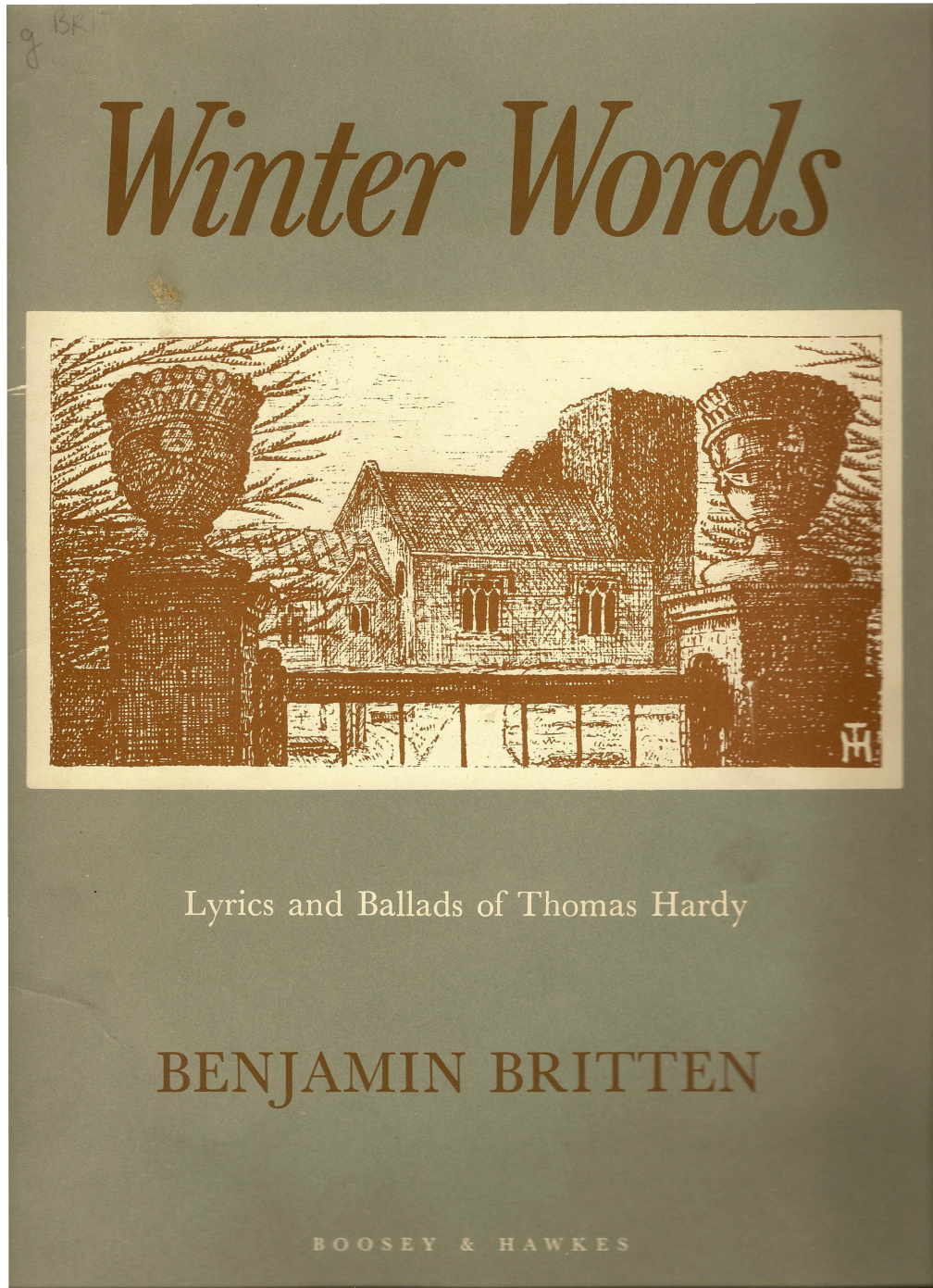


Winter Words

~
Cyclicality and Musical Setting of Poetry in the Song Cycle



BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University
Marleen van Os
3348997
Roselinde Supheert
April 2011

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter 1 – The Song Cycle	
The Song Cycle	10
Britten’s Song Cycles	14
<i>Winter Words</i>	15
Chapter 2 – Words and Music	
Words and Music	22
<i>Winter Words</i>	25
Conclusion	37
References	41
Appendix 1 – The Poems	43
Appendix 2 – The Music Score	
Appendix 3 – The Original Recording	

Introduction

The song cycle *Winter Words* was composed by Benjamin Britten, who based the songs on poems by Thomas Hardy. This collaboration of great minds has resulted in a beautiful song cycle with a melancholy atmosphere that comes to life through the combination of poetry and music. Hardy wrote his poems at different moments in his life, publishing them in different volumes. Britten then took the poems and put them together, to set them to music and compose the song cycle.

Winter Words op. 52 was written for high voice and piano, and published in 1954 by Boosey & Hawkes. According to this original publication, the duration of the songs together is approximately 19.5 minutes (Britten, “Lyrics” ii). The title of the cycle corresponds to Hardy’s *Winter Words* collection, published in 1928 and containing among others the poem “Proud Songsters,” which also features in the song cycle (Paetsch 538). The cycle was dedicated to John and Myfanwy Piper, who worked together with Britten on some of his opera productions (Binks, par. 12). The following poems are in the cycle; they are followed by the titles and dates of the original publications they were in:

“At Day-Close in November” (*Satires of Circumstance*, 1914)

“Midnight on the Great Western” (*Moments of Vision*, 1917)

“Wagtail and Baby” (*Time’s Laughingstocks*, 1909)

“The Little Old Table” (*Late Lyrics and Earlier*, 1922)

“The Choirmaster’s Burial” (*Moments of Vision*, 1917)

“Proud Songsters” (*Winter Words*, 1928)

“At the Railway Station, Upway” (*Late Lyrics and Earlier*, 1922)

“Before Life and After” (*Time’s Laughingstock*, 1909)

The original recording of the cycle in 1954 features Peter Pears as tenor and Britten himself as pianist. They also recorded several later versions. Pears and Britten performed the songs live at the Leeds Festival in 1953, at Wigmore Hall London in 1983 and for BBC Radio 3 in 1985. Many others have also performed and recorded the cycle, including Neil Mackie (tenor) and Iain Burnside (piano) for BBC Third Programme in 1953 (*Winter Words*, “Research,” par. 6), Anthony Rolfe Johnson (tenor) and Graham Johnson (piano) in 1985, and Justin Lavender and Julian Milford in 1997. CDs at which *Winter Words* appears are usually collections of several song cycles by Britten or comparable composers. The recording that is enclosed with this thesis is from the 2009 CD “Britten “Before Life and After,”” featuring *Winter Words* as well as other Britten cycles and individual songs, performed by Mark Padmore (tenor) and Roger Vignoles (piano).

The poems in *Winter Words* all express a sense of melancholy and sadness. The sufferings of growing up, losing innocence and having to face the hard, real world are present throughout the cycle and form an important theme (Paetsch 539). Differences between childhood and being an adult come forward in several poems, indicating the wonderful naïveté of children and the rather grim, melancholy conscience of adults. With this, the speaker also contemplates the temporality of life. In the poems, this transitoriness is, for example, symbolised by describing the end of a day, when the light is dimming. Throughout the cycle, Hardy’s imagery is largely made up of descriptions of nature. This, as will become clear later, finely fits Benjamin Britten’s style of composing. He tries to express the sounds of nature with his music and is therefore well matched with Hardy.

Although the poems were written at different points in Hardy’s life, they reflect on similar thoughts and use similar images. Throughout Hardy’s work, a pessimistic view of the world is presented, although Hardy himself did not agree with this label (Sherman 143). What

is true, however, of many of his poems, is the presence of a melancholy feeling, a longing for the past and a rather negative view of the (adult) world. Hardy's own life and his passions are often reflected in his poetry. This is, for example, the case in "The Choirmaster's Burial," which reflects on Hardy's past of church music. The characters in the poem even parallel Hardy's family: his grandfather was indeed a choirmaster, and his father a tenor violinist (Paetsch 546). The natural descriptions that appear in *Winter Words* are common to Hardy's work; birds play a particularly large role.

