EIGHTEEN SONNETS BY HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW
FOR SOPRANO, MEZZO-SOPRANO, TENOR, AND BARITONE
SOLO VOICES AND ORCHESTRA

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF ARTS

BY
ERIC CHARLES EDWARD WILSON

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BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a tonal modular work for soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and baritone solo voices and large orchestra (3343, 4331, Timp.+4, Hp., Pno., Strings) with an accompanying narrative. The text is drawn from eighteen of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s sonnets. This work consists of four interlocking song cycles, one for each solo voice, and two added songs for the combination of two or more of the solo voices. There are shared tonal and thematic relationships across the work as a whole as well as within and among the individual song cycles. The unique modular nature of the work allows for performance of the whole, but also allows for extracting the individual song cycles—or even individual sonnets from the work as free-standing pieces, complete in themselves. The modular nature of this work makes it attractive as a programming option for orchestras and choirs with featured guest soloists, and also as an addition to singers’ repertoires.

Chapters 3–7 of the narrative address the songs in each individual module or cycle, thus providing a useful reference for a singer wishing to program one or more of the songs for her or his voice classification. The complete transposed orchestral score follows the conclusion of the narrative. This dissertation holds potentially helpful information for research on the topics of contemporary classical music, Indiana composers, and/or orchestral song cycles.
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Thanks to my mother, Della P. Wilson, for your love, sacrifice, and guidance through the years. You have the biggest heart on earth.

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daughter, Katherine. I am proud beyond expression to be your father. Melissa and Kate—I love both of you with my very life and soul.

Most of all, I thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is my strength and my salvation. May all I do reflect His love, truth, and grace—the glory is His alone.
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CHAPTER 1
THE CONCEPT, REVIEW OF LITERATURE, AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The song cycle is one of my favorite genres of music as both a composer and a singer. I have set herein eighteen of the sonnets of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882) for solo voices and orchestra. The solo voices are soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, and baritone. I also combined solo voices for two of the settings: a duet for the soprano and mezzo-soprano, and a quartet setting. This prose portion of the dissertation provides information about each sonnet from a literary and historic standpoint, about the compositional processes involved in its setting, and about the song’s relationship to the rest of the work.

The sonnets of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow are personal and introspective. Most of them are drawn from the poet’s life experience (e.g. A Nameless Grave and The Evening Star) or composed in homage to his fellow literary giants (Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, etc.) I find his sonnets very beautiful in language and structure. His descriptive and vibrant eloquence is conducive to musical text painting. Longfellow exclusively uses
the 4-4-3-3 line scheme of the Petrarchan form in his sonnets.\(^1\) The Petrarchan sonnet form, so named for fourteenth-century poet Francis Petrarch, is Italian in origin (a significant element discussed later in the current chapter), and is divided into two segments: the first eight lines, or *octave*, and the last six lines, or *sestet*.\(^2\) There are many variations available, but the exact rhyme scheme favored by Longfellow is most often: abba cddc efg efg. It is interesting to note that the Petrarchan, or Italian form, is not as often employed in English sonnets. There are differences in the language structure that allow the Petrarchan form to work well in Italian, namely fewer different noun endings in Italian than in English, which make the rhyme scheme somewhat easier than in English.\(^3\)

The following sonnets are set to music in my composition: *The Evening Star; Autumn; Dante; The Cross of Snow; The Galaxy; The Sound of the Sea; A Summer Day by the Sea; The Tides; A Shadow; A Nameless Grave; Sleep; Eliot’s Oak; Venice; The Poets; St. John’s, Cambridge; Moods; Wapentake; and The Broken Oar*. This list is the chronological order as they appear in publication, and also the order in which they appear in the composition. The first four sonnets were published together in an earlier collection, but the remainder is drawn from the work published collectively as *A Book of Sonnets* in 1875. Most of the sonnets from this collection share only the date of publication in common with one another. There is little linkage and interaction among them thematically, other than very broad categories, such as those composed in homage to other writers.

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Longfellow’s prowess as a sonneteer is rarely questioned—even by those who otherwise criticize his work. Paul Elmer Moore printed an article in *The Nation* (ca.1907) upon Longfellow’s centenary calling for publication of the sonnets as a collection. The task was undertaken by Ferris Greenslet. Greenslet arranged the sonnets in three groups: Personal Sonnets (twenty-one); Nature (seventeen); and The Life Letters (twenty-four). Many sonnets, however, fit into more than one of these categories. There are themes of nature in some of the personal sonnets, and personal and literary references in the nature sonnets. Greenslet’s count of the sonnets also falls short of the at least eighty written by Longfellow.

Greenslet’s appraisal of the sonnets ranks no single sonnet as great as those of Shakespeare, Milton, or Wordsworth’s finest examples, but Greenslet finds the average of excellence across the body of Longfellow’s sonnets to be incomparably high. Greenslet notes Longfellow’s dignity, repose of mood, nobly impassioned language, and vivid imagery, among other traits, as hallmarks of his sonnets.

Most of the sonnets are products of Longfellow’s later years. The earliest sonnet is *Mezzo Cammin* (not one of the settings for this project), written in Longfellow’s thirty-fifth year. Of the sonnets that I set to music, the two earliest are *Dante* and *The Evening Star*, both written three years after *Mezzo Cammin*. Longfellow wrote half his sonnets

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5 On a personal note, I respectfully disagree with Mr. Greenslet on this issue. I have set Shakespeare texts many times over the course of my career, and I find Longfellow’s sonnets every bit as beautiful, descriptive, artful, and excellent as those of Shakespeare, at least in this composer’s humble opinion.

6 Wagenknecht, 152.
between 1872 and 1876, and he continued to turn out the occasional sonnet until his death.\(^7\)

Cecil B. Williams illuminates Longfellow’s strong ties to things Italian. Several of the sonnets have Italian locales, one of which, *Venice*, is included in this work. Longfellow even composed one sonnet, *Il Ponte Vecchio di Firenze*, not in my composition, in English, and to maintain his proficiency in Italian, translated his English text into Italian.\(^8\) The sonnet in homage to Dante, which is included in this composition, is perhaps the result of Longfellow’s many translations of the former writer’s works into English.

The very concept of the sonnet is usually grounded in romantic love, but Longfellow is not comfortable with the intimate language associated with romantic love and sexuality in his sonnets.\(^9\) *The Evening Star* is his sole venture into the subject of romantic love, evoking images of his second wife preparing to retire for the night. Although Longfellow seems to be much more at home with themes other than romantic love, his themes were no less personal and intimate, according to Arvin, who refers to Longfellow’s themes of friendship, the love of children, and the bitterness of personal bereavement.\(^10\) Various criticisms of Longfellow’s poetry notwithstanding, he is repeatedly credited in the literature as the finest American sonneteer of the nineteenth century.

\(^7\) Wagenknecht, 152.
\(^8\) Williams, 146.
The Concept

The idea for this project began with a commission to write a song setting for baritone and piano for a recital. I was given free rein on musical language and the choice of text. I began reading through the Longfellow sonnets and I was immediately taken with them. Each new sonnet seemed to me as extraordinary as the one before it. I ultimately selected *A Nameless Grave* for that initial project, with the idea that I would someday set more of the sonnets, either as an extension of the setting of *A Nameless Grave*, as a different project altogether, or even as multiple projects. This work is the ultimate result.

There is a need for this work because it fills a niche between art song and oratorio. The flexibility of the settings makes the work adaptable to the grandeur of the concert hall as well as—in a projected piano reduction—to venues as intimate as the coffee house. Singers may use these songs as staples in their repertoire for recitals, and orchestras or choirs may program them for variety and to further spotlight guest vocal soloists who are hired for other pieces on a program. The demands of the physical development of the singer are likely to make these sonnets favorite pieces for more advanced singers. I am also a singer, so I am sensitive to writing vocal lines the way I believe most singers want to see them on the printed page and to how they prefer to sing them; nevertheless, some of the songs require mastery and control of extremes of both upper and lower ranges and long phrases, and thus require professional-level singers for successful performance.
A significant and distinguishing feature of this project is its modular concept. The cycle as a whole contains tonal, thematic, and harmonic relationships. In addition, each module of four songs for each individual voice classification can be extracted, providing a complete song cycle for that particular voice with these same kinds of relationships. On an even smaller scale, each song, though related in some way to the greater whole, also has the ability to stand complete on its own, so that one or a few songs may be selected to suit concert or recital needs. Additionally, the songs for combined voices may be used individually as a feature for soloists during a choral or symphonic concert.

Review of Literature/Historical Perspective

This work draws from experience with traditional oratorio and art song, and influences from both combine to create something I believe is fresh, yet accessible. One of the great challenges in the creation of a worthwhile new work is to create something original using familiar musical language.

Works that have influenced my composition include some of the cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach for solo voices and multiple instruments. The chamber pieces for voice and one or more instruments by Benjamin Britten and Ralph Vaughan Williams in the twentieth century are undeniably influential to me at some level, since several of these works are part of my voice repertoire. *Four Hymns* for tenor, viola, and piano, as well as *On Wenlock Edge*, for tenor, piano, and string quartet are two Vaughan Williams cycles I have performed in recital. I regularly use his *Songs of Travel* for students in my voice studio. Britten’s *Canticles* series, originally written for tenor Peter Pears, is another example of repertoire of this type. The oratorios of Felix Mendelssohn and George
Frederick Handel are influential models of large works for voices and orchestra. Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* and Handel’s oratorios *Samson*, and, of course, *Messiah* are prime examples of oratorio influence. The primary differences between these oratorios and this work are the absence of a chorus in the current work and the lack of a cohesive story line as is usually found in an oratorio.

Other German composers contributed large-scale song cycles: Ludwig van Beethoven is believed to have written the first true modern song cycle with *An die ferne Geliebte*. (This cycle of six songs with no break between them is also in my voice repertoire.) Robert Schumann’s *Liederkreis* and *Dichterliebe*, as well as Franz Schubert’s *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise* are extensive song cycles that masterfully integrate complex relationships from song to song.

