half note in the right hand and a half note in the left hand. The score concludes with a *marc. pp* marking.

With these common elements in mind, let us now turn to the internal features of the three stanzas. In the first, Barber maintains the kettledrum’s quartal pattern until the closing phrase, at which point it plays a pedal on C; he also briefly continues the opening homophony before introducing the first polyphony of the piece on the text “And the

watch flew off his wrist.” During this phrase, the bass holds a pedal on C while the upper three voices engage in imitative descending lines, thus microtextually depicting the man falling to the ground, the downward trajectory of his watch, and the solidity of the “ground” in its association with C, the home key of the piece (see Example 5). This descending pattern continues in the two lower voices, both of which come to rest on C before the closing olive tree motive.

Example 5. *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, measures 8-11. The second and third lines of the first stanza.

At five a man fell to the
 At five a man fell to the
 At five a man fell to the
 At five a man fell to the

ground And the watch flew off his wrist
 ground And the watch flew off his wrist, And the
 ground And the watch flew off his
 ground

The musical material of the second stanza is dramatically different from that of the first in response to the different tone of the text. At no point does the kettledrum continue its quartal pattern from the previous section; rather it moves from glissandi that introduce the new tonal center of B^b in the opening phrases to a major third pattern in the middle, finally resting on a dominant pedal on F for the closing phrase of the stanza.¹² The choral parts begin with a unison duet between the tenors, after which the second basses take up an ostinato derived from the timpani pattern while the baritone part begins an ascending line based on perfect fifths (see Example 6). The tenors, still in unison, echo the baritone line a third above and a measure behind, joining it in the descent on the final words of the penultimate phrase; the F in the bass serves as a pivot point connecting the second and third stanzas, acting simultaneously as the dominant of B^b minor and the subdominant of C major.¹³

Example 6. *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, measures 38-44. Excerpt from the second stanza showing the beginning of the ostinato in the bass.

¹²Russell E. Friedewald, *A Formal and Stylistic Analysis of the Published Music of Samuel Barber* (Ph.D. diss., State University of Iowa, 1957), 111.

¹³Friedewald, 110.



Spender unifies the poem by reusing imagery from the first two stanzas within the final one: both the “moon” and the five o’clock hour are referenced in the first and final stanzas, and the “bullet” from the second reappears in the third. In response to this textual unity, Barber infuses the third section of his setting with musical ideas from the previous sections. The second phrase, “And the bones are fixed at five,” recalls the earlier phrase, “At five a man fell to the ground” in both its harmonic progression and strident tone; the ensuing phrase, “Under the moon’s timelessness,” blends references to the immediately preceding octave leap in the bass as well as the “olive tree” motive in the upper three voices. As in the first section, the opening homophony is followed by imitation, but the polyphony in this instance resembles that of the fifth phrase of the second stanza both in its ascending nature and the disjunct motion. Before the final statement of the “olive tree” motive, musical material from the second stanza reappears on the text “split open by the bullet.”

While these references make up the bulk of the third stanza’s material, there are unique elements as well. It is the only section of the piece in which Barber changes meter; the prior two are consistently in common time throughout, while the third stanza

features both 3/2 and 5/4. The third stanza also contains the only notable section of rests for the kettledrum, occurring during the fourth and fifth phrases, perhaps depicting either the flow of battle away from the dying soldier or his slowing heartbeat. All the same, the referential material is truly the soul of this final stanza, as Barber uses it to achieve the same unity in his music with which Spender infused the poem. These references combine with the recurring “stopwatch” and “olive tree” motives to provide continuity throughout the work, a continuity that in turn connects this piece to the rest of Barber’s choral repertoire. As we have already seen in *The Virgin Martyrs*, and as we shall see in future works such as *The Lovers* (discussed in Chapter Three), Barber consistently uses recurring melodic motives, rhythmic mottoes, and musicopoetic imagery to provide unity within his pieces. Another feature of *A Stopwatch* that is consistent throughout his oeuvre is his use of text painting, which will be discussed in conjunction with the next piece, *Reincarnations*.

In addition to *A Stopwatch*, Barber also set three poems by James Stephens, collectively called *Reincarnations*, for the Curtis Institute Madrigal Chorus. Although the composer began working on the *Reincarnations* as early as 1936, he completed the project in 1940 with the Madrigal Chorus of the Curtis Institute in mind. It is likely that Barber’s infatuation with James Stephens was inherited from his uncle, Sidney Homer, who used Stephens’ texts for some of his own work; in fact, Barber himself had previously set some of the Irishman’s work for solo voice, namely “The Daisies (1927) and “Bessie Bobtail” (1934).¹⁴ This new work appears in many ways to revert to an

¹⁴Heyman, 182.

earlier mode of composition for Barber, as the poems are less politically charged than either “God’s Grandeur” or “A Stopwatch” and the musical forms are more along the intimate lines of his earliest works. However, in terms of musical complexity and depth, these pieces reflect his growing maturity.

The Irish poet James Stephens (1882-1950) was born in the slums of Dublin. He never knew his father, and at the age of six was abandoned by his mother to the ignominious clutches of the Mearth Protestant Industrial School for Boys. This critical event proved to be, as one might expect, of devastating import to the young child; the image of his mother permeates his literary works, as do drastically unflattering images of Christianity brought about by the harshness to which he was subjected at the Mearth school.

Stephens eventually escaped the school and lived first as a vagrant, then as a clerk, and eventually as a popular and prosperous traveling lecturer. Throughout his life he was mocked for his small stature, which many claimed made him look and act like a leprechaun; one of his friends, renowned author Oliver St. John Gogarty, claimed that his lack of height enabled him to “cast off the conventions which bound ordinary people and become a gleeman, the most lyrical spirit of his time.”¹⁵ This gleeful spirit endeared him to the hearts of many across the United States and in his native Ireland, and also permitted him to speak more freely than most about his commitment to Irish nationalism. By the end of his life, he was a fixture on BBC broadcasts as well as the American

¹⁵“Stephens, James, 1882-1950,” *Literature Online Biography*, http://lion.chadwyck.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/searchFulltext.do?id=BIO002896&divLevel=0&trailId=119DA7DB649&area=ref&forward=critref_ft (accessed 30 March 2008).

lecture circuit, and his literary works were well loved by readers across the Western world.¹⁶

A common complaint of those who study Stephens's life and work is that this admiration for his literature has not historically been shared by either critics or academics, those best equipped to ensure that his work endures. By contrast, his fellow artists certainly held him in high esteem. For example, James Joyce once remarked that if he died before completing *Finnegan's Wake*, only Stephens was capable of finishing it in his stead.¹⁷ Stephens's personal good humor masked a sardonic wit that he often used to parody other authors and, indeed, whole genres; for instance, many read his novel *The Charwoman's Daughter* as a mockery of both the Victorian romance novel in general and the works of Oscar Wilde in particular. Other works include complex references to Irish folklore, W.B. Yeats, and William Blake, the last of whom was one of the most important influences on Stephens's work as well as personal philosophy.¹⁸

When Samuel Barber began to compose *Reincarnations*, he chose three poems by Stephens that dealt primarily with themes of love, loss, and yearning. The first, "Mary Hynes" (text below), is in two parts, both of which contain three stanzas of four lines each. The poet cannot seem to keep his composure as he details the beauty of his beloved; the lines trip over one another in their haste to describe her loveliness, giving the poem a distinctly breathless quality:

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

(1)
She is the sky
Of the sun!
She is the dart
Of love!

She is the love
Of my heart!
She is a rune!
She is above

The women
Of the race of Eve
As the sun
Is above the moon!

(2)
Lovely and airy
The view from the hill
That looks down
Ballylea!

But no good sight
Is good, until
By great good luck
You see

The Blossom
Of the Branches
Walking towards you,
Airily!¹⁹

The second poem that Barber set, “Anthony O Daly” (text below), is a lament over the death of an Irish folk hero in which Stephens paints a picture of grief so intense that the entirety of Nature grinds to a halt. Unlike the boundless energy of “Mary Hynes,” this mournful poem languishes in agony, closing at last by asserting that “there is nothing but grief”:²⁰

¹⁹James Stephens, *Collected Poems of James Stephens* (New York: Macmillan, 1927), 45-46.

²⁰*Ibid.*

Since your limbs were laid out
The stars do not shine!
The fish do not leap
In the waves!
On our meadows the dew
Is not sweet in the morn,
For O Daly is dead!
Not a word can be said!
Not a flower can be born!
Not a tree have a leaf!
Anthony!
After you
There is nothing to do!
There is nothing but grief!²¹

Finally, Barber selected “The Coolin” (text below), a wistful love-poem in which the speaker urges his beloved to join him “under my coat,” coaxing her to come away with him to a secluded place “where we will talk, until talk is a trouble, too.”²² The gentle, lilting rhythm of the text belies the intensity with which the speaker entreats his love, an intensity that breaks forth in the penultimate stanza as he exclaims: “What if the night be black! Or the air on the mountain chill!”²³ After this outburst, the speaker subsides once more into gentle pleading, imploring his lover in murmuring tones:

Come with me, under my coat,
And we will drink our fill
Of the milk of the white goat,
Or wine if it be thy will.

And we will talk, until
Talk is a trouble, too,

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 51.

²³Ibid.

Out on the side of the hill;
And nothing is left to do,

But an eye to look into an eye;
And a hand in a hand to slip;
And a sigh to answer a sigh;
And a lip to find out a lip!

What if the night be black!
Or the air on the mountain chill!
Where the goat lies down in her track,
And all but the fern is still!

Stay with me, under my coat!
And we will drink our fill
Of the milk of the white goat,
Out on the side of the hill!²⁴

The first of the *Reincarnations* seizes attention from the beginning, drawing the listener into the music with a startling half-diminished seventh chord on the opening word (see Example 7).

Example 7. “Mary Hynes,” measures 1-5. The opening of “Mary Hynes” – a motive that returns throughout the piece.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The tempo is marked 'Allegro' and the dynamics are 'f' (forte). The lyrics are: 'She ___ is the sky Of the sun! _ She is the'. The music is in 4/4 time and features a half-diminished seventh chord on the first note of each line.

²⁴Ibid.



The first five measures peal forth in jubilant homophony; the chord progression is relatively simple with root-position chords within the key of C major until the final two measures, in which Barber abruptly shifts to a B major chord. Upon repeating this text, Barber employs a delightful textural device that complements the macrotextual infatuation with Mary: the lines keep attempting to establish polyphonic independence, but they continually mesh together again as if unable to resist the uncommon draw of her loveliness (see Example 8).

This playful back-and-forth between parts continues until the next section, the beginning of which contains the same text and basic musical material as the first; this expansion of two stanzas into three sections can easily be seen as an inversion of the text-music scheme of *The Virgin Martyrs*, in which Barber set three stanzas in two sections. In the opening phrases of the second A section of “Mary Hynes,” the occasional lengthening of a note or phrase, such as on the text, “She is the love of my heart,” represents the only difference from the piece’s opening. While also similar in character,

Example 8. “Mary Hynes,” measures 6-12. The parts come together, drawn by Mary’s beauty.

As the stanza closes, Barber employs a sudden *allargando* and an equally abrupt change to B^b major to set up the final section, a B section that is as tender and tranquil as the previous sections are jubilant. Frequent hemiolas in all parts give the impression that the music is struggling to stay within the newly acquired 3/4 meter; this struggle could be interpreted as a sense of breathlessness, repressed jubilation, or simply a representation of the “lovely and

airy” view described in the text. Once again, the appearance of the poem’s subject in the last line serves as a unifying agent; the four parts return not only to homophony for the description of “the blossom of branches,” but also to a stately quotation of the opening motive. The piece then dies away with a sequence of chords that leads the harmony gently back into the original key, C major (see Example 9).

Example 9. “Mary Hynes,” measures 57-66. The ending of “Mary Hynes,” with a restatement of the opening motive in measures 59-61.

poco rit. a tempo p grazioso

see The Blossom Of Branches Walk - ing towards you,

p grazioso

see The Blossom Of Branches Walk - ing towards you,

p grazioso

see The Blossom Of Branches Walk - ing towards you,

p grazioso

see The Blossom Of Branches Walk - ing towards you,

rit. pp

Air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly.

pp

Air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly.

pp

Air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly.

pp

Air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly, air - i - ly.

In the second of the *Reincarnations*, “Anthony O Daly,” Barber abandons the jubilant spirit of “Mary Hynes,” taking up a keening tone of grief more suitable for this poem’s darker subject matter. He immediately establishes two of the primary musical techniques that he uses throughout the first two sections, namely the descending motive in the soprano, which becomes the piece’s principal thematic idea, and the E pedal in the bass (see Example 10).

Example 10. “Anthony O daly,” measures 1-12. The melodic and accompanimental patterns at the beginning of “Anthony O Daly.”

Example 10 shows the musical score for measures 1-12 of "Anthony O Daly." The score is in 3/4 time and features four vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The Soprano part begins with a descending melodic line marked *mf espr.* The Bass part features a steady E pedal point marked *mf*. The lyrics are: "Since your limbs were laid out The stars do not shine! The fish leap not out In the waves! On our mead - - ows the dew Does not fall in the morn, For O Da - ly is dead! fall in the morn, For O Da - ly is dead, An - - tho - ny, An - - tho - ny, An -".

Barber sets this descending motive imitatively in the upper three voices throughout the first A section, which includes the first ten lines of text. This imitation often yields sharply dissonant results as when the tenors begin a major seventh below the sopranos on the text, “On our meadows the dew does not fall” (see Example 11).

Example 11. “Anthony O Daly,” measures 18-21. The tenor’s dissonant line in the fourth phrase of “Anthony O Daly.”

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) for the piece "Anthony O Daly," measures 18-21. The lyrics are: "On our mead - - ows the dew Does not fall in the a leaf! On our mead - - ows the dew Does not fall dead! On our mead - - ows the dew Does not fall - - - - - tho - ny, An - - tho - ny, An - - tho -". The score includes dynamic markings such as *piu f* and *f*. The tenor's line is particularly dissonant, starting a major seventh below the soprano.

