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MUSC 325: 20th C. Music
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Final Research Project

The Necessity of Neo-Romanticism within the Art Song Genre

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the state of the art song as a European musical genre had weakened significantly when compared to the prominence it experienced during the previous century. With Schubert's death in 1828, the torch of the German lied was passed on to Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms and later to Wolf and Strauss. In 1930, however, Strauss was the only living composer of the German lied dynasty. His song production at this time had significantly decreased, however, as the majority of his songs were composed before the turn of the century.¹ In France, Fauré's death in 1924 left an immense void in the production of the French *mélodie*, as the other greats of the French art song, including Debussy, Chausson, and Duparc, had previously passed on or were no longer composing. The secular songs of Italy and Spain at this time, continued to be almost entirely operatic, while those composed in Russia and Poland were heavily influenced by folk music, blurring the lines between "popular" and "serious" song.² Throughout Europe, the era of the art song had passed, and with the rise of Modernism, the art song appeared to be no more.

¹ Bryan Gilliam, "Strauss, Richard," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 10 April 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

² Geoffrey Chew, "Song," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 10 April 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

The art song in question is the solo song for voice and piano accompaniment, which took its point of departure from the songs of Schubert.³ Generally, the art song as a serious genre can be separated from popular song by its use of accompaniment and style of declamation. While popular song of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries commonly utilized the piano for its simple harmonic accompaniment, art song gave the pianist a more substantial role, in which the piano music often emulated scenes from the text or emotions evoked by the poet and singer.⁴ As for declamation, art song composers became more concerned with reflecting the correct declamation of the text with great precision. Popular song composers, however, were often inclined to use strophic structures, which utilized the same music for each stanza of text.⁵ Although art song composers utilized the strophic form in some cases, it was often a “modified strophic” form in which there were musical changes made between the verses. This modified form, however, was also used by popular song composers, signifying the remaining ties between the two genres.⁶ In his article “How Modern Song Grew up,” C. Hubert H. Parry further described the relationship between singer and accompanist within the genre of art song.

He writes:

As a mere matter of fact, the instrument is capable of doing a great deal more than the voice, and in modern song the accompanist often has a much harder task to accomplish than the singer. To be just, it would often be more fair to describe the singer as accompanying the man at the pianoforte. Yet the interest must centre in the singer, partly because the singer is responsible for the words and elocution, and—which sounds absurd—the singing. The instrument is responsible for the design, the consistency, and

³ Geoffrey Chew, “Song,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 6 May 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

⁴ Geoffrey Chew, “Song,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 6 May 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

⁵ Geoffrey Chew, “Song,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 6 May 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

⁶ Geoffrey Chew, “Song,” *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 6 May 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

all that part of expression which belongs to the harmony and rhythm. The voice must be free in the sense that it cannot reiterate figures, but must follow the sequences of the verbal phrases and their intent.⁷

For Parry, one of the defining characteristics of the art song is the interaction between singer and pianist. Although he notes that the piano is capable of more as an instrument, the singer must be the main focus of the art song, because he or she is the one relaying the text. Again, the way in which the text is portrayed is a major aspect that differentiates the art song from the popular song genre. While Parry attributes many of the characteristics of expression to the piano, he defines the role of the voice as the articulation of the text, the medium which first inspires a song.

Adding to the definition of the art song, William Treat Upton defines the genre, in his article, "Aspects of the Modern Art-Song," by the way in which the voice is displayed, as he writes, "...song must be vocal, not an aping of any instrument idiom; that no matter how rich the accompanying score, the voice part must be thoroughly individualized and dominating; that there must be lyricism in the broadest sense of the word—in short, that song must remain song and not deteriorate into some hybrid mixture of opposing types."⁸ Upton heavily weights the importance of the voice in the genre of art song, putting the accompaniment greatly in the background. While it seems natural that a song should feature the voice, Parry's attribution of importance to the accompaniment in terms of its atmospheric expression, seems more apt in defining the art song genre. The note of importance derived from Upton's definition, however, comes from his insistence that a song must have lyricism. Lyricism, which can be attributed to the natural line of the melody, is a necessity if a composer is to showcase the beauty of the human voice. This condition,

⁷ C. Hubert H. Parry, "The Modern Song Grows up," *The Musical Times*, Jan., 1911: 15.

