

Title

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Question 1

I chose to focus on the poem “Spring and Fall”, by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

- (a) The somber tone and the specific rhythmic notation (with the accents, as I understand they are used in English Poetry) are the primary elements that drew me to this poem. Also of relevance is the discourse of the interior of the child (if, I am, in fact, interpreting this in a reasonable way). I, for one, strongly believe in the agency of children, so a poem with a child subject experiencing and healing from grief is one that pains and intrigues me. Oh! poor child.
- (b) I chose to listen to the songs “Spring and Fall” and “Margaret”, by Ned Rorem and Alec Wilder, respectively.
- (c) The rhythmic uncertainty that begins Rorem’s setting is disorienting, but the harmonic content warms and familiarises us to the sound. Rorem’s setting, as I understand, is quite idiomatic for his music. The use of suspended harmonies, displaced/disoriented rhythm, and the repeated melodic insistence on $\hat{2}$ - that is, the second scale degree - lends itself to a particular sense of nostalgia and frigidity, as well as a very text-forward voice. Centering one note melodically provides a pitch foundation from which it is easier - for me, at least - to glean the lyric content. In contrast, while I do quite love the musical content of the Wilder setting - as I love everything I hear of Alec Wilder - I have a difficult time discerning the lyric content of the voice. The choice of voice range - and thus, though I loathe to relate the two - an implicit characterization and *gendering* of the narrator colour both settings differently, with Rorem and Wilder invoking a sort of Fatherly/Motherly duality.
- (d) I think, as I listen to these settings while working, the Wilder setting is more immediately attractive, with its more straightforward melodic presentation, but the Rorem setting will remain in my heart. The subtlety of piano texture, rhythmic displacement, and *very* controlled melodic contour are striking.

Question 2

- (a) If this set is to adequately span Rorem's entire body of work, it's quite remarkable that both "The Lordly Hudson" and "Ferry me across the water" portray the river. Of the three, I'm quite struck by the contemporality of "The Sick Wife" - the text is very modern, and points, to me, very clearly to the impact of postwar nuclearisation of the American Family - i.e. 1970s to 1990s. This focused temporality is, to me, unfamiliar in other writing we've studied. Musically, I would call none of the three songs quick. All of them are pensive and weighty - not dirges - without, as I hear, a performance of Grandeur. I am slowly but quite warmly growing accustomed to the harmonic language of Ned Rorem.