There is also an influence on my compositional voice from the piano accompaniments by some of the greatest art-song composers. The *Lieder* of Richard Strauss and of Schubert are often infused with orchestral qualities, as are the songs of some of the French composers—Claude Debussy, Henri DuParc, and Gabriel Fauré. The piano is a significant voice in my orchestra for this work. Its important role alludes to the strong ties between voice and piano in art song over the past two-and-a-half centuries.

As for other settings of Longfellow’s sonnets, Michael Hovland’s bibliography cites 1,223 works that take Longfellow’s poetry as their text. Of these, only three employ any of the sonnets I chose for the current project. *The Sound of the Sea* was set
by Louis Coerne in his 1894 work *Ten Songs*, and by John Heiss in his cycle *Songs of Nature* in 1978, and Frederic Walton composed a setting of *Venice* in an undated work.¹¹

An interesting work that is similar in some ways to the proposed project is William Bolcom’s setting of William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, composed intermittently between 1956 and 1983. Bolcom set all of the poems in this Blake collection using chorus, orchestra, and solo voices. It is a massive work that requires large forces and extra, non-traditional instruments in the orchestra.¹²


CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW AND ORDER OF SONNETS

Methodology Overview

This work presented myriad challenges. One of the first decisions to be made was voice assignment for each text. It is important to choose which voice type is best suited to color, or to communicate each text, and to best express the composer’s intentions for each setting. As an example, I chose the tenor to sing *The Evening Star*, the only true “love” sonnet Longfellow ever wrote, dedicated to his second wife. I wanted this setting to be something very tender and lovely. I wanted the persona to be a male voice, knowing that this poem was a personal sonnet from Longfellow to his wife, and even though Longfellow reputedly possessed a big, deep voice in his speech a light lyric tenor seemed to be the more appropriate choice to express the sentiment of the text.

Another challenge was the sheer size of the task. This work required a lot of orchestration and formatting in addition to the compositional demands of the actual setting of the texts. This is the largest single work in my career to date, comprising approximately an hour and fifteen minutes of music.

The application of a variety of musical forms within the literary structure of the fourteen lines of the sonnet afforded stimulating possibilities and challenges in setting the
sonnets. For example, for some sonnets it seemed most appropriate to use a modified strophic form, setting up a kind of verse-chorus song form, while it seemed more appropriate to through-compose some others.

**Order of Sonnets**

One of the many details over which I pondered was the order of the sonnets within the work. I decided to divide the sonnets among the voices according to each sonnet’s primary literary theme. Just as Greenslet divided the sonnets into categories of personal, nature, and life letters, I devised a system of five broad categories, and assigned to each category its own voice or voices. The soprano sonnets are primarily nature-themed; there is some mystical element to each of the mezzo-soprano sonnets; the tenor sonnets comprise Longfellow’s lone love sonnet and those concerned with places; the baritone sonnets are all in homage to various people; finally the sonnets for two or more voices are miscellaneous in their literary theme, but serve well as texts to be shared between or among multiple voices.

I chose to put the sonnets in chronological order of original publication for the purposes of the work as a whole. This arrangement does create asymmetry regarding the placement of voices throughout the work; the first mezzo-soprano solo does not appear until mid-way through the entire work; some voices have songs one after another; and there are other small issues in that vein. Ultimately, however, the solo voices sing an equal number of sonnets.

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Even though each sonnet can be free-standing, I structured the entire eighteen-song composition so that each separate module would have a logical tonal structure, and so that the entire work—consisting of those interlocking modules—would also constitute a tonally logical whole in the key of G.

This key arrangement is shown in figure 2.1:

**Figure 2.1**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Sonnets’ Order and Keys</th>
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<td><strong>Overall work: Key of G</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. The Evening Star—Tenor—G</td>
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<td>2. Autumn—Soprano—A</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Dante—Baritone—Gm</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. The Cross of Snow—Tenor—Em</td>
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<td>5. The Galaxy—Duet (Soprano and Mezzo)—Am</td>
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<td>6. The Sound of the Sea—Soprano—F#m/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. A Summer Day by the Sea—Soprano—E</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. The Tides—Soprano—Am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. A Shadow—Mezzo-Soprano—D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. A Nameless Grave—Baritone—Cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Sleep—Mezzo-Soprano—F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Eliot’s Oak—Mezzo-Soprano—A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Venice—Tenor—D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The Poets—Baritone—Bb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. St. John’s, Cambridge—Tenor—Bm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Moods—Mezzo-Soprano—F#m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Wapentake—Baritone—D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. The Broken Oar—Ensemble—Gm</td>
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</table>

**Key Structure of Each “Module”**

Soprano (A)—A, F#m/A, E, A
Mezzo-Soprano (D/Dm)—D, F, A, F#m
Tenor (G)—G, Em, D, Bm
Baritone (Gm)—Gm, Cm, Bb, D
Duet/Ensemble—Am, Gm (Incidental, but functions within the overall scope of the work.)
The tonal centers of the opening and closing songs are G. Sonnet No. 2 uses the supertonic as its tonal center, while sonnet No. 3 returns to G as its home key, although in minor mode. Sonnet No. 4 in the work is in E minor, the relative minor of G. From there, I decided to develop tonal areas of mediant-related keys: Sonnet No. 5’s tonal center is A, and sonnet No. 6, *The Sound of the Sea*, explores two separate tonal areas simultaneously—F-sharp minor in the “treble” sonic areas, and A major in the lower-pitched register. Of course, these keys share the same key signature, so the effect is more of an extended-chord major key area of A, rich with sevenths and ninths, yet very consonant. Sonnet No. 7 breaks the mediant-related progression, and begins the climb toward the overall dominant. Sonnet No. 9 is in the key of A, or the V/V, and arrives at the work’s dominant, D, at the mid-way point for sonnet No. 9. Sonnet No. 10’s tonal center is C, the subdominant of G, while C’s subdominant, F, is the tonal area for the sonnet No. 11. Sonnets No. 12 and 13 return to A and D, respectively, to reiterate the dominant of G. Sonnets No. 14 and 15 explore the minor and major mediant pitch classes in a G-centered triad. Sonnet No. 16 is centered on F#, the leading tone to G, moving to the final dominant in sonnet No. 17, and finally back to the overall tonal center of G in sonnet No. 18.

Each individual song cycle also has a tonal plan. The soprano cycle tonal scheme is: A–F#m/A–E–A, or tonic–submediant/tonic–dominant–tonic in A. The mezzo-soprano tonal scheme is: D–F–A–F#m, outlining the D major and minor triads, or the dominant in the overall tonal plan. The tenor tonal scheme is: G–Em–D–Bm, highlighting the “home key” of G and its diatonic mediants. The baritone sonnets outline G minor with their tonal scheme of Gm–Cm–Bb–D, or tonic–subdominant–mediant–dominant.
Finally, the sonnets for two or more voices are tonally unconnected to each other, but function within the overall tonal scheme of the work. Figure 2.2 shows the tonal relationships and progression in a brief reductive graph:

**Figure 2.2: Reductive Graph of Entire Work:**

![Reductive Graph of Entire Work](image-url)
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY FOR THE SOPRANO SONNETS

The soprano’s sonnets are all nature-themed poems—especially texts with some element of the sea as their catalyst. One distinctive feature of the soprano sonnets is the pervasive text painting in the orchestration: the instrumental accompaniment takes time to breathe a bit and create an atmosphere of the sea in a state of rest in *The Sea* and *A Summer Day by the Sea*, and to evoke a stark, harsh emptiness of a vacant shore. The text painting in the orchestration as well as the frequent meter changes create a whimsical—almost playful—setting in *Autumn*, where the goal was to allude to the burst of color of the season, the falling leaves, and the harvest. The overall range of the soprano sonnets is B3(optional A3)–B5.

**Autumn**

1) Thou comest, Autumn, heralded by the rain,
2) With banners, by great gales incessant fanned,
3) Brighter than the brightest silks of Samarcand,
4) And stately oxen harnessed to thy wain!
5) Thou standest, like imperial Charlemagne,
6) Upon thy bridge of gold; thy royal hand
7) Outstretched with benedictions o’er the land,
8) Blessing the farms through all thy vast domain!
9) Thy shield is the red harvest moon, suspended
10) So long beneath the heaven’s o’erhanging eaves;
11) Thy steps are by the farmer’s prayers attended;
12) Like flames upon an altar shine the sheaves;
13) And, following thee, in thy ovation splendid,
14) Thine almoner, the wind, scatters the golden leaves!
Autumn is forthright in its text, simply expounding on the beauty and characteristics of the season. There does not appear to be any sub-text intended by Longfellow himself, though the reader could interpret it as a commentary on the beauty of the human experience as we age. I have chosen to address it at face value—a sonnet about the colors and changes brought about by autumn.

I interpret this sonnet as a bit whimsical, and so chose to set it in mixed meter. The piano is the primary accompaniment for the first half of the piece—this time not because of the parlor song allusion that is so prevalent in some of the other sonnets, but rather for the sake of the piano on its own merit. The pizzicato bass doubling the piano’s left hand for the first part of the piece and sounding an octave below is written not only for the sake of reintroducing the lower register, but to reinforce the rhythmic foundation as well.

The harmonic structure remains largely diatonic, despite the occasional borrowed chord, with a few notable exceptions. There is a prolonged area of C in mm. 36–48, followed by a combination of circle-of-fifths progression and mediant-related common tone chords until m. 53, when the diatonic dominant returns, setting up the authentic cadence in A in m. 56.

The brief ostinato in the strings, mm. 76–88, in the relative minor under the text from line 12, “Like flames upon the altar shine the sheaves;” is meant to suggest a dance, as would possibly be found in the culture of some indigenous peoples, without resorting to caricature. The conspicuous absence of percussion, with the exception of piano and tambourine, is to deliberately avoid caricature. The chord structure under the last few
lines, 13 and 14, is intended to build tension and prolong pre-dominant harmony ($\text{II}^6$, Fr+6/V, iii$^6$, V$^7$) before returning to the opening motif.