⁸ William Treat Upton, "Aspects of Modern Art-Song," *The Musical Quarterly* Jan., 1938: 12

however, became less of a concern to composers as ideas of Modernism began to infiltrate most serious musical genres. Modernism, which began as a critique on the cultural standards of the early twentieth century, encouraged composers to stray from the norms of nineteenth century Romanticism. Because the genre of the art song was of major importance in the nineteenth century, it can be expected that the genre fell from favor.

Returning to Upton, the critic recognized that composers of the early nineteenth century were composing songs, but that “the fact still remains that, as far as our representative composers are concerned, production in the field of song writing is practically at a standstill today as compared with the enormous output of the 19th century.”⁹ Upton generally attributes the fall of the art song, as it was understood in the previous century, to the rise of Modernism, as he writes, “For it happens that, just about our period, the fine and ancient mold which has determined the contours and shaped the substance of song, even from Schubert’s time to ours, has been gradually cracking under the strain of a growing modernism, and that new patterns of quite a different type are in the making.”¹⁰ Thus, the art song, as composers knew it, was moving further and further away from the Romantic ideals of the nineteenth century, in which the genre was born. Like Upton, Bruce Saylor, in a review for the *Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association*, notes the decrease in art song in the twentieth century and attributes it to the rise of Modernism. Saylor notes that, “Composers in the twentieth century have certainly not been encouraged to write art songs. In the nineteenth, the art song and certain kinds of piano music were salable commodities, households often displaying a piano and stacks of sheet music for the evening’s entertainment. But as the tonal vocabulary became more

⁹ William Treat Upton, “Aspects of Modern Art-Song,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Jan., 1938: 22

¹⁰ William Treat Upton, “Aspects of Modern Art-Song,” *The Musical Quarterly*, Jan., 1938: 11

advanced, new repertory by the best vanguard composers ceased to be attractive to the lagging popular taste...”¹¹ Saylor attributes the lack of twentieth century song composition to the lack of audience appreciation for the new modernist style. Thus, while modernist composer were already disenfranchised with the nineteenth century genre of art song, the modern audience had no desire to hear those who were combining the modernist style with the art song. This loose-loose situation for modernist composers made the art song genre even more unappealing.

As the production of art songs among modernist composers faded, the young Samuel Barber was just getting his start as a composer, first gaining recognition in 1928 after winning the Beams award for a violin sonata, and then again in 1931 with his Overture for *The School for Scandal*.¹² In the years that followed, Barber became a prolific song composer, anchoring his style in the Romantic traditions developed during the heyday of the European art song. Though judged by critics as “conservative,” Barber’s prowess at song composition was enhanced by his Romantic influences. Returning to the understanding of art song as developed by Parry and Upton, it is apparent that the method defined is how Barber approached the composition of his songs: he consistently showcased the human voice through his use of lyrical melodies, with the accompaniment adding greatly to the atmosphere drawn from the text. While Modernist American composers were stretching the limits of instrumental music, Barber was picking up the pieces of the thought-to-be-lost art of song. At this point it is important to consider the American composer Charles Ives, who like Barber, was a prolific song composer, though a generation earlier. While Ives will be mentioned in further detail later, it should be pointed

¹¹ Bruce Saylor, *Notes: Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association*, Dec. 1977: 476.

