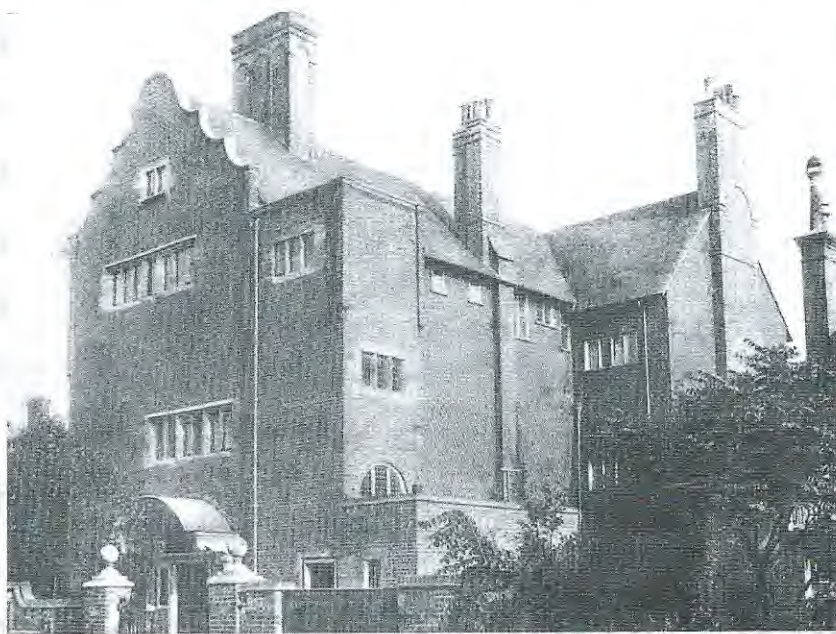


The Elgar Society
journal



November 2010 Vol. 16, No. 6

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*The Editor does not necessarily agree with the views expressed by contributors,
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Foreign words: if well established in English (sic, crescendo) in Roman, otherwise italics.

Numbers: spell out up to and including twenty, then 21 (etc.) in figures.

Quotations: in 'single quotes' as standard. Double quotes for quotes within quotes.

Longer quotations in a separate paragraph, *not* in italic, *not* in quotes; please leave a blank line before and after.

Emphasis: ensure emphasis is attributed as '[original emphasis]' or '[my emphasis]'. Emphasized text *italic*.

References: Please position footnote markers *after* punctuation – wherever possible at the end of a sentence.

In footnotes, please adhere as far as possible to these forms (more fully expounded in the longer version of these notes):

Books: Author, *Title* (Place of publication: Publisher, year of publication), page[s]. Thus: Robert Anderson, *Elgar* (London: Dent, 1993), 199.

Periodicals: Author, 'Title of article', *Title of periodical*, issue number and date sufficient to identify, page[s]. Thus: Michael Allis, 'Elgar, Lytton, and the Piano Quintet, Op. 84', *Music & Letters*, 85 (May 2004), 198.

End a footnote with a full stop, please, and never put a comma before a parenthesis.

Titles that are 'generic' in Roman: e.g. Violin Concerto. Others in *italics* (e.g. *Sea Pictures*; the *Musical Times*). Units within a longer work in single quotes, e.g. 'Sanctus fortis' from *The Dream of Gerontius*.

Editorial

Following five years in the editorial seat, I am handing over to Martin Bird. I warmly thank all contributors who have provided material: articles, reviews, letters, and Geoffrey Hodgkins for '100 years ago'. Martin has already relieved me of the complicated operation of the CD reviews, for which I am particularly grateful. I also thank the Society for entrusting me with its Journal; Michael Byde for setting the pages and responding with unfailing efficiency to requests for alterations; Dominic Guyver for reading proofs, up to the time when he became editor of the News, and for many useful communications since; John Norris, for much helpful advice; Arthur Reynolds for help with illustrations; and many others, including a brace of society chairmen, for kind observations and not too many brickbats.

Reflecting on these years, I conclude that, Elgarian as I consider myself to be, I find it hard fully to appreciate the diversity of the Elgarian mind. The grip the composer exercises on his warmest admirers is remarkable, though not unmatched: the Berlioz and Vaughan Williams Societies could put up champions of equal fervour and single-mindedness. Elgar was the major figure in a British resurgence of gifted and creative musicians, and as John Drysdale has pointed out in his fine thesis (soon, I hope, to be published for a wider readership) he led the way in establishing the profession of *composer* – rather than musician-who-teaches/performs-and-composes, to which (for instance) Parry and Stanford, as much as Mozart and Chopin, belonged. Elgar's performing capabilities were not negligible, but their main importance was their contribution to his compositional expertise. Conducting became a valuable source of income, but Elgar was rightly seen as a composer conducting, rather than a conductor who composed (as Mahler was perceived in his lifetime). Elgar managed this without the inherited comfortableness off (if hardly wealth) of Parry, Vaughan Williams and Bax. It would be no mean achievement even if his music had not reached such heights over some 30 years before 1920.

There is thus every excuse for passionate involvement with Elgar's musical works; and by extension with his output of recordings, letters, lectures, and other sources of his aesthetic views; and by another extension with his outlook on the world. Strangely, there remain disputes in all these areas. I am delighted to have got through five years without printing any more purported enigma 'solutions', especially as some that have recently come to my attention tend to the increasingly tortuous, despite Elgar's claim that the solution, once spotted, would seem obvious. Ingenuity – of which there is plenty – cannot excuse dismissal of inconvenient information or simple failure to make sense (which beside 'fitting' tunes to the 'Enigma' theme that don't fit, include 'Dorabella cipher' readings that don't convey any intelligible message). A few years ago someone announced that he would be surprised if his enigma 'solution' were not proven by the contents of an envelope at the Birthplace,

to be opened only in 2034. It would be good to have a complete moratorium until that point – when I suppose this person, if still living, will be duly surprised.