*Autumn* is related to the rest of the soprano cycle and to the work as a whole through its tonality. I intentionally did not employ in this setting any themes or motives that are shared with others in order to provide a bit of contrast in style and tempo within the soprano songs.

**The Sound of the Sea**

1) The sea awoke at midnight from its sleep,
2) And round the pebbly beaches far and wide
3) I heard the first wave of the rising tide
4) Rush onward with uninterrupted sweep;
5) A voice out of the silence of the deep,
6) A sound mysteriously multiplied
7) As of a cataract from the mountain’s side,
8) Or roar of winds upon a wooded steep.
9) So comes to us at times, from the unknown
10) And inaccessible solitudes of being,
11) The rushing of the sea-tides of the soul;
12) And inspirations, that we deem our own,
13) Are some divine foreshadowing and foreseeing
14) Of things beyond our reason or control.

*The Sound of the Sea* is one of the shorter settings in the composition, but no less substantial than any of the longer pieces. I employed a modified strophic form for this sonnet. The piano is featured prominently in this sonnet to suggest early twentieth-century parlor song, a recurring element in the work as a whole. The piano also provides a point of reference for the location of the split between diatonic polytonal areas: F# minor above middle C, and A Major below middle C. The piano provides a convenient and tasteful way to lend a sense of cohesiveness to the harmonic and melodic structures, while still enabling the two simultaneous tonal areas to function independently of one
another. The frequent vertical sonority of first-inversion chords with added color tones is reminiscent of French art songs by Fauré and Duparc.

From a literary standpoint, the sonnet suggests, like a voice rising from the rushing of the sea, a waterfall gushing from the side of a mountain, or the roar of wind through a wooded thicket, that the inspirations we believe to be our own are divinely granted to us beyond our reason or control. The string section creates effects to suggest some of these descriptive elements of the text.

One significant feature of this piece is found in mm. 9–11, and is a good example of text painting in the orchestration. The text for these measures is from line 3, “I heard the first wave of the rising tide.” A rising sixteenth-note figure creates a sweeping effect through these measures—a wave. The dynamic reflects an ebb and flow as well, beginning softly, swelling to mezzo-forte, and then trailing off to pianissimo.

Another area of interest follows in the treatment of line 4, “Rush onward with uninterrupted sweep.” The text “…uninterrupted sweep” is deliberately set in a syncopated rhythm, across the bar lines and somewhat against the prevailing meter, as though to will that the wave not be interrupted.
Example 3.1: *The Sounds of the Sea* mm. 9–13

One last feature of note in this sonnet is a continuation of the colorful orchestration in mm. 30–32. The text is line 11, “The rushing of the sea-tides of the soul;” and I used a mixture of tremolo in the lower strings with a jagged intervallic and rhythmic line that covers a wide range in the first violins, along with a dynamic swell and quick decrescendo to suggest a wave crashing against the jagged rocks.
This sonnet is a bit more intimate in its setting and orchestration than some of the others in this work. It shares no thematic material with the others, and although the two keys are relatives of each other, it is nonetheless polytonal by definition. These exceptions aside, it has stylistic elements in common with other pieces in the work; the strophic form that is used in a few of the other sonnets, the genteel melodic lines that are not unlike lines in *The Evening Star* and in a few other sonnets, and its tonal function within the overall harmonic structure.
A Summer Day by the Sea

1) The sun is set; and in his latest beams
2) Yon little cloud of ashen gray and gold,
3) Slowly upon the amber air unrolled,
4) The falling mantle of the Prophet seems.
5) From the dim headlands many a lighthouse gleams,
6) The street-lamps of the ocean; and behold,
7) O’erhead the banners of the night unfold;
8) The day hath passed into the land of dreams.
9) O summer day beside the joyous sea!
10) O summer day so wonderful and white,
11) So full of gladness and so full of pain!
12) For ever and for ever shalt thou be
13) To some the gravestone of a dead delight,
14) To some the landmark of a new domain.

A Summer Day by the Sea is another of Longfellow’s nature sonnets that slowly unfurl one picturesque element after another. I reflect this pacing in the musical setting with the pedal tones in the low strings. While Longfellow wrote many nature sonnets simply for the sake of extolling nature’s attributes, this sonnet has a bit of a twist in the last two lines that, in my opinion, gives it a little more depth than some of the other nature sonnets. “To some the gravestone of a dead delight,” could mean that Longfellow is making note of simple pleasures, like a summer day by the sea, that are taken for granted or forgotten—or perhaps it means that the things once enjoyed fade to those who no longer find joy in life or have experienced tragedy. But then he counters that line with something much more optimistic in the hope and promise of, “To some the landmark of a new domain.” I find nothing in the literature that clarifies this passage one way or another, so for the purposes of this setting, I leave the listener to her or his interpretation.

The pedal drone on a P5 in the low strings is inspired by the first words of the sonnet, “The sun is set;” and is meant to evoke a sense of serenity. The first harmony
heard is a polychord: F#m over the pedal tonic and dominant. This lush voicing resolves to tonic and oscillates between the two sonorities throughout the introductory measures. This setting is about nuance—the small things that unfurl slowly over time, just as Longfellow accomplishes the same with the text.

An important connecting feature happens in mm. 65–69, the setting of lines 9 and 10, “O summer day beside the joyous sea! O summer day so wonderful and white.” This passage is shared with the line in A Nameless Grave, “Thou unknown hero sleeping by the sea In thy forgotten grave!” A few modifications, besides the obvious change in key, were required to adapt this passage to A Summer Day by the Sea; the most important adjustment is to the meter, which is 3/4 in A Nameless Grave, but changes to a 4/4 meter to better accommodate the flow of the text in A Summer Day by the Sea. This brief but harmonically dense tonal area is the vehicle for antithetical texts, yet it works well in both settings.
Example 3.3: A Summer Day by the Sea mm. 65–69

One more connection between this and another piece in the work is a loose sharing of melodic content with The Broken Oar. The melody for line 13, “To some the gravestone of a dead delight,” in mm. 75–77 in A Summer Day by the Sea is closely related to the treatment of line 13 of The Broken Oar, “He wrote the words, then lifted up his head.”
The Tides

1) I saw the long line of the vacant shore,
2) The sea-weed and the shells upon the sand,
3) And the brown rocks left bare on every hand,
4) As if the ebbing tide would flow no more.
5) Then heard I, more distinctly than before,
6) The ocean breathe and its great breast expand,
7) And hurrying came on the defenceless land
8) The insurgent waters with tumultuous roar.
9) All thought and feeling and desire, I said,
10) Love, laughter, and the exultant joy of song
11) Have ebbed from me for ever! Suddenly o’er me
12) They swept again from their deep ocean bed,
13) And in a tumult of delight, and strong
14) As youth, and beautiful as youth, upbore me.

The Tides is one of Longfellow’s sea-themed nature sonnets with implications of a meaning that goes beyond the observation of the tidal ebb and flow of the ocean. In writing about the long line of the distant shore, and the sea-weed, shells, and rocks laid bare, Longfellow paints a stark portrait of traits that transcend the physical into the realm of human despair. I found no literary criticism, historical information, or analyses for this sonnet, but given the sheer number of hardships the poet faced in his lifetime, it is easy to imagine that this sonnet was a product of Mr. Longfellow’s deeply personal pain.

The musical setting is as stark and bleak as the poem itself. The long, sustained bass notes, punctuated by woodwind motifs that seem to stab at nothingness, seem to create a sense of emptiness. The sustained vocal line on the tonic also gives a forlorn sense of crushing despair—someone who has nothing left within them. This through-composed sonnet contains one more noteworthy feature in mm. 33–42. Lines 9–11 are set to the notes of a whole-tone scale, which is a useful tool for creating a sense of starkness. The contrast of a moment of abandon in the lush chords of mm. 52–55
provides a brief respite from the harsh loneliness of the darker parts of the sonnet, only to suddenly cut off to leave the voice alone to finish the last two words of the text before finishing the setting with a strong punch in the orchestra.

This sonnet relates to the others in the tonal relationship it enjoys within the work, and in sharing a countermelody accompaniment motif that later appears in the ensemble sonnet, *The Broken Oar*. The very high accompaniment figure in the piccolo and flute, mm. 24–29, recurs in *The Broken Oar* both as introductory material and for the last measures.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY FOR THE MEZZO-SOPRANO SONNETS

The sonnets for mezzo-soprano perhaps feature the most eclectic mixture of styles within any of the modules in this work. They are also perhaps my favorite single song cycle within the work. Two of the sonnets—Moods and Sleep, are marked by a distinctive jazz element. A Shadow uses the rich color palette of the woodwind section, and Eliot’s Oak suggests Native American elements using a pentatonic collection. The mezzo-soprano sonnets contain some of the most memorable melodies in the work as well. The mezzo-soprano sonnets all have a metaphysical theme in some way.

The range of the mezzo-soprano sonnets is A3(optional down to E3)–A5.

A Shadow

1) I said to myself, if I were dead,
2) What would befall these children? What would be
3) Their fate, who now are looking up to me
4) For help and furtherance? Their lives, I said,
5) Would be a volume wherein I have read
6) But first chapters, and no longer see
7) To read the rest of their dear history,
8) So full of beauty and so full of dread.
9) Be comforted; the world is very old,
10) And generations pass, as they have passed,
11) A troop of shadows moving with the sun;
12) Thousands of times has the old tale been told;
13) The world belongs to those who come the last,
14) They will find hope and strength as we have done.
A Shadow ponders the welfare of those we leave behind when we depart this life. The sonnet is plain-spoken in its content and intent. It begins with the anxiety the writer has over whether or not he had provided well enough for his children in the event of his passing. The poem, however, progresses in a positive vein—first expressing wonder at the potential of their lives in lines 4–8, and then taking comfort in the fact that generations have come and gone from the beginning of time—they will continue to come and go and find strength to make it through the adversity that is this life.