¹² Nathan Broder, *Samuel Barber* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1954) 18-21.

out that because of the variability of Ives's style, many of his songs are actually comparable to Barber's in that they too feature a neo-Romantic, or even neo-Classical style. As Ives continued his work within the genre, his songs strayed further from the definition of art song, as the lyricism decreased and the accompaniments began to surpass the importance of the voice. The art song is a genre that requires the emotional approach to music that was enhanced by the Romantic composers. Being an extension of the human body, the voice is meant to express emotion, and has difficulty doing otherwise. As modernist composers moved further away from the emotional expressiveness of the Romantic era with the advancements of electronic music and ideas of futurism, the music they composed became increasingly mechanistic. The use of the human voice contradicts this approach to music, as it is an unavoidably human, and therefore emotional, instrument. While the modernist song is an expected progression, due to the constant change within all aspects of culture, it ignores the inevitable emotionality of the human voice, making it impossible to showcase in a natural way. Thus, the pursuit of song composition warrants a neo-Romantic style. As portrayed through his songs, Barber's style enabled him to emphasize the human voice as it exists, through his use of lyricism, his understanding of the voice as a solo instrument, and ultimately his neo-Romantic style.

Much of Barber's neo-Romantic style can be attributed to a variety of factors, including his mentors, early training, and frequent visits to Europe. Born in 1910, Barber spent his early life in West Chester, Pennsylvania and received much of his training at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. Before enrolling at Curtis, however, Barber was greatly encouraged by his uncle, the composer, Sidney Homer, who became Barber's

mentor from 1922 until Homer's death in 1953.¹³ Homer encouraged Barber to trust his "inner voice," while looking to the European composers of the nineteenth century for inspiration.¹⁴ The songs that Homer composed were grounded in the Germanic style of the early New England composers.¹⁵ These songs were greatly admired by Barber, and thus served as an inspiration for the young composer as well. Homer's influence also extended to the texts Barber chose for his songs. While at Curtis, Barber focused on texts by nineteenth century American poets. As his literary taste matured, Barber became drawn to the texts of European writers, especially those of British poets from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which his uncle set as well.¹⁶

Through the encouragement of his uncle, Barber enrolled at the Curtis Institute of Music during its charter year in 1924. During his second year at the school, Barber began to study composition with Rosario Scalero, an Italian violinist and composer who had worked in Vienna with the musicologist Eusebius Mandyczewski, a close friend of Brahms.¹⁷ Scalero's teachings were rooted heavily in the nineteenth century traditions, as relayed by Nathan Broder's thorough description of Scalero's methodology in his biography Samuel Barber:

Scalero laid great stress on counterpoint and form. Two years of study were devoted to counterpoint, beginning with the simplest two-part writing and ending with double (eight-part) choruses...After mastering strict counterpoint, the students were set to writing canons and fugues, variations, songs and piano pieces embodying the various small forms, and, finally, large works employing the sonata principles. Scalero did not regard

¹³ Barbara Heyman, Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 15.

¹⁴ Barbara Heyman, "Barber, Samuel," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 4 February 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

¹⁵ Dee Baily, "Homer, Sidney," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 10 April 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

¹⁶ Barbara Heyman, Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 43.

¹⁷ Nathan Broder, Samuel Barber (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1954) 13-14.

harmony as a discipline to be studied separately. He treated it primarily as a result of the confluence of voices.¹⁸

Scalero's methods heavily influenced Barber's compositional style, especially in terms of what Barbara Heyman describes as "its remarkable sense of form and well-crafted design."¹⁹ This can be attributed to Scalero's intense focus on counterpoint and the understanding of traditional structural forms. Also, Scalero's belief that harmony is the result of good counterpoint provides reason for Barber's disinterest in the dissonant and atonal harmonies explored by American Modernist composer's throughout the twentieth century.