Barber’s setting of this funereal lament follows with the same AA¹B form as “Mary Hynes,” including textual repetition in the A¹ section. In the second A section of “Anthony O Daly,” Barber repeats the first seven lines of the text, this time with the descending melody in the tenors and basses. The sopranos and altos sing the E pedal an octave apart on the same rhythmic pattern that the basses had in the first section. The higher range of this pedal along with the more intense dynamic level of the entire section produces a feeling of increasing pain and grief that reaches its climax in the *stringendo* transition between the second A section and the closing B section.

This final section begins with the piece’s one instance of full homophony. Barber unites all four voices into one powerful paean, forging a climax of agonized grief. The subsequent entrances of all four voices recall a similar passage in *God’s Grandeur*

wherein all parts enter one after another in a series of descending thirds. The strict imitation in all four parts emphasizes the emotional paralysis brought on by the speaker's grief while the closing open fifth imitates the hollow hearts of those mourning the loss of their beloved leader (see Example 12).

Example 12. "Anthony O Daly," measures 63-81. The *stringendo* section and subsequent descending thirds at the end of the A¹ section.

stringendo molto

tho - ny, An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, is dead! An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, is dead! An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, An - tho - ny, is dead!

a tempo
desperately

An - - tho - ny! Af-ter you There is noth-ing to do! An - - tho - ny! Af-ter you An - - tho - ny! Af-ter you An - - tho - ny! Af-ter you

ten.
f desperately

There is noth-ing to do! Af-ter you There is noth-ing to do! Af-ter you There is noth-ing to do! Af-ter you There is noth-ing to do!

The third and final piece in this set is “tenderly lyrical, mimicking the gentle, lilting rhythm of Stephens’s poetry.”²⁵ While each of the three stanzas receives its own musical material, the gently rocking rhythmic pattern in the opening phrase serves as a unifying pattern throughout (see Example 13).

Example 13. “The Coolin,” measures 1-6. The rhythmic pattern established in the opening measures.

Andante con moto ♩ = 50-54
mf tenderly

Soprano
 Come with me, un-der my coat, And we will drink our fill Of the

Alto
mf
 Come with me, un-der my coat, And we will drink our fill Of the

Tenor
mf
 Come with me, un-der my coat, And we will drink our fill Of the

Bass
mf
 Come with me, un-der my coat, And we will drink our fill Of the

milk of the white goat, Or wine— if it be thy will. —

milk of the white goat, Or wine— if it be thy will. —

milk of the white goat, Or wine— if it be thy will. — And

milk of the white goat, Or wine— if it be thy will. — And

p *pp*

²⁵Heyman, 185.

This homophonic section shows yet again Barber's appreciation for third-based progressions and chord changes; while the F major tonality is never truly in doubt, he makes frequent use of A and D minor, with a surprising D major chord in the penultimate measure. The second section begins with three-part men's voices meandering from the established key into that of A minor; eventually the tonality shifts to C, with both the major and minor modes implied. In this way, Barber uses a third-based progression to subtly settle into the dominant. He also begins to shift the texture between imitative polyphony and homophony, an undulating instability that reflects the tender wooing depicted in the text.

The third section begins with an abrupt return to homophony emphasized by the first *forte* marking of the piece. These combine with frequent dissonant chords to give the opening phrase a chilling effect that matches the description of the air on the mountain (see Musical Example 14).

Example 14. "The Coolin," 26-28. The return to homophony during the final section.

The subsequent phrase returns to the polyphony introduced in the previous section, eventually returning to the text and music with which the piece opened; thus the piece

ends with an abbreviated return of the opening material, a technique that has already been noted as consistent through much of Barber's choral repertoire.

In many ways, *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map* differs greatly from the *Reincarnations* set. The former is unique in its instrumentation, whereas the latter is quite traditional; *A Stopwatch* exhibits a tone of social outrage, while the pieces within *Reincarnations* are much more personal and intimate. Barber's setting of Spender's poem juxtaposes the militaristic cadences of the timpani with sinuous chromaticism, while his settings of Stephens's works retain a lyrical voice throughout. However, both are united by Barber's intense attention to maintaining the integrity of the texts. Examples of what I have termed microtext painting abound in both pieces. In *A Stopwatch*, the percussive line in the bass on the text "split open by the bullet" (see Example 6) clearly depicts the "splitting" that the bullet has produced, while the series of descending lines in the first stanza depicts the fall of the soldier and the flight of his watch described in the text (see Example 5).

Example 15. "The Coolin," measures 23-25. The "sighing" music at the end of the second section.

The musical score for "The Coolin," measures 23-25, is presented for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is common time (C). The score is marked with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "a sigh!", "and a sigh, and a lip, a sigh!", "hand, and a sigh, a sigh!". The music is characterized by a "sighing" quality, with a tenor line marked "ten." and "pp". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

Likewise, *Reincarnations* features moments like the “airy” music at the end of “Mary Hynes” and the music at the end of the second stanza of “The Coolin” that depicts the “sighing” described in the text (see Example 15). At the same time, macrotextual setting is equally prevalent, ranging from the blatant, such as the militarism of *Stopwatch* and the lamentation of “Anthony O Daly,” to the subtle, such as the “occasional longer note values on the word *she*” in “Mary Hynes,” depicting musically the speaker’s hopeless infatuation.²⁶

In addition to faithfully representing the images and moods of the texts, Barber uses familiar structural and harmonic techniques in these pieces. Like the recurring material in *A Stopwatch*, the unifying rhythmic pulses in both “Anthony O Daly” and “The Coolin” and the statements of the opening motive in “Mary Hynes” serve as unifying agents. All three pieces in the *Reincarnations* set utilize third-based progressions in some fashion, a harmonic device that Barber uses throughout his choral repertoire. While there are no instances of this progression in *A Stopwatch*, the perfect fourths in the timpani are reminiscent of the plagal cadences so prevalent in *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*. As different as these pieces are from one another, they retain several key characteristics of Barber’s style that serve to provide continuity with his past works and, as we shall see, provide a foundation for his future endeavors.

Over the next decade, Barber wrote no choral music; when he returned to the chorus in 1954 with *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, he maintained his keen sensitivity for the text, while fusing the more modern quality of *A Stopwatch* and *an Ordnance Map* with the profoundly intimate and lyrical spirit of *Reincarnations*. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*

²⁶Heyman, 183.

reflects the mournfully contemplative state of Samuel Barber at the time. Confronted with the impending death of his beloved uncle, Sidney Homer, and increasingly drawn to what Heyman terms “monastic solitude,” Barber composed this large-scale religious work presumably for the completion of a commission. However, the twelve years between the grant of the commission and its execution argue that the composer’s principal aim with this work was to relate in musical fashion the emotional turmoil within his soul. A newfound interest in the works of the Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) provided Barber with a textual outlet for this turmoil, giving him the depth of paired grief and spirituality that he sought to express in the music.

One of the most influential thinkers of the Nineteenth Century, Kierkegaard’s unique view of Christianity was largely the product of his severe upbringing. His father, a wealthy businessman, was deeply religious and plagued by intense guilt, “feelings of melancholy and anxiety” that were communicated in his dealings with his family.²⁷ Søren, the youngest son, reacted to the pressures of his upbringing by electing to study theology at the University of Copenhagen in order to please his father. Once free from the immediacy of his father’s dour influence, the young man began to dabble in more worldly studies such as literature and contemporary philosophy and developed a lifestyle in which he began “following pursuits sharply at variance with the austere precepts that had been inculcated upon him at home.”²⁸ This digression was short-lived, however, and

²⁷Patrick Gardiner, “Kierkegaard, Søren Aabye,” in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig, <http://www.rep.routledge.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/article/DC044?ssid=235285568&n=1#> (accessed April 11, 2008)

²⁸Ibid.

by the time of his father's death in 1838, the young Kierkegaard repented and returned to theological studies.

After a brief engagement to the daughter of a civil servant in 1840, Kierkegaard withdrew into his own version of "monastic solitude," devoting himself to bachelorhood in order that he might concentrate on developing his unique theological outlook independent of any career within the Christian institutions of his homeland. Most of his works were published under various pseudonyms, but in all of them he attacked worldly, complacent Christianity, raising uncomfortable issues about the rigorous demands of faith.²⁹ One of his central assertions dealt with what he termed the "crucial inadequacies of human reason" in the face of the divine, claiming, for instance, that the existence of God could not be established through metaphysical reasoning, a point of view in direct opposition to mainstream theological thought in Denmark during the 1840s.³⁰ Shortly before his death in 1855, he embarked upon a fervent crusade to denounce "the covert worldliness and hypocrisy" that "permeated the clerical establishment," reiterating his stark view of the severity of the demands of true Christian faith.³¹ This severe view of Christianity permeates the text of Barber's *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, as does the philosopher's insistence upon an "anti-rational" approach to understanding God:

O Thou Who art unchangeable, Whom nothing changes,
May we find our rest
And remain at rest
In Thee unchanging.
Thou art moved
and moved in infinite love by all things:

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

the need of a sparrow, even this moves Thee;
and what we scarcely see,
a human sigh,
this moves Thee, O infinite Love!
But nothing changes Thee, O Thou unchanging!

Lord Jesus Christ
Who suffered all life long
that I, too, might be saved,
and whose suffering still knows no end,
This, too, wilt Thou endure:
saving and redeeming me,
this patient suffering of me
with whom Thou hast to do –
I, who so often go astray.

Father in Heaven,
well we know that it is Thou
that giveth both to will and to do,
that also longing,
when it leads us to renew
the fellowship with our Saviour and Redeemer,
is from Thee.
Father in Heaven, longing is Thy gift.
But when longing lays hold of us,
oh, that we might lay hold of the longing!
when it would carry us away,
that we might give ourselves up!
when Thou art near to summon us,
that we also in prayer might stay near Thee!
When Thou in the longing
dost offer us the highest good,
oh, that we might hold it fast!

Father in Heaven!
Hold not our sins up against us
But hold us up against our sins,
So that the thought of Thee should not remind us
Of what we have committed,
But of what Thou didst forgive;
Not how we went astray,
But how Thou didst save us!³²

³²Samuel Barber, *Prayers of Kierkegaard* (New York: Schirmer, 1955), iv.

In setting the *Prayers*, Barber used several different sources, including prayers from Kierkegaard's *Journals* no. 692 (1847) and 1030 (1850), *Christian Discourses* (1848), and the theologian's last sermon, "The Unchangeableness of God" (1855).³³ The composer "took liberties in fashioning the text to his musical needs: this he did by reordering the sequence of lines, excising internal phrases, and substituting his own translation for specific words."³⁴ The result of this careful attention to the text is a beautiful progression of prayer that begins in worshipful adoration of the unchanging Deity. This adoration calls to mind the speaker's sinfulness, and the subsequent prayers breathe a spirit of abject sorrow and heartbroken contrition. This leads into an expression of longing for union with God, a longing fulfilled in the quiet surrender of the final prayer. In this manner, Barber fashions a seamlessly cohesive text from several different sources, an eclectic fusion that surfaces within the musical setting as well.

Critics such as Olin Downes and Paul Henry Lang hailed Barber's *Prayers of Kierkegaard* as one of his most stunning achievements, citing the variety of styles and techniques used within as evidence.³⁵ While this blending of diverse styles is certainly masterful, it may easily be attributed to Barber's study of the philosopher as much as any broadening of his personal expressive palette. In his program notes for the premier performance of *Prayers*, Barber observed that Kierkegaard "elaborated no philosophy and was indeed the sworn enemy of philosophical systems"; with this basic premise in

³³Heyman, 350.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 354-355.

mind, it is no wonder that Barber chose to compose his music with no overriding system in place but rather responding almost spontaneously to the needs of the text.³⁶

At the outset of the piece, he draws on medieval chant, a genre that moved him in a profound manner that no other music could replicate, according to the composer in his communications with his beloved uncle.³⁷ As the piece progresses, he utilizes such diverse stylistic features as antiphonal chorus, rich chromaticism, canonic polyphony, and atonality, to name a few; yet none of these styles stands on its own. Each new device is intimately tied to the spirit of the text, with the result that the music flows in an organic fashion throughout the piece. Although the textual divisions and tempo markings suggest four continuous sections, in reality the form of *Prayers of Kierkegaard* is much more integral, and much more intimate, than such abrupt divisions would allow. While these divisions make for a logical path of discourse, it is important to remember that the piece's overriding atmosphere is one of spontaneous prayer. This approach to composition was decidedly contrary to the prevailing stylistic trends in art music composition during the 1950s, as many of his contemporaries were working within the strictly regulated process of systematic serialism.

Marked "grave and remote," the chant that begins the *Prayers of Kierkegaard* evokes a sense of solemn introspection. Barber's sensitivity to the flow of the text is evident even in such sparse circumstances; indeed, the association of antiquity with Gregorian chant contributes to the sense of changelessness that Kierkegaard describes, as

³⁶Ibid., 350.

³⁷Ibid., 349.

do the longer rhythmic values on the words “unchangeable,” “changes,” and “unchanging” (measures two, three, and seven, Example 16).

Example 16. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, Measures 1-21.³⁸ The opening chant.

Text from Søren Kierkegaard Samuel Barber, Op. 30

Grave and remote, $\text{♩} = 36$
pp *legitissimo*
 Male Chorus a cappella *
 O Thou who art un - change-a-ble, when noth-ing chang-es, May we find our rest and re-

(5) main of rest in them un - chang-ing. Thou art moved and moved in in-fi-nite love by all things: the

(10) need of a spar-row... is - ven this moves Thee and what we scarce-ly see, a hu-man sigh,

(15) his moves Thee, O in-fi-nite Love!

Ten. this moves Thee, O in-fi-nite Love!

