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LITERATURE INTO MUSIC: MUSIC INSPIRED BY THE WORKS OF THOMAS HARDY

Part Two: Music composed after Hardy's lifetime

CHARLES P. C. PETTIT

Part One of this article was published in the Autumn 2013 issue. It covered music composed during Hardy's lifetime. This second article covers music composed since Hardy's death, coming right up to the present day. The focus is again on music by those composers who wrote operatic and orchestral works, and only mentions song settings of poems, and music in dramatisations for radio and other media, when they were written by featured composers. Hardy's work is seen to have inspired a wide variety of music, from full-length operas and musicals, via short pieces featuring particular fictional episodes, to ballet music and purely orchestral responses. Hardy-inspired compositions show no sign of reducing in number over the decades. However despite the quantity of music produced and the quality of much of it, there is not the sense in this period that Hardy maintained the kind of universal appeal for composers that was evident during the last two decades of his life.

Keywords: Thomas Hardy, Music, Opera, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Alun Hoddinott, Benjamin Britten, Elizabeth Maconchy

In my earlier article, published in the Autumn 2013 issue of the *Hardy Review*, I covered Hardy-inspired music composed during Hardy's lifetime. Since then, Hardy's work has continued to inspire numerous composers of many different types of music, right up to the present day, and this forms the subject of the present article. As in the first paper, for reasons of space I have had to exclude song-settings and also music to accompany film and theatrical adaptations, except where these are written by featured composers.

Those composers writing during Hardy's lifetime benefitted from the author's encouragement and involvement. Hardy had to be involved to some extent, of course, as composers needed his permission before they could publish or put on a public performance, but beyond that it is evident from his interactions with d'Erlanger, Boughton and Holst that Hardy showed a genuine interest in their musical responses to his work. Later composers of course lacked the opportunity of personal involvement with the original author, and therefore that dimension is inevitably lacking from this survey. Nevertheless, it is fascinating to see how Hardy's work has continued to generate so many interesting and varied musical responses over the decades following his death, even though the worlds of music and of literature have undergone such enormous changes.

It becomes readily apparent that the same novels that have inspired the majority of theatrical and film adaptations have also inspired the majority of musical responses.

Therefore *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* lead the way, followed by smaller numbers of musical compositions inspired by *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *The Woodlanders* and *Jude the Obscure*, and with just one musical adaptation each of *The Return of the Native* and *The Trumpet-Major*. I am not aware of any musical responses to the other six novels, while the short stories have inspired relatively little music and *The Dynasts* even less. It is debatable whether the eight novels contain inherent qualities that make them particularly attractive to dramatists, film-makers and composers, or whether it is more simply that they have become established with the reading public as Hardy's most popular (or "best") novels and are therefore most likely to be known by those seeking inspiration in Hardy's work for their own creations.

In order to explore the varying approaches taken by different composers to the same work, this article is organised by the Hardy work that inspired them, beginning with the novels (in order of Hardy's composition), then moving to the short stories and finally to music that draws on more than one of Hardy's works.

Under the Greenwood Tree

"A Young Man's Fancy", based on *Under the Greenwood Tree* was written in 1970 by **Geoffrey Brace** (b. 1930). The dialogue was taken entirely from the original text. The 18 musical numbers include a traditional carol, a hymn composed or copied by Hardy's father, traditional children's singing games supplied by students at Gillingham School, performance of the dances mentioned in the book and ten original musical numbers in traditional style accompanied by a folk band. Brace feels that "it was aimed a bit too specifically at schools and suffered from needing mainly male characters/singers", though despite this it was performed at a variety of venues over the course of a number of decades. Brace wrote it for Gillingham School (in Dorset) where it was first performed in July 1970, then a few years later at what was then Newton Park College, now Bath Spa University. Subsequent productions were in Devon, at King's School in Ottery St Mary, at the Northcott Theatre in Exeter and by the Estuary Players at Topsham.¹

The same novel inspired a very different musical response from **Robin Milford** (1903-1959). Rather than being any kind of musical dramatisation of Hardy's novel, Milford's *Idyll: Under the Greenwood Tree* (Op.57) is a piece for violin and piano that responds to the atmosphere of the novel rather as Holst's *Egdon Heath* responds to *The Return of the Native*. It was written in 1941, and the score states that it was inspired by "a Claire Leighton wood-engraving for Hardy's novel". This must refer to the large-format edition of *Under the Greenwood Tree* that was illustrated by Leighton, and published by Macmillan in 1940. Regrettably we do not know which particular illustration inspired Milford. In this short piece of around six minutes' duration, Milford's attractive and melodic music creates a mood that seems very much in keeping with Hardy's early and arguably most light-hearted novel. Peter Hunter, an authority on Milford, writes that "through its melodic contours, use of melodic and rhythmic motifs and modality, this work is closely related to the English

¹ Personal communication, 27 February 2013.

countryside and English folk-song.” The piece was broadcast many years ago on Radio Ulster, performed by Richard Howarth (violin) and Michael McGuffin (piano), but no recording is commercially available. Milford had earlier used the same approach for his *The Darkling Thrush* (Op17), which very unusually is a response to the mood of Hardy’s poem without the words of the poem being included at all. This 10-minute piece was first published in 1929 as a work for solo violin and small orchestra and was later transcribed by the composer for solo violin and piano and published in that form by OUP in 1930. *The Darkling Thrush* has been recorded in its violin and piano version, and like so much of the music of this unjustly neglected English composer, is well worth listening to.² Hunter quotes a letter from Milford to his long-standing friend Gerald Finzi in which Milford writes that “Of course it’s Hardy too who is my favourite writer, whose poems I sent home for almost as soon as war broke out, who still remains my greatest literary solace.”³ Hardy’s poems indeed proved fruitful for Milford: there are two song cycles (*Four Hardy Songs* (1938) and *In Tenebris* (1940)) plus an individual setting of “The Pink Frock” and choral settings of “Great Things” and “Weathers”. “The Colour” is dedicated “For Gerald Finzi, whose own settings of Hardy are at once my delight and my despair.”