Under Scalero's guidance at the Curtis Institute, Barber was also given many opportunities to study abroad in Europe. After winning his first Beams award in 1928 with a violin sonata²⁰, Barber embarked on the first of many tours throughout France, Switzerland, Austria, and Italy. Barber greatly admired European culture and society and would frequently return to Europe, especially Italy, with his personal and professional partner, Gian-Carlo Menotti. These stays in Europe also connected Barber further to the old masters and intensified his orientation with the Romantic style.²¹ In his letters home, Barber often described the music he heard from different areas of the cities he visited. In a letter from Vienna, Barber writes:

Here a woman was singing to a guitar the 'Paescatori' Tango...and from the other side, the deep baritone of some unknown troubadour answered...and then voices from every side met in the dark beauty of the night and sent to the stars the ever beautiful measures of the Spanish tango...The Rialto bridge was a blaze of rainbow colors which made reflections of dancing

¹⁸ Nathan Broder, *Samuel Barber* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1954) 16.

¹⁹ Barbara Heyman, *Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 35.

²⁰ Lost, remains unpublished

²¹ Barbara Heyman, "Barber, Samuel," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 4 February 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

iridescence in the black water below; and it was thronged with singing crowds, watching the procession pass underneath. It was a night of sensuous beauty, heavy with old-world romance.²²

Barber was moved by the sights and sounds that surrounded him on his travels. His romanticized description of this scene in Vienna emphasizes the inspiration he drew from the European “old-world” and the vivid images and emotions he associated with the culture.

Barber’s experiences abroad, as well as his lessons with Scalero and the encouragement he received from his uncle, contributed to Barber’s adaptation of a more traditional Neo-Romantic style. This style is well portrayed throughout Barber’s songs, of which total one-hundred and three²³, and make up more than half of his two-hundred compositions.²⁴ Otto Karolyi remarks in his book, Modern American Music: From Charles Ives to the Minimalists, that throughout the songs, “it is apparent that Barber was a professionally trained singer by his sympathetic understanding of the human voice.”²⁵ Even in his earliest songs, Barber creates beautifully lyric melodies that accentuate the human voice. His piano accompaniments always accentuate the vocal line and never overshadow the emotionality of text the singer relays. Barber does, in fact, utilize techniques of the twentieth century, such as “open fourths and fifth, dissonance (with intervals of seconds, sevenths, and ninths), twelve-tone rows, and tonal ambiguity,” as described by John Browning in the program notes of the recording *Secrets of the Old*:

²² Barbara Heyman, Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 43.

²³ Of which only thirty-seven have been published.

²⁴ Barbara Heyman, Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 5.

²⁵ Otto Karolyi, Modern American Music: From Charles Ives to the Minimalists, (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996) 44.

Complete Songs of Samuel Barber.²⁶ These more modern techniques, however, are used to develop and enhance the emotion expressed through the text of the songs, rather than to show off technical ability and separate oneself from the prominent techniques of the nineteenth century or earlier. In other words, Barber did not take into consideration whether certain techniques were popular or in style, but rather employed the techniques that would appropriately enhance the emotional substance of the individual texts.

The variability of techniques utilized by Barber throughout his music is well demonstrated throughout the songs, including those first published. In her doctoral dissertation, Jean Louise Kreiling attributes the effectiveness of Barber's songs to their diversity resulting from his various musical techniques. She writes, "Yet while his songs are less adventurous than those of Ives, they show a comparable versatility of technique and flexibility of style. This very diversity—not excluding the conservative tendencies—helps to make his work both timely and expressive."²⁷ Barber's songs are, in part, successful because of the varying techniques he chooses. By drawing from the music of the past and present, Barber wrote in a manner that was uniquely specific to the text with which he was working. This diversity is exemplified in Barber's earliest set of songs, *Three Songs*, Op. 2, published by G. Schirmer in 1936.²⁸ This collection includes "The Daisies," "With rue my heart is laden," and "Bessie Bobtail." Despite being among Barber's earliest works, these songs are surprisingly varied in terms of compositional technique and emotional portrayal. All three songs demonstrate Barber's dedication to the

²⁶ John Browning, "Style" essay in accompanying booklet, *Secrets of the Old: Complete Songs of Samuel Barber*, Deutsche Grammophon, 1994.

²⁷ Jean Louise Keiling, *The Songs of Samuel Barber: A Study in Literary Taste and Text-Setting*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1986), 6-7.