Base this moves Thee, O in-fi-nite Love!

The elongated note on the word “rest” in the fourth measure is an example of microtext painting, as is the comparatively swift motion in measures eight and nine on the text “Thou art moved and moved in infinite love.” In the thirteenth measure, Barber introduces a plaintive melodic gesture on the words “a human sigh” that will be used elsewhere in this section as a source for development, a technique common in much of his music.³⁹ This introduction sets the mystical mood of the piece and provides a stylistic connection with Barber’s previous works, most obviously with the microtext-painting

³⁸Samuel Barber, *Prayers of Kierkegaard* (New York: Schirmer, 1955), 1. All other references to the score of *Prayers of Kierkegaard* are from this edition. Due to the length of this particular excerpt, I have provided measure numbers every five measures in the form of circled numerals above the beginning of the measure to which they refer.

³⁹Heyman, 351.

described above but also with the introduction of an important motive within the first few bars.

The orchestra enters upon the conclusion of the chant, beginning quietly with material derived from the music on the word “sigh” described above; the instruments continue to crescendo up to the entrance of the full chorus in measure 27 on the text, “But nothing changes Thee, O Thou unchanging!” As the chorus extols the immutability of the Divine in the key of D major, the orchestral accompaniment fluctuates between F[#] major and D minor. The resulting harmonic clash admirably depicts the contrast between the permanence described in the text and the uncertainty of the human condition illustrated in the accompaniment (see Example 17).

While Barber will pit the orchestra against the chorus again later in this section, for now they come together in D Dorian as the tenors and basses repeat the opening text, “May we find rest and remain at rest.” This repetition occurs in canonic polyphony with music similar to that of the introductory chant; syncopated figures in the low strings, piano, and harp provide a sparse accompaniment, while the clarinet and bassoon double the voices. The sopranos and altos join the texture, but on different pitches than the tenor and bass sections, which also change their starting notes after the first full iteration of the text. Thus the music begins to “move” tonally as the chorus sings again the text, “Thou art moved and moved in infinite love.”

This propels the music into another statement of the text, “But nothing changes Thee, O Thou unchanging,” at which point Barber reintroduces the harmonic conflict between the chorus and the orchestra.

Example 17. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 30-34,⁴⁰ The clash between the chorus and the orchestra.

4 moving

Picc.

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. I, II, III, IV

Tpt.

Trb.

Tuba.

Timp.

Xyl.

Perc.

Tam-tam

B.Dr.

Harp.

Piano.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

chang - - - ing

May we find rest and re-

4

⁴⁰All instruments in this and subsequent references to *Prayers of Kierkegaard* are described within this thesis at concert pitch.

Example 18. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 59-61. The closing measures of the first section.

The musical score for measures 59-61 of *Prayers of Kierkegaard* is a complex orchestral work. The top section, measures 59-61, is marked *stringendo* and features a complex orchestral texture. The bottom section, measures 62-64, is marked *attacca* and features a similar texture. The score includes parts for Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, English Horn, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Timpani, Percussion, Piano, and voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The orchestration is dense, with many instruments playing sixteenth-note patterns, particularly in the strings and woodwinds. The dynamics range from *p* (piano) to *ff* (fortissimo), with crescendos and decrescendos indicated throughout. The tempo is marked *stringendo* and *attacca*.

Rising sextuplets in the orchestra propel the music towards its climax, an alternation of D major and minor chords; these chords both restate the harmonic conflict that underpins much of the first section of *Prayers of Kierkegaard* section and represent its closing sonorities (see Example 18).

The second section, which features a soprano soloist, begins with the low strings quoting the choral part on the text, “But nothing changes Thee” from the previous section. Immediately thereafter, the violins introduce a new accompanimental figure, a gently flowing pattern of alternating triplets and eighth-notes (see Example 19). This figure subsequently travels through other instruments in the orchestra as they accompany the soprano solo.

Example 19. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 62-68. A quotation in the low strings, and a new rhythmic pattern in the violins.

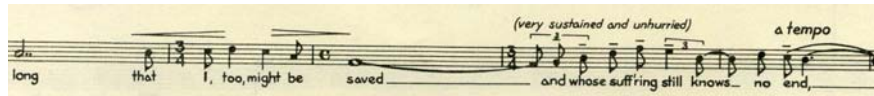
This solo is more akin to the opening chant than any of the subsequent choral material in the first section as it is quite rhythmically flexible, a fluidity enhanced by the consistently shifting meter. The first phrase of the soprano solo is identical to the oboe solo that begins the section (see Example 20). Barber then develops this melody in the soprano throughout the second section, responding to the text as evidenced in the final line of the prayer, “I, who so often go astray” (see Example 21).

Example 20. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, Oboe and soprano solos.

A. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 63-70. The oboe solo at the beginning of the second section.



B. Measures 70-76. The soprano solo's repetition of the preceding oboe solo.



Example 21. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 85-92 (Soprano and Horn solos).

The final phrase of the second section.



At this point, Barber utilizes sevenths and ninths to give the music a “straying” quality which is reinforced by the echoing horn solo. This phrase, quite unlike the largely conjunct and consonant preceding material, provides an instance of poignant microtext-setting at the end of the second section, which draws to a close as the soprano repeats her opening text, “Lord Jesus Christ,” with one final statement of the section’s opening motive.

The third section of the *Prayers* begins with the chorus in quiet homophony on the text, “Father in Heaven,” a texture that continues through the first several lines of

text. This material is reminiscent of Anglican chant in its *parlando* style, a style reinforced by the constantly shifting meters (see Example 22).

Example 22. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 97-102 (Chorus). The opening phrase of the third section on the text “Father in Heaven”; this material returns in many places later in the work.

Barber reinforces the B major tonality of the section through repetition more than functional harmony; the opening measure (see Example 22) is a good example of this, as the B major triad at the end is approached by a movement from F major through A major.

With the text “But when longing lays hold of us,” the texture shifts from the homophonic choral recitative into atonal polyphony, thus disturbing both the texture and tonal center of the opening phrase (see Example 23).

Example 23. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 115-117. The first statement of the atonal line.

The quasi-serialism of this passage was apparently unintentional, as Barber claimed to be unaware of how near he came to writing a tone row until a reviewer pointed it out to

him.⁴¹ Intentional or not, the highly dissonant music quite effectively depicts the yearning described in the text, providing yet another instance of microtext-painting within Barber's choral music.

Having thus stated the two main themes of this section, Barber introduces a musical conflict similar to that in the first section, this time between textures and moods rather than tonal centers. In measure 127, the bass and alto sections restate the opening text, "Father in Heaven," on a C major chord as the other sections restate the text, "But when longing lays hold of us," set in the same atonal polyphony as before. This polyphony is punctuated at regular intervals by homophonic outbursts; at first quiet and fragmented, these outbursts are eventually able to overtake the prevailing atonality, returning to a predominantly homophonic texture in measure 140. This prominence, however, is an uneasy one. The atonal theme continues in the orchestra beneath the choral surface, while the chorus itself is divided into two groups that exchange short passages of antiphonal material. The tempi of these passages steadily accelerate from 84 beats per minute in measure 160 to 160 beats per minute by the end of the section, an acceleration that combines with a dramatic increase in chromaticism in all parts to propel the music toward the end of the third section. As it approaches its frenzied climax, the chorus sings the closing line of the section, "oh, that we might hold it fast." They indeed appear to be holding fast for dear life as the fourth section of *Prayers of Kierkegaard* commences with a furious din in the orchestra.

This final section catapults forward out of the preceding material, commencing with an orchestral fanfare in E minor that is based on the "Father in Heaven" material

⁴¹Heyman, 353.

from the previous section (first seen in Example 22). For thirty-two measures, the higher-register instruments of the orchestra elaborate on this theme at a breakneck pace while the lower-register instruments practically blare out a bass line modeled on the opening chant. This fanfare reaches its climax in measure 203, as the chorus enters in a “frenzied” fashion with the text, “Father in Heaven” (see Example 24).

Thus achieving a moment of passionate catharsis, the music collapses inward to a static open fifth in the ensuing measures, with only the timpani and bass continuing the driving eighth-note pattern from earlier in the movement. The chorus reappears in a similarly subdued fashion in measure 229, now split into three choirs that respond antiphonally to one another. While the winds accompany the chorus for a few measures, the most prominent instruments here are two bells, one of which is placed off-stage. Heyman notes that “the bells were of special concern to Barber,” relating a detailed letter to the artistic administrator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra in which Barber specifies not only the “really distant effect” that he desired for the bells, but also the specific instruments he would like to have for the debut performance.⁴² The increasingly quiet chorus contributes to this “distant” feeling as well, fading gently into the closing chorale in which Barber once again utilizes third-based progressions, with the harmony fluctuating between the tonal centers of E major and C major. Sharing only “its modal character and asymmetrical meter” with the preceding sections, the chorale represents a final arrival of that peaceful rest that has been desired so intensely throughout the entire work (see Example 25).⁴³

⁴²Heyman, 354-55.

⁴³Ibid., 353.

Example 24. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 203-206. The climax of the fourth section's opening fanfare.

[25] Frenzied

Picc.
Fl.
Ob.
Eng. Hn.
Cl.
B. Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tpt.
Trb.
Tuba
Timp.
Xyl.
Perc.
Piano
S.
A.
T.
B.

[25] Frenzied

Vin.
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

pp cresc.
sf
f
rit

S. Dr. solo
rit

Fa-ther in Hea-ven
Fa-ther in hea-ven

Example 25. *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, measures 239-43 (Chorus). The first line of the closing chorale.

The image shows a musical score for a four-part chorus (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and soloists. The lyrics are: "Hold not our sins up a - gainst us, But hold us up against our sins, So that the". The score is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The tempo is marked "Broad and straightforward, ♩ = 60". The dynamics range from *p* (piano) to *mf* (mezzo-forte). The score is numbered 29.

As the chorale draws to a close, the increasingly dense orchestral texture combines with mounting dynamic levels to imply a coming apotheosis; however, such a climax is not forthcoming, and the final chord dies away into silence instead of the expected triumphant swell, similar to the ending of *God's Grandeur*. In this fashion, Barber closes his powerful and evocative musical introspection, having borne his audience through the myriad states of religious contemplation and ultimately into a heartfelt peace in the midst of the tumult.

In *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, Barber integrates distinctly twentieth-century techniques with the Romantic-style lyricism for which he is generally known. One instance of the former is the atonal polyphony used to depict the “going astray” in the third section, while the latter is exemplified in such passages as the soprano solo in the second section and the closing chorale. Throughout the piece Barber utilizes a broad palette of compositional techniques in order to express the text as fully as possible. The opening chant, the insistent D major triad on the word “unchanging,” and the dissonant meanderings mentioned above all provide instances of microtextual setting. The macrotext in this piece is somewhat more difficult to ascertain, due to the size of the work and the attendant plethora of emotional themes; it could be argued that each of the

four sections has its own particular mood or theme that is portrayed in the music. On the other hand, the extreme variance both between and within each section points to another possibility, namely that Barber's setting of these powerful words, the almost spontaneous fashion in which different facets of mystical melancholy flow forth within the music, is itself a macrotextual appreciation for Kierkegaard's emphasis on immediate personal response as opposed to systematic intellectualism.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, grouping these three pieces together may appear to be somewhat awkward. The first two were composed within a few years of one another, while the final work was not premiered for more than a decade after the completion of *Reincarnations*. The texts arc across a vast range of thematic material, as innocent sensuality, spiritual sorrow, socially conscious outrage, and overwhelming grief are all portrayed in the three works. On the surface, the musical styles of the three pieces are as divergent as the themes of the texts. But if *Prayers of Kierkegaard* can be considered to be a synthesis of earlier stylistic traits, then the two pieces discussed earlier provide the best examples of the disparate factors combined within this monumental work. Here can be found both the intimate voice of "The Coolin" along with the shrill urgency of "Anthony O Daly," the driving rhythmic quality of *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map* along with the intricate counterpoint of "Mary Hynes." It is this successful, even masterful, fusion of previously far-flung techniques within the monumental frame of *Prayers of Kierkegaard* that speaks to Barber's maturation as a composer.

CHAPTER FOUR

Searching for Meaning

Opus 42 and *The Lovers*

The three pieces discussed in this chapter are Barber's final choral compositions. In composing the two pieces that comprise Opus 42, the composer further honed his skills of motivic development and musical imagery, expanding on the musical techniques used in his earlier pieces in order to imbue them with exquisite beauty. These two pieces serve as intermediaries between Barber's two large-scale choral works, *Prayers of Kierkegaard* and *The Lovers*. The latter is the culmination of Barber's choral style, as the techniques that he developed throughout his career are used subtly and masterfully to produce a vivid musical tapestry.

By nature a sensitive man, Samuel Barber was devastated by the failure of his second opera, *Antony and Cleopatra* (1966), which he composed for the opening of the new Metropolitan Opera House. Franco Zeffirelli, the librettist and director hired for the event, had in mind a grand spectacle, a gala worthy of the opening of such a glorious theatrical space. To that end, he planned complex staging for which he desired extensive rehearsals including "twenty days to rehearse the Actium battle scene alone," but the event's manager allotted the cast only twenty-five days total.¹ This one instance can be seen as a microcosm of the entire spate of the problems surrounding *Antony and Cleopatra*, namely an overly grand vision paired with a lack, if not of resources, then

¹Barbara Heyman, *Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 444.

certainly of time. The opera was roundly criticized by critics and audiences alike, and while it was later revised to great acclaim, the rancor with which his music was received thrust Barber into a period of self-imposed seclusion that lasted many years.²

It was during this time, when he struggled with depression and alcoholism, that Barber began refusing commissions altogether, determined to compose as he wished: “I ... now want to compose what I want on my own time, be it 48 preludes and fugues for piccolo!”³ This period of artistic independence yielded not only one of his best-known song cycles, *Despite and Still* (1968), but a pair of unaccompanied choral pieces, “Twelfth Night” and “To Be Sung on the Water,” that are grouped together as his Opus 42. While these two pieces differ in their subject matter and musical construction, they are both characterized by a yearning that is intensely expressed by Barber’s poignant settings.