Barry Ferguson (b. 1942) has also been inspired by *Under the Greenwood Tree* in his *Five Thomas Hardy Interludes for Chamber Organ*, music commissioned by the Thomas Hardy Society and first performed by the composer on the organ in Stinsford Church during the Society’s 2000 Conference.⁴ Interlude 4 “Remember Ravenscroft Twice” picks up references to the music of the composer in Hardy’s novel and in his poem “On the Tune called the Old-Hundred-and-Fourth”. The other four interludes are inspired by Hardy’s poems, though, rather like Milford’s *The Darkling Thrush*, they are not settings of Hardy’s words, but are musical responses to the poems and often to musical references within them. For example, Interlude 5 “Barthélémon’s Dream” effectively incorporates musical references to Barthélémon’s famous setting of “Awake My Soul, and with the Sun” cited in the first line of Hardy’s poem “Barthélémon at Vauxhall”. The Interludes were well received, forming part of what an audience member felt to be “a most moving event”.⁵ A composer of over 500 works, with his music currently available on some 20 CDs, Ferguson has been a Hardy enthusiast since he discovered *The Mayor of Casterbridge* at the age of 17. His song cycle *Lost Love at Max Gate*, comprising settings of six Hardy poems, was perceptively welcomed on its first performance in 1995 as “a work of the highest quality”.⁶ It is available on a CD of the same title, that also features well-selected examples of Hardy song settings by other composers, with Ferguson on the piano and Catherine King (mezzo soprano) singing.⁷ Ferguson is one of today’s key figures in

² It is included in the 2004 CD *Love on My Heart*, PDGCD257, available through the Robin Milford Trust, while the tracks may also be listened to on the Trust’s website. See <http://www.robinmilfordtrust.org.uk/index.htm>

³ Milford’s letter to Finzi is dated 21 October 1939. It is quoted in Peter Hunter, “Robin’s middle period solo songs – the 1930s” (2009) published on the Robin Milford Trust website.

⁴ The music was performed on the Brian Daniels 1996 West Gallery chamber organ in Stinsford Church, on 28 July 2000, as part of the programme of the Fourteenth International Thomas Hardy Conference, Dorchester, 22-29 July 2000.

⁵ David Jones, “The Fourteenth International Thomas Hardy Conference, Dorchester, 22-29 July 2000”, *Thomas Hardy Journal* 16.3 (2000), 32.

⁶ Furse Swann, Foreword to CD liner.

⁷ *Lost Love at Max Gate: Thomas Hardy Song Settings*. Catherine King – mezzo soprano; Barry Ferguson – piano. VIF Records, VRCD009 [1996].

the field of Hardy-inspired music; for his role in bringing back from virtual oblivion Frederic d'Erlanger's 1906 opera *Tess* the reader is referred to my first article.

Edward Harper's *The Mellstock Quire* is covered in the section below on *Far from the Madding Crowd*.

Far from the Madding Crowd

This novel has inspired a wide range of musical interpretations, ranging from operas and musicals to ballet music. There have been two full-length operas, both written fairly recently. The first is by **Andrew Downes** (b. 1950), a freelance composer (formerly Head of the School of Composition and Creative Studies and Professor at Birmingham Conservatoire) who has made something of a speciality of Hardy-inspired works. While not yet rivalling Gerald Finzi in the number of musical settings of Hardy poems, he has written three Hardy song-cycles.⁸ *Far from the Madding Crowd* is a five act opera, with libretto by Cynthia Downes, and was first staged at the 17th International Thomas Hardy Conference & Festival in Dorchester in July 2006 (three performances). Downes describes how "After a lot of thought, Cynthia and I decided that *Far from the Madding Crowd* would suit us best in terms of operatic adaptation. We both like happy endings, and unlike *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* the other two novels considered by us, we felt that there is a significant element of humour in *Far from the Madding Crowd* ...Ninety-five per cent of the libretto was taken by Cynthia directly from Hardy's superb dialogue and narrative." Downes describes the music as "modal, strongly melodic and rhythmically orientated. The modality of the folk music likely to have been played in Dorset during the time in which the novel is set has been fully taken into account". Claire Seymour sees the opera as "a worthy achievement", though she considers it "rather let down by the libretto", leading to too much text and too little opportunity for "musical pause or reflection".⁹ The opera was also staged in Wednesbury (West Midlands) in 2007, with The Millenium Scholars and the Central England Ensemble. Roderic Dunnett in *Opera News* (January 2008) called it "an impressive undertaking". Although the opera has not been staged since the Wednesbury performance, a suite of music from the opera scored for orchestra has been performed several times. Moreover, emphasising the point that we have unique opportunities today to experience Hardy-inspired music, scenes from the opera are available on YouTube (where they have been viewed thousands of times) and the Dorchester staging was filmed in its entirety and is available on DVD, so that we all have the privilege of being able to experience the staged opera ourselves.¹⁰

The latest *Far from the Madding Crowd* opera was written by two Cambridge University undergraduates, **Barnaby Martin** (composer) and **Rupert Cabbell-Manners** (librettist). They did not even have the support of the Cambridge University Opera Society, Martin having formed his own opera company and done the fund-raising as well as composing the opera! It was staged at the West Road Concert Hall,

⁸ *Casterbridge Fair* Opus 1 (1973), *Old Love's Domain* Opus 29 (1983), and *Lost Love* Opus 15 (1977).