²⁸ Barbara Heyman, *Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 50.

constraints of the art song genre. Throughout the collection, Barber is governed by the text. He supports the poetry by using the piano accompaniment to enhance the atmosphere and emotion portrayed through the words, and consistently writes lyrical melodies that bring out the beauty of the text and the human voice simultaneously.

Written in 1927, while Barber was still a student at Curtis, “The Daisies” was first performed, along with “Bessie Bobtail,” by Barber in 1934.²⁹ The text of the song is taken from a poem of the same name by the Irish author, James Stephens.³⁰ Published in 1913³¹, the poem has a light-hearted feel, as the narrator describes the happy scene of two lovers walking among the beauty of nature. Composed in three stanzas, each having an ABAB rhyme scheme, the poem has a traditionally Romantic feel, which greatly influenced Barber’s reaction to the text, and therefore the music he set.

“The Daisies”

In the scented bud of the morning-O,
When the windy grass went rippling far!
I saw my dear one walking slow
In the field where the daisies are.

We did not laugh, and we did not speak,
As we wandered happily, to and fro;
I kissed my dear on either cheek,
In the bud of the morning-O!

A lark sang up, from the breezy land;
A lark sang down, from a cloud afar;
As she and I went hand and hand,
In the field where the daisies are.³²

²⁹ Wayne C. Wentzel, Samuel Barber: A Guide to Research, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 72.

³⁰ Greg Alan Coutts, A Formal, Melodic, and Harmonic Analysis of the Published Solo-Song Compositions of Samuel Barber, (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1991), 15.

³¹ Emily Ezust, “The Lied and Art Song Texts Page”, *REC Music Foundation Online*, (Accessed 13 April 2008), <<http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/>>

³² Greg Alan Coutts, A Formal, Melodic, and Harmonic Analysis of the Published Solo-Song Compositions of Samuel Barber, (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1991), 15.

Throughout the song, Barber maintains the same light-hearted feel as the poem by keeping the melodic and harmonic elements of the song simple. Both the vocal line and accompaniment remain legato throughout the piece, except for a brief interruption in measures 13-15 with the added staccato accents. These accents are appropriately applied to the line, "I kissed my dear on either cheek," as a small amount of anxiety is added to the mood through the excitement of the kiss. Despite this brief interruption in the legato quality of the voice and accompaniment, the line of both remains very natural and conjunct. As with the melodic line, Barber keeps the harmonies simple and reminiscent of the nineteenth century parlor song. The piece remains in F major, with the vocal melody keeping to diatonic notes that revolve around the dominant. Barber uses traditional full and half cadences throughout the song, and mainly keeps to chords in the key of F major. Ultimately, Barber maintains the light, cheerful quality of Stephens's poem through his uncomplicated melodic and harmonic techniques. The winding ascending and descending conjunct melody and simple harmonies aptly portray the breezy atmosphere and contented feelings expressed by these two lovers.

The second song of *Three Songs*, Op. 2, is "With rue my heart is laden," which was written in 1928, again while Barber was attending Curtis.³³ The song premiered in 1935, when the entire Opus 2 was performed by Barber's fellow student, Rose Bampton in London, and then at the Curtis Institute in 1937.³⁴ The text is one of A. E. Housman's best known poems from the collection, *A Shropshire Lad*, which was published by the English

³³ Barbara Heyman, "Barber, Samuel," *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 4 February 2008), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

³⁴ Barbara Heyman, Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 50.

poet in 1896.³⁵ The text is very different from that by Stephens, as it deals with the premature death of young men and women and the pain it has caused the narrator.

“With rue my heart is laden”

With rue my heart is laden
For golden friends I had,
For many a rose-lipt maiden
And many a lightfoot lad.