The text of the former piece, “Twelfth Night,” was written by Laurie Lee (1914-1997), a native of the rural town of Slad in Gloucester, England. Despite the consistent specter of hunger, Lee’s impoverished family was a happy one, and although he left his home while still a teenager the peaceful rural village continued to provide “a fertile and consistent garden of imagery for his poetry” throughout his life.⁴ In 1934, Lee traveled to London, where he worked as a laborer and began writing poetry. This existence was notably unsatisfactory for him, and after a year he elected to travel through Spain, equipped only with a violin with which to earn a living and enough command of the

²Ibid., 461.

³Ibid., 463.

⁴Donald Nally, “Barber’s Opus 42: The Poetry and the Music as Key to His Musical Animus - Part I,” *Choral Journal* 47, no. 4 (2006): 8.

Spanish language to request a glass of water. He eventually took part in the Spanish Civil War on behalf of the loyalists, but repeated bouts with pneumonia sent him back to London where he lived and worked through World War II.⁵

While living in London, he began to write poetry with more vigor, participating in the “general redirection of poetry in the early 1940s away from social protest or social reportage towards a renewed emphasis on personal vision”; his works focused mainly on themes of “love, nature and childhood” but he was eager to avoid the traps of “over-sentimentality and luxuriant romanticism.”⁶ Three collections of his poetry were published: *The Sun My Monument* (1944), *The Bloom of Candles: Verses from a Poet’s Year* (1947), and *My Many-Coated Man* (1955). It is somewhat ironic that the third collection won him the William Foyle Poetry Prize, only to become the last volume of original poetry that he would ever publish. After his success as a poet, Lee began to write a series of memoirs, the most successful of which was the second, *Cider with Rosie* (1959); Lee commented that this work “was not a novel and not an autobiography... It was not so much about me as about the world that I observed from my earliest years.”⁷ Its success was such that it rendered Lee independently wealthy, enabling him to return to Slad with his family where he lived until his death in 1997.

Although it is included in all three of Lee’s published collections, Barber discovered “Twelfth Night” (text below) in *My Many-Coated Man*, in which the poet

⁵Petra Freeland, “Lee, Laurie,” *Literature Online*, http://lion.chadwyck.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/searchFulltext.do?id=BIO017571&divLevel=0&trailId=119DA8FEA5A&area=ref&forward=critref_ft (accessed 22 April 2008).

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

recalls his impoverished but happy childhood with fondness. In this particular poem, Barber found instances of themes that recur throughout Lee's poetry: the interplay of time and memory; the idea of death and rebirth, represented both by Christ's birth and rebirth and the seasonal renewal of the natural world; and a preference for assonance ("sky birds fly," "seems can green") as opposed to end-rhyme.⁸ The central theme of spiritual searching is a familiar one for Barber, and the blend of mystical and natural themes recalls some of the composer's earlier works, particularly *God's Grandeur*:

No night could be darker than this night,
no cold so cold,
as the blood snaps like a wire,
and the heart's sap stills,
and the year seems defeated.

O never again, it seems, can green things run,
or sky birds fly,
or grass exhale its humming breath
powdered with pimpernels,
from this dark lung of winter.

Yet here are lessons for the final mile
of pilgrim kings;
the mile still left when all have reached
their tether's end: that mile
where the Child lies hid.

For see, beneath the hand, the earth already
warms and glows;
for men with shepherd's eyes there are
signs in the dark, the turning stars,
the lamb's returning time.

Out of this utter death he's born again,
his birth our saviour;
from terror's equinox he climbs and grows,

12. ⁸ Nally, "Barber's Opus 42: The Poetry and the Music as Key to His Musical Animus - Part I," 8-

drawing his finger's light across our blood--
the sun of heaven, and the son of God.⁹

Barber's setting of this text is principally homophonic with the occasional use of polyphony highlighting particularly vivid passages, such as the *animando* return to the opening idea in measure 39. The overarching tonality is A minor, but this remains unconfirmed until a dominant pedal on E in measure 26, almost halfway through the 58-measure piece; this suspension of the home key is achieved by presenting the opening plagal sonorities as a false tonic and by consistently using an added second scale degree on the cadences.¹⁰ While this is the first instance of such an extended tonal deception in Barber's choral music, the extended plagal section is reminiscent of *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*, in which he uses plagal progressions throughout the piece.

Example 1. Opus 42, "Twelfth Night," Statements of the Opening Phrase.

A. Measures 1-3: The opening bars of the piece present an important motive.

Moderato ♩ = 60
mp
No night could be darker than this night, no cold so cold,
mp
No night could be darker than this night, no cold so cold,
mp
No night could be darker than this night, no cold so cold,
mp
No night could be darker than this night, no cold so cold,
Moderato ♩ = 60

⁹Ibid., 19.

¹⁰Ibid., 17-18.

B. Measures 39-43: The opening motive reappears at the beginning of the final stanza (see measure 40).

The image displays a musical score for measures 39-43. It features five staves: four for vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and one for the piano accompaniment. The tempo and mood markings are *animando e cresc. molto* and *with majesty*. The lyrics are: "For see, Out of this ut-ter death he's born a - gain, - his birth our Sav - iour;". The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (*f*, *poco f*, *ff*), articulation (*staccato*), and phrasing slurs. The piano part features a prominent opening motive in the right hand, which is referenced in the text as measure 40.

Each of the five stanzas is set individually, but much of the material is connected in both character and motive. For instance, the opening phrase is recycled throughout the piece, two examples of which are shown in Example 1. The first stanza introduces not only the motivic material that permeates this piece, but also certain consistent harmonic techniques as well, such as the use of added ninths within chords (see the first chord in measure 40). The second and third stanzas reiterate the opening motivic material, but it is frequently altered to suit the text. For instance, the staccato markings in measure thirteen underscore the “powdering” of the pimpnells in the second stanza (see Example 2). In this particular example, Barber combines two of the stylistic traits discussed within this thesis. He provides structural continuity by using material introduced at the beginning of the piece, but alters it to reflect the immediate meaning of the text, an instance of “microtext-painting.”

Example 2. Opus 42, “Twelfth Night,” measure 13. The staccato marks capture the image of the “powdering” of the pimpurnels.

The musical score for Example 2, Opus 42, "Twelfth Night," measure 13, is presented in a system of five staves. The first four staves are for vocal parts, and the fifth is for piano accompaniment. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal parts are marked *leggiero* and the piano part is marked *p*. The lyrics are: "pow - dered with pim-per-nels, from this". The piano part has a staccato marking under the first measure.

In the fourth stanza, Barber utilizes chromatic chords and progressions as well as halting rhythms to generate a sense of musical instability that reflects the hesitance of the “waiting earth” and the “men with shepherd’s eyes” as they await the “lamb’s returning time.” The composer segues into the final stanza by repeating the opening text of the fourth stanza, “For see,” in ascending imitation that yields a sense of unbearable anticipation through its impassioned dissonance (see Example 1-B); this is resolved with the opening phrase of the new stanza, as the music cadences in A minor without alteration or dissonance for the first time. The fifth stanza is the longest of the piece, with fifteen measures devoted to the climactic resurrection of Christ. The dynamic markings maintain a minimum level of fortissimo throughout, with frequent crescendos marked. In addition, an “animando poco a poco” marking contributes to the sense of catharsis that culminates with the exultant cry at the end of the stanza (see Example 3).

Example 3. Opus 42, "Twelfth Night," measures 53-58. The climax in the final stanza.

he climbs and grows, the sun of

he climbs and grows the sun of

grows, the sun of

grows; the sun of

heav-en, the sun of heav-en, and the

heav-en, the sun of heav-en, and the

heav-en, the sun of heav-en, and the

heav-en, the sun of heav-en, and the

calmando ed

calmando ed

Thus spent, the piece closes in quiet exhaustion, moving from F major to A minor in an example of the third-based progression that Barber uses so frequently.

The opening material reappears in shortened form as a coda during the closing measures, one of Barber's most recognizable conventions in smaller pieces. In this case, however, the repeating material is not only truncated, but is also transposed into two different keys, namely A and E minor compared to the opening D minor. In addition, it is fragmented both rhythmically and texturally, occurring in two different voices displaced by three full beats. These subtle alterations reveal an increased interest in subtlety and versatility, both of which traits are demonstrated in his setting of "To Be Sung on the Water" by Louise Bogan (1897-1970).

In many ways, Bogan was defined by the disasters of her childhood. Her father worked in a paper-mill, and her mother believed that she had married beneath herself; as a result, she carried on numerous flagrant love affairs that resulted in frequently vicious fights with her husband.¹¹ The young Louise was confronted with jealousy, contentiousness, and emotional abandonment at many points during her childhood, and both her personal life and her poetry betray their influence.

At the age of thirteen, Bogan was sent to study at the Girl's Latin School in Boston due to her scholastic aptitude. It was here that her love of poetic expression began to emerge, first modeled after the style of Swinburne and Morris, but eventually finding a more lasting influence in the symbolists, especially Mallarmé. Upon leaving the school, she began a series of disastrous love affairs and marriages that went hand-in-

¹¹Donald Nally, "Barber's Opus 42: The Poetry and the Music as Key to His Musical Animus - Part II," *Choral Journal* 47, no. 4 (2006): 20.

hand with her increasing success as a published writer; it was not until her late thirties that she found peace in both her professional and personal lives due to a lasting relationship with a still-anonymous electrician, a commitment to psychoanalysis, a full-time position reviewing for the *New Yorker*, and a series of teaching positions in Seattle, Ann Arbor, and Chicago.¹² This newfound stability lasted until the end of her life, but the bitterness of her youth consistently provided a source for poetic inspiration.

As early as 1912, Bogan had found “her note, the pure lyric note, as she often put it, of ‘memory and desire.’”¹³ Her love of the symbolists gave her an acute attention to the sonic qualities of her poetry, in particular the interplay of percussive consonants against a background of soothing vowels. Thematically, as mentioned before, her work focuses on issues of jealousy, abandonment, and bitterness in love, as in the excerpt below:

My mother remembers the agony of her
womb
And long years that seemed to promise
more than this.
She says, “You do not love me,
You do not want me,
You will go away.”¹⁴

“To Be Sung on the Water” contains both the melancholy character so typical of Bogan’s poetry and many of the technical approaches that she favored. Rhyme and half-rhyme are interchanged subtly, and the gentle metric flow encapsulates the parting lovers in a fragment of timeless sorrow. The first of the two stanzas is rendered in an a-b-a-b-a

¹²Ibid., 21-23.

¹³Elizabeth Frank, *Louise Bogan: A Portrait* (New York: Knopf, 1985), 416.

¹⁴Louise Bogan, “Betrothed,” in *The Blue Estuaries: Poems 1923-1968* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1968), 7.

scheme, the regularity of which is eroded with the second stanza's expanded format (c-d-d¹-e-d-d-e). The smooth line of the vowels is frequently punctuated by S and T consonants, "like an oar breaking the calm surface of the water."¹⁵ These elements combine to "demonstrate Bogan's extraordinary economy and simplicity, capturing the sound and rhythm of leisurely rowing in a minimum of words and a few, highly-concentrated images":¹⁶

Beautiful, my delight,
Pass, as we pass the wave.
Pass, as the mottled night
Leaves what it cannot save,
Scattering dark and bright.

Beautiful, pass and be
Less than the guiltless shade
To which our vows were said;
Less than the sound of the oar
To which our vows were made,
Less than the sound of its blade
Dipping the stream once more.¹⁷

Dedicated to Florence Kimball, Leontyne Price's voice teacher and a close friend of Barber, the intimate *To Be Sung on the Water* represents a distinctly different mood from its chronological counterpoint, the more hymn-like *Twelfth Night*. While on the surface the two pieces are quite dissimilar, they share a common thread of continuing variation that is used in significantly different ways: whereas *Twelfth Night* presents and develops a central motive, *To Be Sung on the Water* varies an ostinato throughout the piece (see Example 4). The central difference is that the motivic development of the

¹⁵Nally, "Barber's Opus 42: The Poetry and the Music as Key to His Musical Animus - Part II," 24.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., 37.

former leads inexorably to climax, while the variations of the ostinato lead just as inexorably back to its original form, robbing the piece's climax of any lasting power and denying relief from the sorrowful atmosphere created by the composer.

Example 4. Opus 42, "To Be Sung on the Water," measures 1-2. The ostinato presented first in the men's voices.



This ostinato is the defining characteristic of the piece, and both its character and usage are important to interpreting the work. The two-measure pattern occurs throughout the piece on the text, "Beautiful, my delight," the opening words of the poem.

Metrically, the first half of this line is a dactyl, while the second is an anapest; Barber sets these unequal fragments to identical rhythmic patterns, which "creates an effect of calmness ... as if the musical pattern was involuntary."¹⁸ At the same time, the first half of the ostinato ends on a minor sixth between C and A^b (see Example 4, measure 1), possibly implying the first inversion of the VI chord in C minor, while the second half ends on a perfect fifth between C and G, implying the I chord. The relative instability of

¹⁸Ibid., 26.

the first in comparison to the second emphasizes the natural rhythm of the words, while the musically identical rhythm provides continuity and calmness.

As the piece commences, the tenors and basses begin with the ostinato, while the sopranos and altos sing a melodic duet that utilizes the same basic rhythmic characteristics as the ostinato. After three statements of the basic ostinato, Barber begins to alter it as he expands the range of the women's duet (see Example 5). While the opening melodic line moved mostly in parallel thirds, here the basic distance is expanded to a sixth while the upper range of the soprano is increased as well. This change in melodic material corresponds to the first variations in the ostinato, such as the perfect fourth in the previously static bass part in measure seven and the alteration of both the text and the notes in measures eleven and twelve (see Example 5).