⁹ Claire Seymour, "Theatrical Adaptations and Musical Realisations," *Hardy Society Journal*, 2.3 (2006), 42-6.

¹⁰ See <http://www.andrewdownes.moonfruit.com> both for details of the DVD and for the full version of Downes' comments on the opera quoted above.

Cambridge on 2-4 February 2012. Local reviews were mixed, but if nothing else the opera demonstrates Hardy's continuing appeal to contemporary young composers.

Edward Harper (1941-2009), Reader in Music at Edinburgh University and Director of the New Music Group of Scotland (1973-91), used selected episodes from *Far from the Madding Crowd* for his one-act (half-hour) opera *Fanny Robin* (1975), the first of his two successful Hardy-inspired operas and probably his most popular work. Harper's approach is eclectic: he includes spoken passages, draws on folksong and hymns, and uses a theme from Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. This opera, which has been performed in the United States and New Zealand as well being both performed and broadcast¹¹ in the UK, is still available on CD¹², with Harper conducting the Scottish Opera Chorus and Chamber Orchestra; recorded in 1979, it followed up the 1978 production by Scottish Opera. Harper returned to Hardy in 1988 for his chamber opera *The Mellstock Quire* (75 mins), based of course on *Under the Greenwood Tree*. This does not appear to have been recorded. Outside the field of opera Harper responded to Hardy in his *Homage to Thomas Hardy* (1990), a 27 minute song cycle for baritone and orchestra.

As well as classical opera, *Far from the Madding Crowd* has inspired musicals. Probably the most successful in commercial terms was composed by **Gary Schocker**, with book and lyrics by **Barbara Campbell**. Written in 1999, *Far from the Madding Crowd* was a winner of the Global Search for New Musicals in the UK and was performed in Cardiff and at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival as well as in New Zealand, where its world premiere took place in the autumn of 2000. In New York, it was a winner of the ASCAP music theatre awards and was produced at the 47th Street Theatre, from 20 September to 3 October 2004. The soundtrack album was released in 2000.¹³

Another musical version of the same novel was written by **Roger Holman** in the 1980s, and has been promoted via his website since 2011.¹⁴ Though stating that "over 98% of the libretto has been directly extracted from the book" this musical adopts a consciously lightweight approach: "to lighten what many may otherwise consider a 'heavy read', the main focus of the novel's theme has been centered on the humorous side of Hardy's tale". The musical extracts available on the website confirm this approach. The Shinfield Players (Shinfield being near Reading, Berkshire) performed this musical version of Hardy's novel in October 2012.

Dominic Muldowney (b. 1952), Director of Music at the Royal National Theatre from 1981 to 1997, is a versatile English composer, probably best known for his film and television scores, though he has also written classical concertos and popular music for artists such as Sting and David Bowie. He has written "Love Music for Bathsheba Everdene and Gabriel Oak". This music for chamber ensemble was written in 1974, but has not apparently been published or recorded.

¹¹ First performed by Edinburgh University Opera Club in 1975. Broadcast on BBC Radio 3, 8 February 1976.

¹² Metier MSV CD92015.

¹³ *Far from the Madding Crowd/Dusky Sally/The Awakening*, Original Cast Record, B00004RD3G. This audio CD is not currently available in the UK.

¹⁴ <http://www.rogerholmanmusic.com/pages/Base.html>

Also well worth mentioning is **Paul Reade's** effective music for David Bintley's full length *Far from the Madding Crowd* ballet, premiered by the Birmingham Royal Ballet in February 1996. Following performances in Birmingham, the production went on tour to Plymouth, Sunderland, Liverpool and Southampton during March 1996, and the score, performed by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, was later recorded.¹⁵ The Birmingham Royal Ballet revived the production (with a few tweaks) in June 2012.

The Return of the Native

There has been just one musical version of *The Return of the Native*. With book, lyrics and music all by **John Taylor Thomas**, *The Return Of The Native or The Wages Of Sin* was performed (six performances) at The Fall Mid-Fest Theatre Festival in New York in November 2005.

The Trumpet-Major

At one point Benjamin Britten (1913- 1976), generally acknowledged to be one of the twentieth-century's greatest opera composers, considered writing an opera based on *The Trumpet-Major*. A Hardy-based opera by such a major composer would potentially have been one of the pinnacles of Hardy-inspired music. However, any artist is likely to consider a number of possible ideas before definitely deciding on their next opera, novel, painting, film or whatever, and regrettably *The Trumpet-Major* joined a number of other potential opera subjects considered but not pursued by Britten. So far as is known, the project did not reach the stage of written drafts of score, plot outline or libretto; at any rate it is believed that none are still extant, and we only know of the project at all because Britten's partner Peter Pears mentioned it to Dr Philip Reed.¹⁶ However, although a detailed consideration of Britten's completed Hardy-inspired works lies outside the scope of this article, it should be stated that his consideration of *The Trumpet-Major* was but one manifestation of a longstanding interest in Hardy. Britten wrote incidental music for a CBS radio production of *The Dynasts* which, he wrote, "seemed to satisfy everyone"¹⁷ (1940; music now lost¹⁸) as well as composing one of the most famous and most powerful of all Hardy song-cycles, *Winter Words* (Op. 52, 1954). He also wrote two additional settings not included in the final cycle of eight poems, and a setting of "The Oxen". It was in fact entirely appropriate that the composer's last orchestral work *Suite on English Folk Tunes* (1974) should be sub-titled 'A Time There Was ...', the beginning of the first line of Hardy's poem "Before Life and After", itself the last poem in Britten's *Winter Words*.