Thomas Hardy and Music

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) came from an environment filled with music. His father and grandfather were important local musicians; Hardy himself played the fiddle, he sang, and he liked to dance (Grew 120). He performed at parties and other festivities, but was mostly bound to the church and religious song (Grew 132). Hardy had a good understanding of art and musical elements occur throughout his work. Many of his characters in novels and poems play music, but music also features through his use of language. For example, he uses "sound in the creation of emotional background" (Sherman 155). In this process, poetical devices like onomatopoeia, rhythm and metre serve to establish a more visual and real image of things he describes in his poetry. Hardy knew how to describe nature so that everyday sounds are almost audible, and on a bigger scale "the measured movements and melodic contours [suggest] the underlying rhythm of the seasons, of mankind and the universe" (Sherman 155).

Critics have long overlooked the element of music throughout Hardy's work, according to Sherman (143). She argues that "music is the greatest unifying factor in his poetry and prose alike" (155). Like Sherman, Gross notes that, although some of Hardy's poetry is very unorganised in terms of rhythm and metre, he often explores the possibilities of

metre to such an extent that it leads to a more vivid portrayal of a situation described in a poem. According to Gross, “Hardy gives a direct revelation of the curve of life, from birth and growth to decay and death” by his use of prosody (47). This fits very well with the poems from the *Winter Words* cycle, where that “curve of life” with its “decay and death” are precisely the important themes. The following passage from Hardy’s novel *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* shows some of his feelings towards music and the power of the composer:

When the chants came on one of her favourites happened to be chosen among the rest—the old double chant “Langdon”—but she did not know what it was called, though she would much have liked to know. She thought, without exactly wording the thought, how strange and godlike was a composer’s power, who from the grave could lead through sequences of emotion, which he alone had felt at first, a girl like her who had never heard of his name, and never would have a clue to his personality.
(107)

Hardy shows that music can have the power of arousing emotions in a person, emotions that were already felt ages ago when the composer invented the music and that can be carried on through others. This makes music larger than human life, going deep into the human soul.

Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) is renowned for his way of telling stories with his music. He conceives of narrative structures and imitates sounds of nature and the world through his music. In his composition of songs, he combines “words and music meaningfully and vividly” (Rupprecht 1). He expresses perhaps more than what can be said with words, and so his occupation of setting poetry to music produced very rich pieces in which every note and every turn is carefully considered. Words and music then become one, together telling a story and

creating a certain atmosphere (Rupprecht 2). According to Paetsch, Britten's music often contains a narrative structure (538). Even in the *Winter Words* cycle, where there is no protagonist or a series of events happening, there still is a sense of a timeline being followed. The cycle centres around a theme, and the poems together form an expression of ideas that become most clear and climactic in the last poems "At the Railway Station, Upway" and "Before Life and After." In many of Britten's other song cycles this is similar; there is no official narrative structure with a protagonist and a coherent plot, but the songs circle around a theme so that a sense of connection is still there.

Britten composed *Winter Words* in between his operas *Gloriana* and *The Turn of the Screw*, the last of which also centres around the theme of a child's innocence growing into an adult's grim consciousness, as in *Winter Words* (Paetsch 539). This cycle follows up on earlier cycles by Britten, like, among many others, *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, op. 51, and *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, op. 22 (see Bernhart 223-4 for a complete list). Beside songs and song cycles, Britten also composed choral works, instrumental music and symphonic works, and operas and ballets. He had a poetical sense that made him able to compose such music for poetry as to make the two forms of expression intertwine and complement each other. Especially in *Winter Words* the combination of music and words is most striking and meaningful (Porter 280). According to Porter, "only Britten has seen the potential for music in the heartland of Hardy's genius, his realism" (279).

The Song Cycle: Text and Music

Song cycles consist of a collection of poems, most likely written by one author, and set to music later by a composer. They need to display some kind of cyclicity; this can be done in several ways through text and music. Many critics feel that the music in a cycle is most

important. Cyclicity through music can be achieved by, for example, using a certain key pattern, recurring motifs of melodic lines, or similar musical structures throughout. The text of the cycle, however, can also play a part. The combined songs can form a coherent narrative with a central protagonist, or there can be an overarching theme to which all the songs contribute. The most important aspect of a song cycle, then, is the unity between the songs. As will be shown, *Winter Words* is first and foremost a literary song cycle which reaches its unity especially through the poems and their themes.

The setting of words, usually poetry, to music is an intricate task for a composer. Choices need to be made in terms of which interpretation will be used for the setting. Music and words can interact in several ways. The music can have the upper hand, the composer changing the text so that it suits the composer's wishes for the music; the focus can also be on the poem, the composer using music to underscore the meaning of and the sounds expressed in the poem. The composer, then, largely determines the interpretation of the listener. The music certainly offers a new dimension of expression. In the case of *Winter Words*, the music serves to support the text with certain sound effects and the creation of a specific atmosphere.

The focus of this research being on the song cycle *Winter Words* and its way of setting words to music, the main question is to what extent the concept of the cycle and the setting to music add to the interpretation of the poems. To answer this question, several things need to be looked at first, namely the song cycle as a genre and the study of words and music in general. After examining these two general topics, they will be examined within the context of the *Winter Words* cycle. This thesis will therefore be divided into two chapters, each focusing on one aspect of the main question. The first chapter will explore the theoretical background of the song cycle and will then apply this to *Winter Words*. Questions as to why these particular poems were chosen, what putting them in a cycle does to the meaning and interpretation of every poem, and how cyclicity is established will be turned to in this chapter.

The second chapter will go into music and text and provide a theoretical frame of the influence of literature and music on each other. Then this knowledge will again be applied to *Winter Words*, looking at the interaction of words and music there, the music adding to the meaning of the poems, and the either expanded or limited interpretation because of the music, providing examples from the songs at every stage.

Chapter 1

~

The Song Cycle

The song cycle is an interesting genre because of the interaction between words and music. Every individual song can be analysed for its interplay of music and poetry, for example when the music invents particular motifs to support a poetical theme. On a larger scale, the song cycle as a whole “raises the question if, to what extent, and under what conditions words and/or music contribute to creating a larger unity beyond the limits of single songs” (Wolf, “Introduction” 7). The particular case of *Winter Words* will be looked at later in this chapter.

Many song cycles have gone before Britten’s *Winter Words*. Important and often-discussed song cycles are mostly German, including Schubert’s *Winterreise* and *Die Schöne Müllerin*, and Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*. A song cycle comprises a number of poems written by one or more poets and set to music by a composer. There is a difference between song cycles and song collections, as Porter points out: “[a] distinction should always be made between a true cycle, dramatically organized and telling a story...and a collection of poems by the same author or one illustrating a theme” (279). The term song cycle is used too often according to him, and he also states that *Winter Words* is not a “true cycle” (279) precisely because of the fact that it does not have a clear narrative. Other critics disagree and say that song cycles can also revolve around a theme that binds the songs together (cf. Wolf, “Intermedial Intertextuality” 122 and Lodato, “Problems” 104).

Important in a cycle is unity. The songs need to be connected in some way, usually through both the content of the poetry and the musical elements. The claim by Porter above only deals with the poetry of a cycle, while there is always the music to be considered as well. Song cycle analysts mostly agree that, within a cycle, the text and the music both serve to

bring forth a common meaning, and that “relationships among the poems in a song cycle are reflected in analogous relationships among their musical settings” (Lodato, “Problems” 104). This means that the music supports the texts through the structure, atmosphere, or, more concretely, by playing motifs that make the expressed sounds in the poetry audible, like the train whistle motif in the *Winter Words* poem “Midnight on the Great Western.” The music can also intensify the connection between the poems by incorporating recurring structural elements like a deliberate sequence of key settings or recurring or connected motifs. When unifying elements cannot be distinguished in text or music, one can also look at “hermeneutic elements such as biographical or other contextual information in order to explain the musical inconsistencies and complete the picture of a unified work” (“Problems” 104). In *Winter Words*, unity is especially established through the text, but the other elements also contribute, as will be shown later.