By brooks too broad for leaping
The lightfoot boys are laid;
The rose-lipt girls are sleeping
In field where roses fade.³⁶

Although “With rue my heart is laden” has a similar structure to “The Daisies,” with its rhythmic meter and ABAB rhyme scheme, the mood of this poem is much darker. To match the text, Barber utilizes much more harmonic variation and chromaticism to emphasize the sorrowful character of the poem. As with “The Daisies,” the melodic line is fairly simple and generally conjunct. With “With rue my heart is laden,” however, Barber adds a much increased sense of tension with the use of non-harmonic tones, such as the C-sharp on the vocal and piano line on the word “rue” in measure 4. The tension it creates over the F-natural pedal point intensifies the feeling of regret expressed by “rue” and also the natural imagery of the irritating, poison-ivy-like herb it refers to. The tension is extended further, as the C-sharp does not resolve to the D-natural until the next measure, after passing through E-natural. The harmonic language Barber uses in “With rue my heart is laden” is significantly more complicated than that of “The Daisies.” While primarily in

³⁵ Barbara Heyman, Samuel Barber: The Composer and His Music, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 51.

³⁶ Greg Alan Coutts, A Formal, Melodic, and Harmonic Analysis of the Published Solo-Song Compositions of Samuel Barber, (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1991), 22.

D minor³⁷, the harmonic vocabulary expands to include modal borrowings, non-harmonic tones, and an increased amount of sevenths chords.³⁸ While Barber adds depth to the musicality of this piece, it is done in order to represent the text in an appropriate way. Listeners are able to sense the remorse felt by the narrator in reaction to the death of friends, who one day were young and full of life, and dead the next. Barber portrays these emotions through the smooth vocal line played over the constant eighth-notes in the accompaniment. This technique aptly sets the juxtaposition of the narrator's sadness and longing in reaction to death against the numerous lively and natural images that surround the narrator's friends even in death.

The final song of *Three Songs*, Op. 2 is "Bessie Bobtail," written in 1934. The fact that this final song was written six years after the second is exemplified through the increased maturity of the music. Barber was able to express the eerie quality of the poem by James Stephen with the use of musical imagery realized through the rhythm and harmony of the song.

"Bessie Bobtail"

As down the road she wambled slow,
She had not got a place to go:
She had not got a place to fall
And rest herself—no place at all:
She stumped along, and wagged her pate;
And said a thing was desperate.

Her face was screwed and wrinkled tight
Just like a nut—and left and right,
On either side, she wagged her head
And said a thing; and what she said
Was desperate as any word
That ever yet a person heard.

³⁷ The higher key of the two published, original is in B minor.

³⁸ Greg Alan Coutts, *A Formal, Melodic, and Harmonic Analysis of the Published Solo-Song Compositions of Samuel Barber*, (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1991), 25.

I walked behind her for a while,
And watched the people nudge and smile:
But ever, as she went, she said,
As left and right she swing her head,
- *Oh, God He knows! And, God He knows!*
*And, surely God Almighty knows!*³⁹

Stephens's text portrays a vagrant woman who wanders the streets back and forth. As other on-lookers poke fun at the woman's haggard appearance and peculiar walk, the narrator recounts her desperate words that express her religious torments. For this song, Barber creates a coda to encompass the last two lines, which he repeats and extends, to separate Bessie's own words from the rest of the text. Barber uses a fairly stepwise melody that is broken up by extending the second word in each group of two. In measures 3-16, Barber places a rest after each half note, so that each grouping of two words is written as a quarter-note, half-note and then rest. The vocal line is sung between the rests of the piano accompaniment, and vice-versa, which causes the two melodies to imitate the back and forth motion of Bessie's walk. Throughout most of the song, both melodies keep returning to the dominant note, ascending from and then descending to A-natural. This constant return to A suggests the persistence of Bessie's unavoidable presence as she wanders back and forth. The harmonic structure of "Bessie Bobtail" is based on the oscillation between the tonic and dominant.⁴⁰ While these chords are not always complete, they are implied and thus reinforce Bessie's persistent presence. When the coda is sung, however, the dominant is completely avoided, as if Bessie's words are lost on the nearby onlookers. The melody of the coda becomes much more chromatic and higher in the

³⁹ Greg Alan Coutts, *A Formal, Melodic, and Harmonic Analysis of the Published Solo-Song Compositions of Samuel Barber*, (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1991), 27.