Welsh composer **Alun Hoddinott** (1929-2008), one of the leading British composers of his generation, composed his only Hardy-based opera, *The Trumpet Major*,¹⁹ in

¹⁵ It is currently available as an MP3 download (see Amazon) and on CD, though in the UK only as an import: Black Box Classics BDAP2.

¹⁶ "Peter [Pears] told me one morning at the Red House. There's no more documentation as far as I'm aware." Email from Dr Philip Reed, 15 November 2013.

¹⁷ *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976*, ed. Donald Mitchell, assistant editor Philip Reed. Vol. 2 1939-1945. (London: Faber, 1991; paperback 1998), 887.

¹⁸ This may not perhaps be a great loss, Britten biographer Paul Kildea describing it unequivocally as "hackwork". See *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 2013), 177.

¹⁹ (*Sic*) Hoddinott omits the hyphen from Hardy's title.

response to a commission from the Royal Northern College of Music, which gave the opera its premiere in Manchester on 1 April 1981. The libretto was produced by Myfanwy Piper (the librettist of three Britten operas, and, in another Hardy connection, the joint dedicatee with her husband John of Britten's *Winter Words*).²⁰ The libretto follows closely the original narrative, but gives more emphasis to the Trumpet-Major, who is the character who remains on stage at the end of each act. Contemporary reviews are very varied. Hugo Cole in *Country Life* is largely positive both about the music ("lean, energetic and contrapuntal ... will repay many hearings") and the libretto ("extracted from Hardy's novel with tact and skill"). Malcolm Boyd writes that the opera "tells a romantic story in an uncomplicated way ... It has no political or ideological axe to grind ... Its themes are the joys and disappointments of human relationships. Some may find its message old-fashioned; many will think it none the worse for that".²¹ In complete contrast, Paul Griffiths in *The Times* is damning about both music and libretto, and refers to "this dismal evening" despite the enthusiasm of orchestra, chorus and soloists.²² After three performances in Manchester, the opera had two performances in Cardiff, but it has not been recorded.

The Mayor of Casterbridge

Peter Tranchell's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, with libretto by Peter Bentley, was first performed at the Arts Theatre, Cambridge on 30 July 1951 as part of the Cambridge Festival of the Arts. It was essentially a student production, though with input from local professional musicians, and was conducted by Tranchell himself. The opera was greeted warmly, with the reviewer in *The Times* concluding that "If not a total success, then, *The Mayor of Casterbridge* offered promise and much compelling interest for anyone concerned with the development of an English operatic tradition",²³ while Eric Blom praised it as "an English stage work of exceptional quality".²⁴ Tranchell (1922-1993) was a Lecturer in Music at Cambridge University, and his predecessor at Gonville and Caius College was Patrick Hadley,²⁵ Professor of Music at the University, who gave Tranchell his enthusiastic support for *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. However, despite its initial positive reception, there do not appear to have been any further productions of the opera, and only one of its scenes is known to

²⁰ It is tempting to speculate that Hoddinott (who knew Britten and visited him at his home) and Myfanwy Piper (who as one of Britten's own librettists knew him well), had some knowledge of Britten's *Trumpet-Major* project and were perhaps inspired by Britten's interest in Hardy's novel to later consider it themselves as a possible source for an opera. While against this speculation may be set the lack of any mention of a Britten connection around the time of the performances of Hoddinott's opera, it is otherwise quite a coincidence that the only opera ever written based on *The Trumpet-Major* should have been written by a composer and a librettist who had both known a composer who had earlier considered the novel as a subject for an opera. However, as Hardy so often demonstrates in his narratives, coincidences do happen! I have not discovered any evidence to confirm, or indeed definitively to refute, this speculation.

²¹ *Country Life*, 30 April 1981, 1184; Malcolm Boyd: *The Trumpet Major*, *Musical Times*, 122 (1981), 237-8.

²² *The Times*, 3 April 1981.

²³ *The Times*, 31 July 1951, 8. (*Times Digital Archive*)

²⁴ Blom's comment is quoted in the entry on Tranchell in *Oxford Music Online*, but the original source is not given.

²⁵ Patrick Hadley's own Hardy-inspired composition, a setting of the final words of *The Woodlanders*, is covered in my first article.

have been recorded.²⁶ Indeed *The Times* obituary suggests that with neither *The Mayor of Casterbridge* nor his musical *Zuleika* having achieved the success which some critics had anticipated “his life thereafter was in many ways an anticlimax”.²⁷

The same novel inspired a second full-length opera some forty years later. It was composed in 1992 by **Michael Rose** (b. 1959), with the libretto by award-winning poet Mark Jarman. Rose, who is currently Associate Professor of Composition at Vanderbilt University, is the composer of a variety of chamber and symphonic music that has been performed in seven countries.²⁸ His choice of opera subject was partly inspired by his friend and Vanderbilt colleague Laurence Lerner's monograph on the novel.²⁹ Although the opera was commissioned by Nashville Opera, the advent of a new director unfortunately meant that the full four act opera, lasting two and a half hours, was never produced. “Scenes” from the opera were however performed at a “public workshop” on Vanderbilt University campus in 1993, with singers and a piano accompaniment, and the composer narrating.³⁰ Rose very much regrets that his only opera has never yet been produced. He has an enduring love for Hardy and feels that he had put into *The Mayor of Casterbridge* some of his “most heartfelt and lyrical music”, while he describes Jarman's libretto as “masterful and dramatically rich”. As both a poet himself, and an admirer of Hardy's poetry, Jarman wrote his libretto as poetry throughout. When it became clear that under the new regime at Nashville Opera there would be no performance of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, Rose decided to extract and adapt his favourite parts of the opera into other compositions. He writes that “The two pieces which bear the most ample Casterbridgian impression are my *Fourth String Quartet* and my solo piano work, *Dream Work*.”³¹