The term song cycle implies that there is some sort of “cyclic movement” (Wolf, “Intermedial Intertextuality” 122). The ending of the cycle should look back to the first part and establish a link with it, connecting the poems in between as well and creating a larger whole. This link can be established by musical elements being similar at beginning and end, the text of the last poem reflecting the content of earlier poems, or a combination of both (Wolf, “Intermedial Intertextuality” 122). Wolf then opposes Porter’s claim by implying that a cycle does not necessarily have to contain a narrative, but can also be more loosely composed. There is still a cyclic movement, but this can also be realised in the form of a recurring theme or musical motif. In *Winter Words*, this is done exactly as Wolf suggests, with the last song “Before Life and After” functioning as a summation and conclusion of the before treated themes.

Further notes on the unity of a song cycle and the order of the poems within the cycle are provided by McCreless and Komar. In his discussion of “multi-movement tonal works”

(6), including song cycles, McCreless divides those works into two categories, that of “unordered” and “ordered” (6). With this, he refers to the relationships between the individual songs in such a work. Songs may just be put in a quite random order, displaying connections, similarities and repetitions in text and music which turn the work into a cycle, but without a clear ordering according to a line of events. This makes up a work of the first, unordered type (6). The second, ordered type does involve a clear timeline, showing “why events happen where they do” (7). The texts are thus structured to form a storyline, and the music cooperates with an overarching structure, recurring elements and connected key settings. This ordered type is in line with Porter’s claim above, but the unordered type is not; McCreless broadens the definition of song cycles.

Komar, in his study of Schumann’s *Dichterliebe*, goes a little further and states seven stages of unity in song cycles. These stages range from loose connections between the poems and in the music to a fully organised cycle in terms of theme and storyline, and key setting and other musical structures (63-66). McCreless’s and Komar’s findings can be combined, as shown by Lodato in the table below (fig. 1). It shows McCreless’s division of ordered and unordered cycles and the corresponding stages as set up by Komar. As will be seen later, *Winter Words* belongs to the category of unordered song cycles, although the songs do not seem to be entirely randomly ordered. The songs keep their original identity and interpretation, but are combined to create a larger theme through which the interpretation of every poem is deepened. This revolving around a theme would make the cycle fit in Komar’s stage two, but in terms of music it would probably fit better in stage one since the music of every song stands apart from the others, mostly supporting the content of that particular poem only. Chapter two will go into this more deeply.

McCreless's 'unordered' relationships	1. General similarity among the songs in musical style and length, poetry style, structure and subject matter. This factor alone would make this group a collection, rather than a cycle.
	2. More specific correspondence among the songs exist (for example, themes, harmonic progressions, rhythmic figures) than exist among randomly selected songs from the same time period.
	3. In addition to the relationships in #2, some of the motivic or thematic groups recur from one song to another untransposed.
McCreless's 'ordered' relationships	4. Some songs are paired, as indicated by 'elements of local continuity' (64) seen in adjacent songs.
	5. In addition to numbers 2-4, the keys of songs in their compositional order make up a 'coherent' (65) key scheme.
	6. There is a global ordering scheme or compositional plan that accommodates the ordering of non-paired songs and structures the conclusion of the cycle.
	7. Coupled with #6, an entire cycle is essentially 'governed' (65) by one key.

Fig. 1: Arthur Komar's Criteria for Evaluating Song Collections and Cycles. (Lodato, "Problems" 106)

A song cycle, then, should meet certain demands to be called a song cycle.

Usually a cycle's unity is based on both the content and the musical structure, often taking the text as a basis and adding music to reinforce the meaning of the text. The music can create an extra dimension of atmosphere, which will be discussed in the next chapter on text and music. Critics do not fully agree on what can be called a cycle, some merely including song

sequences with narrative force or a clear persona with a line of events, and some also accepting theme-based cycles without a clear storyline. Most critics do agree that cycles containing songs that are merely written by one author, but have nothing else in common, should be called song collections instead of cycles. The ordering of the songs by the composer can be done consciously or randomly, depending on the extent to which the songs in the cycle are linked in terms of music and text.

Britten's Song Cycles

Benjamin Britten has composed seventeen song cycles, and he has called only one of those a cycle himself – *Our Hunting Fathers*, based on poems by W.H. Auden, which Britten calls a *Symphonic Cycle*. Most of his cycles are written for single, mostly high voice, Britten writing for Peter Pears as a tenor singer. Four have an orchestral setting; the rest is written for a single instrument, which was mostly the piano, and voice. Twelve of the cycles consist of poems written by one poet. Mostly, Britten compiled the cycles himself by selecting poems, and when he chose ready-made collections he usually did not maintain the order as set by the poet (Bernhart 212-3).

Important for the discussion of *Winter Words* is Bernhart's distinction of the literary song cycle in Britten's oeuvre. This type of song cycle comprises of "song collections which can be called 'song cycles with a dominant literary coherence'" (217). The theme plays an important role, together with the "mental disposition" (217) of the poet, reflecting part of the poet's personality in every poem in a "sequence of...mental states" (219). Most of Britten's literary cycles (based on poetry by Rimbaud, Michelangelo, Donne, Hölderlin, Pushkin, and of course Hardy) were written for voice and piano (217). Each of these cycles ends with a strong concluding song, Britten having "striven to make the final song a statement...of some

fundamental philosophical tenet of his poet, one that could in retrospect embrace all that had gone before” (Evans, 370). This concluding song is “Before Life and After” in *Winter Words*. Of course musical elements also contribute to the unity of a cycle, with for example a recurring “basic musical motif” (Bernhart, 220) or many other possible links through music. More of the theme and other unifying aspects of the particular case of *Winter Words* will be further discussed below. Although in many respects it does show unity through theme and development of a certain atmosphere or philosophical idea, this second type of literary song cycles would still be labelled a collection by Porter, considering his claim that “a true cycle [should be] dramatically organized and telling a story” (279). Most critics, however, would probably include the literary cycles in the definition of song cycle.¹

Winter Words

Winter Words, as stated above, can be seen as a literary song cycle. It revolves around an important main theme through which the cycle has “literary coherence” (Bernhart 217). The main theme connecting the poems is the transition from childhood to adulthood, a journey which brings along the development of real consciousness about the sufferings and hardships in the world. This consciousness is regarded as something dark, and with a melancholy tone the poems look back longingly towards the innocence of childhood. Throughout the cycle this is done through different perspectives. Mostly, there is an adult speaker who looks upon the

¹ Bernhart distinguished two more types in Britten’s oeuvre, the “loose” (214) and “musical” (220) song cycles. Loose song cycles are only weakly connected through a certain structure in the order of songs, or, for example, by being made up of poems from a single author. They can also show no unity at all. Britten’s musical song cycles achieve unity especially through the music, by, for example, the order of the songs paralleling the “sequence of movements in a symphony” (Bernhart 221). This type is not relevant to the discussion of *Winter Words*, but it is a type of cycle that is much discussed by critics, also in relation to cycles by other composers.

world and relishes the innocence of the children. In “At Day-Close in November” the speaker looks back on his “June time,” when he was still young and life was good to him. “Midnight on the Great Western” portrays a travelling boy; the adult narrator wonders about his past and his innocence as opposed to the hard, sinful adult world: “this region of sin that you find you in, / but are not of.” In some poems, the perspective shifts to that of a child, showing an innocent mind wondering about the world around it. “Wagtail and Baby” tells of a baby wondering about the wicked nature of humankind as perceived by a little bird, who faces all kinds of large animals but flees from “a perfect gentleman.” In “At the Railway Station, Upway,” the perspectives of child and adult mingle in a setting with a boy, a convict and a constable. The ironic lines “this life so free / is the thing for me!” sung by the convict, convey dark criticism of the world where perhaps everyone is constrained from being free since life comes with so many concerns and difficulties. Hardy’s ideas of temporality can explicitly be seen in “Proud Songsters,” where the birds, however cheerful, used to be and will return to be “only particles of grain, / and earth, and air, and rain.” The creaks of the “Little Old Table” still emphasise further the transitoriness of life where history is quickly forgotten, as do many more elements throughout the cycle. Still, Johnson argues that *Winter Words* “is not tragic, . . . inserting storytelling ballads between the more introspective lyrics, stories full of bitter-sweet humour and wry social comment” (297).