⁴⁰ Greg Alan Coutts, *A Formal, Melodic, and Harmonic Analysis of the Published Solo-Song Compositions of Samuel Barber*, (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1991), 32.

singer's range, suggesting the intensity expressed through Bessie's words. With "Bessie Bobtail," Barber was able to put Bessie herself into the music through his use of rhythm and harmony. These techniques allowed him to create vivid images through music, which aptly express Bessie's desperate situation.

Throughout this early collection of songs, it is very apparent that Barber's songs align with the definition of art song relayed earlier. The essential qualities of song, which include the voice's ability to bring out the text in a lyrical, pronounced way, along with the atmospheric enhancement added by the piano are constants in Barber's songs. Listeners will hear many of these qualities in the songs of Charles Ives as well. Songs such as "Two Little Flowers" and "In the Alley," are very much of a neo-Romantic nature. "Two Little Flowers" features a conjunct melody that enhances the text, while the arpeggiated accompaniment carries the music along, with its added motion. "In the Alley," which utilizes a version of a typical popular text, pokes fun at itself with its traditional parlor style. Both songs, however, follow the definition of the art song, with their vocal lyricism and the enhancement of mood by the accompaniment. Modernist songs of Ives's, however, stray from this understanding of the art song. Songs like "The Cage," utilize vocal and piano lines that work against each other, rather than together. With "The Cage," the harsh intensity of the piano accompaniment overshadows the vocal melody and the text, which is relayed in a somewhat Sprechstimme style. This style of singing takes away from the natural emotionality of the voice, as well as the lyricism of the melody. While some of Ives's most successful songs stem from his later modernist style, they stray from the definition of art song. His compositions that utilize a neo-Romantic style fit the

category of art song, but stray from Ives's own feelings, that composition should involve the stretching of one's musical muscles.

As with Ives's earlier songs, when listening to the songs of Barber, such as "The Daisies," it is easy to categorize his style as Neo-Romantic or even Neo-Classical. The fact remains, however, that the music captures the emotion of the text in the appropriate manner. The texts Barber chose governed the techniques he utilized for song composition. His love of literature, developed with the help of Sidney Homer, greatly influenced his music, including that of instrumental genres. In Walter Simmons's book Voices in the Wilderness, the author goes as far as to describe the entirety of Barber's work as "literary." He writes, "Barber's art is fundamentally "literary" in nature; that is, not only does a large proportion of his output—actually, more than half—make explicit references to actual works or genres of literature, but its emphasis on mood and feeling, often evoked by texts that appealed to him, is descriptive, rather than purely self-expressive..."⁴¹ Simmons implies that Barber wrote with his listener's in mind, rather than himself. It was more important for Barber to get across the meaning and emotion expressed by the poet in his text, than it was for him to solely articulate the individual emotional experience he associated with a specific composition.

Barber's relationship with the texts he chose is one of the reasons his music is so successful. As noted earlier, while Barber was composing art songs, most other American composers were focusing on instrumental genres. Upton comments on the decrease in song writing throughout the music community in his article "Aspects of the Modern Art-Song. He writes:

⁴¹ Walter Simmons, Voices in the Wilderness: Six American Neo-Romantic Composers, (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2004), 264.