On a smaller scale, **Philip Wilby** composed in 1983 a ten-minute piece for solo voice for the tenor Gordon Pullin based on *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, in response to Pullin's suggestion that he might compose “a dramatic monologue, as it were an operatic scene for solo voice, based on the central character” of Hardy's novel. Pullin has performed it on a number of occasions and has indeed recorded it.³² Two optional spoken narrative sections supplement the four sung sections: “The Drunkard”, “The Penitent”, “21 Years Later” and “The Will”, with the third section quoting from the psalm tune (“Wiltshire”) that Henchard makes the choir sing in Chapter 33 of the novel. Though essentially a piece for unaccompanied voice, the sounds of the auctioneer's gavel and a church bell are imaginatively incorporated into the score.

²⁶ It is available on a CD that contains 72 minutes of Tranchell's music. See <http://www.patrancheil.info/>

²⁷ *The Times*, 29 October 1993, 23. (*Times Digital Archive*)

²⁸ For the avoidance of confusion, it should be noted that the composer's full name is Michael Alec Rose. For further information on him see his website <http://michaelalecrose.com/>

²⁹ Laurence Lerner, *Thomas Hardy's "The Mayor of Casterbridge": Tragedy or Social History?* (London: Chatto & Windus for Sussex University Press, 1975).

³⁰ When Rose gave a talk on his opera at the Twelfth International Thomas Hardy Conference in Dorchester, 2 August 1996, he played a tape of excerpts from this workshop performance.

³¹ Personal communication, 26 November 2013.

³² *The English Tenor Repertoire*, Volume 3, sung by Gordon Pullin. 2000. SOSSCD294.

The Woodlanders

The Woodlanders has inspired one opera and one small-scale piece (in addition to Patrick Hadley's 1925 *Scene from "The Woodlanders"* covered in the first part of this survey).

The opera is by **Stephen Paulus** (b. 1949), a prolific American composer, with over 450 works to his credit, including twelve operas.³³ *The Woodlanders* is his one Hardy-inspired piece, and has a libretto by Colin Graham³⁴. It was first performed by the Opera Theater of St. Louis on 14 June 1985 where it gained a positive review in the *New York Times*: "He also knows how to stop, draw breaths and soliloquize, and 'The Woodlanders' is perhaps most successful in its set pieces - arias and ensembles that are reminiscent of opera in earlier ages. They rarely startle us with their original thrusts, but Mr. Paulus often finds melodic patterns that are fresh and familiar at the same time."³⁵ The European premiere of the opera took place ten years later at the Oxford Playhouse where it was presented by Oxford University Opera from 22 to 25 February 1995. No professional recording of the opera has been made, and it has not been performed since the Oxford production. Paulus has also produced a 15 minute "Suite from *The Woodlanders*", presumably based on the same material.

More recently, four descriptive passages from the same novel have been set by **Anthony Payne** (probably most famous for his "realisation" of Elgar's Third Symphony) as *Scenes from "The Woodlanders"* (1999). The music, for soprano, two clarinets, violin and cello is described by Payne himself as "a strange hybrid, midway between song cycle and tone poem". It is available on CD in the Payne collection *The Stones and Lonely Places Sing*³⁶.

Tess of the d'Urbervilles

It is perhaps surprising that there appears to have been no musical response to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* between d'Erlanger's 1906 opera and 1982, when **Adrian Williams** wrote his *Tess* as a commission from Vernon Handley for the Guildford Philharmonic Orchestra. The 23-minute work has only been performed once, in 1983, and as it has not been recorded as a whole it is especially helpful to read Williams' own description of the piece. Writing as someone who has "always loved Hardy", he states that "the inspiration was that part of the novel where Tess sets out on a long trek in search of Angel Clare. In the summer of 1981 a friend and I took a few days to follow on foot what we felt was Tess's route. The work is quite rich and complex, over-orchestrated with youthful exuberance... As often with my works there are motifs and themes which run throughout, especially an aching "Tess" melodic figure. The work ends with a kind of funereal lament, [which] I suppose in my mind must have been Tess's demise."³⁷ The introduction (which alone was recorded) to my ears effectively conveys Tess's mood as she begins her walk to Emminster. Williams has not written

³³ For full details see <http://www.stephenpaulus.com/index.php>

³⁴ Colin Graham (1931-2007) originated in Britain, although he later settled in the USA. He worked closely with Benjamin Britten, for whom he wrote a libretto for *Anna Karenina* (not used) and in 1968 became Artistic Director of the Aldeburgh Festival.

³⁵ Bernard Holland, Special to the *New York Times*, 16 June 1985.

³⁶ NMC Recordings, NMC D130.

³⁷ Personal communication, 27 October 2013.

any other Hardy-inspired pieces, though his chamber orchestral work from 2008 *Maelienydd* demonstrates Hardy's influence at one remove, being much influenced by Holst's *Egdon Heath*.