I chose to use the palette of color from the woodwinds to begin this piece. This scoring allowed me to introduced a new timbre into the orchestration every few seconds throughout the introduction—an awakening of sorts. I wanted to be sure that even though the first vocal lines ponder the question about what happens to those in our care after we pass on, it is by no means a dark or morbid dwelling on the subject. Death is not the enemy in this instance, but rather the inevitable fate that awaits us all. The opening line, “I said unto myself, if I were dead…” is repeated three times in the setting, with emphasis placed on a different part of the phrase in each delivery. This varied repetition conveys a pondering of the query in a factual manner rather than a brooding about tragedy or the inevitability of death. The bassoons provide the harmonic framework from the entrance of the vocal line in m. 12 through the first forty-three measures. Their constant presence gives warmth to the texture against the other woodwinds, which are heard in turn.

The accompaniment figure introduced in the clarinets in mm. 20–23 is important to the development of this setting.
Example 4.1: A Shadow mm. 20–23

\[ \text{Clarinet in B}^\flat 1 \]

It returns as a more prominent feature in mm. 44–51 in the strings, and is used to modulate to the dominant, and it is used in mm. 69–71, where it is used to return to the home key.

In my opinion, one of the more memorable melodies in the entire work is the vocal line in mm. 68–76—the setting for lines 9–11 of the sonnet, “Be comforted; the world is very old, And generations pass, as they have passed, A troop of shadows moving with the sun;” distill into a few lines the entire meaning of the poem.

Example 4.2: A Shadow mm. 68–76

This piece is connected to the other sonnets in its tonal function within the work as a whole, and, although there are some recurring elements, it is through-composed. The most significant connection it has to the work as a whole is that it is the midpoint of the work, and also the arrival of the dominant.
Sleep

1) Lull me to sleep, ye winds, whose fitful sound
2) Seems from some faint Æolian harp-string caught;
3) Seal up the hundred wakeful eyes of thought
4) As Hermes with his lyre in sleep profound
5) The hundred wakeful eyes of Argus bound;
6) For I am weary, and am overwrought
7) With too much toil, with too much care distraught,
8) And with the iron crown of anguish crowned.
9) Lay thy soft hand upon my brow and cheek,
10) O peaceful sleep! until from pain released
11) I breathe again uninterrupted breath!
12) Ah, with what subtle meaning did the Greek
13) Call thee the lesser mystery at the feast
14) Whereof the greater mystery is death!

Sleep is a sonnet that imparts tidings of comfort and peace, while still pondering larger issues of life and death. Longfellow, as he does with some of his other sonnets, refers to the gods of Greek mythology in this sonnet. This is another multi-faceted text that can simultaneously mean both literal sleep and sleep as a metaphor for death.

Longfellow asks the question forthrightly in the final lines. I believe this poem to be yet another personal reflection of Longfellow’s pain and trials in life, to the point of embracing and welcoming the sweet release of death.

The setting for this sonnet uses the language of jazz in its instrumentation and harmonic progressions—specifically the influence of the so-called “sweet” stylings of the Big Band-era jazz orchestras of Glenn Miller, Harry James, and Benny Goodman.

Despite the ancient references to Greek mythology, jazz seemed to be the right idiom to

34 The character Hermes was the god of many different aspects of Greek life, but his primary role was as the messenger to Zeus. According to the story, Io, who was the love of Zeus, was turned into a cow to disguise and protect her from the goddess Hera. When Hera took possession of Io, the giant Argus (usually spelled “Argos”) was the herdsman assigned to watch Io. Hermes was instructed by Zeus to steal Io back from Hera (which is why Hermes is also the god of thievery), but when he was found out, he was forced to slay the giant. Atsma, Aaron J. “Hermes: Greek God of Herds, Trade and Athletics, Herald of the Gods Mythology with Pictures” http://www.theoi.com/Olympios/Hermes.html
convey both the conflict within the author and the peacefulness imparted by sleep. The traditional orchestra, including the orchestra for this work, does not typically use the saxophone, a staple of jazz ensembles. Nevertheless, I still wanted to create the effect of a saxophone section for the first few bars of the introduction. I scored the double reeds in a typical sax-section voicing with the melody doubled at the octave and the harmonies sandwiched tightly within that octave span of the melody. The effect is only used in the first four bars, but it is enough to create the desired result. Besides the double reed “sax section” described above, the prominent instruments in this movement are the piano, the vibraphone, solo pizzicato bass, brushed snare drum, and muted trumpet. The harp is also used at the beginning of the piece to soften the lines and set the piece up as a kind of lullaby for adults.

The piece is a ternary form, comprising an A section in mm. 7–34 and lines 1–8, a through-composed B section in mm. 35–55 and lines 9–11, and a C section from m. 56 through the end, and using lines 12–14.

One of the important features within the work is the chromatic descending bass line, idiomatic of jazz ballads. It creates momentum to push through the progression, and has a variety of specific uses: as an introduction, as an instrumental tag at the end of the “verses” of the strophic portion of the first half of the sonnet, and as a foundation for the trumpet solo featured in the middle of the work. Although the piece is in F, there is a strong turn toward d minor every time the descending bass line sets up the framework for the progression Dm—A7/C#—D m7/C—Dm/B—? Each occurrence of the progression ends differently. The first time, beginning in m. 5, it progresses to BbM7—C7—F. The
second time it occurs, beginning in m. 20, it goes to G7—C7—F. The third and final
time it appears, under the trumpet solo, it ends with BbM7—Am—G7—C—F.

Another area of harmonic interest occurs in mm. 35–39, employing a circle-of-
fifths progression with some chromatic inflection. A circle-of-fifths progression is again
used to return to the tonic in mm. 52–56. The last three measures employ quartal
harmony with the tonic as the foundation to provide a sense of completion of the sonnet,
yet maintaining a sense of open-endedness to color the last three lines of the text, “Ah,
with what subtle meaning did the Greek Call thee the lesser mystery at the feast Whereof
the greater mystery is death!”

*Sleep* is connected to the other pieces in the work because of its contribution to
the development of the tonal scheme. It is also connected to *Moods* because of its use of
jazz elements, and it is connected, too, to the final jazz-infused chords in the piano in
*Dante*.

**Eliot’s Oak**

1) Thou ancient oak! whose myriad leaves are loud
2) With sounds of unintelligible speech,
3) Sounds as of surges on a shingly beach,
4) Or multitudinous murmurs of a crowd;
5) With some mysterious gift of tongues endowed,
6) Thou speakest a different dialect to each;
7) To me a language that no man can teach,
8) Of a lost race, long vanished like a cloud.
9) For underneath thy shade, in days remote,
10) Seated like Abraham at eventide
11) Beneath the oaks of Mamre, the unknown
12) Apostle of the Indians, Eliot, wrote
13) His Bible in a language that hath died
14) And is forgotten, save by thee alone.
The subject of *Eliot’s Oak* is John Eliot, seventeenth-century missionary to the American Indians, who undertook the task of translating the Bible into Native American languages.\(^\text{15}\) He was called “The Indian Apostle.” This sonnet is about an old oak tree whose age and location, in the poet’s imagination, might have allowed Eliot to write “underneath [its] shade.”

The most distinctive feature of this piece is the division of strings into two groups—one group for pitch content, and another group to provide an underlying “murmur” throughout the entire piece by playing *col legno* passages in contrasting rhythms. The note content and precise rhythms for the *col legno* group are not important. The murmur effect is shaped by varying the dynamic level, density, and pitch content strata throughout the score. To clarify, although the individual pitches played by the *col legno* group are not clearly heard, the general range in which they are playing will be perceived. There is a modulation to E Major in mm. 55–68, and it is there that the *col legno* group rises by the interval P5. While exact pitch content is still of secondary importance, the overall tessitura of the murmur is raised enough for listeners to perceive a difference in timbre. The change in tessitura of the *col legno* happens again in m. 69, after the return to the tonic key. The *col legno* strings are used as introductory material, and they are also the last thing heard in this setting.

This piece is connected to the rest of the work primarily through its tonality within the overarching tonal scheme and its use of text painting in the orchestration.

\(^\text{15}\) Curtis, Ken “John Eliot Apostle to Indians” http://www.christianity.com/ChurchHistory/11630089/
Moods

1) O that a Song would sing itself to me
2) Out of the heart of Nature, or the heart
3) Of man, the child of Nature, not of Art,
4) Fresh as the morning, salt as the salt sea,
5) With just enough of bitterness to be
6) A medicine to this sluggish mood, and start
7) The life-blood in my veins, and so impart
8) Healing and help in this dull lethargy!
9) Alas! Not always doth the breath of song
10) Breathe on us. It is like the wind that bloweth
11) At its own will, not ours, nor tarries long;
12) We hear the sound thereof, but no man knoweth
13) From whence it comes, so sudden and swift and strong,
14) Nor whither in its wayward course it goeth.

Moods is the second setting in this work that alludes to jazz elements, this time mostly in its harmonic language. The instrumental emphasis in Moods is primarily on the piano and voice, with English horn added as the primary color instrument. The very first line of the sonnet, “O that a song would sing itself to me,” was an obvious invitation to join verse and music together. The title and content of the sonnet inspired me to strive to set up something a bit off-kilter and hypnotic. The 5/4 meter at the beginning helps create a flow that absorbs the listener and pushes the music forward until it gets to the contrasting section later in the piece. Like Sleep, this setting is a jazz ballad, but more in the vein of standards-singers such as Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, and Sarah Vaughan.

The piece is in ternary form. The A section, mm. 1–70, opens with modified strophic structure for the first four lines of the sonnet which are then repeated. These lines are set as recurring “verses,” the term here applied in reference to recurring material found in popular song structure (i.e., verse—chorus). The move toward a whole-tone collection in m. 71, the beginning of the B section, is used to temporarily obscure a tonal
center for lines 9–11, “Alas! Not always doth the breath of song Breathe on us. It is like the wind that bloweth At its own will, not ours, nor tarries long.” The use of the whole-tone collection in this sonnet serves the same purpose as the use of the whole-tone collection in *The Tides*—to impart a sense of starkness. The piano reenters in m. 83, signaling a return to the home key, and the start of the A' section. The pining line “O that a song would sing itself to me!” is played out in fragments in mm. 106–113.