Away from such frivolities, we find disputation even about Elgar's essence: pastoral or urban; little-British or imperial; the most English of composers or one thoroughly international-minded. The first two antitheses are false, for one may assent to both epithets. Elgar, like Vaughan Williams, had an urban and a pastoral side, reflecting intensities in his life and art. Challenged by Jaeger about the imperialism of *Caractacus*, he said 'England for the English', scarcely an imperialist sentiment, yet one cannot really dismiss all his imperial tributes (even, perhaps, *The Crown of India*) as purely commercial. But the third antithesis is less accommodating. Many people, I believe, are unaware of the origins of the national funeral anthem, 'Nimrod', in a tribute to a musical German (or two, if you include Beethoven). Elgarians all know this, of course, but it does not, perhaps, sufficiently warn us against claiming for Elgar the title of 'the most English of composers': a silly notion, and not necessarily to his credit even if it could be proven. His eclecticism is indisputable, and as with other composers, generally a Good Thing. There are debts to Parry, at least, among English composers (and why not?), but they are hardly as significant as the debts to Schumann, Wagner, and Brahms, while the notion of Elgar as a German composer who happened to be English should be tempered by many suggestions of the Slavonic and the French, and not only in his lighter music. His style was forged from the whole wonderfully variegated European music of the previous century, and unless (*pace* Vaughan Williams and *pace*, even, Elgar's own pronouncement in one of his Birmingham lectures) Englishness is defined as eclecticism – which, given British society's tendency since about 1700 to favour foreign over native music, is I suppose possible – one must surely conclude, with Landon Ronald, that 'Elgar did not write English music – whatever that may be; he wrote great music'.¹

I hope work published under my editorial eye may have contributed usefully to these debates, which so long as Elgar's music is performed and loved will no doubt continue not to produce answers that appeal to everybody. I should like to end by apologising for including below another short essay of my own; but it has already been postponed for a couple of years and I do not wish to burden my successor with an obligation. To him I wish the very best for his tenure, and I look forward to some interesting reading.

Julian Rushton

1 *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 June 1935, a propos an Elgar performance by 'a great foreign conductor' (Toscanini).

Tales from the Complete Edition – 4 'It Isnae Her': Elgar, Women and Song

John Norris

While many are intrigued by the uncertainties surrounding Elgar's lingering feelings for Helen Weaver, mere mention of her name is likely to invoke a stifled yawn in others. There is, however, no denying Elgar's complicated emotional feelings towards a number of women, and his propensity to leave fingerprints of these relationships among his compositions for future generations to ponder over. Nowhere is this more true than in his songs for solo voice, making the recently published Complete Edition volume of his later solo songs a fascinating study for musicians and Elgarians alike.¹ Fortunately for the yawners, Helen doesn't make an appearance, the only song which Elgar arguably composed as an outpouring of his feelings for her being *Through the Long Days*, a song from 1885 possibly reflecting a desolation induced by her recent departure for New Zealand.

As with any discussion of Elgar's women, we must start with his wife, who provided the poetry for a number of his earlier settings. Despite the accepted shortcomings of her verse, she inspired him to compose what many would consider two of his finest songs, for both of which he subsequently provided an orchestral accompaniment: the dramatic *The Wind at Dawn* of 1888 for solo voice and the later, delicate part-song for female voice *The Snow* (1894). Unfortunately, the recently published volume contains what many would consider to be an astoundingly bad product of their combined creative talents, *The Kingsway* (1910), a song seemingly written to celebrate the construction of the magnificent new thoroughfare connecting High Holborn with the Aldwych (also newly constructed) and the Strand. The route had been laid out and the street ceremonially opened in 1905 by Edward VII, in whose honour it was named; but the imposing edifices planned for its spacious pavements were slow to rise, and it was not until 1909–10 that some of the larger buildings were finished or approaching completion.

No doubt, in this adaptation of the trio from his fourth *Pomp and Circumstance* March, Elgar was hoping to recapture some of the huge success, populist and financial, he had achieved with *Land of Hope and Glory* some eight years earlier. His fourth March had been greeted by scenes of unprecedented enthusiasm in the summer of 1907, when Henry Wood had conducted its first performance in a

1 Elgar Complete Edition vol. 16: *Solo Songs with Piano 1901-1934*, edited by Brian Trowell (Rickmansworth: Elgar Society Edition, 2010).

packed Albert Hall, not least because of the broad melody of its very singable trio. This 'big tune' was aimed fairly and squarely at popular taste, and Elgar knew that superior persons with a more sophisticated palate would accuse him of pandering to the multitude. His severe friend A.J. Jaeger, anxious for a symphony, was one of these and Elgar tried to pre-empt his disapproval by describing the trio as 'rot, but pleasing to march to'.² He knew very well, of course, that the articulation of the long tune had been developed with much more artistic cunning than his dismissive comment implied, but he also knew that he had another winner, and now, two and a half years later, the public mood seemed ripe for what he had in mind. What went so badly wrong?

If we separate music and words, we know from the orchestral march that Elgar started with a fine *nobilmente* tune. This he adapted for use in the song with rather more subtlety than he did the trio from the first march, adding a contrasting and markedly restrained second theme, a modulating middle section that grasps at the brief opportunity for contrast so obligingly offered by 'The sick and poor' who 'sink sadly down in gloom', living 'on dreary roads' – dispossessed, no doubt, by the demolition gangs, from the mean streets that had been cleared away to create the new road. More problematic is Alice's use of a refrain before and after each stanza. It is essential to the poem's changing meanings, but it forced Elgar to take liberties with the structure of the trio, the very element which he hoped would ensure that the song became a popular hit. To accommodate the opening refrain, Elgar was forced to preface each statement with a few comparatively nondescript bars, causing the tune to stumble at the outset. Accommodating the closing refrain caused rather greater mayhem, forcing the first two statements of the great tune to break off before they reach the final, clinching, double-length phrase; the repetitions of earlier phrases to accommodate the refrain seem sadly incomplete without the trio's emphatic climax. The resulting pent-up frustration eventually finds exciting release when the cadential phrase of the big tune finally arrives, *fortissimo* and *grandioso*, in the final verse to the words 'The King of England's Way', an inspired afterthought by Elgar; but the earlier foreshortenings disappoint one's expectations, and this may explain why the song has not enjoyed anything like the success of its famous sibling.