There was a much shorter gap before American composer Matthew Harris began his full-length opera based on *Tess* of the d'Urbervilles. He wrote the opera, including his own libretto based very closely on Hardy's text, from 1996 to 2000, though there are still some scenes that have not been orchestrated. *Tess* is in three acts and contains a little over two hours of music. There are nine roles, a chorus, children's chorus and dancers. The music is tonal, with influences of both English folksong and Victorian-era popular music. For Harris this piece is "my pipe-dream piece, a big grand opera, whether or not there's any chance of a commission or performance".³⁸ Nevertheless approaches were made to various individuals and opera companies, and although no full performance has yet taken place, there have been no fewer than seven successful performances of extracts. For example *Three Arias from "Tess" for Soprano and Piano* was premiered by Faith Esham at the Derriere Guard Festival at The Kitchen in New York City, March 1997, while the most extensive production so far has been *Two Scenes and an Aria from Tess* (a substantial 45 minutes in length – half as long again as the entirety of Harper's *Fanny Robin!*)) which was performed in concert version with orchestra by the New York City Opera in May 2000. The choral excerpts are published by G. Schirmer but regrettably nothing is available on CD commercially. The excerpts I have heard prove the music to be melodic, and effectively to capture much of the mood of the characters and situations and the atmosphere of the novel, and it is much to be hoped that this excellent work does soon get a production.³⁹

Paul Sarcich has also composed a full-length (three hour) grand opera based on *Tess*. Completed in 2000 he sought advice about production possibilities through the *Thomas Hardy Journal*,⁴⁰ but it has not been performed or recorded. Sarcich writes that following his more recent "experience of writing a chamber opera ... I think *Tess* in its present form is probably unstageable and would require a massive rewrite". He has also written a 12 minute Symphonic Meditation on *Tess* (2002) based on the opera that "was given a read-through by an amateur orchestra at Morley College but that's as far as that has gone so far".⁴¹

Tess appears to have inspired as many **musicals** as grand operas, though not always with great success. Indeed, the 1999 **musical** *Tess* earned its place in musical history as "one of the most expensive flops in the history of West End Theatre" as *The Times* put it, reporting that "an official receiver sealed off the Savoy Theatre and impounded costumes and scenery" when the show closed in January 2000 after playing to as few as 50 people in a theatre with a capacity of 1,000.⁴² The reviewers had slated the production, with Benedict Nightingale writing that "Much of the time, the acting is as underpowered as Stephen Edwards's music and his music as bland as Justin

³⁸ Personal communication, 13 March 2013.

³⁹ For further information on Matthew Harris see his website: <http://www.matthewharrismusic.com>

⁴⁰ *Thomas Hardy Journal*, 18.3 (2002), 12-13.

⁴¹ Personal communication, 3 March 2013.

⁴² *The Times*, 14 January 2000.

Fleming's lyrics"⁴³ The adaptation and direction of the ill-fated show were by Karen Louise Hebden.

More successful appears to have been the "**rock opera**" *Tess* on the other side of the Atlantic, with music, lyrics and libretto by Annie and Jenna Pasqua. *Tess* had a staged reading in New York in November 2007, followed by a number of performances at other venues. Most recently it was produced as part of the New York Musical Theatre Festival in 2012, and was so popular that it had an extended run. A number of the songs can be listened to on the musical's website.⁴⁴

In summer 2012 *Tess* was produced as a **musical** by the **Youth Music Theatre UK**, adapted and directed by Gerry Flanagan.

Jude the Obscure

Jude the Obscure has, perhaps rather surprisingly, generated two musical adaptations in recent years. The first, by **Nicola Jane Buttigieg** was originally put on by the Travesty Players Theatre Company in London, with concert performances in June 2006 in Hampstead being followed by a fully-staged production in March 2007. A concert performance of *Jude* was given in June 2007 at the Hardy at Yale Conference after workshops at New York's Ripley Greer Studios, The Manhattan School of Music and New York Metropolitan Opera House. "Through-composed, in a classical style in keeping with the era",⁴⁵ it has been described as a "convincing and enjoyable production" even if it "may not have been 'Jude-as-we-know-it'".⁴⁶

The second one was the brainchild of Jerome Davis and his wife Simmie Kastner, who decided on an adaptation of *Jude the Obscure* to close their fifteenth season at their Burning Coal Theatre Company in Raleigh, North Carolina. Having decided that it should be a musical, they enlisted **Ian Finley** to make the adaptation, and for the music engaged two young folk music composers **Bruce Benedict and Jonathan Fitts**. It was a substantial undertaking, with a text of 290 pages and a running time of 4 hours 30 minutes across its two parts, which were given on subsequent evenings. The musical included a number of song settings of Hardy poems. The show ran during April and May 2012.⁴⁷

Short stories

The short stories have inspired relatively few musical responses, with the exception of *The Three Strangers*, perhaps partly triggered by Hardy's own adaptation of his short story into the play *The Three Wayfarers*. Balfour Gardiner's early but uncompleted *The Three Strangers* opera project in 1904 (described in my first paper) was the first attempt, and the next operatic version was the only musical adaptation of Hardy to have been written (to the best of my knowledge) in the two decades following

⁴³ Review in *The Times*, 12 November 1999.

⁴⁴ <http://www.tessthenewmusical.com/Index.html>

⁴⁵ See *Hardy Society Journal*, 2.1 (2006), 78-9.

⁴⁶ Claire Seymour, "Theatrical Adaptations and Musical Realisations," *Hardy Society Journal*, 2.3 (2006), 42-3.

⁴⁷ For further information on this production see Jerome Davis, "Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*: A Musical Adaptation," *The Hardy Review*, 14.1 (2012), 17-22. The article is illustrated with photographs of the production.