This song is connected to the work as a whole because of its tonality. It is connected to the setting of *Sleep* because of its heavy jazz influence and the circle-of-fifths progression in portions of the piece. One other connection is the undulating minor second accompaniment patterns in the viola in mm. 2–4, which are also found in one form or another in *The Evening Star* and *The Broken Oar*. 
CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY FOR THE TENOR SONNETS

The tenor sonnets have places or love as their theme. The first two, *The Evening Star*, and *The Cross of Snow* are about Longfellow’s second wife, Fanny. The former is Longfellow’s one “love” sonnet, and the latter is a reflection upon her memory eighteen years after her tragic passing. *St, John’s, Cambridge*, and *Venice* are both sonnets about locations. The tenor sonnets contain moments of great tenderness, unspeakable sadness, as well as moments of power and admiration. *The Evening Star* is the first sonnet performed if the work is performed in order. The range of the tenor’s songs extends from D3(optional down to B2)–D5.

The Evening Star

1) Lo! In the painted oriel of the West,
2) Whose panes the sunken sun incarnadines,
3) Like a fair lady at her casement, shines
4) The evening star, the star of love and rest!
5) And then anon she doth herself divest
6) Of all her radiant garments, and reclines
7) Behind the sombre screen of yonder pines,
8) With slumber and soft dreams of love oppressed.
9) O my beloved, my sweet Hesperus!
10) My morning and evening star of love!
11) My best and gentlest lady! even thus,
12) As that fair planet in the sky above,
13) Dost thou retire unto thy bed at night,
14) And from thy darkened window fades the light.
*The Evening Star*, as mentioned in chapter 1, is the only true love sonnet composed by Longfellow. The sonnet expresses the beauty Longfellow finds in his second wife, Fanny—both that beauty which is physically seen and that which radiates from within, described in the simplicity of the routine of preparing to sleep for the night. Indeed, Fanny is “the evening star” or as Longfellow borrows from Greek mythology, his “sweet Hesperus.” To add another layer of meaning to the metaphor, the star in question, “Hesperus,” is actually the planet Venus, which of course is named for the goddess of love.

In *The Evening Star*, the gentleness and lilt of a lyric tenor voice conveys the tender expressions of love. The color palette of the woodwind section is significant in accomplishing a shimmering background of interwoven contrapuntal lines in coordination and on an equal footing with the vocal line. The orchestra is not merely there for accompaniment in this sonnet, but rather is an equal collective voice expounding on the text through tones. *The Evening Star* is the very first sonnet in the entire work, and the piano is prevalent throughout this sonnet, introducing the allusion to early twentieth-century parlor song that is heard throughout the composition.

A word or two regarding the significance of the role of the piano in this sonnet: the piano introduction establishes G as the tonal center not only for this sonnet, but also for the work. This introduction, in 3/4 meter, also establishes the aforementioned parlor song element. The piano part gives way to the harp part beginning in m. 24, in order to represent the transformation of the piano into an almost dream-like state along with the added colors of the woodwinds in counterpoint. The piano reenters in m. 39 in order to
be present for the return of the introductory material at the end. We see later how this introductory piano theme is inverted and differently employed in *The Cross of Snow*.

**Example 5.1: The Evening Star** mm. 1–2

A feature that connects this song with the larger work is found in mm. 13–14, where the viola begins an oscillation between B and middle C. This undulating pattern returns in mm. 37–40, and is a recurring accompaniment element that appears in various forms, sometimes at the interval of a minor second, and sometimes as a major second in some of the sonnets throughout the work. Other sonnets using this motif are *The Cross of Snow*, *Moods*, and *The Broken Oar*. Other instruments are gradually added in as the piece progresses to create the sense of an awakening or a blossoming.

The form of this sonnet is a modified strophic song form. The first strophe encompasses lines 1–4 of the sonnet; the second strophe sets lines 5–8. The third strophe, using lines 9–12, finds the established melody (which to this point, had been in the vocal line) in the flute, while the tenor has a newly-composed countermelody. Lines 13 and 14, set in mm. 41–47, are modifications of the closing measures of each of the strophes. The closing measures are a return to and slight embellishment of the piano introduction.
The Cross of Snow

1) In the long, sleepless watches of the night,
2) A gentle face—the face of one long dead—
3) Looks at me from the wall, where round its head
4) The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.
5) Here in this room she died; and soul more white
6) Never through martyrdom of fire was led
7) To its repose; nor can in books be read
8) The legend of a life more benedight.
9) There is a mountain in the distant West
10) That, sun-defying, in its steep ravines
11) Displays a cross of snow upon its side.
12) Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
13) These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes
14) And seasons, changeless since the day she died.

*The Cross of Snow* was written eighteen years after the tragic death of Longfellow’s second wife, Fanny, who is both the subject and the dedicatee of *The Evening Star*. His grief, no less palpable nearly two decades after her passing, is poured into these fourteen lines.

This piece is through-composed. The setting is purposely stream-of-consciousness driven, as though the text is being spoken, or in this case sung, for the first time. This effect is accomplished by lingering on some key words in the sonnet, as illustrated in the following examples.

**Example 5.2: *The Cross of Snow* mm. 17–22**
Example 5.3: The Cross of Snow mm. 82–86

The piano introduction from The Evening Star is inverted, now in the key of E minor, and used as an introduction in the oboes. The inverted theme is used as an accompaniment figure in m. 7, again in the oboe. It appears once more as a transitional idea in mm. 23–26, still retained in the oboes. The inverted theme happens in mm. 32–34 in the first clarinet. It is truncated and modified, but clearly derived from the opening material, and the final appearance of the theme is again in the oboes in mm. 94–95.

The stream-of-consciousness element factors into certain lines that seemed particularly relevant and painful. The first part of line 5, “Here in this room she died,” required some space—as though it is still too horrific to state. Similarly, the contrast between the “soul more white” and “martyrdom of fire” that plays out over the course of mm. 27–62, is a programmatic microcosm of the terrible event. The excursion into A minor at m. 47 raises the dramatic tension of both the text and the music, leading to the arrival at the dominant, B minor, at m. 53 before “burning down and cooling” through m. 58.

A unifying motif is used in mm. 71–74 for line 10, “That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines.” The same melodic line is used, in a different key, in line 3 of The Galaxy: “Like gold and silver sands in some ravine.”
The climax of the piece occurs in mm. 75–78, with line 11, “Displays a cross of snow upon its side.” The high C in the tenor, and the temporary change of mode to E major gives a moment of repose and hope to the otherwise darkness of the sonnet. Measures 82–93 return to the stream-of-consciousness component in the repetition of text. Measures 87–92 sustain the minor dominant, with the repeated B in the vocal line to illustrate line 14, “And seasons, changeless since the day she died.”

Venice

1) White swan of cities, slumbering in thy nest
2) So wonderfully built among the reeds
3) Of the lagoon, that fences thee and feeds,
4) As sayeth thy old historian and guest!
5) White water-lily, cradled and caressed
6) By ocean streams, and from the silt and weeds
7) Lifting thy golden filaments and seeds,
8) Thy sun-illumined spires, thy crown and crest!
9) White phantom city, whose untrodden streets
10) Are rivers, and whose pavements are the shifting
11) Shadows of palaces and strips of sky;
12) I wait to see thee vanish like the fleets
13) Seen in mirage, or towers of cloud uplifting
14) In air their unsubstantial masonry.

Venice is one of the sonnets about which I could find no historical information. I can only assume that its text can be taken at face value, in praise of the city, and that it is the product of Longfellow’s affinity for all things Italian.

The form of my setting is best described as irregular rounded binary, in that the first eight lines are a modified strophic form, musically connected through lines 1–4 and 5–8, and the sestet, lines 9–14, is through-composed. The beginning descriptive lines for the city, “White swan of cities…White water lily…White phantom city,” along with the
truncated fragment of line 12, “I wait to see thee,” are drawn together with the motivic idea from the strophic material.

The harmonic language of this sonnet is simple and direct, yet noble. One area of harmonic interest is mm. 5–6. A descending mediant progression is used. D: vi—iv—V/V. A circle-of-fifths progression plays out in mm. 9–11. F#(V/vi)—B7(V7/ii)—E(V/V)—A7(V7)—D(I6). This same progression is found in mm. 23–25. The first chord of m. 26 may be interpreted two different ways—either as V/vi with an added sixth, or as a first-inversion I+7. Its dominant function to B is the same regardless of which interpretation is chosen, setting up another circle-of-fifths progression into m. 27. A Fr+6 begins m. 29, setting up the strong authentic cadence. Both the area in mm. 3–13 and that in mm. 20–31 are areas of prolongation—deliberately avoiding a strong authentic cadence. Even when the root position I is encountered during these passages, it is always either in the form of a I7 (m. 11), suspension (m. 28), or heard very briefly and immediately destabilized with a non-chord tone (mm. 8 and 25).

The change of mode in m. 36 is preceded by another small harmonic ambiguity. The last half of m. 34 is a deliberately misspelled augmented sixth chord in the harp that sounds like a suspension. It is actually an incomplete Fr+6 with the tonic missing, moving to a complete It+6. The reappearance of D major in mm.40–45 begins another interplay of the circle-of-fifths and mediant-related chord structures: D7—G—B7—Em—G—C—E-flat—C7—Fm9—Am. The return to D major begins in m. 46: V/V—It+6—Fr+6—V—I.

This sonnet is connected to the rest of the work because of its tonal implications within the framework of the rest of the cycle.
St. John’s, Cambridge

1) I stand beneath the tree, whose branches shade
2) Thy western window, Chapel of St. John!
3) And hear its leaves repeat their benison
4) On him, whose hand thy stones memorial laid;
5) Then I remember one of whom was said
6) In the world’s darkest hour, ‘Behold thy son!’
7) And see him living still and wandering on
8) And waiting for the advent long delayed.
9) Not only tongues of the apostles teach
10) Lessons of love and light, but these expanding
11) And sheltering boughs with all their leaves implore,
12) And say in language clear as human speech,
13) ‘The peace of God, that passeth understanding,
14) Be and abide with you for evermore!’