Example 5. Opus 42, "To Be Sung on the Water," measures 7-12. The first alterations of the ostinato.

The musical score for measures 7-12 of Opus 42, "To Be Sung on the Water," is presented in a five-staff format. The top four staves represent the vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: "Pass, as the mottled night Leaves what it can-not — Beau-ti-ful, — my de-light, — Beau-ti-ful, —". The piano part features a rhythmic ostinato of eighth and sixteenth notes. The vocal parts enter in measure 7 with a melodic line that moves in parallel thirds. In measure 11, the Soprano part has a melodic alteration, moving from a perfect fourth to a sixth. The piano part also has alterations in measures 11 and 12, including a perfect fourth in the bass part.

save, Scat-ter-ing— dark and bright,
 save, Scat-ter-ing— dark and bright,
 my de-light.— Scat-ter-ing— dark and bright,—
 my de-light.— Scat-ter-ing— dark and bright,—

In combination with the soprano and alto parts, these changes appear to initiate a modulation to the dominant. This excursion to a new tonal center is short-lived, however, as the ostinato immediately subsides to the lower register and closes with a perfect fifth on C.

Example 6. Opus 42, “To Be Sung on the Water,” measures 13-18. The men and women exchange the ostinato and the melody.

Scat-ter-ing dark and bright. Beau-ti-ful,—
 Scat-ter-ing dark and bright. Beau-ti-ful,—
 Scat-ter-ing— dark and bright. Beau-ti-ful,— pass and
 Scat-ter-ing— dark and bright. Beau-ti-ful,— pass and



As the second stanza begins, the tenors and basses exchange roles and material with the sopranos and altos on a regular basis, altering the ostinato in the process (see Example 6). Not only does this version of the ostinato contain no perfect fifths whatsoever, but it also does not remain constant through even the first iteration. The duets begin to trade roles with every line of text; this constant switching of ostinato and melody combines with the increasing dynamic levels and the steadily increasing range of the voices to lead the piece to its climax in measures 26-29 (see Example 7).

Example 7. Opus 42, “To Be Sung on the Water,” measures 26-31. The climax achieved in the second section of the piece.

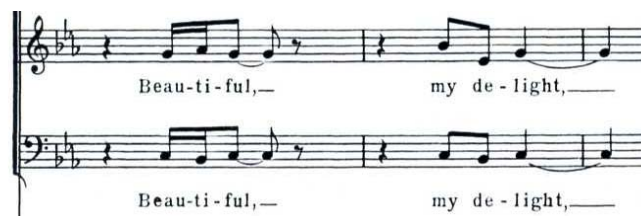
This musical score snippet shows measures 26-31 of Opus 42, 'To Be Sung on the Water.' It features five staves: two for vocal parts (Soprano and Alto) and three for piano accompaniment (Right Hand, Left Hand, and a lower Right Hand part). The vocal parts have lyrics: 'Beau-ti-ful, — Less than the sound — of the oar — To' and 'which our vows were made, to which our vows — were made, —'. The piano accompaniment includes a steady eighth-note ostinato in the right hand and a more complex rhythmic pattern in the left hand. The score is marked with 'f' (forte) and 'espr.' (espressivo).



At first, it appears that the resolution of this climax marks the end of the piece, as the music seems to wind down immediately. The dynamic levels decrease steadily from measure 30, and the sopranos close to a sustained G in measure 33. The ostinato in the men's voices slowly returns to its original form, and the alto line begins to repeat the ostinato as well. What appears to be the final iteration of the ostinato in the men's voices slows via rhythmic augmentation (see Example 8, measure 35).

Example 8. Opus 42, "To Be Sung on the Water," measures 34-5 (men's voices).

The "final" appearance of the ostinato in the men's voices.



But Barber is not yet done. As we have seen before in pieces such as *A Stopwatch* and *an Ordnance Map* and *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*, he frequently ends smaller pieces with reiterations of their opening material; he uses this technique here by closing with a section that at first appears to be a simple repetition of the first stanza. But after

repeating the first three lines of the first stanza, Barber segues seamlessly into the final two lines of the poem, thus unifying the two stanzas with an extended fourteen-measure coda that serves as a summary of the entire piece. This closing section repeats the musical material of the first stanza, but reverses its pattern by contracting in both dynamics and range until the final open fifth simply dies away. What in earlier pieces seemed simply to be a habitual closing now serves a distinct purpose, one that fits in with the relentlessness of this piece's sorrowful mood. The decision to continue the piece past the climax and bring the ostinato back into the texture gives the work a sense of timelessness, "the feeling that this ostinato (again, these waves) began long before this poem and will end well out of our sight."¹⁹

In both of these pieces, Barber uses to some extent the techniques discussed in the previous chapters. The motivic development in "Twelfth Night" is pervasive, and while "To Be Sung on the Water" is fairly nondevelopmental in nature, the variations of both the ostinato and the melodic line indicate that even here the composer uses familiar and consistent material to give the piece cohesiveness. Microtext-painting is somewhat less prevalent in these two pieces than in earlier works, but there are still instances. For example, the music on the text "powdered with pimpernels" in "Twelfth Night" (see Example 2) is directly representative of this scattered image, while the climactic music that begins the final stanza appears to be "born again" out of the preceding confusion, just as Christ is announced as rising "out of this utter death" (see Example 1-B). Microtext-painting is even scarcer in "To Be Sung on the Water," but certain lines are represented

¹⁹Nally, "Barber's Opus 42: The Poetry and the Music as Key to His Musical Animus - Part II," 28.

fairly directly; for instance, the final line of the first stanza, “scattering dark and bright,” is depicted by the suddenly increased dynamics and somewhat agitated motion in the tenors and basses (see Example 5). In addition, the ostinato can easily be interpreted as a representation of the lapping of the waves and the constant dipping of the oars in the water described in lines two, nine, and eleven of Bogan’s poem.

While individual lines and phrases are depicted musically, the emphasis in both pieces appears to be on the macrotext. The motivic recurrence throughout “Twelfth Night” can easily be seen as representative of Christ’s resurrection, while the harmonic instability and poignant dissonances reflect the speaker’s sorrow at His death. The ostinato in “To Be Sung on the Water” emphasizes the timelessness discussed previously, while the introspective, meandering melody reflects the gentle musings of the speaker, who cherishes these memories of happiness regardless of the sorrow that they engender.

These two vastly different pieces appear to share only their common year of origin; in the spirit of artistic liberty mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it appears that at this point Barber simply wanted to write small-scale choral pieces. “Twelfth Night” is highly structured and involves consistent thematic development, whereas “To Be Sung on the Water” appears to roll forth in a dream-like state, paying only the slightest attention to formal structure. The former’s mystical themes contrast greatly with the intimately personal subject matter of the latter. Indeed, the only common strand between the two, other than the performing forces involved, is an air of quiet sorrow that is by no means unique to these two pieces within Barber’s choral oeuvre. Seen in the context of that output as a whole, they seem to join together to look forward and backward: the sorrowful spirituality of “Twelfth Night” recalls the musings of the

Prayers of Kierkegaard, while the bittersweet remembrance of lost love presages Barber's next and final major choral work, *The Lovers*.

In 1971, he accepted a commission for the Girard Bank of Philadelphia, despite his recently proclaimed aversion to the proscriptive nature of working under commission. He fulfilled their request by composing his second large-scale choral work, *The Lovers*, which required a full orchestra along with the chorus and baritone soloist.²⁰ The work is based on *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair* by Pablo Neruda (1904-73), a collection of intensely sensual poems, written in 1920, that chronicle a doomed love affair from passionate inception to bitter unraveling. Barber's friend Valentin Herranz introduced him to these poems in 1970; their intensely personal and intimate nature struck a chord with the composer, as he consistently sought to ground his compositions in personal experience.²¹ While the audience at the premier, a predominantly conservative group, "raised their eyebrows" over both the leftist politics of the poet and the explicitly erotic imagery used throughout the work, their admiration for the music overcame these reservations and *The Lovers* met with approval wherever it was performed, even prompting one critic to avow that it represented Barber "at his very best."²²

Pablo Neruda, originally named Ricardo Eliecer Neftalí Reyes (Neftalí to his family and friends), was born in central Chile to an engineer whose work on Andean railways ensured a comfortable, if not lavish, upbringing for his three children. Neftalí's schoolteacher, future Poet Laureate Gabriela Mistral, introduced him to the world of

²⁰Heyman, 476.

²¹Ibid., 476-77.

²²Ibid., 479-82.

verse and encouraged him to pursue his own talents. At the age of sixteen, the young poet changed his name “in part to avoid his father’s disapproval” of his poetic pursuits, but also in honor of the Czech poet Jan Neruda, one of Mistral’s perennial favorites.²³

The newly christened Neruda’s first major collection, *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (“Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair”), was immensely popular; their combination of often brutal eroticism and equally forceful melancholy describe “the effects of passion and its loss in terms that speak to lovers everywhere.”²⁴ Commenting later on the violence of the love in *Veinte poemas*, Neruda remarked that these poems were not “aimed at idealizing beauty or love, but the messy, scented perceptions of lived loves—and lusts.”²⁵ Their publication in 1924 thrust Neruda into the public eye, a rising fame that eventually resulted in a series of civil appointments, beginning with the post of Chilean consul to Rangoon, Burma in 1927. During the next decade, he served as consul in Ceylon, Java, and Singapore, all the while experiencing a growing sense of alienation from those around him, including his first wife, Maria Antonieta Hagenaar. *Residencia in la tierra* (“Residence on Earth”), his 1935 collection in two volumes, reflects this disassociation and the subsequent depression that gripped him with imagery and techniques that reflect such works as T.S. Eliot’s *Wasteland*.²⁶

²³Christina García, foreward to *Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*, by Pablo Neruda, trans. W.S. Merwin (New York: Penguin, 2004), viii.

²⁴Sarah Johnson, “Neruda, Pablo, 1904-1973,” *Literature Online*, http://lion.chadwyck.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/searchFulltext.do?id=BIO008661&divLevel=0&trailId=119DA9279ED&area=ref&forward=critref_ft (accessed 18 April 2008).

²⁵García, viii.

²⁶Johnson.

This despondency met its end when Neruda experienced the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. In 1934, he traveled to Madrid to have his *Residencia* published; in addition to meeting his second wife, the painter Delia del Carril, he saw close friends killed by the soldiers of General Franco. His third *Residencia*, published in 1947 but written in the late 1930s, reflects the sublimation of his sorrow and alienation into anger at the violence caused, in his eyes, by the evils of capitalism.²⁷ Thus Neruda, like Spender, became a political poet, waging a war of words on the side of socialism; unlike Spender's poetry, Neruda's work did not suffer in the eyes of his audience, as his political works of the 1940s were immensely popular. This immense popularity led to his election as a communist senator in 1945, as well as his reception of the Chilean National Prize of Literature that same year. Unfortunately, his deeply held and loudly proclaimed convictions about the corruption of the Chilean government led to an order for his arrest in 1947, after which he was forced to flee the country.

During his exile, Neruda's poetry grew even more forceful and political. He acknowledged what he described as "poetry's duty to the common man," and subsequently stripped his verse of much of its esoteric quality, developing a far more "transparent style" than his earlier works.²⁸ This trend found its grandest expression in his *Canto General* of 1950, in which he described his view of humanity's unity with the world and history. During his exile he met the woman who would eventually become his third and final wife, Matilde Urrutia; his love for her inspired another set of poems, *Los versos del capitàn* ("The Captain's Verses"), published in 1952. While this collection

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

returned to the intimate, personal nature of his earlier works, the violent struggles associated with sexual love were gone, replaced by Neruda's belief in the necessary unity between man and woman in the face of social injustice.

In that same year, Neruda was allowed to return to Chile, and he and Matilde settled in Isla Negra on the coast. The representative government of Salvador Allende treated Neruda as a national hero, and in turn the poet was grateful for the stability that Allende's government provided his beloved homeland. In a twist of bitter irony, Neruda passed away in 1973 just as the Allende's government began to fall: the poet was spared the sight of his nation being torn by chaotic revolt once again, but lived long enough to know that it was inevitable. Upon his death, eight volumes of previously unpublished poetry were released. These final collections were intensely personal and reflective, marking a return to the themes of sensual love for both his homeland and his beloved.

While he enjoyed all of Neruda's work, Barber had to decide which particular poems to set, in addition to choosing translations and cuttings of text. After carefully considering his texts, he included only three poems in their entirety; for his English texts he drew from translations by two different scholars, Christopher Logue and W.S. Merwin, supplemented at times by his own translation. For instance, the poem used for the first movement is represented in its entirety as translated by Merwin, while the second is also included as a complete entity but in Logue's translation. For the eighth movement, "Tonight I can write," Barber used Merwin's translation, but omitted several lines and substituted individual words, such as "infinite" for "endless."²⁹ In addition to carefully editing the words of the texts, Barber also rearranged the order of the poems;

²⁹Heyman, 479.

the original works are not arranged with any chronology in mind, and Barber wanted to express the birth and death of this love affair within a more narrative framework. The resulting texts weave a tapestry of evocative imagery from the violent lust of “Body of a woman” to the sobbing grief of “We have lost even this twilight,” a tapestry that Barber’s music colors in rich, luscious detail.

Musically, *The Lovers* is bound together by the opening motive of the introduction. Based on the call of a songbird heard by the composer, this motive, referred to subsequently as “the *Lovers* motive,” consists of an ascending perfect fourth followed by a descending major third in the flute part.³⁰

Example 9. *The Lovers*, Prelude, measures 1-7 (flute, clarinet, and oboe). The first statements and alteration of the *Lovers* motive.³¹

The image shows a musical score for measures 1-7 of the Prelude from *The Lovers*. It features four staves: Flute 1, 2; Oboe 1, 2; English Horn; and Clarinet 1, 2. The Flute part begins with a '1. Solo' marked 'mp espr.' and plays an ascending perfect fourth followed by a descending major third. The Oboe part has a '1. Solo' marked 'mp' and plays a similar motif. The English Horn and Clarinet parts have rests. The score includes dynamic markings like 'pp' and 'p', and performance instructions like 'liberamente' and 'p espr.'