Yet the finger of blame cannot be pointed at Alice's words alone. Others who provided alternative words fared no better. First, in 1928, Alfred Noyes, at Elgar's own suggestion, provided words for *Song of Victory*.³ Then, during World War II, A.P. Herbert designed *Song of Liberty* not for the trio alone but for a new arrangement of the whole March. If Alice's choice of subject matter might seem a little strange (not least since the Elgars were living in remote Hereford at the time), and if, as Percy Young claims, she initially disguised her authorship under the nom-de-plume 'Charles Alison', implying that she harboured her own doubts, the *Daily Mail* at least did not share them, reproducing two of the verses on the eve of the song's premiere.⁴

2 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar and his Publishers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 673.

3 Moore, op. cit., 855–6.

4 Percy M. Young, *Alice Elgar: Enigma of a Victorian Lady* (London: Dobson, 1978), 165.

There is in any case evidence that the words are not Alice's alone. Those who know them in their entirety are struck by the change of emphasis in the final verse: an entirely parochial celebration of the opening of a fine new London thoroughfare a few years earlier suddenly changes into a diatribe against the growing German naval military threat, seemingly on the slim pretext that those fine men whose labours helped build Kingsway will also help protect us from the foreign aggressor. Such a casual, tendentious link is not beyond Alice's capabilities. As we have seen, she could have been moved to write the opening verses at any time between 1905 and 1910 and may have been sufficiently angered to add that last stanza after 1907, when Germany's refusal to implement the proposals of the Hague Peace Conference caused it to collapse, to the great and mounting annoyance of the British. Anglo-German rivalry continued to build and there was another crisis in March 1909, when the two powers failed to reach agreement on limiting the size of their fleets, thereby precipitating a panic over the neglect of the Royal Navy – and perhaps prompting the last verse.⁵ A manuscript of the libretto in the Birthplace Museum shows a change of handwriting, suggesting the last verse to be the work not of Alice Elgar but of Edward. Elgar took his bardic duties seriously, indicating in an interview of 1904 that he thought that a composer should be prepared to 'step in front of an army & inspire the people with a song'. Following the crisis in March 1909, he duly set about writing both the words and music for an anti-German patriotic song. Its language was too strong for Arthur Boosey, and it was never published; the words are lost.⁶ Perhaps, disappointed by his publisher's rejection, Elgar seized the opportunity presented by *The Kingsway* and adapted the rejected words to form the final verse. But whoever should shoulder the responsibility for authorship, the real culpability surely lies with Elgar himself in choosing to set them. Alice's words at least are inoffensively trite; their overblown sentiment can be laughed away if confined to the printed page. But pairing them with the *nobilmente* tune of the trio gives them too much of a sense of purpose, demanding to be taken seriously, an intent which makes them seem plain silly.

Alice was unswervingly compliant in meeting Elgar's lyric needs, providing alternative words ('Afar, amidst the sunny Isles') for the part-song *My Love Dwelt in a Northern Land* when Andrew Lang, the author of the original poem, at first refused Elgar permission to use it after he had composed the music. Lang later relented, unlike Adrian Ross whose poem *May, June, July* Elgar also set, only for copyright permission again to be refused; in the latter case, A.C. Benson stepped in with the words of *Speak my Heart*, to which Elgar's setting is now sung.

Volume 16 of the Complete Edition contains a curious tribute, or perhaps aid, to Alice's poetic assistance in a fragment entitled *Pattern to a Bag-Poet*.⁷ Although not in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is clear from the context that 'bag-poet' meant the composer had a poet 'in the bag' who could be relied upon to write poetry on demand to a template – exactly the role Alice had filled with *My Love Dwelt*

5 On this see also Carl Newton's article below [ed.].

6 What remains of this Patriotic Song is now published for the first time in the Appendix to *Elgar Complete Edition* Vol.16 (2010).

7 The original is to be found at the Elgar Birthplace Museum.

in a Northern Land. The fragment has no words but – one further curiosity of unexplained significance – its tune is an earlier, undeveloped form of the theme now universally known as the ‘Welsh tune’ from *Introduction and Allegro*.

One woman whose name crops up at intervals throughout the volume, but whose relationship with Elgar no-one has dared to suggest was anything other than professional, is Clara Butt. The story of her involvement in the creation of *Land of Hope and Glory* is well known. Elgar fondly believed that it was the king who suggested that he should put words to the trio from the first *Pomp and Circumstance* March as the finale of the *Coronation Ode*. Revisiting his sketchbooks some years later, Elgar added at the foot of two pages containing sketches of related material: ‘first sketch of the main tune “Land of Hope and Glory”’. This (and p. 18) are the earliest version for the finale of ‘The Coronation Ode’; embodied in the Ode at the suggestion of H.M. King Edward VII.’; and ‘National Song – This is the first sketch of the rest of the song “Land of Hope and Glory” the principal theme of which first appeared in “Pomp & Circumstance No.1”, afterwards in the Coronation Ode’.⁸ Butt subsequently reminded Elgar that it was she, not Edward VII, who first put the suggestion to him. Whatever the truth, it seems that it was Boosey, publisher of both the *Pomp and Circumstance* Marches and the *Coronation Ode*, who first suggested to Elgar a third, far more lucrative life for the trio as a National Song – the form most familiar to all today – to be sold to the masses by the thousand in the form of sheet music.