St. John’s, Cambridge is a location sonnet, reflective in thought and purpose.

This sonnet is infused with elements of the sonnets themed nature and mystical. Its central theme is that God is found all around us in that even the trees impart His peace.

I chose to use elements of Celtic music in this setting, constructing a folk-like melody and using a solo “fiddle” and flute/piccolo as the primary colors in the orchestration—along with a floor tom to allude to the bodhran, which is a Celtic drum.

The flute and fiddle lines are embellished with grace notes—a typical feature found in Celtic music. The strophic melody is deliberately rigid in that there is some discontinuity between text painting and the “will of the tune” to progress. I took care to accentuate text properly by emphasizing more important words by a change in register or note duration.

The demands of the tenor are extensive in this setting, which requires use of both lower and extreme upper registers. This setting is for a professional-level singer. In m. 91, the strophe is given to the solo fiddle and piccolo while the tenor has a newly-composed countermelody—a feature found in some of the other sonnets as well. The break away
from the strophic material occurs at m. 119, with a lush wash of strings and a simple, plaintive melody sung by the tenor using the text, “Not only tongues of the apostles teach lessons of love and light.” The mode change from B minor to B Major happens in m. 146, and lasts until m. 172. The orchestra plays the introductory figure in mm. 175–180 in the original mode, but ending with a Picardy third.

This sonnet is connected to the rest of the work through its place in the tonal scheme, as well as sharing the characteristic of the countermelody in the voice singing over a previously introduced primary melody in the accompaniment.
CHAPTER 6

METHODOLOGY FOR THE BARITONE SONNETS

The texts chosen for the baritone sonnets were written by Longfellow in homage to a person or persons. *Dante* was written for its namesake, *Wapentake* was dedicated to Alfred Tennyson, *A Nameless Grave* was written in memory of an unknown Union soldier, and *The Poets* was written in homage to Longfellow’s predecessors. The idea for this entire work began with the setting of *A Nameless Grave*. The range of the baritone sonnets is G2–F4 (optional up to G4).

*Dante*

1) Tuscan, that wanderest through the realms of gloom
2) With thoughtful pace, and sad, majestic eyes,
3) Stern thoughts and awful from thy soul arise,
4) Like Farinata from his fiery tomb.
5) Thy sacred song is like the trump of doom;
6) Yet in thy heart what human sympathies,
7) What warm compassion glows, as in the skies
8) The tender stars their clouded lamps relume!
9) Methinks I see thee stand, with pallid cheeks,
10) By Fra Hilario in his diocese,
11) As up the convent-walls, in golden streaks,
12) The ascending sunbeams mark the day’s decrease;
13) And, as he asks what there the stranger seeks,
14) Thy voice along the cloister whispers, ‘Peace!’
Dante, in homage to the great Italian poet Dante Alighieri, references several of Dante’s characters found in his *Divine Comedy*. The Tuscan is Dante himself. Farinata, a real person who was also written into Dante’s work as a character, was “posthumously executed,” along with his wife in that their bodies were exhumed and burned. Fra Hilario is another character found in the *Divine Comedy*.

The piece is in G minor, and remains largely diatonic throughout, with the exception of a few embellishing chords interspersed throughout the setting. Although there are some repeated motifs, the piece is through-composed, with a constant dramatic build to m. 45, which ends line 12, “The ascending sunbeams mark the day’s decrease.” There is a distinctive piano figure in mm. 37–44 with the quick rolled-chord eighth-note triplets, leading to the fuller rolled-chord release of m. 45 to the end, where jazz voicings are employed.

The triplet accompaniment figure that runs through this setting from the very beginning is also used elsewhere in the cycle. One other element, besides the tonal center, that connects this piece to the rest of the work is the use of jazz harmonies in the piano part in the last few measures, which create a connection to *Sleep* and *Moods*. 
A Nameless Grave

1) ‘A soldier of the Union mustered out,‘
2) Is the inscription on an unknown grave
3) At Newport News, beside the salt-sea wave,
4) Nameless and dateless; sentinel or scout
5) Shot down in skirmish, or disastrous rout
6) Of battle, when the loud artillery drave
7) Its iron wedges through the ranks of brave
8) And doomed battalions, storming the redoubt.
9) Thou unknown hero sleeping by the sea
10) In thy forgotten grave! With secret shame
11) I feel my pulses beat, my forehead burn,
12) When I remember thou hast given for me
13) All that thou hadst, thy life, thy very name,
14) And I can give thee nothing in return.

This sonnet was written in homage to an unknown Union soldier. Like so many
of the other sonnets, it was personal to Longfellow. His son was severely wounded in the
American Civil War. He was believed to be dead for weeks. Longfellow eventually
found out he was, indeed, alive but badly wounded. The tragedy of the war affected
some of his other writings, but it is this sonnet that speaks so vividly of the war and the
sorrow left in its wake, as is told in lines 5 and 6, “…Shot down in skirmish or disastrous
rout / Of battle when the loud artillery drave / Its iron wedges through the ranks of brave…”

Compositionally, the setting is dictated by the coloration of the very descriptive
text. I chose long, lyrical lines in both the vocal and instrumental parts to contrast
sharply against more percussive, staccato, and harsher elements to illustrate both the state
of rest in the grave, albeit forgotten and neglected, and the reason for the grave in the first
place—the violence that ended this soldier’s life. For example, the staccato eighth note
and two sixteenth notes, followed by a full quarter note figure that occurs in mm. 24–26
in the strings, muted trumpets, and snare drum are meant to emulate the drums and bugle calls of war. The challenge was to create this type of allusion without resorting to cliché. Putting the figure in the strings and muting the trumpets soften the figure and give it a misty background effect—just as a photograph fades through the years and develops a patina with age. Other descriptive elements are found in the death knell of the chimes and the artillery of the bass drum hits.

Although the first eight lines are treated strophically as two “verses,” the text still dominates and dictates slight differences between the two. For example, the second “verse” that begins line 5, “Shot down…” has a different phrase structure from that of its counterpart in the previous verse, and breath and phrase markings are used to indicate the differences in phrase structure between the two strophes. This element also gives a somewhat syncopated irregular metrical phrase against the strict 3/4 meter in the accompaniment, making the line more musically interesting as well as adding to the dream-like quality to the text. The high note and the climax in the song comes on the final word of the dramatic lines 12 and 13, “When I remember thou hast done for me / All that thou hadst, thy life, thy very name.” “Name” is the most important single word of the entire sonnet. This sonnet, a message to this soldier, tells him that even though he gave everything—even his very name—for the cause, he will not be forgotten. The vocal line ends on scale-degree 2 so there is no true resolution. The ending, with its lack of resolution, demonstrates the many emotions the author feels for the soldier, those of sorrow, gratitude, and reverence, and is a reminder that these feelings for the soldier have no ending.
This setting was the very first one composed—prompting the concept for the entire work. *A Summer Day by the Sea* contains a line that is set with material from line 9, mm. 34–38 of *A Nameless Grave*.

**The Poets**

1) O ye dead poets, who are living still
2) Immortal in your verse, though life be fled,
3) And ye, O living poets who are dead
4) Though ye are living, if neglect can kill,
5) Tell me if in the darkest hours of ill,
6) With drops of anguish falling fast and red
7) From the sharp crown of thorns upon your head,
8) Ye were not glad your errand to fulfill?
9) Yes; for the gift and ministry of Song
10) Have something in them so divinely sweet,
11) It can assuage the bitterness of wrong;
12) Not in the clamour of the crowded street,
13) Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng,
14) But in ourselves, are triumph and defeat.

*The Poets* was written in homage to all the great poets who came before Longfellow. The text is straightforward and requires no elaboration.

The setting is majestic, with much pomp. The key of B-flat works well for brass, the chief family of instruments used for this setting. This setting takes advantage of the full scope of the brass section. Elsewhere in the composition, I typically cross-fade instruments so that the orchestration flows freely in one continuous stream. This piece, however, required setting one family of instruments against another—namely, brass and percussion versus the strings. This technique yields something akin to terraced dynamics, used mostly in music from the Baroque era, where there is no crescendo/decrescendo, but rather sudden changes in dynamics. The song is through-composed, with the brass
introduction recurring in a *ritornello*-like fashion throughout. Harmonically, the
movement is mostly diatonic, with occasional mode-mixture and embellishing chords.

**Wapentake**
To Alfred Tennyson

1) Poet! I come to touch thy lance with mine;
2) Not as a knight, who on the listed field
3) Of tourney touched his adversary’s shield
4) In token of defiance, but in sign
5) Of homage to the mastery, which is thine,
6) In English song; nor will I keep concealed,
7) And voiceless as a rivulet frost-congealed,
8) My admiration for thy verse divine.
9) Not of the howling dervishes of song,
10) Who craze the brain with their delirious dance,
11) Art thou, O sweet historian of the heart!
12) Therefore, to thee the laurel-leaves belong,
13) To thee our love and our allegiance,
14) For thy allegiance to the poet’s art.

*Wapentake* was written in homage of Alfred Tennyson, and speaks of
Longfellow’s respect and admiration for his fellow poet’s art. While most of the sonnets
build up to an identifiable apex, this sonnet starts off with a literary bang, and retains the
energy of praise for Tennyson throughout the piece.

One distinctive feature of this setting is the complete lack of an introduction. The
baritone begins with the orchestra from the very first note to give a punch to the word
“Poet” at the outset of the piece.

An important unifying feature is found in mm. 37–49. The same music,
transposed of course, underscores line 9, “Not of the howling dervishes of song;” as is
used in line 12 of *Autumn*, “Like flames upon the altar shine the sheaves.” The vocal lines
of the two songs are nearly identical as well.
CHAPTER 7

METHODOLOGY FOR THE SONNETS FOR TWO OR MORE VOICES

The Galaxy

1) Torrent of light and river of the air,
2) Along whose bed the glimmering stars are seen
3) Like gold and silver sands in some ravine
4) Where mountain streams have left their channels bare!
5) The Spaniard sees in thee the pathway, where
6) His patron saint descended in the sheen
7) Of his celestial armour, on serene
8) And quiet nights, when all the heavens were fair.
9) Not this I see, nor yet the ancient fable
10) Of Phaeton’s wild course, that scorched the skies
11) Where’er the hoofs of his hot coursers trod;
12) But the white drift of worlds o’er chasms of sable,
13) The star-dust, that is whirled aloft and flies
14) From the invisible chariot wheels of God.