Hardy's death. This was **Julian Gardiner's** *The Three Strangers*, which was performed as part of a double bill with a Vaughan Williams piece at the Royal College of Music on 7 July 1936. The libretto adds sensational additional drama to the narrative, with the escaped prisoner being killed on stage, while the hangman is hustled off it by the enraged guests. Julian Gardiner (apparently unrelated to Balfour Gardiner) was both a composer and a singer (tenor), who also set some Hardy poems to music and gave performances of them (perhaps wisely with an accompanist, his earlier experiment of singing to his own piano accompaniment having led to a critical review).⁴⁸

Dame Elizabeth Maconchy (1907-1994), though perhaps most highly-regarded for her chamber music, also wrote song cycles, theatre works, choral pieces and operas, among the latter being one based on *The Three Strangers*. Originally composed in 1957-8, to Maconchy's own libretto adapted from Hardy's text, its first performance did not take place until 5 June 1968, at Bishop's Stortford College. The review in *The Times*, though noting that its vocal demands were beyond the capabilities of the schoolboy performers, wrote that "the performance was adequate enough to show what a finely atmospheric and subtly poetic piece it should become in fully professional voices and hands".⁴⁹ The opera was subsequently revised, most recently in 1977, but I am not aware of further performances or a recording.

The other short story adaptations have been very recent. Hardy's short story "**Absentmindedness in a Parish Choir**" provided the basis for "The Devil's Trill", described as "a Dorset Musical Romp", written for Dorset Chamber Opera by Brian Parkhurst (composer) and David Bushrod (librettist), and performed at a variety of West Dorset locations in 2000-2003.

An operatic adaptation of the short story, *The Withered Arm* which "blurs the boundaries between music theatre and opera" was performed (although uncompleted) in August 2011 at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith, London. The music was by Jenny Gould and the libretto by Rachel Barnett.

The highest-profile production of all recent Hardy musical adaptations of recent years has been *In the Locked Room*, a one-act opera based on "**An Imaginative Woman**" which was performed in Edinburgh and Glasgow before the performance was brought to the prestigious venue of the Linbury Theatre at London's Royal Opera House on 27-29 September 2012. The music is by **Huw Watkins**, who has an impressive body of orchestral, chamber and vocal works to his credit, and the libretto is by poet and librettist **David Harsent**, with whom Watkins previously collaborated in 2009 on the chamber opera *Crime Fiction*.

The production was brought to London by Music Theatre Wales in collaboration with Scottish Opera and was directed by Michael McCarthy and Matthew Richardson. It was performed as part of a double bill with *Ghost Patrol*. The Edinburgh production drew a very positive review from Andrew Clements in the *Guardian* ("It's a beautifully crafted piece of music theatre"), while Nick Kimberley's review of the

⁴⁸ Carl Weber, *Hardy Music at Colby: A Check-List* (Waterville: Colby College Library, 1945), 16. The opera was reviewed under the heading "Royal College of Music: Two Short Operas" in *The Times*, 9 July 1936, 12. (*The Times Digital Archive*)

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 6 June 1968, 13. (*The Times Digital Archive*)

London production (much preferring it to the other half of the double bill) concluded that although “No masterpiece” it was “a genuine music drama”.⁵⁰

Rather than being inspired by one particular short story, **David Gow** (1924-1993)⁵¹ responded to *A Group of Noble Dames* as a whole, with a piece for classical guitar that was premiered by Raymond Burley at the 1990 Thomas Hardy Festival in Dorchester.⁵² It consists of a theme and ten variations, one for each of the “noble dames”. As he explains in his programme note, “I have not attempted to ‘tell the story’ but rather to capture fleetingly what seems to be the salient characteristic of each ‘noble dame’”, with each variation bearing a descriptive term. So, for example, the First Countess of Wessex is characterised as “romantic”, while the Lady Icenway is “proud”. Following Gow’s death in 1993, this work was also performed at the David Gow Commemorative Festival held in Swindon in February 1994. Gow’s interest in Hardy resulted in a number of other works. His half-hour Symphony No. 3, which had been commissioned by the Wyvern Theatre in Swindon to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Hardy’s birth, was entitled “Wessex Heights”. It was first performed by the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Norman Del Mar, in May 1990, and further performances followed. Although not directly related to Hardy’s poem of that title, beyond the titles of the three movements being drawn from the “heights” mentioned in it, Gow later based a setting of Hardy’s “Wessex Heights” on music from his symphony. That song setting was premiered at the 1992 Thomas Hardy Conference in Dorchester by Charles Gibbs (baritone) and the Lyric Quartet. Gow notes that “the quartet does not ‘accompany’ the voice in the traditional sense but rather carries on a musical argument of its own simultaneously with the vocal line – a sort of commentary on the words of the poem”.⁵³ Gow also wrote two other Hardy song-cycles, and *Dances from Casterbridge* (1987): incidental music for flutes, oboe, clarinets and bassoon for a dramatisation of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; this can be performed as an eight-minute separate piece.

Others

While most composers have been inspired by a particular piece of Hardy’s writing, whether novel, short story or collection of short stories, Graham Moore’s musical *England Expects!*, based on the threat of invasion during the Napoleonic wars, drew on a number of Hardy sources: *The Dynasts*, *The Trumpet-Major*, *The Return of the Native* and “A Tradition of 1804”. Using a combination of traditional and newly-composed folk music, this musical was so successful at its performance by Endangered Species at the 1994 Thomas Hardy Conference that it was staged again at the 2000 Conference.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ *Guardian*, 31 August 2012; Kimberley in *London Evening Standard*, 28 September 2012.

⁵¹ His obituary in the *Independent* (1 March 1993) describes Gow as “one of that group of fine British composers who receive reasonably regular performances and occasional broadcasts but never quite achieve the wider public recognition that would seem their due. His output was quite large, based mainly on concerto forms and the string quartet in the instrumental field, as well as a considerable body of choral and vocal compositions.”

⁵² 28 July 1990, Dorset County Museum, Dorchester.

⁵³ The concert was on 30 July 1992, in the Corn Exchange Dorchester, as part of the Tenth International Thomas Hardy Conference. Gow’s words are from his programme note.