To help achieve those soaring sales, Boosey traded on the name of the start of the moment, emblazoning the cover of the sheet music with the legend ‘Sung by Madame Clara Butt’. It was a promotional banner Boosey also used on three other solo songs. They make a fascinating set. The first, Clifton Bingham’s *Come, Gentle Night*, an emotionally powerful yet restrained ballad to be sung in predominantly hushed tones, seems wholly in accord with the image of Clara delivering *Sea Pictures* in her corsetless, shimmering blue mermaid costume. But the other two songs, like *Land of Hope and Glory*, belong to the 6’ 2” Butt’s masculine persona, for they are the aforementioned *The Kingsway* and *The Chariots of the Lord*, both melodramatic tub-thumpers likely to raise the roof at the unfortunately named Boosey Ballad Concerts. Elgar secured particularly favourable terms for the publication of *The Chariots of the Lord* and proceeded to mark another twenty hymns by John Brownlie from the same hymnal as suitable for setting, although in the event he set about only one more – *The day fades into night* – and abandoned the attempt after making no more than a few minor adjustments to the words.

In many ways the real star of Volume 16 is the Sunderland-born contralto Muriel Foster, now widely recognized as Elgar’s preferred interpreter of the leading female roles in his cantatas and oratorios. Ironically it seems to have been Stanford who first recommended Muriel to Elgar after hearing her perform *Sea Pictures* while still a student, and before long she repeated the cycle under the composer’s direction, at Bradford in February 1901 when she was 23. She ‘combined beauty of voice and of presence with a sensitive intelligence quite new in the interpretation

8 British Library Additional MSs 63153, f. 18v, and 63155, f. 9.

of Edward's music'.⁹ Elgar entrusted her with the role of the Angel in place of an unreliable German singer for the all-important second Düsseldorf performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* in May 1902, which set the seal on Elgar's European reputation as well as her own. On her return to England she replaced Marie Brema (who was ill) for two further performances of *Gerontius* that autumn, at the Three Choirs Festival in Hereford and at the Sheffield Festival, and in the following year she again played an essential part in rehabilitating the work at its first London performance. Gervase Elwes thought her 'the best Angel of all', and Ernest Newman agreed that her interpretation was not to be surpassed.

Elgar admired Foster enormously, and she was one of only two female singers excepted when he complained, in his Birmingham lecture of 29 November 1905 on 'English Executants', that our singers lacked any sense of drama. Henry Wood was surely right when he said that Elgar wrote all his mezzo parts after 1902 with her in mind. She was his chosen mezzo-soprano for the premieres of the *Coronation Ode* (1902), *The Apostles* (1903), and *The Kingdom* (1906). But after her marriage in 1905 to Ludovic Goetz she followed the example of her twin sister Hilda – also a singer – and withdrew from public performance at her husband's request, though completing certain long-promised engagements.

At some point before her retirement, Muriel Foster wrote to Elgar requesting that he compose a concert *scena* for her to take on tour in the USA. Elgar's intended response was an imposing solo cantata out of some ideas originally conceived in 1897 with the tenor Edward Lloyd in mind and sketched for bass or baritone in 1905. This was the project known as *Callicles* after the young harp-player whose hopeful song contrasts with the pessimism of the philosopher who commits suicide at the end of Matthew Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*. Elgar revisited his sketches in the Spring of 1909 (and again in 1913 and 1926) but they were never assembled into a completed work. Nor did he finish various shorter projects for mezzo-soprano, such as his setting of Shelley's *Ozymandias*, which remains, symbolizing the theme of the poem in unintended irony, as a towering fragment.

On 6 October 1909 Elgar met Foster at a performance of *Gerontius* in Birmingham after a three-year gap. She would no doubt have told him of the birth of her son Anthony some nine months earlier. He presented her with a sketch from *The Kingdom*, adding an inscription whose half-humorous manner fails to conceal his sorrow that her voice has for too long been absent from performances of his works. Their unexpected meeting seems to have fired within Elgar a desire to lure her back into the concert hall. On the very next day, Alice's diary records that he 'Thought of tune for Empedocles scena written at Careggi', the *Callicles* which he had begun to re-work for mezzo six months before. Then in late 1909 Elgar presented her with *A Child Asleep*, a setting of verses from a poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which he dedicated to Anthony with the inscription 'This Simple Song (For His Mother's Singing) is Made to Anthony Goetz', adding a quotation from Chaucer, taken from the description of Emilye in *The Knight's Tale*: 'As An Aungel Hevenly Sche Song'. The dedication is doubly ambiguous, no doubt deliberately so:

9 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar, a Creative Life* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 347.

did Elgar dedicate the song to Anthony as a reward 'for his mother's singing' in her capacity as a wonderful exponent of Elgar's music, or for his mother to sing in the future? and does the Chaucer quotation mean that Muriel sang 'like an angel' in a heavenly fashion, or is it an acknowledgement of her finest achievement when she sang the role of the Angel in *The Dream of Gerontius*?

The Elgars and the Goetzes became good friends. They visited and dined, and the Goetzes introduced the Elgars to Paderewski. They also helped to furnish Severn House, contributing a settee. Muriel visited Alice Elgar when she lay dying, and in the event proved to be her last visitor. Elgar has recorded that she used to call his wife 'the Little Wren'. Whether Muriel ever sang *A Child Asleep* in public remains unclear, but Elgar realised his ambition, not with this song, but with his three completed settings of songs by Gilbert Parker for the unfinished Op. 59 song cycle – *Soft was the Song, Was it some Golden Star?*, and *Twilight*. Elgar had completed these before embarking on *A Child Asleep*, but they remained unperformed at the end of 1909. Following the lingering death of August Jaeger in the same year, friends organised a concert at Queen's Hall in January 1910 for the benefit of his widow and children. For this, Elgar provided an orchestral accompaniment to the Op. 59 songs and succeeded in luring Muriel out of retirement to perform them. She presumably enjoyed the experience, for, Elgar having abandoned the Op. 59 song cycle in order to embark on Op. 60, Muriel also premiered *The Torch* and *The River*, again with their orchestral accompaniment, at the Hereford Three Choirs Festival in September 1912, and *The Music Makers* at the Birmingham Festival the following month.