The Galaxy, a duet for soprano and mezzo-soprano, mixes elements of nature and mysticism in its literary theme. Greek mythology is referenced again in Phaeton, son of the sun god Helios. When Phaeton steals the sun chariot fails to control its course, Zeus strikes him down in order to save the earth from being destroyed. The poem is in homage to the galaxy.

The setting begins in A minor, and moves to F minor in m. 11, and eventually toward the dominant beginning in m. 26, then finally back to the main tonic in m. 35. Aside from a few embellishing chords, the movement finishes out in A.
An important feature connecting it to the other sonnets, besides the key relationship, is the sharing of the music in the passage in mm. 10–13, set to the text, “Like gold and silver sands in some ravine” with a similar portion of text in line 10 in *The Cross of Snow*, “That, sun-defying, in its steep ravines.”

**The Broken Oar**

1) Once upon Iceland’s solitary strand
2) A poet wandered with his book and pen,
3) Seeking some final word, some sweet Amen,
4) Wherewith to close the volume in his hand.
5) The billows rolled and plunged upon the sand,
6) The circling sea-gulls swept beyond his ken,
7) And from the parting cloud-rack now and then
8) Flashed the red sunset over sea and land.
9) Then by the billows at his feet was tossed
10) A broken oar; and carved thereon he read,
11) ‘Oft was I weary, when I toiled at thee’;
12) And like a man, who findeth what was lost,
13) He wrote the words, then lifted up his head,
14) And flung his useless pen into the sea.

*The Broken Oar* is the final sonnet in the work as a whole, and fittingly so. Its text serves as a postscript or epitaph and commentary on the rest of the sonnets that come before it. The text speaks of a poet wandering a desolate beach, pondering the meaning of life and his pursuit of perfection in his work. When the oar, inscribed with the message thereon, washed up at his feet, he writes them as the final words to close his work, realizing that we are all here but a short time, and one day our works will be something that passed the time while we were here. I read the sonnet as something bittersweet in that, to paraphrase King Solomon, there is no meaning under the sun, but at the same time, we are all part of the same humanity that came before us and will come after us.
Because *The Broken Oar* is the last piece in the work, I deliberately wove into it elements from several other sonnets. The flute motif at the beginning and end of the piece is derived from a similar motif in *The Tides*; the oscillating accompaniment figure found in various versions in *The Cross of Snow* and *Moods* is present through the introduction in the clarinets; the triplet motif that begins in the harp in m. 17 and reappears throughout the orchestra and throughout the setting is taken directly from *Dante*; and this same triplet figure appears inverted in the bassoon and bass clarinet in mm. 45–48.

*The Broken Oar* is through-composed, with some distinctive passages. The extended introduction serves to evoke the image of the writer walking the long, cold, solitary shore. The baritone gives voice to the poet with an introductory section that sets lines 1–4. The other voices join in to express the text for line 5, which begins, “The billows…” and the energy created by the contrapuntal texture in this section lasts until the reading of the text upon the oar in line 11, when the listener is given time to ponder the weight of the seemingly simple line, “Oft was I weary when I toiled at thee.” The soprano (melody) line ends on scale degree 2 to give a sense of unrest, even after the conclusion of the text. I employed this technique in *A Nameless Grave* and *Moods* as well. The music from the introduction returns to round out the setting.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

In closing, the Longfellow sonnets provided an excellent vehicle for me to explore a range of musical expression and development. Because of my great respect for Longfellow’s verse, it was a humbling experience to set his words to music. Every composer who sets text written by another person makes judgments and decisions that impose the composer’s interpretation upon the text. My intention was to set each sonnet in a way that would honor Longfellow’s poetry.

The interplay of musical and literary forms was a challenge. Employing various musical forms to the 14-line sonnet structure was interesting. The outstanding quality of Longfellow’s verse kept the project fresh for me.

The modular construction of the work is unique among other compositions that might be considered in the same genre. There are other works that have similar qualities to this composition, but there are none I have found that employ exactly the same modular concept.

The musical language is fresh and varied, even though it is a tonal work, and the piece exemplifies my personal compositional voice. There has been a renewed interest in tonal music over the past several years. It was not long ago that most modern scholarly
compositions were expected to be exclusively atonal or experimental in nature. It is this composer’s opinion that the current trends indicate that there is still more musically to say in tonal music, just as there is more to say in other musical languages as well.

Most of all, the orchestrations are descriptive and the orchestra serves just as much as do the voices to paint the texts of the sonnets. While the forces of the orchestra needed for the work are relatively large, the scoring at any given moment is more likely to be for a chamber orchestra. My orchestrations are more often about subtleties in the combination of timbres rather than a wall of sound—although there are those moments in this work as well. I prefer to have a wide variety of combinations available, even though I may not use every color in every piece.

This work, with its large scope, has helped prepare me to write even larger works in the future. One of my professional goals is to write opera—both music and libretti. Intense exposure to Longfellow has served to sharpen my literary sensibilities. I believe that soaking in great writing, even with language that is sometimes archaic, is beneficial. Working with voices in a large-scale work has broadened my compositional palette. I have gained a greater awareness of balancing the orchestra with solo voices.

I have thoroughly enjoyed writing this project. Longfellow’s text always refreshed my creative sensibilities, and I hope that others will find the beauty of his words amplified by their settings in this work.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Eighteen Sonnets
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
for Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano,
Tenor, and Baritone
Solo Voices and Orchestra

Music by
Eric C. E. Wilson
INSTRUMENTATION

Piccolo
Flutes (2)
Oboes (2)
English Horn
B♭ Clarinets (3)
B♭ Bass Clarinet
Bassoons (2)
Contrabassoon
Horns in F (4)
B♭ Trumpets (3)
Trombones (2)
Bass Trombone
Tuba
Timpani (4—32″, 26″, 23″, 20″)
Percussion (4 players—Glockenspiel, vibraphone, snare drum, floor tom, bass drum, tambourine, chimes, crash cymbals, suspended cymbals)
Harp
Piano
1st Violins (12)
2nd Violins (12)
Violas (10)
Violoncellos (8)
Double Basses (8)

Duration: Approximately 75 Minutes.
The Evening Star
Tenor and Orchestra

Sonnet by
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807-1883)

Music by
Eric C. E. Wilson
(b.1968)
The Evening Star
The Evening Star
Autumn
Autumn
The Cross of Snow
Tenor and Orchestra

Text by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1883)

Music by Eric C. E. Wilson (b.1968)
The Cross of Snow

80
The Cross of Snow
The Cross of Snow
The Cross of Snow
The Cross of Snow
The Cross of Snow
The Galaxy
The Sound of the Sea
A Summer Day by the Sea
A Summer Day by the Sea
A Summer Day by the Sea

day so wonder ful and

glad ness and so

ever and for

ever shalt thou

To some the

of pain! For

and for

ever be

to light,

rit.

A Summer Day by the Sea

107
To some the landmark of a

A Summer Day by the Sea

44
Score

Soprano and Orchestra

The Tides

Sonnet by
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807-1883)

Music by
Eric C. E. Wilson
(b. 1968)

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<td>Eric C. E. Wilson</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>(b. 1968)</td>
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I saw the long line of the vacant shore,

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[Note: The image contains a musical score with various instrument notations and bars.]
The Tides
A little slower
A Shadow
Mezzo-Soprano and Orchestra

Sonnet by
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807-1883)

Music by
Eric C. E. Wilson
(b. 1968)
A Shadow
A Nameless Grave
Sonnet by
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807-1883)

Music by
Eric C. E. Wilson
(b.1968)
A Nameless Grave
...
A Nameless Grave
Sleep
Mezzo-Soprano and Orchestra

Sonnet by
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807-1882)

Music by
Eric C. E. Wilson
(b.1968)
Sleep
Sleep
Eliot's Oak
Eliot's Oak
and whose pavements are shifting shadows of palaces and strips of sky; I wait to see thee vanish like the fleets seen in mirage, or towers of cloud up lifting in the air.
Tell me if in the dark est
hours of ill
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Ye dead poets, who are living still.

Imortal in your verse, though life...
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St. John's, Cambridge

168
# Moods

**Sonnet by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**

(1807-1882)

**Music by Eric C. E. Wilson**

(b.1968)

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**Score**

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**Sonnet by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow**

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(1807-1882)

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**Music by Eric C. E. Wilson**

(b.1968)

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Moods
Wapentake
The Broken Oar

Sonnet by
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
(1807-1883)

Music by
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Score

Percussion

Flute 1

Oboe 1, 2

Harp

Chimes - 2 mallets

Glockenspiel

Piano

Soprano

Mezzo-Soprano

Tenor

Baritone

Violin I

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

Clarinet in B

Bass Trombone

Trumpet in B

Bass Clarinet

Horn in F 1, 3

English Horn

Trombone 1, 2

Percussion 3

Timpani

Violin II

Percussion 2

Timpani

Harp

Violoncello

Baritone

Violin I

Viola

Violin II

Double Bass
The Broken Oar
The Broken Oar
The Broken Oar
APPENDIX

COMPLETE TEXTS OF THE SONNETS

The Evening Star

Lo! In the painted oriel of the West,
    Whose panes the sunken sun incarnadines,
    Like a fair lady at her casement, shines
    The evening star, the star of love and rest!
And then anon she doth herself divest
    Of all her radiant garments, and reclines
    Behind the sombre screen of yonder pines,
    With slumber and soft dreams of love oppressed.
O My beloved, my sweet Hesperus!
    My morning and evening star of love!
    My best and gentlest lady! even thus,
As that fair planet in the sky above,
    Dost thou retire unto thy bed at night,
    And from thy darkened window fades the light.