The title of the cycle, *Winter Words*, further clarifies the theme. It unifies the cycle since the title applies to all poems. Thomas Hardy’s own poetry collection called *Winter Words* was published posthumously and comprises of poems written at the end of his life. Therefore, the title has a clear connection with growing old, death and perishing. Britten used this title to apply to the melancholy theme, with winter being dark and cold and appearing at the end of every year. It has a connection with the coming and going of seasons and the temporality connected to that. The end of the year can be compared to the approaching end of

life by growing older. Moreover, in wintertime people look back on the year with a certain sadness of it being over, which is exactly what happens on the greater scale of life in the cycle.

There is a variety of kinds of poems, which makes this cycle quite diverse: “The Choirmaster’s Burial” and “Midnight on the Great Western” for example are narratives, telling a small story; “Wagtail and Baby” is a satire, depicting a particular scene, and “At Day-Close in November” is quite lyrical (Bernhart 217). The subtitle of the work, *Lyrics and Ballads*, also indicates this diversity and seems to suggest that *Winter Words* is merely a collection of poems set to music. Moreover, there is no central perspective or narrator, no “on-going narrative” (Paetsch 540) and no main protagonist. Because of this, the qualification as cycle can be much doubted. Still, every individual poem forms a little narrative, contributing to the larger whole of the cycle. Eight stories portraying different scenes are combined to create an entity, which works because of the central theme, coined “melancholy fatalism” by Kennedy (196), around which every single poem revolves. The cycle “consists of a series of “events” . . . , each of which contains its own literary narrative even though they are unrelated through a central plot or even . . . through a central narrator” (Paetsch 539). One individual poem is food for thought, but put together, they all shed light on slightly different facets of the theme. Different situations are created, placing characters in different circumstances and changing perspectives, combining that of the child and the adult and offering the possibility to compare these two. The last poem, “Before Life and After,” offers a climactic conclusion to what has been said in earlier poems. The main theme is made explicit by lamenting human consciousness and expressing a longing for renewed innocence: “ere nescience shall be reaffirmed / how long, how long?” After telling seven different stories, their intentions are clarified. The last poem then links the poems together, which is in accordance with Wolf’s statement about the song cycle requiring a cyclic structure by having

the last poem look back on what has been said before (Wolf, “Intermedial Intertextuality” 122).

The cycle can be seen as an unordered one in terms of McCreless’s division of song cycles. There is no clear timeline, although *Winter Words* may be argued to be in between unordered and ordered, since it does involve a kind of progression (cf. Lodato, “Problems” 104). The cycle increases in seriousness, the poems being more and more sudden in their twists (“Proud Songsters”) or rich in their metaphorical meaning (“At the Railway Station, Upway”). Earlier poems are more innocent and mild (“At Day-Close in November”) or lead to further thought (“Wagtail and Baby”). “At Day-Close in November” touches mildly upon the subject of temporality and a past youth, using imagery of nature and referring to the innocent children. “Wagtail and “Baby” deals with the implied wickedness of man lightly by using the perspective of a baby and images of animals. Still, already in the second poem, “Midnight on the Great Western,” the key notion of the hard adult world is quite clearly introduced. “Proud Songsters,” the sixth poem in the cycle, is harshly explicit in saying that life comes from nothing, implying that it will return to that as well. In “At the Railway Station, Upway” the relationship between the characters is complex and raises questions of the real nature of freedom and righteousness.

More importantly, but linked to this structure from innocence to consciousness in the cycle, is what Paetsch calls the “meta-narrative which pervades the cycle: the history of man, both collective and individual” (554). The cycle can be paralleled with life and the “loss of childlike innocence as adult consciousness develops” (Paetsch 539). It is a constant journey, with things starting innocently and gradually becoming graver while consciousness develops. Things continue and change and fade, like the seasons and years, the stages of life, and people and their souls. That is what the cycle is trying to express, in its content, but also in its form. The climax and explicitness of “Before Life and After” emphasise this. In response to Porter’s

claim that *Winter Words* is not a “true cycle” (279) since it is not “telling a story” (279), it can be said that the storyline is that of life, travelling through time and developing in age.

Putting the poems in a cycle changes the way in which every individual poem is read. They are now no longer seen as separate poems, but they all contribute to a larger whole. Reading one poem makes the reader wonder about the others, and the other poems supply complementary information that the reader (or better, listener) can use to interpret the single poem. So, by combining the poems, more meaning is ascribed to a particular poem. The thematic context that the poems were in originally in Hardy’s own collections is taken away. The poems are taken separately and then ascribed a new meaning by being put together with new poems from other collections. Since all included poems treat the same subject, the combination can lead to a deeper reflection on the part of the reader. They know more of what the poet wrote and intended, and therefore they can join in reflecting on the subject matter instead of staying somewhat in the dark as to the meaning of a single poem.

Now that the unity and the order of the cycle are clarified, it is interesting to look at Britten’s choice of poems, since they were not put together in a collection by Hardy himself. Actually, the poems stem from very different moments in Hardy’s life, the dates of publication ranging from 1909 to 1928. Still, they all express a similar state of mind. “Before Life and After,” the last poem of the cycle, comes from a publication from 1909, showing that the explicit sense of longing for “nescience” did not come as a result of writing many other poems with the same theme first. The cycle building up to a climax is not a reflection of Hardy’s course of life and the development of his thought. Britten then also did not order the songs according to publication date. Porter states that Britten chose very original poems that would usually not be considered great individual poems (279). However, together they work very well towards the central theme, which also “preoccupied Britten throughout his life” (Paetsch 539). Hardy and Britten apparently had a common inclination towards rather

pessimist thought, reflecting on life as a time that will never come back. Hardy definitely did, considering the songs in *Winter Words* that all express more or less explicitly this sense of temporality and a longing for renewed youth.

Reasons as to why Britten chose these particular poems can be found in Hardy's imagery in relationship with the main theme. "Midnight on the Great Western" and "At the Railway Station, Upway" feature a train, a transport functioning as a metaphor for the journey through life. The theme of temporality is reinforced by Hardy's use of nature. Nature involves a life cycle, just like that of man, where things grow and bloom, and later shrink and perish. An example of this are the birds in "Proud Songsters," flying cheerfully without knowing they will eventually die and return to being "only particles of grain / and earth, and air, and rain." Birds are part of the cycle of nature and feature in several poems. They flourish and sing loudly while they live, but are quite similar to children in their innocence. The use of birds as imagery further develops the contrast between children and adults, innocence and consciousness. It is clear that "Before Life and After" was chosen to create a definite conclusion with its dramatic question at the end.

Winter Words can definitively be regarded as a real song cycle, because it satisfies several demands. There is a central theme around which all the poems revolve, and together those poems make the theme clearer and more confronting. This is part of where the unity in the cycle comes from. Since it is a literary song cycle, the theme develops throughout the cycle. There is a climactic ending which looks back on what has been said. There is a certain structure in the order of the poems, leading from innocence to consciousness as the seriousness and explicitness increase and the poems become more metaphorically rich. Human life is implied and as the cycle progresses and evolves, so does life. The poems have been chosen for their imagery and reflect on Hardy's disposition towards life and death. The

cycle is unified through several features, and is similar to a beautiful painting made up of several different fine little portraits.

Chapter 2

~

Words and Music

The previous chapter has almost solely focused on the textual part of the song cycle. The music, however, is also very important for the complete analysis. A song is first and foremost a musical work, and so song analysis requires a close look at music as well. Words and music can be seen as similar in that “they both are auditory, temporal, and dynamic art forms” (Scher, “Literature and Music” 182). In words, already many musical elements can be found in prosody, rhyme and assonance. When read aloud, a text can sound almost like music in using a certain rhythm and an interplay of sounds. Setting words to music is an intricate process and the result can take many shapes. This chapter will focus mainly on song and the interaction between words and music in songs and song cycles, in relation to *Winter Words*.

The present-day song, an intermedial construction combining text and music, can be traced back to the *Lied*, the art song that originated in the Romantic period in the nineteenth century (Agawu 4). There have been different tendencies in the way songs were composed. At first, the music was especially there to support the meaning of the text and to “increase our understanding of the poem” (Cone, “Words into Music” 15). Goethe agreed with this view; he, “as a poet, preferred to see music in a secondary role and liked to think of the composer as merely uncovering the melody already concealed in his own word-rhythms” (Cone, “Words into Music” 6). Later during the development of the song, the music began to play a more important part and piano accompaniments of songs became more prominent (Scher, “Comparing Poetry” 226). In *Winter Words*, Britten has followed the first tendency of composing music to suit the text and not the other way around. As will be seen below,

Britten's setting transfers to music the sounds expressed in the poetry, like, for example, birds, a train, and a violin.