Barber uses this melodic fragment in a variety of ways, often inverting it or altering the intervallic content. Indeed, there are times when it appears to have been stretched beyond its limits or compressed into nothingness with only the basic contour remaining. And yet,

³⁰Ibid., 479-80.

³¹Samuel Barber, *The Lovers* (New York: Schirmer, 1971), xx. All subsequent references to the score or text of *The Lovers* are from this edition.

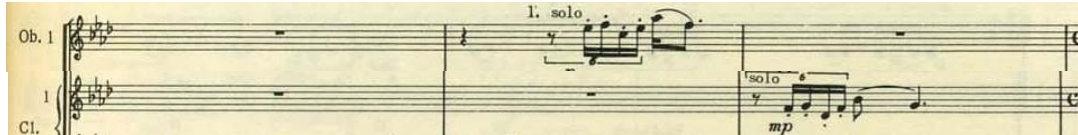
even in this guise it provides musical unity between the movements in a manner similar to (if more extensive than) Barber's use of motivic development in other pieces discussed in this thesis. The orchestral introduction features it prominently and in multiple voices at the outset, with the flute and clarinet stating it first, followed by a modified inversion in the oboe (see Example 9). A few measures later, a quintuplet accompaniment in the harp also utilizes a reordering of this motive; this pulsing undercurrent serves to highlight the principal theme of the movement, a plaintive *appassionato* melody introduced canonically, with the cellos echoing the first violins (see Example 10).

Example 10. *The Lovers*, Prelude, measures 16-19 (Harp, 1st violins, cellos). The principal theme of the prelude, stated in the violins and cellos.

The image displays a musical score for measures 16-19 of the Prelude from 'The Lovers'. It includes four staves: Harp, Vn. I, Vc., and Cb. The Harp part has a quintuplet accompaniment. The Vn. I and Vc. parts play a plaintive melody marked 'mp appassionato'. The Cb. part provides a bass line. The score is in 3/4 time and D major.

Beneath this soaring line, a new theme begins to emerge; first stated in the background in the oboes, then in the clarinets, this idea, develops into the contrasting theme of the introduction (see Example 11).

Example 11. *The Lovers*, Prelude, measures 17-18 (Oboe and 1st Clarinet). The contrasting theme of the introduction.



This secondary theme consists of two iterations of the *Lovers* motive, E^b-F-C and E^b-A^b-F; its rhythmic drive is enhanced by the use of a wide battery of percussion instruments whose variety of sounds give the first full statement a somewhat irreverent feel.

In the ensuing material, a struggle arises between the lyricism of the first theme and the obsessively rhythmic drive of the second; this struggle is reminiscent of similar techniques used in *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, although in this context the musical duel reflects sexual tension rather than religious contemplation. The two ideas take turns occupying the melody and the accompaniment, with the latter steadily gaining ground against the increasingly feeble statements of the former. Barber achieves this effect by first restating the primary theme with altered intervals that give it a frantic edge, then utilizing fragments of it as a flippant accompaniment to the increasingly prominent secondary theme.

Example 12. *The Lovers*, Prelude, measures 56-59 (strings). The apotheosis of the primary theme of the prelude.

This image shows a snippet of a musical score for measures 56-59. It features four staves for strings: Violin I (Vn. I), Violin II (Vn. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Double Bass (Vc. and Cb.). The tempo is marked 'Broadly' and the time signature is 4/4. The music is in G major. The Violin I and II parts are marked 'ff espr.' (fortissimo, esprimo). The Viola and Cello/Double Bass parts are marked 'arco' (arco) and 'ff espr.' (fortissimo, esprimo). The notation includes eighth and sixteenth notes with beams, and a fermata over the final note of the phrase.

Material drawn from the secondary theme continues to build in intensity toward the climax, at which point the primary theme is rendered in a grandiose apotheosis in the strings (see Example 12). Even here, the opposing material is present in the accompaniment, and as the climax fades away, the rhythmically pulsing theme reappears, providing a direct segue into the first full movement, “Body of a woman”:

Body of a woman, white hills, white thighs,
you look like a world, lying in surrender.
My rough peasant’s body digs in you,
and makes the son leap from the depth of the earth.
I was alone—like a tunnel, the birds fled from me,
and night swamped me with its crushing invasion.
To survive myself I forged you like a weapon,
like an arrow in my bow, a stone in my sling.

But the hour of vengeance falls and I love you.
Body of skin, of moss, of eager and firm milk.
Oh the goblets of the breast! Oh the eyes of absence!
Oh the roses of the pubis! Oh your voice, slow and sad!

Body of my woman, I will persist in your grace.
My thirst, my boundless desire, my shifting road!
Dark river-beds where the eternal thirst flows
and weariness follows, and the infinite ache.³²

More than any of the other poems within this work, “Body of a woman” emphasizes the raw sexuality of the beloved, focusing on the speaker’s desire to an almost obsessive degree. Barber reflects this obsession by basing the entire monothematic movement on the secondary theme from the overture, which itself is an expansion upon the *Lovers* motive. The orchestra maintains a strong rhythmic pulse throughout the movement, providing a forceful backdrop for the baritone soloist (see Example 13). The soloist himself opens with what amounts to a parallel period: the first

³²Barber, *The Lovers*, xx.

two four-measure phrases introduce the movement's theme and ends it on E, the dominant, while the second pair of phrases repeats the same general material with an expansion at the end that moves the melody line to A, the tonal center of the movement.

Example 13: *The Lovers*, Movement I, measures 1-8 (full). The opening of the first movement with material based on the prelude's secondary theme.

The baritone line repeats this material for the remainder of the movement, with four parallel periods occurring in all. This melodic fixation focuses attention on the carnal nature of the text, mirroring the speaker's carnal obsession with the body of his beloved. The orchestra underscores this obsession with both its rhythmic ostinato and the recurring statements of the secondary theme from the introduction; at first, these occur only between the baritone's periods, but toward the end they become more frequent, punctuating each four-bar phrase as the movement dies away.

While the macrotext of this movement is expressed through the methods detailed above, there are also many instances in which Barber utilizes microtext-painting. For

example, the text “birds fled from me” is accompanied by trills in the upper strings that provide a mimetic rendering of birds in flight (see Example 14).

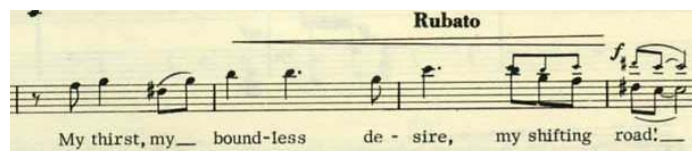
Example 14. *The Lovers*, Movement I, measures 21-2 (Baritone and strings).

The trills in the strings represent the birds that fly from the speaker.



In the closing period, the optional part for the baritone line on the text, “my shifting road,” alters the original theme for the first time, musically depicting the “shifting” described in the text (see Example 15).

Example 15. *The Lovers*, Movement I, measures 57-60 (Baritone). The “shifting road” as depicted in the baritone line (upper part).



Other instances of microtext painting are more oblique, such as the extended range of the phrase “And makes the son leap from the depth of the earth” and the dynamic decrease to *piano* on the text “I was alone.” In short, Barber’s setting of this poem provides vivid illustrations of the text at every turn, whether subtle or direct, a vividness that continues primarily in the macrotext of the second movement, “Lithe girl, brown girl”:

Lithe girl, brown girl,
The sun that makes apples,
And stiffens the wheat,
And splits the thongweed,
Made your body with joy.

Your tongue like a red bird
Dancing on ivory,
Your lips with the smile of water.

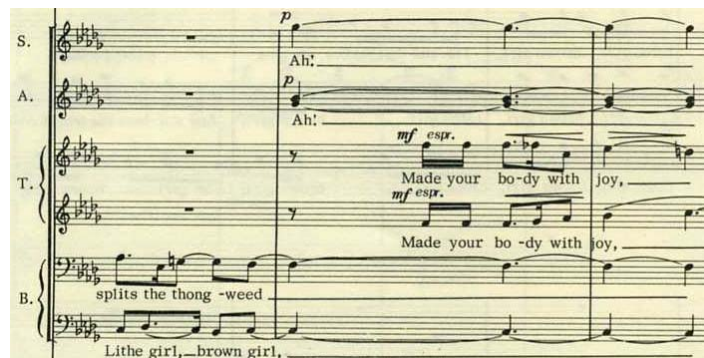
You stretch out your arms
And the sun grabs
At the loose black coils
Of your hair
As if water were falling.

Tantalize the sun if you dare,
It will leave
Shadows that match you everywhere.
Lithe girl, brown girl,
Nothing draws me towards you,
And the heat within you
Beats me home
Like the sun at high noon.

Knowing these things,
Perhaps through knowing these things
I seek you out.
Ah! Listening for your voice
Or the brush of your arms against wheat
Or your steps among poppies
Grown under water.

The second movement is a tripartite piece that features a men's chorus with, as Barber states at the beginning, "a few women's voices." The composer uses bongo drums, whole-tone scales, and 5/8 meter to emphasize the exotic sensuality of the text and provide a contemplative contrast to the forcefulness of the previous movement; while *A Stopwatch* has several measures in 5/4, it is only occasional, and none of his other choral pieces use any of these devices. The opening and closing sections of "Lithe

Example 16. *The Lovers*, Movement II, measures 1-8 (Chorus). The opening of the second movement.



The middle section begins with the tenors and basses alternating rhythmically active homophonic material in three and two parts, respectively. Harmonically, the vocal

lines move the harmony away from the previously established Bb minor through a series of implied tonal regions, including B minor, E minor, and A minor, none of which are confirmed by either traditional harmonic progressions or extended use. Throughout this call-and-response section, the melody is presented in the accompaniment, but it cannot gain the attention of the singers save for a brief moment at roughly the middle of the section. This reappearance is short-lived, as the voices immediately split into three parts and end the section with an energetic canon on the text “And the heat within you / Beats me home / Like the sun at high noon.” The final bars of this section almost appear to be an uneasy marriage of material from two pieces discussed earlier in this thesis: the two tenor lines involve the same intervallic relationships as the “olive branch” motive from *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*, while the bass line recalls the frantic buildup to the closing section of “Anthony O Daly” (see Example 17).

Example 17. The *Lovers*, Movement II, measures 26-28 (Men’s Voices). The men’s voices recall both *A Stopwatch* and “Anthony O Daly.”

The image shows a musical score for men's voices in measures 26-28 of *The Lovers*, Movement II. The score is written for three parts: soprano, alto, and bass. The lyrics are: "beats me home, beats me home, —" for measure 26, "beats home, beats home at high —" for measure 27, and "noon. —" for measure 28. The tempo is marked "poco rit." and the dynamics are "p sub.".

In this movement, Barber begins to disguise this central motive, withdrawing it from the foreground but using it to provide a subtle connection to the preceding music. The bottom notes of the piano accompaniment spell out the motive in absolute pitch (B^b-E^b-C), but the third beat must be transposed down an octave to achieve this (see Example 18). The melody line utilizes a transposed inversion of the motive at the end of

the phrase on the text, “splits the thong-weed”; the tenor line at the end of the middle section uses the same inverted version, but does so between two separate iterations of the “beats me home” text. Thus, while Barber uses the *Lovers* motive from the introduction within this movement, its presence is much more subtle here than in “Body of a woman.” In addition, he foregoes any of the microtext-painting used in the previous movement, preferring here to simply set the overall ambiance of the poem.

Example 18. *The Lovers*, Movement II, measures 1-2 (Piano). A subtle variation of the *Lovers* motive in the opening piano part.



In the second movement, the men’s voices are the central performing force; ever the lover of symmetry, Barber chooses to set the third movement for women’s voices. “In the hot depth of this summer” (text below) is a delicate piece in which the women’s voices move in gentle counterpoint against a smoothly rocking four-chord accompaniment played by three-part cellos; these elements are punctuated by instrumental interludes, marked *liberamente*, that emphasize the languid nature of the movement as a whole:

In the hot depth of this summer
 The morning is close, storm-filled.
 Clouds shift: white rags waving goodbye,
 Shaken by the frantic wind as it goes.
 And as it goes the wind throbs over us
 Whom love-making has silenced.

The tonality of this piece is F# minor throughout, but this tonal center is achieved more through repetition than traditional cadences. At no point is there a dominant harmony,

and the tonic chord occurs on weaker beats throughout the piece, as demonstrated by the cello parts in Example 19.

Example 19. *The Lovers*, Movement III, measures 1-4. The opening measures of the third movement establish both the overall ambiance and the accompanimental patterns used throughout the movement.

In this fashion, the tonal center is achieved in a manner consistent with the relaxed, even exhausted nature of the text; the piece ends in the parallel major, but even this transition is remarkably lacking in emphasis due to the decrescendo that marks the closing plagal cadence. This erosion of the tonic is reminiscent of other pieces such as *Twelfth Night* and *Let Down the Bars, Oh Death*, works that share the contemplative mood of “In the hot depth.”

Barber sets the three couplets of this poem to music that varies in an almost organic manner, responding to the poetic images that they relate; at no point does any melodic idea contrast greatly with that which appears at the very beginning (see the voice parts in Example 20). The rising figure in the first measure of the soprano line remains the principal idea throughout the piece, while the altos maintain an undulating pulse underneath the melody. Within this general motion, Barber is sensitive to the opportunities for text-painting that Neruda’s poetry offers. For instance, at the beginning of the second couplet Barber begins the soprano line out of place on the text “Clouds

shift”; further in the same couplet, the sopranos seem to be shaken by the same wind that grips the clouds (see Example 20, measure 9). Pulsing dissonance marks the text, “the wind throbs over us” (see Example 20, measure 12). Lastly, the two vocal lines join together on a unison pitch at the very end, dying as one on the word “silenced.”