Elgar was not good at carrying his intended song cycles through to completion, for the Op. 60 cycle also remains no more than half-finished. *The Torch* and *The River* were intended to be the first and last in a four-song cycle, separated by settings of two other cod-East European folk poems: *The Shrine* and *The Bee*. No trace exists of words or music for the middle two songs, although the titles of all four are recorded in Elgar's handwriting on the title page of the manuscript score of *The Torch*.¹⁰ Elgar seemed intent on creating an air of mystery round the cycle. As well as attributing authorship of the two set poems to 'Pietro d'Alba' ('Peter White'), his daughter Carice's pet white angora rabbit, his inscription on *The Torch* manuscript claims the poems to be 'from the Ukraine', while the published score of each claims more vaguely 'from Eastern Europe'. As if to strengthen the claim, Elgar gives the eponymous river the name 'Rustula', presumably an elision of 'Russia' and 'Vistula', the great river of Poland, and adds to the end of this score 'Leyrisch-Turasp', a place name not to be found in any gazetteer but which has been subjected to anagrammatic analysis in the hope of discovering a deeper meaning.¹¹ Arguably the greatest mystery surround the cycle, however, is Elgar's dedication of *The Torch* 'To Yvonne', a name which does not occur elsewhere in the Elgar archive. Diana McVeagh, no doubt tongue firmly in cheek, has suggested that Yvonne may have been another pet rabbit, but while the concept of one rabbit writing and dedicating a passionate love poem to another is delightful, Alice's diaries do not support the

10 British Library Additional MS 58026 f.9.

11 British Library Additional MS 58026 f.8.

theory.¹²

Another Volume 16 persona who receives only passing mention in Elgar biography is Frank Schuster's sister Adela. Although Elgar exchanged occasional letters with her and stayed at least once at her house in Torquay, their relationship is generally viewed as no more than an appendage to his far stronger relationship with Frank. Yet in June 1932, when seemingly sifting through old sketchbooks for uncompleted fragments, he came across one which caused him to write to her:

With this come John Davis's [sic] words – extracted from the long poem: I (conceitedly) send them to shew how 'transcendently' I thought of you 25 years ago when I set the three verses to music (just found): the sketch had 'to Adela Schuster' – so here it comes to her from her faithful friend.

Included in this letter were three verses from Sir John Davies's philosophical poem *Nosce teipsum*, written in the latter years of the sixteenth century, and possibly part of a first sketch of Elgar's setting of them, presumably with the dedication 'to Adela Schuster', which has been torn out of one of his sketchbooks.¹³ What interpretation are we to place on Elgar's use of the word 'transcendental'? The paucity of correspondence between Elgar and Adela points to nothing deeper than an intermittent acquaintance, and yet here we have Elgar in his prime seemingly intending to dedicate a song to her, an accolade never awarded to Muriel Foster, and in his dotage recalling fondly their friendship of a quarter century earlier.

Dotage has pejorative overtones of decline which must be applied with caution to Sir Edward Elgar. His final five years showed a rebirth not just of creativity, with *Severn Suite*, *Pomp and Circumstance* No. 5, *The Spanish Lady*, *Symphony* No. 3, and a whole cluster of miniatures including those of the *Nursery Suite*, but also of the romantic impulse, with his now well documented fascination for Vera Hockman.¹⁴ While the late major works emphatically suggest no decline in his compositional skills, with an increasing number of Elgarians coming to regard the fifth *Pomp and Circumstance* as the finest of the set, the miniatures, while undeniably charming, seem to owe more to the contract Elgar signed with the publisher Keith Prowse, requiring him to provide four new pieces a year. To fulfil this obligation, Elgar once more trawled his sketchbooks for early unpublished pieces which he could quickly polish up for publication. But the one song from this period – *It isnae me* – drew its inspiration from more familiar sources: Elgar was once more in love, but not yet with Vera.

Elgar seemingly came across the words, a short (two-verse) poem expressing the painful recollection of lost love, in *Country Life* (14 June 1930). The words are in a strong and rather impenetrable Scottish brogue, recently identified by Garry Humphreys as specifically an Arbroath dialect.¹⁵ On the sheet music the poet is

12 Diana McVeagh, in a private conversation.

13 British Library Additional MS 63157 f.18v.

14 Kevin Allen, *Elgar in Love* (Malvern, 2000).

15 Garry Humphreys: 'Elgar – songs of a life'. Lecture to Elgar Society London Branch, 4

identified only as 'S.H.' The initials hide the identity of Sally Holmes, whose name otherwise seems lost to the world of poetry. But there is no mystification intended: correspondence between Elgar and Holmes reveals that the use of the initials arose from a misunderstanding between Elgar and his publisher after she had expressed a preference for the sheet music to carry her full name. She was at that time an aspiring novelist living in Henley-on-Thames, and only passing reference in the correspondence to visits to the Outer Hebrides hint at a possible Scottish ancestry.

While Sally Holmes's verses may have provided Elgar with the literary inspiration, however, the romantic inspiration came from elsewhere. The song carries no dedication, but the sheet music is inscribed 'Sung by Miss Joan Elwes', the soprano who premiered the song at Dumfries on 1 October 1930. Elgar's friendship with Joan seems to have begun at the Three Choirs Festival of 1927 in Hereford, after which on 15 September he wrote to Osmond Williams commending her voice ('without tremolo') and suggesting that the Gramophone Company might use her more.¹⁶ Her name recurs in Elgar's very scanty diaries of this period, and in those of Carice when she was with her father. In June 1928 Joan visited him for breakfast at Tiddington House, Stratford, driving down from London. She called there again on 26 July and stayed for three nights from 31 July to 3 August, going boating on the river with her host. She drove him about in London on 8 and 9 August, and became friendly with Carice, attending plays and lunching at Rumpelmayer's with her. On 2 November she went to a rehearsal of *Beau Brummel*, for which Elgar had written incidental music.