During the later development of composition of songs, composers started altering the texts they used so that they would fit the music that was composed. Schumann "saw poetry as secondary" (Kramer 131) and Schubert produced "a song that when necessary sacrificed the stanza-pattern for the sake of a higher dramatic or rhetorical unity, a song that was not content with vaguely indicating the mood of the poem but instead actively shaped its emotional content anew in accordance with its own interpretation" (Cone, "Words into Music" 6). So, from the early stance of viewing song as a "translation of the text" (Kramer 126), the focus shifted to more musically significant songs where the text is seen as "raw material" (Kramer 126) with which the composer can work. The music in *Winter Words* functions more as a translation, although Britten did alter most of the poems mildly by repeating several phrases for a heightened effect. An example of this is the concluding question "How long, how long?" in "Before Life and After." More examples will be given below.

Composing a song is a process of many choices. Composers choose whether they want to maintain the poetry as it is or whether they alter the content to fit the new medium of song. There are, of course, many options in between where both the text and the music are important, and where the song is a product of collaboration between the two, complementing each other. Mostly, although song – vocal music – is "a primarily musical genre" (Scher, "Music and Literature" 176), the text remains the basis for the interpretation of the composer. When composers read a poem, they do so with the music in mind, thinking of the musical possibilities they see in the poem. This "musical competence" (Scher, "Comparing Poetry" 224) leads to one interpretation, presented through the music. As said before, to create the musical piece the composer wants, the original text might be altered. According to Cone, repetition of phrases or changes in accentuation by emphasising different words than those

emphasised in the original poem are not harmful to the original since they can reveal or create new interpretations (“Words into Music” 11-14). However, changes on a larger scale, like in order, structure, or prosody, alter the poem more drastically so that the original poem makes way for the music and possibly gets a different meaning altogether. At that point it is not just an interpretation that composers add; they make changes in the original so that perhaps some of the original interpretations are lost.

Winter Words fits in with several typologies or models for the interaction between words and music. The songs are “symbiotic construct[s]” (Scher, “Comparing Poetry” 225), which means that both the poem and the music are an important part of it. Still, the nature of *Winter Words* is mostly determined by the text. Britten created a hierarchical relationship between text and music, which is in accord with Agawu’s model of a “pyramid structure with music at the base and words at the top” (6). The “words, lying at the top, provide access to meaning, while the music lies at the base and supports the signification of text” (6-7).²

Music can correspond to text in several ways, for example in terms of “text declamation” (Lodato, “Recent Approaches” 102), where the music may “‘truthfully’ [represent] accent, inflection, syllabification, and verse and line structure in the poem” (Lodato, “Recent Approaches” 102). A connection can also be found in “semantic textual meaning” (Lodato, “Recent Approaches” 103), so that the atmosphere and motifs are an expression of the theme in the poem. This last options is very clearly present in *Winter Words*, where several motifs support the theme by, for example, creating the sense of a journey through the sounds of a moving train. Moreover, the atmosphere of the poems, connected to

² Agawu describes three more models, the “assimilation model” (5), where songs become predominantly music, leaving the original text behind and making it “assume a musical form” (5), a model where words and music are “incorporated” (6), “without ever losing their individual essences” (6), and a model of a “confluence of three independent but overlapping systems” (7), namely text, music, and an independent entity of song. These models, however, are not relevant for the discussion of *Winter Words*.

the melancholy theme, is enhanced by the music in the use of dissonance and hardly ever completely harmonious chords. This will be explained in more detail below.

A common problem in song analysis is “[a]d hoc reasoning” (Agawu 8), where connections between the text and the music are made just for the sake of making connections. Individual connections may seem plausible, but can perhaps not actually be placed in the wider structure and meaning of the song. These connections are called “marriages of convenience” (Agawu 9). Agawu further argues that a problem in song analysis can be the overshadowing of the text over the music and solely searching for the textual meaning to come back in the music. This may limit the interpretation that the music can possibly give, and so a close look also needs to be taken at the music as an individual entity, without considering the meaning of the text for an instant (10). Agawu, like many other song analysts, concludes his argument by stating that there need not necessarily be connections between the text and the music of a song, and that usually music has the upper hand in determining the nature of a song (30). However, as will be shown, the songs in *Winter Words* mainly revolve around the text. It is a literary cycle, where the music supports the text and by no means controls the cycle.

Winter Words

Throughout the cycle *Winter Words*, the piano accompaniment is relatively sober. Every individual song contains a story of its own in the text and is “satisfactorily rounded” (Evans 358) in terms of music. As stated before, in the *Winter Words* songs the text is the basic element and the music supports the text. Britten has invented motifs that express sounds in the poems and he enhances the text’s atmosphere and twists in perspective and tone in the poems through melodic lines, dynamics and dissonance. A clear example of a motif representing a

sound is the train whistle motif in “Midnight on the Great Western” (see ex. 1). This sound recurs several times in the song and announces the train. In the first bars of the song, the train is heard slowly coming closer. When the accompaniment starts to build up in bar four, the train can be visualised as coming in sight through the ascending trills in the right hand accompaniment. A few bars after that, where the score says “With deliberate movement,” the rhythm of the train is going steadily onwards, expressed through the continual quavers and occasional sixteenth notes in the accompaniment. This goes on during the rest of the song, sometimes interrupted by the whistle motif, and sometimes by a momentary change of rhythm in which the changing of tracks can almost be heard (Johnson 297).

The image shows a musical score for the introductory bars of "Midnight on the Great Western". It consists of three staves. The top staff is for the piano, with a whistle motif in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The middle staff shows the vocal line for Verse 1 and Verse 2. The bottom staff is for the piano accompaniment, featuring a bass line with dynamic markings and performance instructions. The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *pp*, *cresc.*, and *fp*, and performance instructions like "gradually pushing forward", "With deliberate movement (♩ = 88)", "marked", "without pedal", and "sim.". The lyrics "In the third - class" and "In the band of his" are shown for Verse 1 and Verse 2 respectively.

Ex. 1. Introductory bars of “Midnight on the Great Western” (bars 1-10)

At the end of the song, the train is moving out of sight and the whistle motif is played again, “from afar.” The interruption by the whistle at some points in the song can be seen as a marker when the narrator steps outside of his own environment to try to understand the boy’s state of innocence and the course of his life so far. As Paetsch pointedly notes:

the whistle motif is not merely a sound-effect which simulates the aura of the train journey but, rather, a symbol which serves a number of narrative functions: it

introduces each stanza; it delineates the shift of focus whereby the narrator breaks out of his own world to wonder about the boy's past; it heralds the return of the adult observer to his own world as he tries to comprehend the boy's transcendent innocence. In effect, the whistle functions as a tangible marker along the adult narrator's intangible inner journey. (543-5)

The train is an important feature of the cycle, since the main theme of the cycle concerns a journey from innocence to consciousness. As the journey goes on and the train keeps on moving, people are being brought to new phases of their lives, growing up and realising that many things are only temporary in life.

Another example of specific sounds expressed in the songs are the birds that appear in "At Day-Close in November," "Wagtail and Baby" and "Proud Songsters." The latter is like "a whirlwind of 'particles of grain and earth, and air and rain'" (Johnson 296) in between slow, grave songs. The high tempo, the many triads and the high notes express the cheerful, almost frantic flying of the birds who are in the peak of their lives (see ex. 2). They are flying high and piping, but have not always done so and will not always remain that way. In the score, the recurring steep falls to longer major second chords after several high triads can be said to illustrate this inevitable fall, back to being nothing. Moreover, at "these are brand new birds," which is the start of the turn to the more serious topic in the poem, the accompaniment is lower and contains longer notes, indicating the grave topic that is brought up.

night - in - gales..... in bush-es Pipe, pipe, as they can when
 A - pril wears, As if all Time were

Ex. 2. High triads and a frantic melodic line in “Proud Songsters” (bars 11-15)

“Wagtail and Baby,” similarly, presents the little bird fluttering in the water by means of quickly ascending notes (see ex. 3). The melodic line is very cheerful so long as the bird feels safe and keeps on drinking happily from the water. When the “perfect gentlemen” arrives, however, the fluttering sounds are replaced by short chords with a hasty melody above when the bird is fleeing from the man. The end of this song is made up of a sequence of strange chords reflecting the baby’s confusion, the “infant’s mind searching about in various unlikely keys before coming to its inscrutable conclusion” (Johnson 297).