Example 20. *The Lovers*, Movement III, measures 9-12. Microtext-painting occurs on the text “shaken by the frantic wind” and “the wind throbs over us.”

The trend of decreasingly obvious use of the *Lovers* motive continues in this movement, with its direct statement occurring only rarely, such as in the soprano voice at the beginning of the final couplet (see Example 20, measure 11). The bass notes of the accompaniment figure represent an inversion of this motive in which the direction of the third is altered (see Example 20); in other places, especially in the melody, the rising and

falling contour of the motive is traced without it being used directly. This movement substitutes a deceptive simplicity at odds with the chromatic and rhythmic complications of the earlier movement, and the quiet sorrow that it engenders with its repetitive harmonies and aching dissonances can easily be interpreted as the beginning stages of the lovers' estrangement.³³

In the fourth movement, "Close your eyes" (text below), the poetry returns from its musings over the natural world and focuses again on the lovers themselves, a focus that Barber recreates faithfully in the music:

Close your eyes wherein the slow night stirs,
Strip off your clothes. (O frightened statue!)
Like new-cut flowers your arms, your lap as rose.

Close your eyes wherein the slow light stirs,
Breasts like paired spirals,
Lap as rose, and rosy shadows in your thighs.
The slow night stirs within your eyes,
My quiet one.

Rainfall. From the sea a stray gull.
The rain walks barefoot through the street.
Leaves on the trees are moaning like the sick.

Though the white bee has gone
That part of me the world calls soul
Still hums and the world is not so wide
I cannot hear its bell
Turn in the spirals of grey wind.
My quiet one.
Strip off your clothes.
My quiet one.

The movement is bipartite with a brief coda that recalls the opening section, a familiar trait of Barber's music; the opening section itself features a gently rolling rhythm, a

³³Heyman, 478.

lyrical melody, and lush, dissonant harmonies that reflect the sensual nature of the text. The text's depiction of unbalanced sensuality is present from the outset, as the opening accompaniment appears to be in two different keys.

Example 21. *The Lovers*, Movement IV, measures 1-6. The unbalanced tonality at the beginning of the fourth movement.

With quiet motion ♩ = 69

B. Cl. *p* *sempre legato*

T. *mp* Close your eyes where - in the slow night...

Vn. I *mp espr.*

Vn. II *p*

Vla. *p pizz.*

Vc. *p*

poco trattenuto

B. Cl. *poco trattenuto*

Cel.

T. *Solo pp* stirs. Like new cut flow'rs your arms, your lap as

Vn. I *Solo p*

Vn. II *Solo p*

Vla. *Solo pp* Strip off your clothes. (O frighten'd

Vc. *Solo p* Strip off your clothes. (O frighten'd

Vn. I *arco*

Vn. II *1. solo pizz.* *p*

Vla. *1. solo pizz.* *p*

Vc. *1. solo pizz.* *p* *div.*

The cello and bass clarinet are decidedly in D, and their quintal pattern suggests a I-V-ii-V-I progression; however, the viola and 2nd violin revolve around the key of A major while the tenors and first violins cannot decide whether they are in A major or F# minor (see Example 21).

The dissonance created by the bitonality combines with persistent syncopation to give the entire A section a feeling of uneasy sultriness. This unease continues as the choral texture stretches from two to four-part men on the last line of text; the previously straightforward harmonies begin to dissolve into chromaticism, a dissolution which affords Barber the chance to utilize the third-based progression of which he is so fond, moving in the last two chords from E^b major to G major (see Example 22).

Example 22. *The Lovers*, Movement IV, measures 14-17 (Chorus). Barber uses a third-based progression between E^b and G in measure 17.

The image shows a musical score for measures 14-17 of 'The Lovers', Movement IV, Chorus. The score is for Tenors (T.) and Basses (B.). The lyrics are: 'slow night stirs with in your eyes. My qui - - et one.' and 'The slow night stirs, my qui - - et one.' The music features a third-based progression between E-flat major and G major in measure 17.

The altos and sopranos join in the second section, which marks a departure from the studied sultriness of the opening. The chromatic tendencies revealed at the end of the opening continue here, as no tonal center is allowed to establish itself; the chorus weaves a nervous counterpoint that sinks in both dynamics and register against a backdrop of chromatically offset triplets in the accompanying instruments. This decrease in volume and register is short-lived, as the music begins to build toward a cacophonous climax on the lines “I cannot hear its bell / Turn in the spirals of grey wind,” with a sharply

dissonant chord falling on the last word of the phrase. The section then closes with another third-based progression on the same text as before, this time from B^b major to D major; after a brief orchestral transition, the movement closes with a coda that quotes the solo lines from the opening.

Example 23. *The Lovers*, Movement IV, measures 36-38. The altered *Lovers* motive appears in many voices in the orchestra.

The musical score is for measures 36-38 of 'The Lovers', Movement IV. It is written for a full orchestra and includes vocal parts. The tempo is 'allargando molto'. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major/D minor). The time signature is 3/4. The score shows various instruments including Piccolo, Flutes, Oboes, Horns, Clarinets, Bassoons, Trumpets, Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, Percussion, and strings. The vocal parts are Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The score features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as 'ff' and 'marc.'

The *Lovers* motive is used more often and more obviously here than in the previous two movements, occurring first at the end of the opening melody line (see Example 21, measure 3). As the piece progresses, it is used in its pure form with less frequency, often stated with a tritone instead of a perfect fourth (see the first tenor part in Example 22, measure 14, on the text “stirs within”). During the middle section the motive is repeated in various forms throughout the texture, growing more forceful and frantic until the end of the section (see Example 23). In the overarching plot of *The Lovers*, this movement marks the speaker’s doomed attempt to recapture the original passion that he experienced, a passion that is dwindling into tiresome fretfulness. The underlying unease of this movement continues in the next, “The Fortunate Isles” in which the speaker recalls a romantic escape that he and his lover shared.

The central feature of the fifth movement is the motion between the fourth scale degree and the raised fifth, demonstrated in the flute and oboe parts in Example 24; this generates a constant pattern of tension and release that simulates the motion of the boat mentioned in the poem, “The Fortunate Isles” (text below):

Drunk as drunk on trementine
From your open kisses,
Your wet body wedged
Between my wet body and the strake
Of our boat that is made out of flowers,
Feasted, we guide it—our fingers
Like tallows adorned with yellow metal—
Over the sky’s hot rim,
The day’s last breath in our sails.
Pinned by the sun between solstice
And equinox, drowsy and tangled together
We drifted for months and woke
With the bitter taste of land on our lips,
Eyelids all sticky, and we longed for lime
And the sound of a rope

Lowering a bucket down its well. Then,
We came by night to the Fortunate Isles.
And lay like fish
Under the net of our kisses.

Example 24. *The Lovers*, Movement V, measures 1-3 (Flutes and Oboes). The opening measures of the fifth movement establish an undulating pattern.

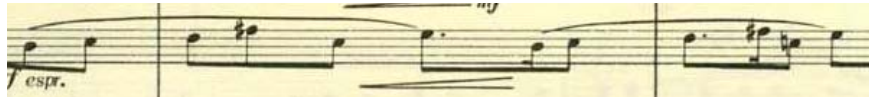


Unlike most of the previous movements, here the melodic ideas are not relegated solely, or even principally, to the chorus. Soloists from both the orchestra and chorus state the melodies while the chorus becomes part of the accompaniment, both on text and on the syllable “ah.” This melodic material is never truly developed, but rather is restated in various keys throughout the movement. As a result, the piece does not consist of contrasting sections but rather repeated statements of the central thematic material, all underscored by the augmented second motion described previously. This approach is somewhat uncommon in Barber’s choral music, as most of his pieces involve some semblance of development; the closest correlation would be with “To be sung on the water” from Opus 42, in which the ostinato varies only slightly throughout.

The fifth movement of *The Lovers* draws on the opening motive as heavily as any other in the piece, although in a modified form. In the spirit of the augmented interval

that pervades the movement, “The Fortunate Isles” features the *Lovers* motive based on a tritone instead of a fourth, as in the cello part illustrated in Example 25 (below).

Example 25. *The Lovers*, Movement V, measures 14-15 (Cellos). The cello part features a variation of the *Lovers* motive based on a tritone (A[#] - E - G).



In addition to such liberal use of this motive, Barber employs text-painting with virtually every phrase of the poem. During the opening text, “Drunk as drunk on trementine,” the tonic chords fall on the second pulse of the measure, implying an inebriated unsteadiness.

Example 26. *The Lovers*, Movement V, measures 20-26 (Chorus). Barber uses microtext-painting to depict the texts “tangled together” and “drifted for months.”

The second section, featuring exchanges between the men and women, also illustrates powerful text painting in both parts: the men’s line is indeed “tangled together” with its dense harmonies, while the alto line appears to “drift,” if not for months, then at least for several measures (see Example 26). Such attentiveness to individual imagery pervades the fifth movement, providing a fascinating surface against which the lulling motion of the harmonies plays a gentle lullaby. However, the ensuing movement, “Sometimes”

(text below), breaks the quiet spell cast by “The Fortunate Isles,” bringing us back from peaceful remembrance into a bitter present:

Sometimes it’s like
You are dead when you say nothing.

Or you heard things I say, and
Could not be bothered to reply.

And your eyes, sometimes,
Move outside of you,
Watching the two of us, yes
As if
After you turned to the wall,
Somebody’s kisses stopped your mouth.

This movement is a paroxysm of suspicion and rage that is accompanied by ostinatos in the cello and second violin (see Example 27).

Example 27. *The Lovers*, Movement VI, measures 1-4. The opening of the sixth movement features ostinato patterns in the accompaniment.

Quite fast ♩ = 69

Tpt. I

Baritone Solo

Vn. II

Vc.

Cb.

mf (with suspicion)

1. and.

p

Sometimes it's like You are dead when you say nothing.

Above this expansion of the opening motive, the baritone soloist sings a line rife with chromatics and percussive rhythms that illustrate the ugly, violent nature of the poetry. Whereas the previous movement featured the raised second scale degree in contrast with the tonic, this one emphasizes motion back and forth between the first and the flat second, a stunted motion that accents the obsessive choler of the speaker. Perhaps the most inventive facet of this movement is the use of a whip as a percussion instrument at

the end of the piece. At any rate, the union between the speaker and his lover appears to be fraying rapidly, leaving him to grieve the love that he has so recently lost, a grief that manifests itself in the sixth movement, “We have lost even this twilight”:

We have lost even this twilight.
No one saw us this evening hand in hand
While the blue night dropped on the world.

I have seen from my window
the fiesta of sunset in the distant mountaintops.

I remembered you with my soul clinched
in that sadness of mine that you know.

Where were you then?
Who else was there?
Saying what words?
Why does the whole of love come on me suddenly
when I am sad and feel you far away?

The book I read each night fell down,
And my coat fell down
Like a hurt dog at my feet.

Each dusk you drew further out,
Out where the dusk shifts, masking statues.

The formal organization of this movement is typical for Barber. An opening section states the essential thematic content of the movement, then in a subsequent section the preceding material undergoes various forms of development; finally, there is a closing coda that refers to the opening. This form is shared with the fourth movement, “Close your eyes,” and seems to combine with it to demarcate the central movements of *The Lovers* in which the affair undergoes the cruel transformation from soaring passion to bitter regret. Barber foregoes setting any of the specific imagery used in the poem,

choosing instead to emphasize the overall mood of aching sorrow with his somber setting.

The opening section begins with a quotation from the introduction in which the solo oboe plays a variation of the primary motive, while the alto flute immediately responds (see Example 28).

Example 28. *The Lovers*, Movement VII, measures 1-5. The opening measures of the seventh movement feature variations of the *Lovers* motive.



Three strophes follow, in which the vocal lines seem to be seeking the primary motive, alluding to it constantly in the contour of the melody (see Example 29). The motive does not surface in its exact form until the closing bars of the phrase, at which point the voices abandon their strict imitation. Underneath the text, the tonal center of G[#] minor is established by a pedal in the cello. This tonal center is weakened by the lack of any dominant sonority in the accompaniment, as well as the repeated emphasis of A[#] and E in the vocal lines against G[#] minor chords in the accompaniment.

Example 29. *The Lovers*, Movement VII, measures 6-9. Further variations of the *Lovers* motive in the soprano and alto parts.

The second section begins with an expanded version of the opening melody that utilizes tritones and major sevenths to stretch the tonal stability that was just established at the end of the opening, all accompanied by increasingly frenetic activity in the orchestra. As the men join the texture, the chorus refuses to leave the confusion and anger inherent in the text, “Where were you then? Who else was there? Saying what words?” The orchestra’s increasingly rhythmically active and chromatically charged material adds to the overwhelming feeling of desperation, eventually leading into a climactic *sforzando* in A minor (see Example 30).

Example 30. *The Lovers*, Movement VII, measures 28-33. The chorus and strings at the climax of the seventh movement.

Example 30 shows the musical score for measures 28-33 of *The Lovers*, Movement VII. The score includes vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and orchestral parts (Violins I & II, Viola, Violoncello, Contrabass). The vocal parts have lyrics: "When I am", "Why does the whole of love come on me suddenly", and "Where were you then? Who else was there? Saying what words?". The orchestral parts are marked "Agitato, più mosso" and "in tempo". The score includes dynamic markings like "ff" and "p".

Continuation of the musical score for measures 34-39 of *The Lovers*, Movement VII. The vocal parts have lyrics: "sad and feel you far a-way?", "The book I read each night fell down", and "Where were you then? Who else was there? Saying what words?". The orchestral parts are marked "pizz., staccato" and "arco". The score includes dynamic markings like "ff" and "p".