Elgar's 1929 diary contains fewer references, but she 'sang well' for him in a London performance of *The Kingdom* on 2 March, when Carice sat with Joan's parents; Carice drove her home after *The Apostles* on 2 April and again on 3 April; and on 7 September Carice went for a drive with Joan before the Three Choirs Festival opening service in Worcester. There is a hint in this that Joan's friendship has shifted from father to daughter, but it would appear something of a leap to suggest from this alone that Elgar was to suffer the same pangs of unfulfilled longing experienced by the subject of Sally Holmes's poem. There is, however, another piece to the jigsaw.

Of the 21 fragments and sketches in Volume 16 of songs left unfinished by Elgar,

February 2008. Sally Holmes's words are:

It isnae me that's keerin' - or no' an awfu' lot,
But - it's sair, whiles, mindin' things ye thocht ye had forgot.
An' when wee Tam the Fiddler played 'The Lea Rig' doon the street,
I gie'd mase! a shock tae find that I wis near tae greet.
It isnae me that's keerin' - or no' for vera lang,
But - there's mony happy times awa' since last I heard yon sang.
An' someway -- Och, I dinnae ken! I cannae say things richt -
Someway I wish Tam hadnae played it doon the street last nicht.

In setting the song, Elgar changed the last line to: 'I wish young Tam the Fiddler hadnae played yon sang last nicht.'

- 16 Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Elgar on Record: the Composer and the Gramophone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 75.

the most extensive are of the song 'XTC' (on one folio 'XTC'; presumed to be his abbreviation for 'Ecstasy'), first recorded in 2007 by Amanda Pitt and David Owen Norris.¹⁷ There are four surviving sketches for this song, all in the Elgar Birthplace. Two are partial, preliminary drafts; the later two seem to belong together as if intended for an experimental run-through with copies for voice and piano; of the four, only one of the latter contains words, clearly Elgar's own, and is headed 'soprano'. This and the period of composition – October/November 1930, immediately following the premiere of *It isnae me* – in themselves suggest that this song was also intended for Joan Elwes. Elgar left no doubt about this by adding a curious inscription to the end of the textless later sketch, presumably the piano accompaniment which he himself hoped to play. The inscription originally read: 'Jovial Old And Nervous EE's Leaves Wither Every Second', an acrostic on JOAN ELWES, to which he added 'for the above beautiful tune'. Obviously realising that such an open indication of his feelings could invite a degree of ridicule, Elgar clumsily altered the acrostic to the nonsensical 'Alluvial (or perhaps Alleval) Eld And Pervious Epic Sheaves Washed Every Second', then crossed out the whole annotation, adding 'no good'. Above the acrostic Elgar has also written 'B Jonson', much as he did at that time on other pieces to mark them for possible inclusion in *The Spanish Lady*. There is however no mention of 'Ecstasy' in the opera material, and no obvious place where the song might have been interpolated. It seems far more likely that the addition of Ben Jonson's name was a further Elgarian smokescreen to deflect interest and cover his embarrassment over his infatuation.

In 1931 Joan Elwes stayed at Marl Bank on the night of 15 June, and on 6 November Carice spent a 'Nice evening' with her. But after 7 November, when Elgar first set eyes on Vera Hockman, there is no further mention of Joan. He seems ultimately to have found his relationship with her as unsatisfactory as his symbolically unfinished song.

Acknowledgement: My main and profound debt of gratitude goes to Brian Trowell, editor of Volume 16 in the Elgar Complete Edition, not only for his research for the volume on which much of this article is based but also for his willing permission to allow me to incorporate paragraphs of text originally drafted for, but in the event omitted from, the volume. I am also indebted to Martin Bird whose extensive database has shed light on the correspondence between Elgar and Sally Holmes, and to David Bury, whose article 'Elgar and the Two Mezzos', published in *Elgar and the Awful Female* (Elgar Editions, Rickmansworth, 1993), provides a fuller account of Elgar's relationship with Muriel Foster.

17 Norris, David Owen, Amanda Pitt and others: *Elgar: Songs & Piano Music* (AVIE 2129).



**Fig. 1: The recently knighted
Sir Donald Tovey in August
1935**

Elgar and Academe (3): Grove and Tovey

Julian Rushton

I recently noticed that my two articles 'Elgar and Academe' (a title owed to the BBC's Radio 3 11.00 p.m. 'essay' in 2007), promised, or threatened, a third. One intended element, which it might have been tedious to develop at length, concerns the treatment of Elgar in the doyen of music encyclopaedias, *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Volume 1 of the first edition, edited by Grove, appeared in 1879; not surprisingly, nothing intervenes between Elford and *Elijah*. The next two volumes (1880, 1883) contain short entries on Parry and Stanford.¹ The first Elgar entry is the second edition (1904), edited by J.A. Fuller Maitland, who wrote the articles on these three composers. They are almost exactly the same length, which may seem surprising, not only because Elgar had yet to write his symphonies and concertos, but also because the editor, according to Herbert Thompson, was known in his Cambridge days as 'Stanford's shadow'.² But the article is sound enough, and fair-minded. The next edition edited by H.C. Colles (1928) gives Elgar three times the space allocated to the other two, and the supplement that constitutes the fourth edition (1940) has several more pages on Elgar by the editor, according him a classified work-list (for which accolade, it seems, a composer had first to die). In the fifth edition Elgar is similarly favoured, and the fine essay by Diana McVeagh for *The New Grove* (edited by Stanley Sadie, 1980) maintained his high standing relative to his British contemporaries. He remains standing, as it were, alongside composers whose reputations grew in the second half of the last century, such as Bruckner and Mahler although in the millennial second edition of *The New Grove* (2001) the latter is accorded slightly more extended treatment.

It may be objected that, at least until Sadie was joined by John Tyrrell for the 2001 edition, the *Grove* editors have not actually been academics. At a time when there were relatively few universities, of which even fewer had established positions for musicians, this is not surprising; those who wanted to become learned about music, and to display their learning by preparing editions and critical and historical writings, usually had other jobs: Fuller Maitland, Colles, and Sadie all wrote for *The Times*. Nevertheless, when editing and writing for an encyclopaedic work these men and their peers were functioning as music historians, critics, or on occasion theorists. In short, they were the same kind of animal that now teaches in university

1 Originally only two volumes were intended; Vol. 2 says 'in three volumes' and Vol. 3 'in four volumes'. There was also a supplement; the whole is reprinted by Cambridge University Press (2010).