Ex. 3. Quick sequences upwards representing the bird in “Wagtail and Baby” (bars 39-44)

Significant changes in dynamics occur all throughout the cycle, and can, for instance, be seen in “At Day-Close in November.” The children introduced in the third stanza are still innocent and this is presented by the indication of *pianissimo* and “sweetly” in the music. According to Paetsch, the steady “alternation of D minor and A major” (541) chords creates an effect “of stasis, suggesting a suspension of time, which accords with the narrator’s entry into the children’s world where the world of the present is the only reality” (541). In this song, there also are complex tonal relationships that cloud the cheerfulness of the playing children (Paetsch 541). This is the case throughout the entire cycle; dissonant harmonies and nervous melodic or accompanying lines keep recurring to indicate the dark theme of temporality and adult consciousness.

All of Britten’s alterations to the poems in *Winter Words* concern repetitions, enhancing the flow of the music and accentuated pieces of text that require special attention. Because of this, the meaning of the poem is not changed but only emphasised at particular points. “The Little Old Table” displays this in the repetition of the “creak” sounds the table

makes. These repetitions make the song more rhythmical and almost personify the table as if it has something to say and wants to get attention. Every owner knows a different story about the table, and thus the creaks represent “the sound of something familiar [which] transports poet and composer into the past” (Johnson 296). This suits the theme of temporality – the table exists for a long time, but the owners are only temporary and change often. Their experiences with the table are forgotten. Britten’s direction, “warm,” for the last phrase, “from long ago” emphasises the warm and affectionate feeling people can have for a thing that was part of their lives. The creaks are also illustrated in the music, in the short and accentuated major second intervals in the left hand accompaniment:

Ex. 4. The creaks in “The Little Old Table” (bars 54-58)

Another significant example of Britten’s alterations is the phrase “How long, how long?” in “Before Life and After,” which expresses a sincere longing to a state of innocence. The despair conveyed in this phrase is amplified by its continual repetition in the last few bars of the song (see ex. 4). The music has become more agitated at the phrase “But the disease of feeling germed” and from then on the melodic line ascends, forming a contrast with the descending left-hand accompaniment. At “how long” the melody reaches its climax, and from there the line again descends, expressing a powerlessness over the bad state of consciousness humankind is in. The music illustrates the change in state of mind throughout the song from peaceful to rather depressed, and therefore “the musical ground plan accords with that of the

poem” (Evans 361). The final question to the cycle gives it a more dramatic effect of true longing:

Ex. 5. Repetition and descending melodic line in “Before Life and After” (bars 30-35)

A special way of Britten’s musicalisation of the poem can be seen in “The Choirmaster’s Burial.” The poem contains a framing of the narrative, expressed through the music by the unaccompanied beginning, when the “tenor man” is introducing the story, at the end of the song, at the lines “such the tenor man told / when he had grown old,” and also in the middle when the voice of the tenor man returns explicitly for a moment in “but ’twas said that.” These passages “create narrative distance” (Paetsch 546); they are set off from the rest of the text to show that the narrative is set in the past, a time long ago. The most important musical feature of this song is the use of “Mount Ephraim,” an old hymn which the choirmaster in the poem asked to be sung at his funeral. Britten has incorporated this melody, somewhat altered, in the accompaniment when the “band all in white” plays and sings for the choirmaster (see ex. 5). The way the music is put on paper here “(minims and crotchet triplets in spacious 3/2 bars) even has the look of the ‘ancient stave’ in this ceremony of spirits”

(Johnson 298). The “ancient stave” is also mentioned in the poem, and refers to an old way of musical notation, here seen in the accompaniment in bars 64-67:

The image shows a musical score for the song "The Choirmaster's Burial". It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first two lines of the poem. The vocal line has lyrics: "frost was gray-ing The head-stoned grass, A band". The piano accompaniment features triplets and a *ppp* marking. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the next two lines of the poem. The vocal line has lyrics: "..... all in white Like the saints in church-glass, Sing-ing and play-ing". The piano accompaniment features a *cresc.* marking. A small asterisk is placed below the piano part in the first system.

Ex. 6. “Mount Ephraim” in the accompaniment of “The Choirmaster’s Burial” (bars 63-69)

“At the Railway Station, Upway” is the richest song in terms of metaphorical meaning. There is a complex relationship between the boy, the convict and the constable, and the poem raises questions about the true nature of freedom. The song again portrays a different way in which Britten has musicalised the poem, and the music in this songs adds a possible interpretation to the poem by implying a similarity between the boy and the constable, which is not present in the poem. Britten has composed the accompaniment “entirely within the limits of a single violin” (Evans 360), reflecting the boy playing the violin for the convict. It consists of only a single line, and “[m]any devices of fiddle-playing are transferred to the piano: open strings, double-stopping, *détaché* bowing, *spiccato* and even a final harmonic” (Johnson 298). The convict’s outburst, “this life so free / is the thing for me,”

is accompanied by arpeggios and his line “this life so free” is repeated, giving the passage a climactic quality. Moreover, Britten’s direction “lightly and like an improvisation” at the start of the song serves to bring the image of the boy playing the violin even more into the piano accompaniment. Paetsch notices a remarkable equivalence between the way the boy and the constable are portrayed in the music. At the line “and the constable smiled,”

the accompaniment changes to the long notes previously heard in conjunction with the boy’s speech. This musical equivalence of the constable and the boy suggests an innocence on the part of the constable which is not present in the narrative, leaving the listener to wonder whether the composer’s authorial voice is implying that the constable’s “unconsciousness” is more akin to the boy’s naivety than to indifference or obliviousness. (553)

In this case, other than before, the music goes from merely supporting the text to inserting a new interpretation, adding to or changing the meaning of the poem at that point.

The main goal of the music for *Winter Words*, then, is to support the text by expressing particular sounds, and overall by enlarging the sense of atmosphere. In all the songs, the harmonies can be quite dissonant, expressing the unhappy state of mind of the speaker. One of the exceptions is “Before Life and After,” in which the beginning is very harmonious since the text at that point is about the bliss of innocence. In most of the other songs the consonant harmonies do not last long, which again emphasises the temporality of youth and life. As seen before, the ending to “Wagtail and Baby” is a good example of the unlikely keys sometimes used in the cycle to express a sense of searching for what is right in the world. The cheerfulness of the birds in some of the songs is not quite complete; there is always a certain dissonance or strange key setting. Melodic lines ascend or descend and the accompaniment becomes lighter or graver, depending on the tone of the text or the state of mind of the speaker.

The cyclicity of the song cycle *Winter Words* has not been mentioned so far in this chapter, and that is because it is hard to find features that establish cyclicity in terms of music. There are no striking recurring elements; the songs all have their individual musical setting. What the musical elements in the cycle do is establish a more vivid idea of a journey in, for example, “Midnight on the Great Western.” This can be seen in the wider context of the entire cycle, which also portrays a journey through life towards consciousness through, among others, the ordering of the poems from mild to confronting as discussed in chapter one. Some of the key setting may be significant, since the cycle starts in D minor in “At Day-Close in November” and ends in D major in “Before Life and After.” This creates a rounded cycle, beginning and ending on a similar chord. Still, the atmosphere of the chords is very different, the minor chord indicating the grave mood of the cycle, and the major chords suggesting a brighter state of mind. This brighter state of mind at the end does not spring from the last part of the song, which is very dramatic, but more from the beginning of the song where the speaker relishes a state of youth and innocence. It can be argued that the speaker gives in here, knowing that his suffering will not end soon. Instead of lamenting that, he decides to focus on what he longs for and to remain blissfully ignorant. This interpretation adds to the meaning of the poem, making the concluding song in the cycle even stronger. The song does not just make the theme more explicit and dramatic; it also suggests a kind of acceptance and a way of dealing with the theme through the music. What is true for most of the songs is that the accompaniment cannot stand on its own; it needs the text to acquire meaning since the accompaniment in itself is too sober and without long melodic lines. These melodic lines are added by the singer.