From here, the tenors and basses repeat the pattern begun at the opening of the second section, with two-part imitation expanding into the full chorus. In contrast to previous instances, this time the imitative pattern slows and dies away dynamically, and the second section ends by slipping quietly back into G[#] minor for the closing coda, a restatement of the opening chorus part with the bass accompanying the soprano. Thus the movement ends with uneasy sorrow brought about by one final statement of the A[#]-E tritone hovering over the G[#] minor sonority in the orchestra.

In the eighth movement, “Tonight I can write” (text below), the speaker lingers over the failed love affair, struggling to come to terms with the pain of his loss by translating it into fragments of poetic thought. And yet, these fragments never take on a life of their own, eventually returning the speaker’s thoughts to the memories that he is trying to escape:

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
Write, for example: “The night is starry
and the blue stars shiver in the distance.”
The nightwind revolves in the sky and sings.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
I loved her and sometimes she loved me too.
Through nights like this I held her in my arms.
I kissed her so many times under the infinite sky.

She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.
How could one not have loved her great staring eyes?
Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
To think that I do not have her. To feel
that I have lost her.
What does it matter that my love could not keep her?
The night is starry and she is not with me.
This is all. Far away someone is dreaming.
Far away.
The same night that makes the same trees white.

We, of that time, are no longer the same.
 I no longer love her, it is true, but how much I loved her!
 Another's. She will be another's. As she
 was before my kisses.
 Her voice, her bright body. Her infinite eyes.
 I no longer love her, it is true, but maybe I love her . . .
 Love is so short, forgetting is so long.
 Even though this be the last pain that she cause me
 and these the last verses that I write for her.

After an introduction reminiscent of recitative, Barber reintroduces both the rhythmic and lyric themes from the opening of the work, alternating them beneath impassioned outbursts from the baritone solo.

After an opening statement of the *Lovers* motive in the horns, a new accompaniment figure is introduced in the strings (see Example 31, measure 4).

Example 31. *The Lovers*, Movement VIII, measures 4-6. The baritone and string parts at the beginning of the eighth movement.

This rhythmically free figure, which becomes the basis for the final movement, contains both the *Lovers* motive in the low strings and a third-based progression between C[#] minor and A major.

Over a sustained A major chord, the baritone sings his opening line, which acts as punctuation throughout much of the piece (see Example 31, measure 5). He continues to sing the opening line of Neruda's poem, his meandering part imitating the seemingly aimless drifting of the poetry by repeatedly latching onto new melodic ideas, only to return to his opening statement time and again. The orchestra continues to state the *colla voce* figure described above, emphasizing tonal centers closely related to A major such as E and D.

In the final cadence of the opening, Barber takes the harmony through a third-based progression once again, this time settling in C# minor as the key of the subsequent section. In this new section, the lyric theme from the orchestral introduction of *The Lovers* is reintroduced via imitation in the orchestra; stated first by a flute soloist, it then ripples through the wind section with statements by the English horn, first clarinet, and first bassoon (see Example 32).

Example 32. *The Lovers*, Movement VIII, measures 22-26. The lyrical theme from the introduction reappears in the eighth movement.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for measures 22-26 of *The Lovers*, Movement VIII. The first system covers measures 22 and 23. In measure 22, the tempo is marked 'poco rall.'. In measure 23, the tempo changes to 'a tempo'. The flute soloist (F1. 1) begins a melodic line in measure 23, marked 'mf espr.' and '1. solo'. The English horn (E. H.) and clarinet 1 (Cl. 1) are silent in measure 23. The second system covers measures 24 and 25. In measure 24, the English horn and clarinet 1 enter with a melodic line, marked 'mp' and 'solo'. The flute soloist continues the line in measure 25, marked 'p' and '1. solo'. The English horn and clarinet continue the line in measure 26, marked 'mf espr.' and '1. solo'.



The soloist and strings attempt to continue with material from the movement's opening, but give in to the impassioned melody as the baritone sings, "To think I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her." At this thought, the speaker seems to shake himself and deny the importance of his loss; in response to this newfound bravado, Barber reintroduces the rhythmic theme from the overture that eventually became the main idea for the first movement, "Body of a woman." In the ensuing material, the struggle that marked the introduction is reborn, as the speaker alternates between sorrowful reminiscence and repeated denials of his love for her. The two themes continue to play back and forth, now directly tied to the denial and loss depicted in the text. The climax of the movement echoes the apotheosis in the introduction (see Example 33).

Example 33. *The Lovers*, Movement VIII, measures 61-71. The climax of the eighth movement recalls that of the introduction.

Having achieved this moment of catharsis, the passionate strains die away as the coda recalls the descending fifth that marked the beginning of the movement; in this manner, Barber begins the final movement, “Cemetery of kisses”:

Cemetery of kisses, there is still fire in your tombs,
 still the fruited boughs burn, pecked at by birds.
 Oh the bitten mouth, oh the kissed limbs,
 oh the hungering teeth, oh the entwined bodies.
 Oh the mad coupling of hope and force
 in which we merged and despaired.
 This was our destiny and it was the voyage of our longing.
 And in it all our longing fell, in us all was shipwreck!
 It is the hour of departure, the hard cold hour that night enforces on all
 timetables.
 Forsaken like the wharves at dawn.
 Oh farther than everything! Oh farther than everything!
 It is the hour of departure. Forsaken!

The ninth movement of *The Lovers* contains two major sections based on identical material. The descending sixteenth-note pattern introduced in the previous movement

minor, A minor, and A^b minor in rapid succession, emphasizing the “mad coupling of hope and force” described by the speaker. The final chords of the first section establish E^b minor as a new tonal center, one that is quite far indeed from the original key; this suits the text of the transitional episode well, for it describes the “voyage of our longing.”

The lyrical theme that was used in the eighth movement to signify regret and loss reappears briefly between the two phrases of the closing A section, stated first in the soprano and subsequently imitated in the other voices of the chorus. As this melody dies away, the final phrase begins, a desolate repetition of both the poetic imagery and musical material from the previous A phrase. The chorus closes to a unison F on the word “Forsaken,” but the orchestra expands to an F major chord with an added ninth. It is difficult to say what Barber had in mind with this final sonority; perhaps he intended his audience to believe that the speaker has finally purged himself of the pain and loss of this failed love, or perhaps the faint dissonance of the added ninth signifies the last strains of lingering regret. Regardless of his intentions, with this chord Barber concludes an immensely powerful work that explores the raw emotive context of a shattered romance with piercing insight.

Throughout *The Lovers*, Barber continues to use the stylistic techniques that I have described in the previous pages of this thesis. The pervasiveness of the *Lovers* motive throughout the piece is the most extensive instance of motivic development in Barber’s entire choral repertoire. While he does not use third-based progressions as extensively in this work as in previous pieces, they are certainly present, especially in the fourth and final movements (for instance, see Example 22). Throughout my discussion of *The Lovers*, I have endeavored to include examples of microtext-painting, such as the

trills that represent the birds in the first movement (see Example 14) and the passionate outburst in the final movement on the text, “There is still fire in your tombs” (see Example 34).

The macrotext of the piece in its entirety is the progression from raw sensuality to regret and loneliness at the end, and every movement contributes in some fashion to this overarching plot; in addition, each movement depicts its own macrotext through the unique manner in which Barber sets each of the poems. From the violence of the first movement, to the sensuality of “The Infinite Isles,” to the despair of “We have lost even this twilight,” every movement encapsulates the poetry within, contributing to the overall design of *The Lovers* while maintaining the individual flavor of each poem. *The Lovers* is thus, in my opinion, the culmination of Barber’s choral style. In it he continues to use the same techniques that we have observed throughout his other choral works, but uses them on a larger scale, especially the text-painting and motivic development.

As stated in the introduction, Opus 42 acts as an intermediary between *Prayers of Kierkegaard* and *The Lovers*, both thematically and musically. The same spirit of religious melancholy that permeates the music and text of the *Prayers* is present in both the music and the text of “Twelfth Night,” while the romantic regret of “To Be Sung on the Water” is expanded upon in *The Lovers*. In terms of musical styles, these roles are somewhat inverted; the spontaneous nature of *Prayers of Kierkegaard* is more closely echoed by the introspective meanderings in “To Be Sung on the Water,” while the motivic development in “Twelfth Night” is a microcosm of that which runs throughout *The Lovers*.

This continuity is crucial to understanding Barber's choral output on the whole, for while each of Barber's choral pieces is unique, the stylistic language remains largely intact throughout. The motivic development that Barber began to use in *The Virgin Martyrs*, his first choral work, is present in "Twelfth Night"; the microtext-painting that abounds throughout *The Lovers* is presaged in *A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map*. These common threads of harmonic tendencies, motivic development, and devoted attention to the images presented in the texts provide a foundation for a fuller appreciation of Barber's choral music, as well as possible elements for further research into both this particular composer's work and, I hope, the choral genre as a whole.

CHAPTER FIVE

Coda

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated that certain stylistic traits remain more or less consistent throughout Barber's choral oeuvre and that his later works represent a synthesis in many ways of more disparate elements of his earlier style. While this is certainly true, I must caution against an overly systematic approach to Barber's life and compositions. Tracing definable elements of style can be quite helpful in understanding any composer's music for the purposes of scholarly research, performance, or sheer enjoyment. And yet, there can arise a tendency to make too much of such an approach. It is easy to forget that Barber was a complex person for whom the act of composition was intimately tied to his life experiences; as a result, convenient systems for explaining his music can often be misleading. Take, for instance, the example of the *Easter Chorale*.

Written for the dedication of the bell-tower of the National Cathedral in 1964, the *Easter Chorale* (text below) represents in many ways a departure from Barber's typical mode of choral composition. Every other piece discussed in this thesis is based on a text by a well-known poet or cultural figure, while the man who wrote the text for this chorale, Pack Browning, is all but anonymous; he appears to be a minor literary figure who has edited some of Mark Twain's work, but I have found no references to him whatsoever in any scholarly source, much less any available accounts of this particular poem. Additionally, the other choral pieces that were composed for specific events are

well chronicled, whereas I have been unable to locate information regarding this dedication service.

The text of the *Easter Chorale* is appropriate solemn in nature for the occasion:

The morning light renews the sky.
Across the air the birds ignite
Like sparks to take this blaze of day
Through all the precincts of the night.
Alleluia! Alleluia! The fires of dawn refresh our eyes.
We watch the world grow wide and bright
And praise our newly risen Light.

The winter land receives the year.
Her smallest creatures rouse and cling
To swelling roots and buds that stir
The restless air to reel and ring!
Alleluia! Alleluia! The sounds of waking fill our ears.
We listen to the live earth sing
And praise our loving Source and Spring.¹

Barber's setting of this two-stanza poem is, of course, in the style of a chorale, consisting largely of strophic homophony. As such, the religious overtones of this style can be seen as depicting the "macrotext" of the piece, as can the steady increase in dynamic levels through both verses; however, there are no instances of what I would call "microtext-painting" anywhere in the piece. The two stanzas are set to identical music, with the only changes being more forceful dynamics and optional brass and percussion parts in the second stanza. Consequently, there are not "motives" that can be said to develop, and the structural unity that arises from the repeating material is not a matter of complex motivic reference, but simply the result of direct repetition. Unlike the *Prayers of Kierkegaard*, the choral work that immediately precedes it, the *Easter Chorale* does not synthesize

¹Samuel Barber, *Complete Choral Music* (Milwaukee, WI: G. Schirmer, 1979), 83-87.

previously disparate elements into a new mode of composition; unlike the two works of Opus 42, the choral works that immediately follow it, the chorale does not act as a midway point between surrounding works with obvious connections to both. It is closest to the *Prayers* in conception and theme, due to the religious nature of the text and the chorale form, a form shared by the *Prayers* in the closing measures, but there the similarities end.

In short, the longer you try to fit this piece into a trajectory of stylistic evolution and continuity such as I have described in the preceding three chapters, the more confusing it becomes. The answer to this dilemma is, I believe, to freely admit that “the system” can never be the point. Understanding that certain compositional techniques remain consistent throughout Barber’s choral works is helpful to any who are interested in his music, as is the concept of stylistic synthesis that I have mentioned throughout this thesis. The choral pieces of Samuel Barber invite such comparison and analysis, for most of them do share many common traits. All the same, I believe that one cannot reduce Barber’s music to a simple formula of stylistic development and continuity without losing sight of the fact that he did not compose this music to be dissected, but to be enjoyed, with or without the aid of research and analysis.

With that said, there are still many routes available for study and research both within Barber’s music and the choral genre as a whole. A narrower focus on the choral pieces is still possible, as there are some facets that I have only briefly discussed, such as harmonic structure. In addition, comparing Barber’s choral music to his solo vocal material could prove fruitful; of particular interest to me would be comparing his text-setting methods in both styles, but other aspects such as motivic development or the

editing of texts could provide fertile ground for research. Discussing Barber's choral music within the context of twentieth-century choral literature as a whole would also be a fascinating study, as there are several other composers whose choral literature could potentially provide opportunities for research. In short, there are many opportunities for the further study of both Samuel Barber's music and choral literature in general, and it is my sincere hope that students of music will avail themselves of these opportunities in the future.

APPENDIX

List of Works Discussed

The Virgin Martyrs, Siegebert of Gembloux, trans. Helen Waddell, 1935

Let Down the Bars, Oh Death, Emily Dickinson, 1936

God's Grandeur, Gerard Manley Hopkins, 1938

A Stopwatch and an Ordnance Map, Stephen Spender, 1904

Reincarnations, James Stephens, 1937-40

Prayers of Kierkegaard, Søren Kierkegaard, 1954

Easter Chorale, Pack Browning, 1964

"Twelfth Night," Laurie Lee, 1968

"To Be Sung on the Water," Louise Bogan, 1968

The Lovers, Pablo Neruda, 1971

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