2 I am grateful to Duncan Boutwood for this information. Thompson's papers are held in the Special Collections of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds. The entry was unchanged in the 1912 reprint of the edition.

music departments – the ‘academics’ once widely supposed to despise Elgar. No doubt some did; but my student experience included lectures on *Gerontius* and the symphonies, and performances conducted by organists who were also on their universities’ teaching faculties.³ In an earlier generation, one of Britain’s finest academic musicians was also a performer and an Elgarian, and the remainder of this essay is devoted to him (fig. 1).

Donald Francis Tovey (1875–1940) was first and foremost a musician, but he held the prestigious academic position of Reid Professor of Music at the University of Edinburgh from 1914. The modern music professor is torn between research (publish or be damned), administration (untrained), and teaching (classes, once small, may now number over 100, even in music). Life may have been simpler for the Reid Professor early in the last century. Much of Tovey’s time was devoted to rehearsing and conducting orchestral and choral concerts, for which he provided model programme notes. Most of these have been now published in book form by Oxford University Press; he himself started the process by gathering some into ordered collections, the celebrated – if perhaps misnamed – *Essays in Musical Analysis*.

The growth of music analysis as a semi-autonomous discipline, with its own British society and periodical (*Music Analysis*), may be marked by the treatments accorded to it in successive editions of *Grove*. The fifth (1954) had no entry for ‘Analysis’, other than ‘ANALYTICAL NOTES. See PROGRAMME NOTES’.⁴ This was probably not intended sarcastically, being typical of its time and place in ignoring major music analysts such as Riemann and Schenker. The entry ‘Programme Notes’ remarks that these are ‘also called analytical notes. The latter name is less likely to be accurate, since such notes may also be concerned with historical facts ... or with fanciful interpretations’.⁵ Not surprisingly, in its initial struggle for recognition music analysis remained aloof from the concept of the ‘analytical programme note’ of which, however, according to *Grove* in 1954, Tovey was the ‘master ... of all time and probably for all time’. Analysis was distinguished from mere description; programme-notes generally fell into the latter category. More recently, music analysis and theory have become established as a sub-discipline of musicology, but of course no analysis can be carried out other than on the basis of an accurate description of what it being analysed. And analysis and theory now embrace musical repertoires previously considered off limits, among them Elgar. Whereas for a while he fell from academic favour, Tovey’s standing is once again high thanks to the clarity of his writing and the musicality of his many insights.

So what of Tovey and Elgar? There was no hostility comparable to that generated between Elgar and Edward J. Dent, whose ill-chosen words I have

3 If a bit of autobiography may be excused, I’ve played under David Willcocks (*Gerontius*), Sidney Watson (*Gerontius* and First Symphony) and the late Peter Dennison (*Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, *The Kingdom*, and the Bach Fantasia and Fugue orchestration).

4 *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th edition (ed. Eric Blom: London, Macmillan, 1954), vol. 1, 143.

5 The article is signed ‘H.C.C., adds.’; i.e. H.C. Colles, but parts of the entry survive from the first and second editions, where they are signed ‘G.’ (Grove himself); in the 1904 edition, however, the article is called ‘Analysis’.

already discussed.⁶ Tovey's earnest and informed admiration contrasts markedly with Dent's faintly patrician disdain. Readers of Elgar's correspondence will recall the composer's impatient comments on Tovey's analytical note on *Falstaff*. But that Tovey should have written at such length about *Falstaff* and other works, as well as conducting them, should banish the notion that 'academe' was ever unanimously hostile to Elgar. Before his academic appointment, Tovey was well known as a pianist and, if less well, as an aspiring composer. There have been revivals of his music, including the immense cello concerto written for Casals. But despite his evident skill, there remains a sense that he was insufficiently original to keep our attention as a composer among his numerous more distinctive British contemporaries. Perhaps he knew and understood too much music for his own good; composers need prejudices against which to react (Elgar surely did). Tovey like Elgar and Schoenberg was partly an autodidact; he brought himself up on the classics, and in adult life his greatest love remained Beethoven, of whom he was developing a major study at the time of his death. A champion of Brahms, he was Joachim's accompanist from 1894, becoming well known on London concert platforms but only occasionally playing his own music (fig. 2).

He did, however, play a his own concerto in 1903, conducted by Henry Wood, and in November 1911, according to his conducting student and later biographer Mary Grierson, 'Tovey played the Brahms B flat Concerto in public for the first time with the London Symphony Orchestra, under the conductorship of Sir Edward Elgar'.⁷ This concerto although (being Brahms) not flashy, is acknowledged as one of the hardest in the repertory. The collaboration does not seem to have been entirely happy since, according to *The Times*, Tovey's view was 'entirely the introspective one of the scholar', and Elgar's conducting seemed to lack confidence; possibly his view of Brahms had more red corpuscles. But the two musicians seem to have been friendly enough. Some time before Elgar had paid Tovey the compliment of asking for copies of his analytical notes, and many years later he congratulated Tovey on his completion of the unfinished sections of Bach's *Art of Fugue*.⁸

Tovey remained acutely aware of the distinction between himself, a performer and scholar who composed, and Elgar, the real thing. In 1937 he wrote to Bantock:

But gosh! you should hear the difference between rehearsing my symphony and rehearsing Elgar's *Allassio!* There's no flattering unction I can lay to my soul in the matter; I can only say that my orchestration is all right, demonstrably economical, and effective when adequately rehearsed. But dear old Elgar has me beaten to a frazzle; it's as if nothing could go wrong, and, Heaven knows, it's not simple!⁹

6 'Elgar and Academe: Dent, Forsyth, and What is English Music?', this Journal 15/3 (March 2008), 27–32, and 15/4 (July 2008), 21–28.

7 Mary Grierson, *Donald Francis Tovey. A Biography based on Letters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 153–4.