For *Winter Words*, the cyclicity apparently lies very much in the poetry – the themes, imagery and atmosphere as explained in chapter one. The music merely functions as a support for the music, making the situations palpable and even more touching since the content of the

text is transferred to the new dimension of music, which makes the separate stories and the overarching theme more vivid. To look back to chapter one, the music then fits with stage one out of the seven stages proposed in Komar's theory of cyclicity: "General similarity among the songs in musical style and length, poetry style, structure and subject matter" (Lodato, "Problems" 106). In terms of poetry, the cycle is more coherent than in terms of music. There is a clear theme in the poetry, but the music is mostly composed for every song separately without noticeable connections between the songs other than a similar portrayal of atmosphere. Poetry definitely comes first; this contradicts many critics' and composers' ideas, like Schumann and Schubert mentioned before in this chapter, who claimed that music usually has the upper hand and that they can change the text as they please.

All the above examples, of which there are many more, show that the music in *Winter Words* adds another dimension to the atmosphere that is already in the text. The music cannot be said to add specific meaning to the poems, except perhaps in the case of "At the Railway Station, Upway" and "Before Life and After;" it is there to create more awareness of the theme of temporality, the bliss of childhood and the sufferings of adults, by adding another form of expression. The poems are released from the paper and become more vivid because of the addition of musical interpretation. In song cycles in general, musical settings might actually limit the possible interpretations of poems, since they realise only one particular reading of them. The setting is the result of a choice of the composer, and it could have been done very differently. Still, in the case of *Winter Words*, the theme is very clear throughout the poems, so it can also be argued that as a whole, the cycle cannot lead to very different interpretations from the one also presented in chapter one of this thesis. Britten has created the striking overarching theme of praised innocence and lamented consciousness of temporality himself by selecting the poems, and his musical setting is very much a reflection of the

melancholy atmosphere present throughout the cycle. The music reinforces and amplifies this atmosphere, and the cycle as a whole then guides the listener towards the specific theme.

Conclusion

Thomas Hardy's poetry was in good hands with Benjamin Britten when he made the selection and composed the music for his choice of poems. Britten has focused on the text, leaving the originals almost entirely as they were, except for some repetitions to create a heightened effect. The main theme of *Winter Words*, created by the combination of the poems, is the journey through life from innocence to consciousness. In this, innocence and youth are portrayed as an ideal state, whereas adult consciousness is regarded as grim and dark because of the sufferings and the awareness of the temporality of life. The overall atmosphere of the poetry and the cycle as a whole is very melancholic. Britten's setting enhances this atmosphere and also contributes to a further clarification of the theme.

In song cycles, unity and cyclicity are very important aspects. Unity can be established through a narrative structure or specific theme in the poetry, and through musical structure in key setting, recurring motifs and so forth. Cyclicity is further achieved by making the last song reflect on what has been said before and possibly by building up to a climax. In *Winter Words*, the theme is central and unifies the songs. "Before Life and After" functions as the climactic reflecting song at the end, looking back on the previous poems and making the theme even more explicit. The cycle is not very clearly structured, and therefore corresponds to McCreless's unordered type of song cycle. The structure exists mainly in the poetry, making *Winter Words* a literary cycle revolving around a theme. The order of the poems does portray a kind of cyclicity, corresponding to the cycle of life. The cycle starts mildly and innocently, and becomes more serious and confronting towards the end. This can be paralleled with life and a person's journey from innocent youth to adult consciousness. Therefore, the structure of the cycle enhances the theme. The theme is clarified and intensified through the

combination of the poems, and also through the concept of the cycle, which adds a portrayal of the theme through its form.

Britten most likely chose these poems for his cycle because of the corresponding themes and especially the imagery Hardy used in his poems. The collection made by Britten consists of many different kinds of poems portraying different situations from different perspectives. This way, the theme of the cycle becomes clearer with every song and is deepened because of the different perspectives given on it. The images of nature, like the trees and the birds, connect the cycle of nature to the cycle of life with its continual growing and perishing. The birds are especially appropriate because of their flying high with ignorant cheerfulness. They are the perfect illustration for the blissful innocence of children, who live in the moment and do not yet realise what awaits them.

The songs in *Winter Words* are intermedial constructions in which the text is most important. This goes against the views of many critics and composers who believe music usually controls the text, altering it to suit the intended musical structure and balance. The music corresponds to the text by expressing the sounds, the atmosphere, and thereby also the meaning of the text. A kind of pyramid structure, stated by Agawu, is applied in *Winter Words*, since the text is the basic determiner of meaning and the music is merely there to enhance it. Britten invented specific motifs to express, among others, the sound of birds, a violin, and a train – Hardy's images that contribute to the unification of the cycle. The melodic and accompanying lines, together with the dynamics, underline where the narrative of a particular poem is going in terms of, for example, peacefulness or agitation. The dissonance present in many (parts) of the songs, and the way it keeps on popping up when things seemed peaceful and harmonious, further establish the atmosphere of melancholy longing for a renewed youth and a serious questioning of whether nothing at all then is eternal in the world.

In the music, cyclicality is harder to find than in the text. Every song is well-structured and provides the listener with a rounded portrait, but there are no recurring motifs or underlying structures in the cycle as a whole, except for the similar, but still atmospherically different, D minor and D major chords at beginning and end. The final bright D major chord suggests the speaker's giving in to the suffering and focusing on a past of youth and "nescience." The cyclic effect mainly springs from the poems, their theme and their structuring. The music supports this, and only twice adds a truly new interpretation. It directs the listener to the clearest interpretation of the cycle, that of the theme explained above. Britten enhanced this interpretation by stressing some important parts of the poems through repetition. He also literally included his thoughts on the meaning of the songs by writing directions in the score saying in what way and with which feelings the songs should be sung and played.

The main question presented in the introduction was to what extent the concept of the cycle and the setting to music add to the interpretation of the poems. In answer to this, both influences on the poems create a larger whole with a central theme and appropriate atmosphere. The combination of the poems and the addition of the musical setting vivify this theme and atmosphere. The song cycle is Britten's product. Although he did not write the poems himself, he did bring them together and thereby created the theme covering the whole cycle. Through this personal establishment of the theme he could compose his music just as he had in mind, supporting the poems by giving them the extra dimension of music. Every song is well-rounded, just like every poem is a small narrative contributing to the larger story of life and its growing consciousness. The songs together build up to a climax, resulting in a desperate last question asking how long the torturing state of adult consciousness will last and when nescience will finally return.

The combination of the poems gives every poem a deeper interpretation, since they are now part of the larger literary theme as formed by Britten. The musical setting adds another dimension to the situation, making it more palpable. Through all the different perspectives and situations, and the sounds and atmosphere in the music, the theme deepens and causes reflection on the course of life and its temporality. Hardy and Britten were both very aware of these topics; this song cycle therefore also serves as a reflection on both of their lives and states of mind. The songs fit with a wintertime when people look back on their lives and long to be young and thoughtless again. Through its cyclicality, *Winter Words* is a reflection of and on human life, alluding to its course and its passing. The images of nature further enhance this cyclic element of continual renewal, and the music creates another dimension of atmosphere, making the theme all the more striking and the situation all the more real.