In the first place, song writing as a *compelling* field of creative endeavor, such as stirred a Schubert, a Schumann, a Brahms, a Wolf, a Strauss, a Fauré, a Chausson, a Duparc, simply does not exist today. I think we will all agree to that, although even here it does not behoove one to generalize too broadly. The song writing of such well known composers as Hindemith, Schoenberg, Castelnuovo-Tedesco, Křenek, and other contemporary composers, is far from negligible, whether regarded qualitatively or quantitatively. But the fact still remains that, as far as our representative composers are concerned, production in the field of song writing is practically at a standstill compared with the enormous output of the 19th century. And yet, of all who wrote to me on the subject not one denied the inherent value of the form, and very few admitted a lack of interest in it.⁴²

Written in 1938, Upton's article presents the opinions of young composers and their understandings of the decline of the art song. The quote above expresses the predicament at large: Why has art song production decreased so significantly from the previous century when it is still a genre of interest to many young composers? ... Upton takes a more subtle approach to explain the problem, linking it to a lack of texts for composers to use in song composition. He writes:

Quite apart from these more obvious difficulties, however, there are some which, while more intangible, more subtle, are no less real. One of these is the lack of suitable texts. This has been mentioned by several composers... Another difficulty is that a composer does not have at his hand a fund of poetry that will permit him to express himself freely in this [the song] form. If we examine any period in which it flowered we shall find that songs were written to texts that belong to the period. There are exceptions to be sure, but in general the sensibility of the composer must find an echo in the poet, and it is usually in a poet of his own time that he finds the most satisfying response. In our day the best poets are exceedingly complex.⁴³

Upton brings up an excellent point in this section of the article: With modern advances in music come modern advances in literature, art and all aspects of culture. When considering the poets of the early to mid-nineteenth century, it is apparent that poetry

⁴² William Treat Upton, "Aspects of Modern Art-Song," *The Musical Quarterly*, Jan., 1938: 22.

⁴³ William Treat Upton, "Aspects of Modern Art-Song," *The Musical Quarterly*, Jan., 1938: 23.

became more about the look of the text on the page than its sound when read aloud. The first literature and poetry was based on oral traditions, making the sound of the words essential. With the advancement of the Modernists, however, the need to separate oneself from older traditions made poetry an equally visual art. When the poems of authors who wrote during Barber's time, such as e. e. cummings, are read aloud, they can have a completely different meaning from when they are read on the page.

While Modernist poems did not make for easy adaptation into song, the texts that Barber utilized for his compositions worked especially well. Barber was drawn to texts that had regular metric patterns and rhyme schemes, and that also produced within him a meaningful reaction. As Jean Louise Kreiling notes in her doctoral dissertation, "Samuel Barber's selection and handling of texts suggests that his creative attention could be drawn by a sonorous rhyme scheme, a striking image, an eloquent formal design, and/or a compelling atmosphere—and that his musical forms and methods were governed by such varying responses."⁴⁴ As an avid reader of slightly earlier works, Barber was intrigued by these more traditional elements of poetry described above. Coincidentally, these works made for excellent song writing, when compared to the Modernist poetry written by Barber's contemporaries.

The songs of Samuel Barber are a unique collection that well represents his musical style. Although often described as neo-Romantic, Barber's techniques are specific and appropriate to the texts he chose for his songs, rather than the time period within which he worked. Karolyi, in fact, writes that, "Stylistically he is neither a neo-Romantic nor a neo-classicist, but rather his music is an unproblematical continuation of late romantic musical

⁴⁴ Jean Louise Keiling, The Songs of Samuel Barber: A Study in Literary Taste and Text-Setting, (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1986), 13.

procedures as applied by a highly civilised American internationalist. But, within the conservative idiom which he chose, he created a body of works which proves what Schoenberg stressed once in connection with tonality, that many masterpieces can yet be written in C major.”⁴⁵ Barber’s success within the art song genre, however, is in part due to his neo-Romantic style. While other American composers, such as Charles Ives, experienced success within the genre, many of their best songs strayed from the essential characteristic of the art song, due to modernist tendencies. Barber’s songs remain successful among listeners because of their ability to stay within the constraints of the genre, thus supporting the use of the neo-Romantic style in the composition of art song.

⁴⁵ Otto Karolyi, Modern American Music: From Charles Ives to the Minimalists, (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996) 44.

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