8 Grierson, *Donald Francis Tovey*, 154, 227–8.

9 Grierson, *Donald Francis Tovey*, 307.



Fig. 2: Tovey (standing at the piano) with the Joachim String Quartet, 1905 (note the quartet's seating pattern, separating the violins)

Tovey's continuing support for Elgar is made clear in his publication of selected notes. These were presumably written not long before the performances; and given the nature of the Reid orchestra, that would mean during the rehearsal period. Thus they arose from direct contact with the musical substance. The works for which Tovey published his own notes are the Variations ('Enigma'), *Cockaigne*, *In the South*, *Introduction and Allegro*, the Second Symphony, *Falstaff*, and the Violin and Cello Concertos.¹⁰ This amounts to a considerable survey for Edinburgh audiences of the works then, and perhaps still, considered to form the canonical Elgar, surprisingly excluding the First Symphony, and without oratorios, although Tovey conducted Smyth's Mass in D.

Tovey's preoccupation with actual music, rather than music history, aligns him with Elgar's own academic strengths. Two of Elgar's Birmingham lectures are essays in musical analysis, on Brahms's Third Symphony and Mozart's in G minor, K. 550.

10 Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935–9): Elgar works are in vols. II *Symphonies II* (Second Symphony); III (*Concertos*); IV (*Illustrative Music: Variations, Cockaigne, Falstaff*), and VI (*Miscellaneous Notes: In the South, Introduction and Allegro*). All except the concertos were reprinted in 1981 by OUP in Tovey: *Symphonies and other Orchestral Works*.

Elgar's audience was supposed to bring scores and follow his discussion, page by page. The Mozart lecture mainly concerned orchestration, but Elgar discussed it in a way that only makes sense if the harmonic and formal properties of the music are understood. Modern academics would give their eye-teeth for audiences able to follow such points without the aid of recordings (though whether Elgar's audience – other than trained listeners such as Ernest Newman – actually did follow, we cannot possibly know). Tovey's notes also require knowledge of musical notation, as they are copiously illustrated, like Thompson's and Jaeger's notes to *Caractacus*, *Gerontius*, and *The Apostles*.

Nowadays Tovey's scholarly credentials might be questioned because he wrote on *Falstaff* without realising that Elgar had done the job himself, in 1913. When he reprinted his notes, Tovey inserted what amount to Elgar's corrections by pointing to places where his own interpretation, innocent of the composer's, had diverged. Grierson, Tovey's advocate, calls this procedure 'amusing and illuminating'; Elgar, in a letter to Carice, called Tovey 'tiresome & tireless' and the combination of views 'misguided', adding 'I have said do what you like. I wish people wd. drown themselves in ink & let me alone'.¹¹ This waspish comment suggests passing irritation rather than a desire to rubbish Tovey's activities. For, on a happier note, according to Grierson Elgar 'was the prime mover in connexion with the honour of a knighthood ... conferred on him [Tovey] in January 1935'. Although Elgar died in February 1934, this is confirmed by Moore.¹² Thus it seems that the composer reciprocated something of this particular academic's admiration.

In the January 1935 issue of *Music and Letters* Tovey, at the request of the editor (A.H. Fox Strangways) wrote an appreciation of Elgar, rather than an obituary, of admirable frankness.¹³ He admits that Elgar's art, like Wagner's, is not entirely to his taste, but 'it is childish to measure great things by one's likes and dislikes'. He defends Elgar from the charge of vulgarity; as for 'Land of Hope and Glory', 'Heaven be praised that the British public of to-day is capable of showing a popular opinion in favour of any ambitious music at all' (plus ça change ...). Tovey seems concerned to distance himself from the academic establishment: 'Nobody treats wine as frivolously as our connoisseurs treat their first impressions of a composer of Elgar's calibre'. He considers that Elgar, on the contrary, was respectful of mastery in others, and that he was shabbily treated in return. Tovey was concerned to emphasize Elgar's mastery, particularly with respect to orchestration, but admits to being 'not so sure about his mastery of form'. In this he adopts a position perhaps typical of the period in his concern that there may be too many sequences on 'figures ... not sufficiently pregnant to show well under the amount of repetition forced on them'. Yet he concludes: 'I do not know any English compositions that are more free from this fault than Elgar's, except some that have definitely abandoned the classical forms and language'.

11 Grierson, 271; Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar. Letters of a Lifetime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 458.

12 Grierson, 282; Moore, *Letters of a Lifetime*, 459.

13 The essay is reprinted in Tovey (ed. Hubert Foss), *Essays and Lectures on Music* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 298–301.

For Tovey, Elgar was a classic, and one with whom he had a close encounter. Proximity to greatness is not always comfortable. But his understanding of how to approach music shines through in this comment on the concertos – not least because his mode of expression is like nothing one encounters nowadays in academic journals:

If your approach to Elgar's Violin Concerto is donnish and censorious, the concerto will behave to you exactly like a shy person with a vein of irony. It will then suffer acutely, if you are conducting or playing it. So will you; and serve you right. I am not claiming that it is a faultless work, nor that it represents my idea of a concerto. I prefer it to represent its own ideas. The Violoncello Concerto is a much less important work, and is much more accessible to me though (or perhaps even because) it is not in the great classical forms ... [302]

While I dissent from the suggestion that the Cello Concerto is 'much less important' than its elder sibling, I sympathize with Tovey's view of its readier accessibility. At the time of writing, Tovey tells us he was rehearsing *Falstaff*, which 'I believe to be Elgar's greatest work'. That too is a view not everyone will share (though for Dent *Falstaff* seemed less objectionable than other works). But, as Tovey observes, 'Elgar's humour is of the highest order'. Above all, Tovey admired Elgar as a professional at a time when British opinion seemed to favour amateurishness; the young Benjamin Britten suffered from the same idiotic prejudice. Hence Tovey's peroration:

... let us be thankful that popular and official recognition had the sense to recognize in Elgar a master, in spite of our inveterate prejudice against everybody who does not profess and call himself an amateur.

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