References

- Agawu, Kofi. "Theory and Practice in the Analysis of the Nineteenth-Century 'Lied.'" *Music Analysis*. 11.1 (1992): 3-36.
- Bernhart, Walter. "Three Types of Song Cycles: the Variety of Britten's 'Charms.'" *Word and Music Studies: Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field*. Eds. Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001. 211-226.
- Binks, Adam. "Benjamin Britten Winter Words." 2008. *Linn Records*. 28 Feb 2011. <<http://www.linnrecords.com/recording-Leighton-Earth-Sweet-Earth-and-Britten-Winter-Words-james-gilchrist.aspx>>.
- Britten, Benjamin. "Winter Words." *Britten 'Before Life and After.'* Perf. Mark Padmore and Roger Vignoles. Harmonia Mundi, 2009.
- . "Winter Words." *Benjamin Britten*. Perf. Anthony Rolfe Johnson and Graham Johnson. Hyperion Records Limited, 1985.
- . "Winter Words." *Britten: Three Song Cycles*. Perf. Justin Lavender and Julian Milford. Carlton Classics, 1997.
- . *Winter Words*. Lyrics and Ballads of Thomas Hardy. Op. 52. London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1954.
- Cone, Edward T. "Words into Music: the Composer's Approach to the Text." *Sound and Poetry*. Ed. Northrop Frye. New York: Columbia University Press, 1957. 3-15.
- Evans, Peter Angus. *The Music of Benjamin Britten*. London: Dent, 1979.
- Grew, Eva Mary. "Thomas Hardy as Musician." *Music and Letters* 21.2. (1940): 120-142.
- Gross, Harvey. *Sound and Form in Modern Poetry: a Study of Prosody from Thomas Hardy to Robert Lowell*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1965.
- Hardy, Thomas. "At Day-Close in November." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 334.
- . "At the Railway Station, Upway." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 607.
- . "Before Life and After." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 277.
- . "Midnight on the Great Western." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 514.
- . "Proud Songsters." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 835.
- . *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. London: Macmillan and co., 1912.
- . "The Choirmaster's Burial." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 534.
- . "The Little Old Table." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 648.
- . "Wagtail and Baby." *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 296.
- Johnson, Graham. "Voice and Piano." *The Britten Companion*. Ed. Christopher Palmer. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1984. 286-307.
- Kennedy, Michael. *Britten*. 2nd ed. London: Dent, 1993.
- Komar, Arthur, ed. *Schumann, Dichterliebe: An Authoritative Score*. New York: Norton, 1971.
- Kramer, Lawrence. *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

- Lodato, Suzanne M. "Problems in Song Cycle Analysis and the Case of *Mädchenblumen*." *Word and Music Studies: Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field*. Eds. Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001. 103-120.
- . "Recent Approaches to Text/Music Analysis in the Lied." *Word and Music Studies: Defining the Field*. Eds. Walter Bernhart, Steven Paul Scher and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999. 95-112.
- McCreless, Patrick. "Song Order in the Song Cycle: Schumann's 'Liederkreis,' Op. 39." *Musical Analysis*. 5.1. (1986): 5-28.
- Paetsch, Annabelle. "Aspects of Narrativity and Temporality in Britten's 'Winter Words.'" *Music and Letters*. 79.4. (1998): 538-554.
- Porter, Peter. "Composer and Poet." *The Britten Companion*. Ed. Christopher Palmer. London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1984. 271-285.
- Rupprecht, Philip. *Britten's Musical Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Scher, Steven Paul. "Comparing Poetry and Music: Beethoven's Goethe Lieder as Composed Reading." *Essays on Literature and Music (1967-2004)*. Eds. Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. 223-247.
- . "Literature and Music." *Essays on Literature and Music (1967-2004)*. Eds. Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004. 173-202.
- Sherman, Elna. "Thomas Hardy: Lyricist, Symphonist." *Music and Letters*. 21.2. (1940): 143-171.
- "Winter Words." Benjamin Britten. 2011. *Britten-Pears Foundation*. 28 Feb 2011. <<http://www.brittenpears.org/?page=/britten/repertoire/songs/winter.html>>.
- "Winter Words." Research resources. 2011. *Britten-Pears Foundation*. 28 Feb 2011 <<http://www.brittenpears.org/?page=research/catalogue/detail.html&id=261>>.
- Wolf, Werner. "Intermedial Metatextuality in Schubert's 'Der Leiermann.'" *Word and Music Studies: Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field*. Eds. Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001. 121-140.
- . "Introduction." *Word and Music Studies: Essays on the Song Cycle and on Defining the Field*. Eds. Walter Bernhart and Werner Wolf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001. vii-xii.

Appendix 1 – the Poems

At Day-Close in November

The ten hours' light is abating,
 And a late bird wings across,
 Where the pines, like waltzers waiting,
 Give their black heads a toss.

Beech leaves, that yellow the noon-time,
 Float past like specks in the eye;
 I set every tree in my June time,
 And now they obscure the sky.

And the children who ramble through here
 Conceive that there never has been
 A time when no tall trees grew here,
 That none will in time be seen.

Midnight on the Great Western

In the third-class seat sat the journeying boy,
 And the roof-lamp's oily flame
 Played down on his listless form and face,
 Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going,
 Or whence he came.

In the band of his hat the journeying boy
 Had a ticket stuck; and a string
 Around his neck bore the key of his box,
 That twinkled gleams of the lamp's sad beams
 Like a living thing.

What past can be yours, O journeying boy
 Towards a world unknown,
 Who calmly, as if incurious quite
 On all at stake, can undertake
 This plunge alone?

Knows your soul a sphere, O journeying boy,
 Our rude realms far above,
 Whence with spacious vision you mark and mete
 This region of sin that you find you in,
 But are not of?

Wagtail and Baby

A baby watched a ford, whereto
 A wagtail came for drinking;
 A blaring bull went wading through,
 The wagtail showed no shrinking.

A stallion splashed his way across,
 The birdie nearly sinking;
 He gave his plumes a twitch and toss,
 And held his own unblinking.

Next saw the baby round the spot
 A mongrel slowly slinking;
 The wagtail gazed, but faltered not
 In dip and sip and prinking.

A perfect gentleman then neared;
 The wagtail, in a winking,
 With terror rose and disappeared;
 The baby fell a-thinking.

The Little Old Table

Creak, little wood thing, creak,
 When I touch you with elbow or knee;
 That is the way you speak
 Of one who gave you to me!

You, little table, she brought –
 Brought me with her own hand,
 As she looked at me with a thought
 That I did not understand.

– Whoever owns it anon,
 And hears it, will never know
 What a history hangs upon
 This creak from long ago.

The Choirmaster's Burial

He often would ask us
That, when he died,
After playing so many
To their last rest,
If out of us any
Should here abide,
And it would not task us,
We would with our lutes
Play over him
By his grave-brim
The psalm he liked best –
The one whose sense suits
'Mount Ephraim' –
And perhaps we should seem
To him, in Death's dream,
Like the seraphim.

As soon as I knew
That his spirit was gone
I thought this his due,
And spoke thereupon.

'I think', said the vicar,
'A read service quicker
Than viols out-of-doors
In these frosts and hoars.
That old-fashioned way
Requires a fine day,
And it seems to me
It had better not be.'

Hence, that afternoon,
Though never knew he
That his wish could not be,
To get through it faster
They buried the master
Without any tune.

But 'twas said that, when
At the dead of next night
The vicar looked out,
There struck on his ken
Thronged roundabout,
Where the frost was graying
The headstoned grass,
A band all in white
Like the saints in church-glass,
Singing and playing
The ancient stave
By the choirmaster's grave.

Such the tenor man told
When he had grown old.

Proud Songsters

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,
And as it gets dark loud nightingales
 In bushes
Pipe, as they can when April wears,
 As if all Time were theirs.

These are brand-new birds of twelvemonths' growing,
Which a year ago, or less than twain,
No finches were, nor nightingales,
 Nor thrushes,
But only particles of grain,
 And earth, and air, and rain.

At the Railway Station, Upway

'There is not much that I can do,
 For I've no money that's quite my own!
 Spoke up the pitying child –
A little boy with a violin
At the station before the train came in, –
'But I can play my fiddle to you,
And a nice one 'tis, and good in tone!'

 The man in the handcuffs smiled;
The constable looked, and he smiled, too,
 As the fiddle began to twang;
And the man in the handcuffs suddenly sang
 With grimful glee:
 'This life so free
 Is the thing for me!'
And the constable smiled, and said no word,
As if unconscious of what he heard;
And so they went on till the train came in –
The convict, and boy with the violin.

Before Life and After

A time there was – as one may guess
 And as, indeed, earth's testimonies tell –
 Before the birth of consciousness,
 When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,
 None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings;
 None cared whatever crash or cross
 Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,
 If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung;
 If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed,
 No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,
 And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong;
 Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed
 How long, how long?

Hardy, Thomas. "At Day-Close in November". *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 334.

Hardy, Thomas. "Midnight on the Great Western". *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 514.

Hardy, Thomas. "Wagtail and Baby". *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 296.

Hardy, Thomas. "The Little Old Table". *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 648.

Hardy, Thomas. "The Choirmaster's Burial". *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 534.

Hardy, Thomas. "Proud Songsters". *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 835.

Hardy, Thomas. "At the Railway Station, Upway". *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 607.

Hardy, Thomas. "Before Life and After". *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*. Ed. James Gibson. London: Macmillan, 1979. 277.