⁵⁴ The performance at the Eleventh International Thomas Hardy Conference took place on 26 July 1994. Comment will be found in the October 1994 issue of the *Thomas Hardy Journal*, (10.3), 27, 30. The reprise at the later Conference took place on 24 July 2000.

Moving out again from a number of Hardy works, one composer has responded to his work as a whole. **Chris(topher) Wiltshire** is a composer, conductor, music educator and creator of “SightRead4Piano”, an iPad app to help pianists to sight-read. His *Thomas Hardy Suite* has been performed in Sheffield, but has not apparently been published or recorded.

As will be seen from the above survey, Hardy’s work has continued to inspire many different kinds of music in the years since his death. Indeed the pace of composition has quickened: each of the last three decades has generated approximately the same number of Hardy-related compositions as the entire period from Hardy’s death up to 1979, while five new compositions have already been noted from 2010 to date.⁵⁵ Much of the music is both interesting and enjoyable, and demonstrates an enormous range of musical responses – responses “so various”, as Hardy’s poem puts it. No doubt there are other pieces that have been written, whether or not performed or recorded, and I would be interested to learn of any works I have missed that are known to readers of this article.

Nevertheless, one does not sense that Hardy has over this period maintained the kind of almost universal appeal to composers that was evident during the last two decades of his life. During Hardy’s later years the list of composers who were inspired by his work reads like a roll-call of many of the most notable British composers of the day. Many composed song-settings of his poems, while others wrote the orchestral and operatic pieces covered in my first paper. There were of course some major British composers of the day who did not produce any Hardy-inspired music, but they were the exceptions, and one of those few, Elgar, did seriously consider writing an opera based on a Hardy text. However, in the decades since Hardy died, the situation is rather the reverse. Clearly, some major composers have been inspired by Hardy: Britten and Finzi are the outstanding examples, though as my terms of reference for this article exclude song settings of Hardy’s poems, Britten has only received one paragraph, while it has not been possible to cover at all the six splendid song-cycles based on Hardy poems composed by Gerald Finzi (1901-1956).⁵⁶ Among other major composers, Nicholas Maw wrote a song-cycle of six Hardy poems, while Mark-Anthony Turnage has set one Hardy poem. Of the composers considered in this article Hoddinott and Maconchy perhaps stand out as the most significant figures, but almost all have an established reputation in their different fields of music.

However one looks in vain for any Hardy-inspired productions by the majority of leading composers, stretching from those whose lives overlapped with Hardy’s such as Sir William Walton, Sir Michael Tippett, Elisabeth Lutyens and Sir Malcolm

⁵⁵ Total of 8 from 1928 to 1979; 1980s – 6; 1990s – 9; 2000s – 7; 2010s – 5. Note that the early decades may be under-represented, in that only those compositions that achieved public performance and / or recording are known, while for more recent decades information is available on compositions that have not yet achieved that distinction. Nevertheless, a dip in interest during the first few decades following Hardy’s death reflects the trajectory of his literary reputation and indeed the posthumous reputation of many artists.

⁵⁶ For a full consideration of Finzi, see Diana McVeagh, *Gerald Finzi: His Life and Music* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005).

Arnold, and beyond those born within the two decades following Hardy's death such as Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Jonathan Harvey, Sir John Tavener and John Rutter right up to the most recent classical luminaries such as Judith Weir, James MacMillan, George Benjamin and Thomas Adès⁵⁷. To some extent this may simply be due to different fashions in music. Some classical composers of the past few decades would not have considered writing music inspired by literature. And of course Hardy no longer has that status of the "Grand Old Man of English Letters" that made him such an influential figure in his later years; as a source for music he has taken his place alongside other major writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This is perhaps why a similar lack of Hardy-influenced major music applies to musicals as well as to classical music. While some of the Hardy-based musicals considered above have had some commercial and critical success, there is no sign of any response to Hardy from the giants of the genre such as Rodgers and Hammerstein, Lerner and Loewe, Stephen Sondheim or Andrew Lloyd Webber, nor from a leading producer of musicals such as Cameron Mackintosh. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of much of the Hardy-influenced classical music and musicals described in this article indicates that Hardy remains a rich quarry for current and future composers. We can look forward with a reasonable level of confidence to future compositions inspired by Hardy that will in their own individual way match the quality of Holst's *Egdon Heath* and Britten's *Winter Words*.

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Notes on Contributors

Charles P. C. Pettit was educated at Exeter College, Oxford, and at the University of Sheffield, and until his recent retirement was an Assistant County Librarian in Oxfordshire Libraries. A former Vice-Chairman of the Thomas Hardy Society, he directed three of the Society's biennial international conferences, including the 1992

⁵⁷ I cannot claim an encyclopaedic knowledge of all of these composers, and it is possible that I have overlooked one or more minor pieces that were inspired by Hardy. However, I have been unable to find any at all, and can state with confidence that none of the composers listed has been significantly inspired by Hardy's works.

conference which provided the material for *New Perspectives on Thomas Hardy*, the first of three Hardy conference volumes which he edited for Macmillan Press. He has contributed articles on Hardy to several periodicals and books, edited *The Trumpet-Major* for Wordsworth Classics, and written a short guide, *St Juliot Church and Thomas Hardy*. His most substantial recent contributions have been the Introduction and Supplement to the 2002 edition of R. L. Purdy's *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* (Oak Knoll/British Library), and chapters on 'Hardy Bibliographies' and 'Hardy Archives' in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Thomas Hardy*, edited by Rosemarie Morgan (Ashgate, 2010).

Correspondence to: charles.pcpettit@btinternet.com