Autumn

Thou comest, Autumn, heralded by the rain,
    With banners, by great gales incessant fanned,
    Brighter than the brightest silks of Samarcand,
    And stately oxen harnessed to thy wain!
Thou standest, like imperial Charlemagne,
    Upon thy bridge of gold; thy royal hand
    Outstretched with benedictions o’er the land,
    Blessing the farms through all thy vast domain!
Thy shield is the red harvest moon, suspended
    So long beneath the heaven’s o’erhanging eaves;
    Thy steps are by the farmer’s prayers attended;
Like flames upon an altar shine the sheaves;
    And, following thee, in thy ovation splendid,
    Thine almoner, the wind, scatters the golden leaves!
Dante

Tuscan, that wanderest through the realms of gloom
With thoughtful pace, and sad, majestic eyes,
Stern thoughts and awful from thy soul arise,
Like Farinata from his fiery tomb.
Thy sacred song is like the trump of doom;
Yet in thy heart what human sympathies,
What warm compassion glows, as in the skies
The tender stars their clouded lamps relume!
Methinks I see thee stand, with pallid cheeks,
By Fra Hilario in his diocese,
As up the convent-walls, in golden streaks,
The ascending sunbeams mark the day’s decrease;
And, as he asks what there the stranger seeks,
Thy voice along the cloister whispers, ‘Peace!’

The Cross of Snow

In the long, sleepless watches of the night,
A gentle face—the face of one long dead—
Looks at me from the wall, where round its head
The night-lamp casts a halo of pale light.
Here in this room she died; and soul more white
Never through martyrdom of fire was led
To its repose; nor can in books be read
The legend of a life more benedight.
There is a mountain in the distant West
That, sun-defying, in its steep ravines
Displays a cross of snow upon its side.
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast
These eighteen years, through all the changing scenes
And seasons, changeless since the day she died.
The Galaxy

Torrent of light and river of the air,
   Along whose bed the glimmering stars are seen
   Like gold and silver sands in some ravine
   Where mountain streams have left their channels bare!
The Spaniard sees in thee the pathway, where
   His patron saint descended in the sheen
   Of his celestial armour, on serene
   And quiet nights, when all the heavens were fair.
Not this I see, nor yet the ancient fable
   Of Phaeton’s wild course, that scorched the skies
   Where’er the hoofs of his hot coursers trod;
But the white drift of worlds o’er chasms of sable,
   The star-dust, that is whirled aloft and flies
   From the invisible chariot wheels of God.

The Sound of the Sea

The sea awoke at midnight from its sleep,
   And round the pebbly beaches far and wide
   I heard the first wave of the rising tide
   Rush onward with uninterrupted sweep;
A voice out of the silence of the deep,
   A sound mysteriously multiplied
   As of a cataract from the mountain’s side,
   Or roar of winds upon a wooded steep.
So comes to us at times, from the unknown
   And inaccessible solitudes of being,
   The rushing of the sea-tides of the soul;
And inspirations, that we deem our own,
   Are some divine foreshadowing and foreseeing
   Of things beyond our reason or control.
A Summer Day by the Sea

The sun is set; and in his latest beams
Yon little cloud of ashen gray and gold,
Slowly upon the amber air unrolled,
The falling mantle of the Prophet seems.
From the dim headlands many a lighthouse gleams,
The street-lamps of the ocean; and behold,
O’erhead the banners of the night unfold;
The day hath passed into the land of dreams.
O summer day beside the joyous sea!
O summer day so wonderful and white,
So full of gladness and so full of pain!
For ever and for ever shalt thou be
To some the gravestone of a dead delight,
To some the landmark of a new domain.

The Tides

I saw the long line of the vacant shore,
The sea-weed and the shells upon the sand,
And the brown rocks left bare on every hand,
As if the ebbing tide would flow no more.
Then heard I, more distinctly than before,
The ocean breathe and its great breast expand,
And hurrying came on the defenceless land
The insurgent waters with tumultuous roar.
All thought and feeling and desire, I said,
Love, laughter, and the exultant joy of song
Have ebbed from me for ever! Suddenly o’er me
They swept again from their deep ocean bed,
And in a tumult of delight, and strong
As youth, and beautiful as youth, upbore me.
A Shadow

I said to myself, if I were dead,
   What would befall these children? What would be
   Their fate, who now are looking up to me
   For help and furtherance? Their lives, I said,
Would be a volume wherein I have read
   But first chapters, and no longer see
   To read the rest of their dear history,
   So full of beauty and so full of dread.
Be comforted; the world is very old,
   And generations pass, as they have passed,
   A troop of shadows moving with the sun;
Thousands of times has the old tale been told;
   The world belongs to those who come the last,
   They will find hope and strength as we have done.

A Nameless Grave

‘A soldier of the Union mustered out,‘
   Is the inscription on an unknown grave
   At Newport News, beside the salt-sea wave,
   Nameless and dateless; sentinel or scout
Shot down in skirmish, or disastrous rout
   Of battle, when the loud artillery drave
   Its iron wedges through the ranks of brave
   And doomed battalions, storming the redoubt.
Thou unknown hero sleeping by the sea
   In thy forgotten grave! With secret shame
   I feel my pulses beat, my forehead burn,
When I remember thou hast given for me
   All that thou hadst, thy life, thy very name,
   And I can give thee nothing in return.
Sleep

Lull me to sleep, ye winds, whose fitful sound
   Seems from some faint Æolian harp-string caught;
Seal up the hundred wakeful eyes of thought
   As Hermes with his lyre in sleep profound
The hundred wakeful eyes of Argus bound;
   For I am weary, and am overwrought
With too much toil, with too much care distraught,
   And with the iron crown of anguish crowned.
Lay thy soft hand upon my brow and cheek,
   O peaceful sleep! until from pain released
I breathe again uninterrupted breath!
Ah, with what subtile meaning did the Greek
   Call thee the lesser mystery at the feast
Whereof the greater mystery is death!

Eliot’s Oak

Thou ancient oak! whose myriad leaves are loud
   With sounds of unintelligible speech,
Sounds as of surges on a shingly beach,
   Or multitudinous murmurs of a crowd;
With some mysterious gift of tongues endowed,
   Thou speakest a different dialect to each;
To me a language that no man can teach,
   Of a lost race, long vanished like a cloud.
For underneath thy shade, in days remote,
   Seated like Abraham at eventide
Beneath the oaks of Mamre, the unknown
Apostle of the Indians, Eliot, wrote
   His Bible in a language that hath died
And is forgotten, save by thee alone.
Venice

White swan of cities, slumbering in thy nest
So wonderfully built among the reeds
Of the lagoon, that fences thee and feeds,
As sayeth thy old historian and guest!
White water-lily, cradled and caressed
By ocean streams, and from the silt and weeds
Lifting thy golden filaments and seeds,
Thy sun-illumined spires, thy crown and crest!
White phantom city, whose untrodden streets
Are rivers, and whose pavements are the shifting
Shadows of palaces and strips of sky;
I wait to see thee vanish like the fleets
Seen in mirage, or towers of cloud uplifting
In air their unsubstantial masonry.

The Poets

O ye dead poets, who are living still
Immortal in your verse, though life be fled,
And ye, O living poets who are dead
Though ye are living, if neglect can kill,
Tell me if in the darkest hours of ill,
With drops of anguish falling fast and red
From the sharp crown of thorns upon your head,
Ye were not glad your errand to fulfill?
Yes; for the gift and ministry of Song
Have something in them so divinely sweet,
It can assuage the bitterness of wrong;
Not in the clamour of the crowded street,
Not in the shouts and plaudits of the throng,
But in ourselves, are triumph and defeat.
St. John’s, Cambridge

I stand beneath the tree, whose branches shade
Thy western window, Chapel of St. John!
And hear its leaves repeat their benison
On him, whose hand thy stones memorial laid;
Then I remember one of whom was said
In the world’s darkest hour, ‘Behold thy son!’
And see him living still and wandering on
And waiting for the advent long delayed.
Not only tongues of the apostles teach
Lessons of love and light, but these expanding
And sheltering boughs with all their leaves implore,
And say in language clear as human speech,
‘The peace of God, that passeth understanding,
Be and abide with you for evermore!’

Moods

O that a Song would sing itself to me
Out of the heart of Nature, or the heart
Of man, the child of Nature, not of Art,
Fresh as the morning, salt as the salt sea,
With just enough of bitterness to be
A medicine to this sluggish mood, and start
The life-blood in my veins, and so impart
Healing and help in this dull lethargy!
Alas! Not always doth the breath of song
Breathe on us. It is like the wind that bloweth
At its own will, not ours, nor tarries long;
We hear the sound thereof, but no man knoweth
From whence it comes, so sudden and swift and strong,
Nor whither in its wayward course it goeth.
Wapentake

Poet! I come to touch thy lance with mine;
    Not as a knight, who on the listed field
Of tourney touched his adversary’s shield
    In token of defiance, but in sign
Of homage to the mastery, which is thine,
    In English song; nor will I keep concealed,
And voiceless as a rivulet frost-congealed,
    My admiration for thy verse divine.
Not of the howling dervishes of song,
    Who craze the brain with their delirious dance,
Art thou, O sweet historian of the heart!
Therefore, to thee the laurel-leaves belong,
    To thee our love and our allegiance,
For thy allegiance to the poet’s art.

The Broken Oar

Once upon Iceland’s solitary strand
    A poet wandered with his book and pen,
Seeking some final word, some sweet Amen,
    Wherewith to close the volume in his hand.
The billows rolled and plunged upon the sand,
    The circling sea-gulls swept beyond his ken,
And from the parting cloud-rack now and then
    Flashed the red sunset over sea and land.
Then by the billows at his feet was tossed
    A broken oar; and carved thereon he read,
‘Oft was I weary, when I toiled at thee’;
And like a man, who findeth what was lost,
    He wrote the words, then lifted up his head,
And flung his useless pen into the sea.